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JOHN JEBB, A BRITISH RADICAL IN THE AGE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by

KENNETH L. PEARL

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1998

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Finally, this work is dedicated with love and gratitude to my wife, Ronit. While it is writer's cliché to say that their work could not have been completed without the help of others, I have no doubt that she is as much responsible for its completion as myself.

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Introduction

I

In 1787, one year after his death at the age of 50, John Jebb was memorialized by his friends with the publication of a three volume compilation of his writings. To complete this set of edited works, John Disney, Jebb's closest friend, added to the first volume a biography of the author. In a practice that was not uncommon in the late eighteenth century, a commemorative work of this nature would have its publishing costs covered by subscription and this work had a particularly distinguished list of subscribers including several M.P.s, and such illustrious individuals as the future American President, John Adams, Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, John Cartwright, Francis Blackburne and Benjamin and Richard Vaughan; in all 603 individuals, libraries and societies. The subscribers were involved in this project for two reasons: the first was that they wanted to offer a tribute to their recently deceased friend and colleague - a man they held in deep affection. The second reason is more important for the historian: they believed that Jebb's writings were worth preserving and that a significant contribution to the advancement of political and religious thought could be found in those pages.

In writing a biography of Jebb, Disney was also thinking of posterity and noted, "Some, which may seem uninteresting in the present moment, may afford not an unuseful

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lesson in future times and on some future occasion."[1] Keeping in mind this notion of providing a not "unuseful lesson," this dissertation will provide the first full-length study of the life and work of John Jebb, one of the most significant British radicals of the late eighteenth century.[2] A study of the life of John Jebb will reveal the wide range of his activities and the desire for reform that he brought to each and every one of them. At various times he was a churchman, an academic, a physician, a prison reformer, as well as a radical polemicist and politician, though perhaps thankfully for the present biographer, Jebb never did add barrister to the list, though he took the step of being admitted to Lincoln's Inn when his medical career appeared to have stalled. Jebb's religious and political radicalism forced him into these diverse endeavors, since the expression of his divergent opinions mandated that he find some other means of earning a living, rather than persisting with the clerical and academic career he had originally chosen. Jebb possessed a deep passion for change and applied it to wherever life brought him, whether in the Church, Cambridge, Parliament, hospitals or prisons.

Because of the nature of the sources available, this dissertation will focus more on the public part of Jebb's life as opposed to revealing the private man. No central cache of letters survive from Jebb's pen, though there are scattered letters held in various collections

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[1] John Jebb, *The Works Theological, Medical, Political and Miscellaneous of John Jebb, MD, FRS, with Memoirs of the Life of the Author.* Edited by John Disney. 3 Vols. (London, 1787), p. v.

[2] An entry on Jebb was one of 720 articles that Alexander Gordon, an early chronicler of Unitarian history, contributed to the *Dictionary of National Biography.* Another entry on Jebb, written by Naomi Miller, was part of the *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals* and served to introduce the present biographer to this topic.

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in Great Britain as well as the United States. Fortunately, there are a significant number of manuscripts which display the full extent of his Jebb's political activities. The British Library holds the recorded minutes of the Westminster Committee, along with other important materials, including an invaluable volume providing a contemporary blow by blow account of the contentious Westminster election of 1784.[3] The Public Record Office has the Minute Books of the Society for Constitutional Information, which were seized by the government when the organization was prosecuted for seditious libel in 1793. In addition, Dr. William's Library offers a specialized collection of manuscripts dealing with the history of British religious dissent. Outside of London, an invaluable resource was the North Yorkshire Record Office, which contains the private papers of Christopher Wyvill, while in Manchester, the John Rylands University Library and the Unitarian College hold the letters and papers of Theophilus Lindsey, which revealed Jebb's contribution to English Unitarianism.[4]

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[3] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784)

[4] The historiography for the individuals and events covered in this dissertation fall into two distinct areas, though in recent years there has been an attempt to find common ground between the two. The first, and the one with a much longer tradition, involves the study of the politics of the period. No name stands as more prominent in this area than I. R. Christie, whose *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, remains the most valuable work on the extraparliamentary reform movement of the 1780s. Christie was very sympathetic to Wyvill's more moderate vision of reform and therefore views Jebb in a less positive manner. Christie asserts that it was the uncompromising zeal of the Jebb dominated Society for Constitutional Information which helped doom the efforts of the far more politically astute Christopher Wyvill. This sense of Jebb as a well meaning, but naive and ineffectual leader of radical opinion is shared by Eugene Black in *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organization, 1769-1793*. Black's book is important since he is the only author to have dealt with any detail on the Society for Constitutional Information, while he is the only historian, besides Christie, to write on the organization history of the extraparliamentary associations both in Yorkshire and in Westminster. Other works, such as John Cannon's useful study *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832*, have placed the parliamentary movement of the 1780s within the larger framework of the parliamentary reform question in British history.

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To produce a narrative of Jebb's life, however, one must go beyond the manuscripts and rely on John Disney's biography. Nevertheless, this work should be looked at critically, since Disney did his best to always portray his friend in the best possible light. Jebb was not alone in being honored with such a hagiographic memoir, it became almost common for prominent Unitarians to be so honored, and others, such as Theophilus Lindsey, also received what one historian has called a "ponderous and sycophantic life."[5] Disney was wary of revealing too much and justified not having "affected an excess of candor," since many of the individuals were still living at the time of publication.[6] In one instance, Disney refers to a personal conflict that Jebb had with a friend over the former's decision to drop his preferments within the Church of England.

The other strand in the historiography behind this dissertation has been the more dynamic in recent years and involves the study of the English Enlightenment. Several decades ago such an area of study did not exist, since works on the Enlightenment, such as Peter Gay's magisterial *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, emphasized the Enlightenment as a European-wide movement, with certain universal themes such as a challenge to revealed religion and the rise of atheism. Over the past decade there has been a movement to rediscover the Enlightenment on a national or even beyond that, on an institutional basis. John Gascoigne in recent years has been rewriting the history of eighteenth-century Cambridge University, in order to rescue it from the attacks from nineteenth century critics who wanted to compare their own reformed University from the supposed lackluster institution that preceded it. Gascoigne's *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment* finds the University to have been a flexible institution, which first challenged and then accepted the revolution in natural philosophy presented by Newton. Another aspect of the English Enlightenment is presented by J. C. D. Clarke, who in a number of widely discussed books and articles has argued that the main trend in English Enlightenment thought was not coming from the pen of marginalized rational dissenters like Jebb, but rather from conservative clerics, including Jebb's cousin Samuel Hallifax.

[5] Herbert McLachlan, "Fresh Light on the Life of Theophilus Lindsey." In *Essays and Addresses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), p. 41.

[6] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. iv.

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We are left without knowing the identity of this person, since Disney refused to provide the name.[7] Also Disney, while sympathetic to Jebb's political views, was not an active participant in the political reform movement and was sometimes confused concerning political developments in Westminster.

Disney, while at times including excerpts from certain personal papers of Jebb, including a diary, left out of his memoir items of a more personal nature. Therefore we know very little of Jebb's early life and there are other significant gaps which are apparent when putting together a complete narrative of his life. This is particularly unfortunate since we are kept in the dark concerning his relationship with his wife, Ann. In his obituary notice which appeared in *Gentlemen's Magazine*, it was noted that "their hearts and understanding were formed for each other," and from all appearances that assessment is correct. She was apparently an extraordinary woman who showed great interest in her husband's work and anonymously published a number of works in support of clerical relief from mandatory subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, while also displaying a keen interest in Jebb's struggle to bring about examination reform at Cambridge. Later, during her long widowhood, she published a series of articles supporting the French Revolution.[8] Unfortunately, this dissertation is unable to reveal very little of the personal side of the relationship between this remarkable couple.

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[7] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 142.

[8] George Meadley in his *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb* (London: 1812), compiled her various newspaper and journal articles.

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Chapter one deals with Jebb's family background, his education at Cambridge, and concludes with his disappointing failure to secure a professorial chair in Arabic; a post that would have ensured the continuation of a much desired academic career. Chapter two deals with Jebb's spirited response as he is charged with religious heterodoxy following a series of lectures that he provided at Cambridge on the New Testament. This chapter also covers Jebb's involvement with the movement behind the Feather's Tavern Petition, an attempt to end mandatory clerical adherence to certain specific articles of faith. Chapter three is concerned with a difficult period in Jebb's life, as he is forced, due to lack of gainful employment, to leave his beloved Cambridge for London, as well as to undertake a second career as a physician. It was also during this period in London that Jebb helped Theophilus Lindsey establish the first Unitarian chapel.

The second half of the dissertation focuses on Jebb's involvement in radical politics. Chapter four deals with Jebb's early political interests, leading in 1779 to the publication of his first political tract, the *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex*. It will reveal how Jebb's engagement with the early stages of the parliamentary reform movement resulted from his belief that the war with the American colonies was not only a mistaken way of handling the colonial crisis, but was also indicative of failures within the British political system. Jebb then proceeded to join with other metropolitan radicals in working towards the creation of an extraparliamentary political association. Meanwhile, in the North of England, Christopher Wyvill, a Yorkshire clergyman, was forming a political association with political goals that were quite different than Jebb's. When they met at the first general meeting of political associations in March 1780, as discussed at the end of the

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chapter, it was clear that Jebb's and Wyvill's differing notions on how to reform the British polity would be difficult if not impossible to reconcile. Chapter five begins with political developments within the Westminster Association, the extraparliamentary political association that Jebb was associated with, and the writing of Jebb's influential program for reform, the *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster*. The chapter continues with Jebb and Wyvill's continued disagreements regarding the nature of political reform, despite efforts to work out their differences at a second general meeting of political associations. The chapter ends with news that completely shocked Jebb and altered the entire political equation: Charles James Fox and Lord North, formerly bitter enemies, had formed a coalition ministry. Chapter six focuses on the collapse of the parliamentary reform movement in the wake of the Fox-North coalition, centering on the events of the contentious Westminster election of 1784, as Jebb and his allies tried to fight Fox for control over the direction of politics in Westminster. Chapter seven covers Jebb's pivotal involvement with the Society for Constitutional Information, the most important and influential of the political organizations that Jebb was associated with. Finally, the epilogue discusses Jebb's interests in the final two years of his life: scriptural study and the humane reform of prisons and ends with his death in 1786 at the age of fifty.

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Chapter One

Cambridge

I

In *Tristram Shandy*, Lawrence Sterne has his pseudo-autobiographical character Tristram satirize the literary convention found in the novel of telling a story as a linear tale of development by beginning his narrative at the point of his own conception. For poor Tristram, life often consisted of a far more erratic course than could ever be revealed in a linear narrative. For John Jebb, despite being very dissimilar to a "Shandean" character, it seems quite appropriate in this biographical study to begin even prior to his conception and deal with his ancestors.

The paternal ancestors of John Jebb were gentry from Woodborough in Nottinghamshire, where parish records concerning the family go back to the reign of Elizabeth.[1] Four generations prior to his birth, the records indicate that the family sold their land in the parish and his grandfather, Samuel Jebb, sought to make his living as a malster.[2] Despite their long-established roots in Nottinghamshire, John Jebb's father and his uncles left the county when they reached adulthood. His eldest uncle, Richard, went to Ireland and while suffering financial difficulties there, established an Irish branch of the

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[1] John Burke, A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland for 1852 (London, 1852), p. 645.

[2] J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses, a biographical list of all known students, graduates and holders of office at the University of Cambridge from earliest times to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940-1955), p. 212.

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family. Both of Richard's sons were to go on to prominence: the elder. Richard. became judge of the King's Bench in Ireland in 1818. while the younger son became the Bishop of Limerick.[5]

Another uncle. Samuel Jebb. was a major influence on John Jebb. Samuel wrote several commentaries on classical works. edited an edition of *Opus Majus*. the masterpiece of the thirteenth-century philosopher and scientist Roger Bacon, as well as crafted biographies of Mary. Queen of Scots and Robert Dudley. the Earl of Leicester. Samuel was a non-juror. a group whose origins resided with the approximately four hundred clergymen who refused to swear loyalty oaths to William and Mary following the revolution in 1688, since such oath-taking would have violated what they felt were still binding vows made previously to James II. The non-jurors refused to accept the authority of those clergymen who were summarily chosen by Parliament to replace the non-juring bishops. Eventually. with the death of the original non-juring bishops, the remaining non-jurors began the process of naming their own bishops and priests and established clandestine chapels for the continuation of what they considered to be the true Church of England.

Samuel Jebb attached himself to Jeremy Collier, the most significant of the second generation non-jurors. Collier is well known among students of English literature for his authorship in 1698 of the *Short View of the Profaneness of the English Stage*, an attack on the indecent language and morals of the English theater. While Collier's attack played a

[5] John Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England, Ireland, and Scotland*, 2nd ed. (London, 1844), 282.

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significant role in helping to set the mood for the less bawdy sentimental comedies of the early eighteenth century, such as is found in the work of Colley Cibber. Collier was also the self-styled "Primus Anglo-Britaniæ Episcopus" of the non-juring clergy.[4] Collier ordained Samuel Jebb as a deacon and priest in his separatist church and made him his personal secretary. In this position Samuel handled all the clandestine correspondence of the non-juring clergy, including their failed attempt to reach a concordat with the Greek Orthodox Church, on the basis of what the non-jurors thought were commonly held beliefs, such as their opposition to Papal domination.[5]

Non-jurors were ineligible for degrees at Cambridge, but Samuel became a non-juror after taking his B.A. degree in 1712 at Peterhouse, the same college his nephew would later attend.[6] Besides being ineligible for university degrees, non-jurors, as a result of the Test Act of 1671, were excluded like other dissenters from the Church of England from holding positions in the government or in the military.[7] Following the death of

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[4] J. H. Overton, *The Nonjurers; Their Lives, Principles, and Writings* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1903), p. 122.

[5] Overton, p. 268.

[6] *Admissions to Peterhouse or S. Peter's College in the University of Cambridge....* Compiled by Thomas Alfred Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. 222.

[7] The financial status of non-jurors could also be threatened due to their beliefs. In 1722 Parliament pased an act to raise 100,000 pounds from the estates of non-jurors and Catholics. J. H. Overton, *The Nonjurers*, p. 310.

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Collier in 1726. Samuel needed to find a way of making a living and finally settled on a career in medicine, having gone to Rheims to receive his degree in Physic in 1728.[8]

The life of his non-juror uncle possibly provided several important lessons for John Jebb. When Jebb later became disenchanted with the teachings of the Church of England and gave up his clerical preferments, as well as finding that an academic career was closed off to him, he followed the example set by his uncle and pursued a career in medicine. Additionally, his uncle's religious position may have had a subtle effect on his own attitude towards a church which was officially sanctioned by the state. As one historian of the non-juror movement has written, "They realized far more vividly than most of their contemporaries the existence of the Church as a distinct spiritual society with laws of their own, whose connection with the state, however beneficial, was purely accidental; and as a consequence, they insisted on the independency of the church of any power on earth in the exercise of her purely spiritual power and authority."[9] The non-jurors saw the Erastianism of the Church of England as a dual threat: its erroneous teachings were a hazard to the individual's chances for salvation, while here on earth the legal restrictions which the state placed on non-adherents to the Church of England threatened them socially and

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[8] Thomas Alfred Walker, *Admissions to Peterhouse or S. Peter's College in the University of Cambridge....*(Cambridge University Press, 1912), 223. His son Richard, who will have a significant role in John Jebb's life, went on to have an extraordinarily successful career as a doctor.

[9] J. H. Overton, *The Nonjurers; Their Lives, Principles, and Writings* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1903), p. 6.

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economically.[10] Though the non-jurors were often inaccurately accused by their opponents of displaying a fanatical brand of Jacobitism [i.e., loyalty to the memory of James II], their writings did however offer a model for the creation of an independent Church of England, a church whose religious purity would be achieved through the loss of its official government sanction. By the end of the eighteenth century, when the non-juring movement was drawing to a close, it was rational dissenters like John Jebb, who though far removed from the non-jurors on doctrinal matters, took up the challenge to a state-dominated religion.

John Jebb's father[11] (also named John) pursued a more traditional religious career than his brother Samuel. After finishing his studies at Christ's College, Cambridge, he followed his eldest brother Richard to Ireland in order to seek preferments in the Church of Ireland. His choice was a wise one for an individual lacking wealth and high social status, since both could be obtained in Ascendancy Ireland through attachment to the exclusive minority whose main identity came from their Anglicanism.[12] For the British government, the desire to place Englishmen in Irish sees was a cornerstone of the policy of colonial domination, and it opened up the possibility to men like Jebb, who due to his relatively modest background, would have found few opportunities back in England.[13]

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[10] In 1722 Parliament passed an act to raise 100,000 for the estates of non-jurors and Catholics.

[11] Jebb Senior was going to outlive his son, dying on February 6, 1787.

[12] R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 170.

[13] T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan (eds.), *A New History of Ireland. Vol. IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland 1691-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 86.

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In his search for preferments in Ireland, Jebb benefited from a number of important patrons including the Archbishop of Dublin, John Hoadley,[14] and the Earl of Oxford.[15] While Irish-born clerics such as Jonathan Swift deplored the placement of Englishmen in Irish sees, Swift became genuinely fond of Jebb and wrote a letter to the Earl of Oxford in which he inquired whether there were any preferments available for Jebb since he had a "very good reputation among us, which I believe he well deserves, and hath naturally good principles."[16] Unlike Jebb's son, who would lash out wherever he saw inequity without considering the personal cost, Jebb Senior knew how to please his powerful patrons, though without sacrificing all his personal integrity. Swift noted that Jebb was able to "tack the prudence of the serpent to the innocence of the dove," something which Swift could admire in others though he himself always found it to be a difficult task.[17]

Despite his outward quiescence, Jebb Senior was a man of strong convictions. "He was a man of good sense and most excellent principles," according to man-about-town and noted eighteenth-century diarist Sylas Neville, who added, "He abhors priestcraft and is an enemy to civil and religious tyranny of every kind."[18] Quite possibly many of his son's

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[14] John Hoadley was the younger brother of Benjamin Hoadley, Bishop of Winchester, whose writings on the relationship of the Church and State were to be very important for the anti-subscription movement.

[15] Swift to the Earl of Oxford, May 31, 1733, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, F. Elrington Ball (ed.) vol. 4 (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd), 437-8.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Sylas Neville, *Diary of Sylas Neville 1767-1788*, ed. Cozens-Hardy (London, 1950), p. 110.

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beliefs on matters religious and political were partly shaped by his father with whom he maintained a close relationship. How much the father later shared his son's doctrinal heterodoxy is not clear and there is no record of Jebb Senior attending Theophilus Lindsey's Unitarian chapel as his son was later to do. He did, however, have cordial relations with several of the leading Unitarians of the period and was particularly fond of Joseph Priestley, who he always jokingly referred to as "divine."[19]

Through the intercession of Archbishop Hoadley, Jebb was presented with the Deanery of Cashel,[20] which Swift estimated as having the not inconsiderable income of four hundred and fifty pounds a year.[21] As was quite common in the eighteenth-century Church of Ireland (as well as in the Church of England), Jebb Senior spent his years as Dean of Cashel in nonresidency, using the money from his Irish see to provide for a household in England. With a secure income, in 1735 he married Ann Gashel, whose prosperous family had an estate near Colchester in Essex.[22] Swift thought that Jebb was intending to bring his new bride back to Ireland,[23] but instead Jebb decided that he wanted to remain in England and he eventually settled in London on Southampton Street, near Covent Garden.

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[19] Neville, p. 111.

[20] Cashel was one of the four ecclesiastical provinces of the Church of Ireland.

[21] Swift to the Earl of Oxford, Sept. 2, 1735, *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 222-223.

[22] Venn, p. 213.

[23] Jonathan Swift to the Earl of Oxford, Sept. 2, 1735. Cited in *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, pp. 222-223

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II

Within a short time of their arrival in London. John and Ann Jebb had their first child. John. who was born on February 16. 1736.[24] Since he did not leave a personal memoir and his biographer Disney did not linger over this period of his life. very little is known about John Jebb's early life. except for his fairly peripatetic early education. which included attending a series of schools in England and Ireland. Upon concluding his primary education at Chesterfield. Jebb went to Trinity College. Dublin. where he was admitted as a pensioner.[25] He proved to be a fine student and received copies of the writings of Horace. Juvenal. Trench and Plato as a reward for his academic achievements. Despite the fact that in the eighteenth century Trinity College offered a stronger education than its English counterparts, with a superior system of examinations that Jebb would later try to introduce in Cambridge. Jebb knew that better possibilities for advancement awaited graduates of the two English universities. In 1754, he decided to leave Trinity College and in the fall of that year began his studies at Cambridge.[26]

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[24] Jebb's biography in the *D.N.B.* by Alexander Gordon states that Jebb was born in Ireland, though Disney states that Jebb was born in London and most likely he was correct.

[25] The lower fee paying students were labeled as pensioners while the higher fee paying students were fellow-commoners.

[26] By a long-standing arrangement between the English universities and their Irish counterpart, Jebb was able to use his time spent at Trinity towards his degree at Peterhouse.

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Cambridge in the mid-eighteenth century, despite a precipitous drop in the number of students, was a bustling small town, full of activity particularly at the start of each academic term. The excitement of one's first entrance into the precincts of the university was captured by William Wordsworth, who entered St. John's College in 1787, in his autobiographical poem *The Prelude* written years later:

> My spirit was up, my thoughts were full
> of hope:
> Some friends I had, acquaintances who there
> Seemed friends, poor simple schoolboys, now
> hung around
> With honour and importance: in a world
> Of welcome faces up and down I roved;
> Questions, directions, warnings and advice,
> Flowed in upon me, from all sides; fresh
> day[27]

Possibly John Jebb also experienced that same sense of wonder and contentment when he made his first entrance into the university accompanied by his father. Nevertheless, Wordsworth and Jebb would eventually react in different ways to their Cambridge experience. By the time he sat down to complete this passage of *The Prelude* in 1799, Wordsworth was commenting on his youthful innocence that was later shaken by his abhorrence of the violent turn taken by the French Revolution. His reaction against the extreme rationalism espoused by those responsible for the Reign of Terror led him to reject the very nature of what he considered to be the cold, sterile, rationalist education he had received at Cambridge.

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[27] William Wordsworth, *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1904), p. 138.

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Jebb's response to Cambridge took a different form than Wordsworth's. since it did not encompass a total rejections of the institution and its values. As we will see. Jebb saw no need to tear down the walls of Cambridge, since a great deal of what he experienced he deemed to be of great value. He never could have endorsed Joseph Priestley's attitude. as expressed in a letter to friends in Manchester, that "I bless God that ... I was not educated at Oxford or Cambridge."[28] Rather. Jebb thought so highly of the education offered at Cambridge that he hoped to obtain a permanent position at one of the colleges. in order that he could fulfill his desire to act as an internal reformer of the examination system. which he felt was the weak link of the education offered at the University.

Jebb always looked upon Cambridge with affection. even in his darkest days at the University when his plan for examination reform was being turned aside. or when he finally left Cambridge in 1776. after opponents of his heterodox religious beliefs blocked any possibility for him to remain at the University. Despite these setbacks. Jebb never looked with bitterness on a place where under different circumstances he might have happily spent the remainder of his life.

Jebb was admitted as a pensioner to Peterhouse College in November 1754, under the tutelage of Daniel Longmire and the Rev. William Oldham.[29] His choice of a college, possibly the result of the influence of his uncle, was significant for his later involvement in religious dissent, since among the assorted Cambridge colleges Peterhouse was a major

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[28] Joseph Priestley, *Familiar Letters Addressed to the Inhabitants of the Town of Birmingham in Refutation of Several Charges Advanced Against the Dissenters.* Birmingham, 1792, letter 4 page 6.

[29] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 4

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center for heterodox religious views. Throughout his long involvement in religious and political reform Jebb remained in contact with important allies, some of whom he initially met at the college. When Jebb entered Peterhouse, the institution was increasingly under the intellectual domination of Edmund Law, who served as its Master from 1754-1768. Law, a loyal Whig, benefited from powerful patrons such as the Duke of Newcastle and the Earl of Hardwicke, and it was through the Duke of Grafton that Law was made Bishop of Carlisle in 1768. He was a critic of many of the practices of his church and later became one of only two ecclesiastical Lords to support the Feather's Tavern petitioners in their struggle to end mandated clerical statements of faith.[30]

Law's edited edition of Locke's *Works* (1777) became a standard text at Cambridge and played an important role in teaching Cambridge students that the relation between sovereign and subjects was the subject of a contract. His earlier theological work, *Considerations on the State of the World with Regard to the Theory of Religion* (1745), also proved to be an important text at Cambridge, since its emphasis on exploring nature in order to discover God's intent helped solidify the link between religion and Newtonian science. Law's writings often expressed antitrinitarian ideas which influenced a whole generation of Peterhouse students. While Law himself never left the Church of England, he played the role of midwife to many who eventually took that step. During his years at

[30] In defense of the petitioners Law wrote his *Considerations on the Propriety of Requiring a Subscription to Articles of Faith* (1774).

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Peterhouse Jebb had frequent contact with Law and considered himself to be Law's disciple.[31]

Jebb received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1757. This was a year after he was expected to receive his degree. but he was delayed by the onset of a severe illness in 1756. Despite having to work particularly hard to catch up. Jebb received the honor of being selected Second Wrangler.[32] Second in this instance was no dishonor since the Senior Wrangler for that year was Edward Waring. a brilliant mathematician who was to hold Newton's Lucasian Chair in Mathematics from 1760 to 1798.[33] While Wordsworth in the *Prelude* denigrated the system of honors, it was part of the university's attempt to show a greater commitment to education and it did allow for outstanding students like Jebb and Waring to emerge from out of the shadow of their relatively modest pedigrees.

Shortly after taking his degree Jebb offered his services as a private tutor. with eight students eventually under his charge. This was a fairly common practice among recent graduates who had shown academic promise. Hiring a tutor was seen as a necessary

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[31] Disney, 19.

[32] Beginning in 1753 students at Cambridge were ranked according to their achievements in the mathematical tripos. The highest distinction went to those who achieved the rank of Wranglers, with the top student receiving the title of Senior Wrangler. The second level of honors went to those labeled as Senior Optimes, while the third level students were given the title of Junior Optimes.

[33] Waring later wrote the most influential mathematical work of mid-century, his *Miscellaneous Analytica* (1762). Not all Wranglers went on to achieve further distinction after receiving their degrees. Two years prior to Waring's award, Thomas Gastley became Senior Wrangler but was famous for little more than his poverty and very plain features which earned him the nickname "Ghastly"; C. M. Neale, *The Senior Wranglers of the University of Cambridge, from 1748 to 1907* (Bury St. Edmunds: T. Groom and Son, 1907), 16.

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step for any student who wished to do well in the mathematical tripos. since the quality of education provided by the fellows was quite poor. At the very least tutors like Jebb were recent participants in the mathematical tripos and therefore could provide some guidance as to how best to undertake the exam. Tutoring was seen as a temporary position, usually undertaken until the more prestigious post of fellow was achieved.[34]

Because he planned on a career in the Church. Jebb continued with his theological studies at Cambridge and in 1760 received his Master of Arts.[35] On July 1. 1761 he was confirmed as a fellow of Peterhouse.[36] Fellowships were given to those students who had outstanding academic records as undergraduates. as was the case with Jebb. and since there were few responsibilities attached to the post, the possibility of a lazy, tranquil existence among the quadrangles of the colleges of Cambridge made it a rather appealing sinecure. Certainly teaching had very little importance in the life of a fellow, since it was the tutors rather than the fellows who primarily undertook the education of the undergraduates. Because fellowships were forfeited upon marriage, most waited to take that step until they had procured suitable clerical preferments to provide a living.

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[34] Occasionally the contacts made by a tutor could make a career, since tutors often had as pupils aristocrats and future politicians who had sinecures to grant. Few were as fortunate as George Pretyman of Pembroke College, who became Bishop of Lincoln and Dan of St. Paul's within three years of his former student William Pitt becoming Prime Minister. [Ben Ross Schneider, *Wordsworth's Cambridge Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 22]

[35] Eighteenth-century Cambridge M.A. degrees required additional academic work, unlike today, when after a three and a half years wait, a bachelors degree recipient becomes automatically eligible for a Masters degree.

[36] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 6.

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In 1762, as part of his service to the university, Jebb and Richard Watson, a fellow of Trinity College,[37] were given the office of Moderators for the university-wide disputations. Disputations were public oral examinations, in which second-year students defended three theses, one in moral philosophy and two in mathematics. The examinations were undertaken in order to determine class standing among the undergraduates, and had the unfortunate consequence of creating a competitive environment in which genuine learning was sacrificed to the goal of focusing on preparation for the exams.

The office of Moderator was partly an honor in recognition of academic distinction. The Moderators would inform the second-year reading men (those students who planned to take examinations and were in pursuit of academic honors) two weeks prior to the exam that they were to be summoned to the Cambridge Senate House for the disputation, which was held in Latin. The Moderator would also select up to three students from the same academic year as the disputant, and these students were expected to pose responses to the disputant's syllogisms. At the end of the disputation the Moderator would give out a grade in the form of a compliment in Latin.

Those who attended these academic gladiatorial matches were apt to be disappointed, since rather than hearing the splendor of Ciceronian Latin, they were more likely to get what one nineteenth-century critic noted were "syllogisms such as would make Aristotle stare, and the Latin would make every classical hair on your head stand on

[37] Watson later became the Bishop of Landaff.

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end."[38] In fulfilling their task, Jebb and Watson had a much larger audience than was usual for Senate House disputations for one of the students being questioned was William Paley, a young man who already had established a reputation as a fine scholar.[39] Jebb was to serve as Moderator for the next five years though the quality of the disputants never again matched the level of Paley.

Jebb during his years as Moderator began work on a commentary on Newton's *Principia*. Jebb's co-authors were Robert Thorpe, a fellow from Peterhouse and later Archdeacon of Northumberland, and George Wollaston, a fellow of Sidney College. Their work, *Excerpta quaedam e Newtoni Principiis philosophi naturalis*, was completed in 1765.

Jebb's interest in Newton was part of a major change that was taking place at Cambridge in the second half of the eighteenth century. John Gascoigne has suggested that contrary to accepted opinion, there was less interest in the sciences at Cambridge than at Oxford in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[40] However, by the time Jebb arrived at Cambridge in 1754, the curriculum had been overhauled so that it was now clearly differentiated from Oxford in having replaced the older mechanical philosophy of

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[38] Denys Arthur Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 47.

[39] George Wilson Meadley, *Memoirs of William Paley* (Edinburgh, 1810), p. 18. Paley later went on to write his most important work, *Moral Philosophy* (1785), a work that established him as the leading Cambridge authority in that field.

[40] John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment. Science, Religion and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 58.

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Descartes and Hobbes with the new mechanical philosophy of Newton.[41] This was the second major change in academic direction to take place at Cambridge within a relatively short period of time, since it was only during the Restoration that Cartesianism became part of the curriculum of Cambridge, over the objections of many high churchmen who wanted to see a continued commitment to scholasticism.[42]

Jebb's lectures were clearly influenced by Newtonian science and played a role in the formulation of Jebb's concept of a divine being. Many years later, one of his former students recalled: "Dr. Jebb, in his mathematical lectures, in concluding Newton's *Principia,* used to insist on the Newtonian system, as the strongest, and, indeed, only rational demonstration of the existence of a deity. In his opinion, we were not to form our ideas of a God, from abstruse, metaphysical reasoning, but from the consideration of his works. Thus, he would endeavor to form an idea of the strength of the deity, by calculating the force with which the planet Saturn must be subjected to have its greatest velocity."[43]

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[41] Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1976), p. 17.

[42] The shift towards a more mathematical based education was not popular among potential students. It may have been one of the reasons why throughout the eighteenth century, Oxford was to enroll more students than Cambridge, with only 200 a year entering the school by the 1750s. John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment. Science, Religion and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 18; Lucy S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell (Eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford,* Vol. V: *the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 309.

[43] Letter from John Baynes to John Disney, May 4, 1786, cited in Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 15.

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By the 1730s Cambridge students were being examined in topics from the *Principia*. As a result of Newtonian science becoming a cornerstone of a Cambridge education, there was a demand for appropriate textbooks. The first popular Newtonian textbook was John Keil's *Introductio ad veram physicam* (1701), while others soon followed. In a situation that sadly does not sound so different from where we find ourselves today, one historian of these early science texts has noted that even in the eighteenth century, textbook writers, being financially dependent on their audience, were aware of the low level of knowledge of their audience and produced books which they could easily handle.[44]

Jebb's co-authored study, compared to many of the textbooks of the time, was a relatively sophisticated affair, in which the authors used Newton's third book of the *Principia* as a means of commenting on the first. It was received with favor by the *Monthly Review*, where the reviewer commented that it "appears to be the work of a very able master," and added that "the principles and reasonings of Sir Isaac Newton are explained with much greater clearness and perspicuity, than in the celebrated commentary of Jacquier and Le Seur. In a word, the whole of this commentary is remarkably clear and instructive."[45] At Cambridge the book was well received and it was still being read by

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[44] G. N. Cantor, *Optics After Newton: Theories of Light in Britain and Ireland, 1704-1840* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 47.

[45] *Monthly Review*, vol. xxxiii (1765), pp. 205-6.

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students at the time of Jebb's death in 1786, though it was the only study of its kind that he would attempt.[46]

III

For most of the tutors and fellows at Cambridge, an academic career was usually combined with a number of benefices on the side in order to provide for a suitable income. Since non-residency was endemic in the eighteenth-century church, there apparently was no problem in holding clerical positions outside the bounds of the university. The first step for Jebb's clerical career came when he was ordained deacon on June 6, 1762 at Buckden, Cambridgeshire, by Dr. John Green, the Bishop of Lincoln.[47] A little over a year later Green admitted Jebb into priest's orders.

For his choice of ordination sermon Jebb spoke on Mark viii. 38: "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." One must wonder whether Jebb had selected this verse or was encouraged by Dr. Green to pursue it. This sermon, with its emphasis on the sinfulness of man, was quite different from the sermons he would deliver in later years, sermons that would place a greater emphasis on the benevolence of God and the worthiness

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[46] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 11.

[47] Green was later to join William Law as the only spiritual members of the House of Lords to support the claims of the clerical petitioners against clerical subscription.

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of man to be the recipient of this benevolence. themes that were very significant in the newly formed Unitarian chapels of the last quarter of the century.

Jebb's first clerical preferment came about through the intercession of his patron Edmund Law. who recommended Jebb to Matthias Mawson. the Bishop of Ely. for the small vicarage of Gamlingay. in Bedfordshire. which Jebb took possession of in August. 1764.[48] His clerical career received an additional boost from his academic success and service to the university; since in gratitude for his work as Moderator for the academic disputations. Jebb was nominated in October to stand for the rectory of Ovington. in Norfolk. one of the livings in the possession of Cambridge University. whose holder was determined by an election in the Cambridge Senate. This was a notable victory for Jebb in part for its singularity. since despite numerous attempts. this was the only electoral triumph that he was ever to experience at Cambridge: in this instance with the comfortable margin of 91 to 73 over his opponent Henry Turner.[49]

With a fairly secure income derived from his clerical livings Jebb could now consider settling down and getting married, since marriage would lead to the forfeiture of his comfortable Peterhouse fellowship. While attending a ball in Huntingdon, Jebb was introduced to Ann Torkington, the eldest daughter of the Rev. James Torkington, rector of Little Stukely, County Huntingdon, and Lady Dorothy Shepard, the daughter of the second

[48] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, 18.

[49] *Cambridge Chronicle*, October 20, 1764.

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Earl of Harborough.[50] Ann Torkington was an extremely shy twenty-nine year old, whose short, thin body and pale complexion made her appear delicate and reserved. While Ann had not received much in the way of a formal education she had a true love of reading and when Jebb met her he was immediately captivated by her obvious intelligence and thoughtfully argued opinions.[51]

On December 29, 1764 the couple were married. It was a good match for both of them for "their hearts and understanding were formed for each other," as one mutual friend noted in a piece that appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* to mark the death of John Jebb.[52] Both seemed to thrive within this relationship and Jebb took to conferring with his wife on all subjects in which he was involved. Throughout Jebb's work for the campaign against clerical subscriptions to articles of religious faith, as well as in his struggle with examination reform at Cambridge, not only did he seek out Ann's opinion but she became an active participant in this work through her authorship of a number of bitingly satirical pamphlets. She also provided important emotional support when Jebb later left the clergy and was forced to leave Cambridge and to start again in a new career as a physician in London.

Unlike her husband, whose death in 1786 prevented him from participating in the swirl of radical activities which stemmed from the impact of the French Revolution, Ann

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[50] George Meadley, "Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb," *Monthly Review*. Her brother, the Rev. John Torkington, became Master of Clare Hall Cambridge.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Anon. *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 56 (1786), 195.

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was very active in the 1790s and wrote a number of pamphlets in which she criticized the curtailment of political liberty and the war fever that gripped the nation in the backlash against the revolution. She also maintained an active correspondence with her husband's former colleagues in radical politics and Unitarian circles. While Ann Jebb never wrote directly on the emancipation of women, she lived her own life based on the assumption that she had every right to be involved in the political process. She lived to the advanced age of 77 and at her death in 1812 was fondly remembered for her contribution to religious and political reform.[53]

IV

Though dependent upon his clerical benefices for income, Jebb was always a rather indifferent clergyman and in the years following his marriage he directed himself towards finding a permanent place in the academic life at Cambridge. For a time Jebb lived in Potton, Bedfordshire, because of its proximity to his vicarage in Gamlingay, though he resigned this post on August 19, 1765 after slightly less than twelve months. Freeing himself of this vicarage meant that he could return to Cambridge where he received a curacy and lectureship at St. Andrew's Church. He also took on seven students whom he tutored on a daily basis. With an eye towards showing his value to the university community, Jebb continued to competently fulfill the role of Moderator during the

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[53] At her death George Meadley, who was to write a number of biographical works on prominent Unitarians, contributed a two-part article "Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb" to the *Monthly Review*. He later took the article and added a bibliography of Ann Jebb's writings and published it as *Memoirs of Mrs. Jebb* (London, 1812).

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university disputations and continued to do so until October 1768.[54] However, by the time Jebb handled his last disputation, his position at Cambridge was becoming increasingly uncertain, as a struggle for the chair in Arabic studies made very apparent.

In 1666 Sir Thomas Adams established a Professorship in Arabic, which provided an annual income of forty pounds. The professor, who would be responsible for one lecture per week, was to be selected by the Vice-chancellor of Cambridge and the heads of the various colleges.[55] In 1724 a second Arabic professorship, known as the Lord Almoner's Chair, was created with an endowment that produced an income of fifty pounds per year. Instead of a second person being granted this chair, the holder of the Adams chair was to assume the responsibilities and, more importantly, the money set side for the possessor of the Lord Almoner's Chair.

On January 14, 1768, Edward Chappelow, the occupant of both chairs in Arabic, died after a brief illness.[56] On the very same day, Jebb sent a letter to the Chancellor of the University, the Duke of Newcastle, a prominent Whig politician, informing Newcastle that he had studied Arabic for the past several years and promising to "employ my whole attention upon the duties of the office and [to] acknowledge whatever assistance your grace shall be pleased to afford me with the utmost gratitude."[57] Since the selection for the

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[54] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 17-18.

[55] Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, p. 132.

[56] B. L. Letter from R. Plumptre to 2nd Lord Hardwicke, January 17, 1768. Add. MSS. 32,988, f. 17.

[57] Add. MSS. 32,979, f. 228.

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Arabic chair was made by the heads of the colleges. Jebb needed to lobby Newcastle as well as the High Steward. Lord Hardwicke. in order to get them to bring pressure on the heads to support his candidacy. Jebb had reason to expect that Newcastle and Hardwicke would be receptive to his request. since he had taken steps from the beginning of his career at Cambridge to identify himself as a supporter of Newcastle.

From the sixteenth century on it was an accepted practice to elect distinguished statesmen and nobles to high offices at both Oxford and Cambridge.[58] In keeping with this tradition. the Duke of Newcastle was chosen Chancellor in 1748. a position which allowed him to do what came most naturally to him - grant patronage. while the actual running of Cambridge was left in the hands of the Vice-chancellor, an office that was given on an annual basis to the heads of colleges on a rotation system. Newcastle was. however. involved in more than just patronage at Cambridge; Newcastle took a tremendous interest in all issues relating to the university.[59]

Unfortunately for Newcastle, his influence at Cambridge was on the wane. In 1744 Newcastle's election as Chancellor was indicative of the increasing hegemony of the Whigs over the political life of the country, which by mid-century had resulted in the almost complete eradication of the Tories as a political force. This Whig domination over both the country and Cambridge lasted until the reign of George III in the 1760s. In the second year of George's reign, Newcastle was dropped from the government and the system of

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[58] Winstanley, *Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century*, 6.

[59] The several volumes of Newcastle's correspondence dedicated to affairs at Cambridge now deposited in the British Library attest to his tremendous involvement in all aspects of university affairs.

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patronage that he had spent a lifetime creating with Parliament, the Church, and the University began to collapse. While his position at Cambridge may have remained more solid than his control over ecclesiastical and parliamentary clients, his position still had changed rather dramatically.[60]

In 1763, at the very time that Newcastle's political power was on the wane, he became involved in a major struggle at Cambridge to ensure that Lord Royston, the son of his political ally, Lord Hardwicke, would succeed his father as High Steward, a position he held from 1749.[61] The Grenville ministry, which was in power at the time, saw this as a perfect opportunity to strike an additional and perhaps final blow to Newcastle's political power. They might have succeeded in their design if not for having made the unfortunate choice of John Montagu, the fourth Earl of Sandwich, as their candidate. Sandwich had earlier shown a genuine interest in Cambridge, which was near his estate at Hinchingbrooke and where he had spent two years as a student at Trinity. Nevertheless, Sandwich was a lackluster candidate, particularly since his already poor moral reputation was combined with the additional charge of hypocrisy, after making a notorious speech in the House of Lords in which he denounced his former friend, John Wilkes, for publishing an obscene poem, *An Essay on Woman*.[62]

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[60] Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 109.

[61] While the High Steward was the chief judicial officer of the University, in reality the office had few responsibilities attached to it and was mainly viewed as a stepping stone to the office of Chancellor. Newcastle had secured his own election as High Steward in 1737 in order to position himself for top prize at Cambridge, the Chancellorship. Winstanley, *Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century*, 36.

[62] Winstanley, *Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 56-7.

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Since the election for High Steward was held in the Cambridge Senate, it was necessary to canvas the university community.[63] Lord Royston (now the Second Lord Hardwicke) eventually won a close victory over Sandwich when the election was held on March 30, 1764, one that owed a great deal to the dedicated efforts of supporters like Jebb, who were able to stem the tide of defectors away from the increasingly powerless Newcastle.[64] Several years later Jebb reminded Hardwicke of his commitment to his cause:

> It is well known that I engaged in what appeared to me to be the cause of virtue. I opposed Lord Sandwich from a persuasion that his success and the ruin of the University was inseparably connected. My zeal appeared preposterous in the eyes even of the party which I served. I disregarded the welfare of a father which seemed to be immediately concerned, and was deaf to the entreaty of a mother rather than go back from my engagements and this at a season when it was my interest to stand well with them - when I was soliciting their assistance and consent to my marriage .... I have not yet recovered from the consequence of my conduct.[65]

The overwhelming ardor that Jebb was to bring to all his later endeavors on behalf of radical reform was already apparent in this struggle for the position of High Steward. Why his tremendous passion, questioned by friends and made the subject for derision by his enemies and to the consternation of his parents, was brought to the fore over this contest is

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[63] The Cambridge Senate was a two house body which consisted of a regent house containing every Master of Arts who had kept his name on the books at one of the colleges (Jebb as a recent M.A. would have sat in this house), after five years they were eligible to sit in the non-regent house. The non-regents had the advantage since they could vote down a candidate or a Grace (a Cambridge statute) before it even reached the regents or they could, if necessary, flood the regent house with Doctors. Winstanley, *Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 31-2.

[64] The dispute over who would fill the office of High Steward eventually spilled over into the courts where it was finally settled. See Blackstone, vol. I, pp. 547-553.

[65] John Jebb to the Second Lord Hardwicke, January 22, 1769, Hardwicke Papers Add. MSS. 35,658, f. 1.

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not quite clear. Certainly it was not the issue of ministerial involvement at Cambridge. since Jebb had never questioned the dominance of Newcastle. Much more likely. support for Hardwicke was a way for Jebb to express his dissatisfaction with George Grenville's ministry and in general with the shift in politics which occurred with the accession of George III. with the result that this relatively minor contest at Cambridge provided Jebb's introduction to the wider world of British politics.

In a more immediate and practical manner. Jebb's support for Hardwicke in 1763 allowed him to try to collect on any debts he may have earned for his support. In addition to the letter that he sent Newcastle. Jebb followed up four days later with a letter to Hardwicke. echoing his earlier request for assistance from Newcastle and added the pointed plea that "my success will be of the utmost importance to my happiness."[66] Hardwicke had certainly remembered Jebb's engagement on his behalf. As late as 1805 he commented favorably on Jebb's assistance. which Jebb's widow. grateful for the acknowledgment, assured Hardwicke was "entirely voluntary."[67]

Despite his record as a supporter of Newcastle and Hardwicke at Cambridge. Jebb was not guaranteed success in this attempt to gain the chair in Arabic. Jebb's opponent was his first cousin. Samuel Hallifax, who formally entered his name for the professorship at the same time as Jebb.[68] Hallifax had earlier expressed an interest in possibly gaining

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[66] John Jebb to Lord Hardwicke, January 18, 1768. Add. MSS. 35,657, f. 295.

[67] Ann Jebb to Lord Hardwicke, January 16, 1805. Add. MSS. 35,755, f. 182.

[68] Hallifax was the daughter of John Jebb's father's sister Hannah.

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this chair when it became vacant,[69] which accounts for Jebb's haste in sending off his letters to Newcastle and Hardwicke. Still it was considered to be a duplicitous act by Jebb since he and his cousin had previously been close friends and also since Hallifax was considered to be the heir to the chair in Civil Law that was currently held by Dr. Ridlington, which Hallifax took two years later following Ridlington's death.

One factor that was seemingly of little consequence in this contest was the fact that neither Jebb nor Hallifax were expert in Arabic. Nevertheless, Jebb was better prepared than his cousin, since back in July 1764 he had begun to teach himself Arabic and for the next several years remained committed to its study.[70] While in later years he reached a proficiency that enabled him to translate passages from the Koran into English, at the time of the election for the chair he was not yet proficient, but was certainly ahead of Hallifax, who apparently knew no Arabic whatsoever.[71]

This lack of knowledge on the part of the candidates was not the barrier one might assume, for it was not uncommon for eighteenth-century Cambridge professors to be completely unfamiliar with their subjects. Few of the holders of the Regius Chair in Hebrew knew much of the language,[72] while for a time Richard Watson, before holding the Regius Professorship in Theology, occupied the Professorship of Chemistry, a field in

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[69] Robert Plumptre to the Second Lord Hallifax, January 17, 1768. Add. MSS. 35,628, f. 68.

[70] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, 9.

[71] Jebb at this time also began to study Hebrew under the direction of Israel Lyons. Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 9.

[72] Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, p. 121.

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which he had absolutely no knowledge.[73] Even when a professor was extremely knowledgeable, there was no guarantee of teaching excellence. Edward Waring, one of the great mathematicians of the age, became Lucasian Professor of Mathematics in 1760. However, in his 38 years in the Lucasian chair he never once offered a lecture.[74] Under the original Professorship of Arabic established by Sir Thomas Adam there was supposed to be a penalty of ten shillings for every lecture not delivered by the Professor, though this fine was never collected.[75]

While in the case of Waring his refusal to lecture was regrettable since he was a brilliant mathematician at a school where mathematical education was deemed to be of great importance, in the case of the Arabic professorship the lack of competence among the candidates was less of a drawback since there was virtually no student interest in this field. As it turned out, despite student indifference, the first Arabic Professor, Edmund Castell, was a fine academic who published a number of critical Arabic commentaries as did the second Professor, Simon Ockley. With Edward Chappelow the level of competence declined but he was still a knowledgeable student of Arabic.[76]

Since the academic qualifications for the candidates was not a central issue in the case of Jebb and Hallifax, it evolved around their ability to gather supporters for their candidacy. Like Jebb, Hallifax had supported Hardwicke in his contest for High Steward

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[73] Charles Henry Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge* vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1842-1908), p. 343.

[74] Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, p. 131.

[75] Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, p. 132.

[76] Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, p. 133.

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and he also sought compensation for his support, which he solicited through letters to both Newcastle and Hardwicke requesting their assistance[77]

Despite the entreaties of Hallifax, Newcastle decided to throw his support behind Jebb, which he indicated to Lynford Caryl, the Master of Jesus College, who passed on the information to Jebb. In a letter which he immediately rushed off to Newcastle, Jebb gratefully acknowledged that "your grace's determination lays me under the strongest obligations."[78] Perhaps Newcastle supported Jebb because he had doubts about Samuel Hallifax's political reliability, something which came to light in later years when Hallifax became increasingly embarrassed by his past Whig association, particularly since the wind was obviously blowing the other way with George III's anti-Whig ministries. Newcastle also seemingly resented, as Jebb certainly had, the fact that Hallifax was in line for the Civil Law chair and he viewed Hallifax's desire for the Arabic post as greedy.[79]

The dilemma of having two past supporters of Hardwicke's struggle for the High Stewardship contesting the Arabic chair was noted by Richard Plumptre, head of Queen's College and a major source of Cambridge information for Hardwicke, with whom he maintained a frequent correspondence. "I am sorry they are competitors," Plumptre wrote in a letter to Hardwicke, "as I should have been glad to have served Mr. Jebb, and shall be glad to do so at some future opportunity, but have long considered myself as engaged to

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[77] Hallifax to Newcastle, Jan. 14, 1768, Add. MSS. 32,988, f. 19 and Hallifax to Hardwicke, January 15 1768, Add. MSS. 35,657, f. 294.

[78] John Jebb to the Duke of Newcastle, January 18, 1768. Add. MSS. 32,988 f. 42.

[79] Samuel Hallifax to the Duke of Newcastle, January 27, 1768. Add. MSS. 32,988, f. 79.

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Dr. H. for this thing."[80] There are no surviving letters indicating Hardwicke's personal preference. though it must have been a very difficult choice. There is reason to believe that Hardwicke supported Hallifax. since later in the year. Hallifax offered to back Hardwicke in his possible bid for the office of Chancellor following the death of Newcastle.[81] If Hardwicke had not supported him in the Arabic contest it is doubtful whether Hallifax would have offered him such support.

Disney. ever loyal to the memory of his deceased friend. was going to remember Cambridge as being for the most part behind Jebb.[82] Hallifax. however. upon visiting the various Heads of Houses was given assurances that he was going to win.[83] Jebb on this occasion. as he was to show at times in later life. could be fairly oblivious to political realities. and even on the eve of the election which was held on January 27. 1768. when he was urged to drop his candidacy, still thought victory was possible. His failure to do the socially accepted thing and drop out gracefully was to prove to be a major error on his part and was even used by Robert Plumptre in later years as a model for poor behavior in a letter he sent to a father whose son was about to lose a Cambridge election.[84] As it turned

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[80] Robert Plumptre to the Second Lord Hardwicke, January 17, 1768. Add. MSS. 35,628. f. 68.

[81] Hallifax's support was not needed since Hardwicke dropped out of the race to avoid an embarrassing defeat to the Earl of Grafton. Add. MSS. 35,640, f. 303.

[82] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 21.

[83] Letter from Hallifax to the Duke of Newcastle, January 14, 1768. Add MSS. 32,988, f. 19.

[84] Robert Plumptre to Charles Yorke, January 3, 1769. Add. MSS. 35,640, f. 342. In this letter Plumptre was describing to Yorke how he tried to encourage a father to block the application of his son (for what post is not clear) since the son was going to lose and that if by

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out. Hallifax defeated Jebb nine to one with only the Master of Clarehall. John Goddard. voting for Jebb.[85] When casting his vote Goddard said "there that is *Conscientia teste. mea Conscientia*" an allusion to the oath that the heads took prior to such a vote. in which they promised to vote for the best candidate "*Conscientia teste.*"[86]

Jebb made an additional error in manners by attempting to contest the Lord Almoner's chair in Arabic, rather than simply allowing Hallifax to assume the second Arabic post as had all his predecessors. Once it was clear to Jebb that he was going to lose the first vote to Hallifax, Jebb began to clamor for a splitting of the two Professorships so that he could have the lesser one. Jebb sent a letter to Newcastle asking for his support for the Lord Almoner's chair "provided the future Professor shall not himself think it proper to give lecture," an oblique reference to Hallifax's almost complete ignorance of Arabic.[87] Jebb's behavior, however, was seen as quite insufferable and William Talbot, a fellow of

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dropping out he could avoid "making such a sort of figure as this [Jebb], it would be a kind part."

[85] William Talbot in a letter to Newcastle incorrectly said the vote was eight to two for Hallifax. January 27, 1968. Add MSS. 32,988, f. 103. Hallifax, knowing of Newcastle's skepticism regarding his commitment to the Arabic chair, on the day of the election sent him a letter to assure Newcastle of his "intention to fulfill to the utmost of my power the duties of my new office and I beseech your grace to give me credit for the truth of what I say, till the contrary appears to our grace from the event. Letter from Samuel Hallifax to the Duke of Newcastle, January 27, 1768. Add MSS. 32,988, f. 79.

[86] Robert Plumptre to Lord Hardwicke, February 2, 1768. Add. MSS. 35,628, f. 72. It was somewhat ironic that Goddard would be Jebb's only supporter in this contest since Goddard was an opponent of Newcastle and had supported Sandwich in the contest for High Steward. Winstanley, *Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century*, 299-315.

[87] John Jebb to the Duke of Newcastle, January 22, 1768. Add. MSS. 32,988, f. 60.

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Clare, describes the resentment many at Cambridge now felt towards Jebb, sentiments that some would maintain until he was eventually forced to leave the university:

> Mr. Jebb has contrived to give great offense in the course of the late competition; and now excites no small resentment in the University by his attempt to separate the Lord Almoner's Bounty from the Arabic Professorship. But he is a warm man and will not be advised by his sedator friends.[88]

Despite Jebb's attempt to split the two professorships, Hallifax was elected to the Lord Almoner's Professorship almost immediately after winning the election for the Adams chair.

For John Jebb, this lost opportunity to receive a proper preferment at Cambridge must have been a particularly devastating defeat. Certainly his relationship with his cousin Hallifax never recovered, and when in later years the Church of England was split over the issue of mandatory clerical subscriptions to specific articles of faith, both Jebb and his wife Ann took tremendous delight in lampooning Hallifax in a number of pamphlets, since the latter had assumed the role of one of the chief supporters of the necessity for clerical subscriptions. Jebb's rather unbecoming behavior during the Arabic election also left him tarred with the reputation of being something of a crank. For the next several years after this defeat Jebb made several more failed bids for permanent academic posts. The first opportunity came when the Professorship of Modern History was vacated in 1768 upon the

[88] William Talbot to the Duke of Newcastle, January 29, 1768. Add. MSS. 32,988, f. 109.

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death of its holder Lawrence Brockett. Jebb joined five others who were soliciting for the position though again nothing was to come of this.[89]

Another possible position for Jebb opened up after Edmund Law was named Bishop of Carlisle in 1768. Eight years earlier, Law was given the post of Proto-bibliothecarius, making him the chief librarian of the Cambridge University Library.[90] Law hoped to keep all his preferments in order to provide for his large family, particularly since Carlisle was not a very wealthy bishopric. But William Cornwallis, the Archbishop of Canterbury, demanded that he give up his other positions.[91] Once he was informed that he had to give up his librarianship Law favored Jebb to replace him. With Law's support, Jebb solicited the backing of Lord Hardwicke and his younger brother, Charles Yorke, the member of parliament for Cambridge, who was also active in university affairs.[92] It was at this point that Jebb sent the letter to Hardwicke in which he reminded the earl of the fervor that he had brought to the election for High Steward. Despite the fact that both Hardwicke and his

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[89] Paget Toynbee (Ed.), *Correspondence of Thomas Gray* vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 1036.

[90] This office was created in 1721 for Dr. Conyers Middleton so that he could pay some debts which had arisen from a libel action. Known as "Fiddling Conyers" because of his musical tastes, he took the job seriously and in 1723 published a plan for the arrangement of the books. *D.N.B.* vol. III, pp. 344-5.

[91] Richard Brinkley, "A Liberal Churchman: Edmund Law," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 6 (1987), p. 4.

[92] John Jebb to the Earl of Hardwicke, January 22, 1769, Add. MSS. 35,658, f. 1; John Jebb to Charles Yorke, February 19, 1769, Add. MSS. 35,640, f. 350.

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brother supported his candidacy.[93] Jebb was again defeated, this time by John Barnardiston, Master of Corpus Christi College.

Jebb's final opportunity for a position at Cambridge came in October 1770, when Samuel Hallifax gave up his Arabic post in order to take up the chair in Civil Law that was assumed to be his all along. Since the time of the first election two years earlier, Jebb had continued to work on his Arabic, and as he noted in a private manuscript: "[I] resolved to study the Koran in the original, with a view of extracting from thence evidences and explanations of the gospel."[94] However, as will be seen, by the time of this second Arabic election Jebb was beginning to give public lectures on the New Testament which scandalized many at Cambridge and this made it even more unlikely that he would receive a permanent place at Cambridge. In 1770 Jebb's reputation for religious heterodoxy was firmly established within the Cambridge community and in his second try for the Arabic chair Jebb became the victim of an apparent campaign to slander his reputation among the heads of the colleges who served as the electors for the professorship. On this occasion his opponent was William Craven, who had an amateur's interest in Arabic, although his post as Master of St. John's allowed him little time to develop more than a rudimentary knowledge of the language.[95] While Jebb's opponent was not involved in the slander campaign, he was the beneficiary and went on to replace Hallifax as the new professor of Arabic. Craven received the chair though there was none of the bitterness which

[93] Letter from Charles Yorke to John Jebb, February 19, 1769, Add. MSS. 35,640, f. 350.

[94] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, 22-3.

[95] Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, 137.

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accompanied the earlier struggle, and Jebb and Craven subsequently became friends and Craven became one of the subscribers to the three-volume compilation of Jebb's writings that was published in his honor after his death.[96]

While it may not have been evident at the time, one of the crucial turning points in the life of John Jebb took place with his failure to receive the endowed chair in Arabic. Up until this point Cambridge had been for him an unqualified success and he possessed every expectation that he would spend the remainder of his life there, an outcome which would have been extremely appealing to him. Jebb had taken every possible step to prove himself as an active supporter of the Newcastle-Hardwicke Whig connexion at Cambridge and even though these Whig credentials were beginning to mean less in the rapidly changing world of British politics, at Cambridge Newcastle and Hardwicke were able to maintain their domination with far greater success than either found in the Church of England or in Parliament.[97] Nevertheless, Jebb's active support of Newcastle was unable to be converted into enough leverage to achieve a permanent post. Possibly this serves as an indication of how even an active Chancellor such as Newcastle was not able to completely dictate his whims to the university, though perhaps its was Jebb's misfortune that at the time he needed Newcastle's support the Duke was at the nadir of his power. Unfortunately for Jebb, it is clear that the heads of colleges and members of the Senate were not quite as intimidated by Newcastle as they had been in earlier decades.

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[96] There is no record as to whether this chair was decided by a contested vote among the heads of houses, or whether Jebb dropped out prior to this, making the vote among the heads a unanimous decision

[97] Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 109.

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Jebb was certainly left in a very vulnerable economic position after his failure to get a chair. With no recourse to a permanent post, he had nothing to fall back on when he made the decision to leave the Church of England in 1775, a decision worthy of respect since it was undertaken with no concern for his financial well-being. Without a professorship, Jebb was successfully driven out of Cambridge when the university authorities banned students from employing him as a tutor. Eventually he went to London to pursue a career as a physician, finding it necessary to start over in a new position at the age of forty.

Possibly the most significant consequence of his failure to receive a permanent post at Cambridge was that it brought Jebb into contact with the much wider world existing outside the colleges of Cambridge. Coming to London ultimately brought him into contact with a radical milieu which he would never have been part of if he had stayed at Cambridge. Political radicalism in England was primarily urban-based, and while in later years Cambridge would create radical societies of its own these were always pale copies of the radical organizations based in London. Jebb could never have achieved such a prominent place in the radical circles which developed after 1779 if he had remained behind in a provincial town like Cambridge.

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Chapter Two

Religious Concerns

I

1768 turned out to be a critical year for Jebb, not only due to his failure in gaining the Arabic chair, but also due to the controversy that engulfed him at Cambridge concerning his religious beliefs. The situation developed almost immediately following his loss to Hallifax as a result of the opposition to him by the Heads of the Colleges, although it was still a time when Jebb believed that some academic post at Cambridge was within his reach. With time on his hands and little inclination to leave the precincts of Cambridge, Jebb took a rather nontraditional step; he decided to offer public lectures while taking the further provocative step of informing the Cambridge community of this decision through a notice in the public press. This notice stated that beginning on November 21, 1768, Jebb would initiate a series of lectures focusing on the study of the Greek text of the New Testament.[1]

The choice of subject matter was by no means an afterthought. Throughout his life Jebb remained a devoted student of the scriptures, a task he pursued with vigor even during the difficult period when he was training to become a physician. In his final years, Jebb was a central figure in the creation of the Society for the Promotion of the Scriptures, an organization dedicated to the publication of biblical commentaries in order to improve the

[1] John Disney, *Life of Jebb*, 23.

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level of theological discourse. Scriptural study was never considered by Jebb to be mere academic dilettantism. Instead it ranked among the most important of human endeavors and therefore was worthy of his attempt to "revive the languishing study of the sacred writings in one of the most celebrated universities in Europe"[2]

This was a task, however, that was not being pursued with great diligence at Cambridge. As was noted in the first chapter, lecturing was considered to be the sole preserve of the Professors, though one in which few bothered to engage. Jebb, by offering to deliver a series of public lectures was offering a backhanded insult towards the majority of Cambridge Professors who never bothered to fulfill their responsibilities in that area. With his chosen topic Jebb was directly stepping into the domain of the Regius Professor of Divinity, a position filled at the time by Thomas Rutherforth, the author of several pamphlets attacking Francis Blackburne's challenge to the idea of clerical subscription.[3] Rutherforth never delivered public lectures at Cambridge, but this did not stop him from feeling highly resentful towards Jebb. In an attempt to appease Rutherforth, Jebb offered to abandon his lectures if the university provided a regular course of lectures in the gospels to be offered in each of the colleges once every year.[4] There was no response to his offer, and Jebb was to make an important enemy in Rutherforth, since it was apparently the

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[2] *Short Account*, 43.

[3] Thomas Rutherforth, *A Vindication of the Right of Protestant Churches to Require the Clergy to Subscribe to an Established Confession of Faith and Doctrines* (1766); *A Defense of a Charge Concerning Subscriptions in a Letter to* [Francis Blackburne] *the author of the Confessional*, (1767).

[4] *Short Account*, p. 42.

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Professor of Divinity who made the content of Jebb's lectures known to the hierarchy within the Church of England.[5]

In November six students faithfully began to attend the seven-week-long lecture series. Jebb was apparently a highly regarded teacher. Many years after the lectures, a former student, Thomas Pearne, wrote to John Disney that his time as Dr. Jebb's pupil "was one I shall ever recollect with the highest satisfaction." Pearne remembered Jebb's "wish to see every doctrine whatever fairly discussed on both sides. He considered a man who published a serious argument against the Christian religion, or against the existence of a deity, as by no means criminal, if his real sentiments accorded with his publication." In his lectures the only writings Jebb found censorious were those publications "which either endeavor to throw ridicule on serious subjects, or to seduce, by inflaming the passions."[6]

Despite the apparent satisfaction of his students, the lectures were met almost immediately with a storm of protest. The Rev. Joseph Price, Vicar of Bradbourne, noted that Jebb's lectures "had made so much noise because he had been charged with propagating Socinianism and Fatalism."[7] On a similar note the Cambridge antiquarian William Cole wrote in his private notebook that "It is said he [Jebb] explains away the divinity of our Savior in his lectures," and added that Jebb also "instills pernicious and

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[5] B.L. Add. MSS. 5873, fol. 53.

[6] Letter from John Baynes to John Disney, May 4, 1786, cited in Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 16.

[7] G.M. Ditchfield and Ryan Keith-Lucas (Eds.). *A Kentish Parson. Selections from the Private Papers of the Revd. Joseph Price, Vicar of Bradbourne, 1767*-1786 (Stroud, 1991), p. 71.

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dangerous principles into his pupils subversive of religion and government."[8] Despite the almost immediate notoriety over his lectures, it took several years before a more committed opposition within Cambridge would see to it that Jebb was punished. The first step took place in 1770, when the University authorities banned students from taking any additional lectures that Jebb might hold in the future.[9]

At the same time the University was banning student attendance at his lectures, Jebb found that word of his supposed religious heterodoxy was becoming a topic of discussion outside of the University. The news that reached Jebb was uniformly bad - as he later explained in the introduction to *A Short Account of Theological Lectures*:

> When he [Jebb] was informed, that a charge of the most invidious nature was solemnly urged, in a manner which was likely to do him great disservice; he no longer was able to refrain from attempting a vindication of himself from those calumnies, with which the untempered zeal of some, otherwise well disposed brethren, had aspersed his character.[10]

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[8] British Library, Add. MSS. 5873, fol. 53. William Cole would become an implacable enemy of Jebb at Cambridge. Cole wrote out almost a hundred manuscripts by hand dealing with antiquarian matters and also issues involving Cambridge. They were donated to the British Library with the proviso that they not be accessible until twenty years after his death. One of Cole's detractors pointed out that "His littleness was but cursorily noticed, and misrepresentations, which might have been pointed out, were passed by." His bigotry led him to be called "Cardinal Cole." *D.N.B.*, vol. 11, pp. 278-281; George Dyer, *History of the University and Colleges of Cambridge* vol. 2 (London, 1814), p. 98.

[9] *Short Account*, 8. The practice of banning students from attending private lectures did not end with Jebb. James Lambert was to join with Jebb at Feather's Tavern as well as work for his plan for examination reform at Cambridge. In 1775, Lambert gave lectures that were similar in nature to Jebb's and the Master of Trinity College responded by forbidding students from attending. Gascoigne, pp. 204-5.

[10] *Short Account*, p. 6.

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Among those "well disposed brethren" within the Church of England who began to question Jebb's religious orthodoxy. the most significant was Dr. William Warburton. the Bishop of Gloucester.[11]

Warburton's interest in the content of Jebb's lectures stemmed from his self-imposed role as protector of religious orthodoxy. Leslie Stephen. in a belated attempt to address the wrongs inflicted on the eighteenth-century Deists. includes a bitingly satirical description of Warburton in his *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. noting that "For many years Warburton led the life of a terrier in a rat-pit. worrying all theological vermin."[12] Warburton probably would not have been unduly bothered by Stephen's characterization. since his own description of his mission was that it was a "warfare upon earth: that is to say, with bigots and libertines. against whom I have announced eternal war. like Hannibal against Rome. at the alter."[13]

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[11] William Warburton is usually remembered today not for his theological writings, but for serving as Alexander Pope's literary executor following Pope's death in 1744. Among his contemporaries. however, Warburton was better known for his role in the deist controversy of the mid-eighteenth-century. Warburton's authorship of the *Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated* (1738-41), marked him as a significant participant in the debate, since the work was possibly the most widely read attack on writers such as Matthew Tindal, who in his *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730), argued that biblical revelation was superfluous since God had completely revealed himself though the act of creation.

[12] Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* vol. 2, third edition (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), p. 345.

[13] Ibid.

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Warburton first brought the attention of the hierarchy of the Church of England to Jebb's lectures when he was attending a session of the House of Lords. Coming upon William Cornwallis. the Archbishop of Canterbury, he informed Cornwallis that he had heard that Jebb was giving public lectures at Cambridge in which he was clearly challenging the Church of England's stated position regarding the Trinity. In addition. Warburton informed the Archbishop that Jebb was operating with impunity since he was receiving protection from another suspected heterodox thinker. Edmund Law. the Bishop of Carlisle. whom Cornwallis knew well since Law had served as his tutor during his years at Cambridge.[14]

William Cornwallis was for the most part a moderate man, who throughout his time as Archbishop sought to dissipate tensions among the various factions within his Church.[15] Because of this. Jebb may have decided that the best manner to defend himself would be to directly inform Cornwallis regarding the content of his lectures. Jebb proceeded to do this in a letter sent to Cornwallis in the spring of 1770. This note, which Jebb later included in the published version of the *Short Account of Theological Lectures*, did not lead to the intended result. since as Jebb noted with dissatisfaction once Cornwallis received his letter: "Accusations were every where multiplied," and added that his own "endeavors to exculpate himself from the various aspersions, which were thrown upon his character and conduct, were received with evident marks of prejudice." As a result of the increasing antagonism that was being directed towards him, Jebb decided that his "only resource is

[14] B. L. Add. MSS. 5873, fol. 53.

[15] *D.N.B.* vol. iv, p. 1166.

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the power of appealing to the free and impartial voice of an unprejudiced public."[16] Jebb worked feverishly over the winter of 1770 to expand and polish the text that he had sent Cornwallis, as well as to complete a guide to comparative scriptural study known as a Harmony, which he was working on over the last year in order to ready all the material for publication.

II

While in terms of theology the *Short Account of Theological Lectures* was a rather cautious affair, the work does begin on an angry personal note, a sign of the deep pain that Jebb felt dating back to the point when his efforts to offer public lectures were first met with open hostility. Jebb could clearly not contain the wrath he felt for his most bitter opponent - William Warburton. This deep animosity explains Jebb's use in the preface to his *Short Account* of a visitation sermon delivered by Robert Lowth in 1758, when Lowth was prebendary of Durham.[17] In 1765, Lowth and Warburton were involved in a nasty dispute that started when Warburton, in a haughty manner, criticized the date that Lowth had assigned to the life of Job in his *Lectures on Hebrew Poetry*. Lowth took up the challenge by responding in his *Letter to the ... Author of the "Divine Legation" in Answer, & by a Late Professor of Oxford* (1765), a successful work that Gibbon in his memoirs

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[16] *Short Account*, p. 7.

[17] Lowth later became Bishop of London.

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cited as a "pointed and polished epistle."[18] Warburton, however, was infuriated by Lowth's reply, and in this instance rightly so, since Lowth had included in his published response personal correspondence that had been exchanged by the two men.

After using Lowth as a means of attacking Warburton, Jebb set himself on the far more important task: to show the public that the charge that he was teaching heterodox theology to his students was patently false. To that end Jebb reprinted his earlier letter to Archbishop Cornwallis; a letter that failed to convince the Archbishop, but one that Jebb hoped would confirm in the eyes of his readers that he was not, "endeavoring to overturn the established religion of this country, by inculcating upon the minds of my pupils in opposition to those which have received the sanction of ecclesiastical authority."[19]

In a letter dating from 1775 Jebb wrote, "I have, for seven years past, in my lectures, maintained steadily the proper unity of God; and that he alone should be the object of religious worship."[20] Jebb, however, was not as straightforward with the Archbishop as his memory would have it.[21] In actuality he informed the Archbishop that "the two most material of those opinions, which I have been charged with maintaining,

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[18] Gibbon clearly thought that Lowth emerged triumphant from the contest and that Lowth's victory "was clearly established by the silent confession of Warburton and his slaves." D.N.B. vol. XII, pp. 214-5.

[19] *Short Account*, p. 17.

[20] Disney, p. 106., 571.

[21] One reader who noticed the inaccuracy of this statement was the printer John Nichols, who commented in his *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* that in his letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury Jebb made no such assertion denying the Trinity. John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*. 9 vols. London, 1812-1816

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relate to the Immaculate conception of Jesus, and the doctrine of free will.[21] What Jebb failed to mention was that the issue that had actually concerned his opponents was his supposed denial in the course of his lectures of the scriptural basis for the Trinity. In a footnote that Jebb added to the version of the letter contained in his *Short Account*, he noted that when he was referring to the Immaculate conception he understood that "these terms have always hitherto been supposed to relate to a controversy of a very different kind." Jebb here was essentially suggesting that in the *Short Account* he was still referring to the Trinity when discussing the issue of the Immaculate conception, but that Immaculate conception was "the most decent of those forms of expression" with which he was attacked by his opponents, so he stayed with that term rather than use the more contentious term Trinity.[22]

Jebb was attempting to preclude an actual discussion of his opinion on the notion of the Trinity, but he may have felt justified in this attempt at obscurantism due to the vehemence of the attacks by his opponents and because his livelihood both within the Church of England as well as at Cambridge possibly hung in the balance. He may have also felt justified in slightly masking the issue with the Archbishop since in essence his lectures were primarily concerned with providing his students with a proper methodology for scriptural study and, as such, they were less concerned with specific points of theology. It does seem clear, however, that by the time Jebb first began to publicly lecture on the scriptures in 1768, he was already expressing personal doubt regarding the Trinity, so that in the small cloistered world of Cambridge his views would have been known, with the

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[22] *Short Account*, 18.

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result that Jebb was attacked by his opponents for views that may not have been enunciated in his lectures but which he was known to possess.

A confluence of his private beliefs and lectures may also exist in the supposedly less sensitive issues that Jebb addressed directly to the Archbishop, such as the question of free will. Jebb denied that the issue had ever been covered since, as he pointed out the "one great aim of my lectures was entirely to banish from the study of divinity, those physical and metaphysical speculations which have too long obscured and disgraced it."[23] While Jebb denied that free will played any sort of major role in his lectures, he did admit that he had discussed the issue, though in private philosophical conversations or when he had served as a Moderator in Cambridge disputations, when he might have played the role of advancing contrary ideas in order to propel further debate.

Jebb does, however, in a very short passage indicate where he stands regarding the issue of free will. He believed that his own ideas on this issue left him likely to "be a little inclined to the system of Hartley and of Locke," while also noting that he had never "in my most private thoughts, gone beyond what Bishop Butler has, with great reputation expressed in print."[24] Jebb knew that he had to be somewhat cautious on this point since Locke, Butler and Hartley were not entirely operating within the limits placed by Article Ten of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, which contains the classical Protestant view denying the possibility of free will.

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[23] *Short Account*, 20.

[24] *Short Account*, p. 21.

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Locke in his *Essay on the Law of Nature* argued that God had provided guideposts for human behavior and that man, through the use of reason, could readily discern what those laws of natural behavior were. Man was a free agent, however, in having the freedom to accept or to deny those guideposts. Joseph Butler (1692-1752), the Bishop of Durham, was influenced by Locke's ethical theory, but he added the idea that God had attached pleasure and pain to those natural laws and that those who followed God's will would naturally obtain pleasure while those that denied God's intent felt pain.[25]

David Hartley, whose theory of the association of ideas would greatly influence Jebb's friend Joseph Priestley, wrote in his *Observations on Man* that man was free to associate, or call up ideas, which would then serve as the limits of his behavior.[26] All three writers accepted the notion of divine guidance and it was due to their influence that Jebb was to base his own argument that man was a moral agent who was responsible for his own actions to God and that rather than follow the constraints on believers imposed by mandatory adherence to the Thirty-Nine Articles, this sense of moral responsibility was "sufficient for all the purposes of religion."[27]

On the other theological issue that Jebb would briefly touch upon in his *Short Account* - that of the Immaculate conception of Jesus -- Jebb, in the note that was sent to the Archbishop, indicated that he believed that any question regarding the orthodoxy of his

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[25] Percy Allen Carlsson, *Butler's Ethics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), p. 47.

[26] David Hartley, *Observations On Man*, facsimile edition, two vols in one (Gainsville, FL: Scholars Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966), i, 501.

[27] *Short Account*, 21.

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position may have come from his insistence that this was in no way proof of the messiahship of Christ. The latter, according to Jebb, was based on the evidence of the miracles that Jesus performed as well as by scriptural prophecy regarding the appearance of a messiah.[28] What Jebb left unsaid, however, was that his acceptance of the messiahship of Jesus did not preclude his rejection of Jesus as being of divine nature.

Just as with the idea of free will, where Jebb was interested in those ideas that were, as he put it, "sufficient" or broad enough to tie together Christians, rather than deal with theological minutiae, so too on the issue of Jesus' messiahship, Jebb was hoping to create a common ground. Here he was influenced by Locke, since he found in the philosopher's work the idea "that [with] their acknowledgment of the messiahship of Jesus, they hold that fundamental article of faith, which with reason the high prerogative - the exclusive privilege of being essentially necessary to our salvation.[29] This search for the fundamentals of religion was to provide Jebb with a lasting leitmotif in all of his subsequent writings on religion as well as the justification for his opposition to the church-mandated requirement to swear to specific articles of faith.

After taking these tentative steps to defend himself from the charges of heterodoxy, Jebb found himself on more comfortable ground as he attempted to use the publication of the *Short Account* to propose a positive program for scriptural study. Jebb was apparently being honest when he claimed that he had never intended the lectures to focus on the major doctrinal issues of the day. The true intent of his lectures was to foster among the students

[28] *Short Account*, 19.

[29] *Short Account*, p. 12.

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of Cambridge a special appreciation for the magnificence of the scriptures. Once again Jebb would find use in the writings of Robert Lowth, this time not as a means to rebuke Warburton, but rather for Lowth's far more important legacy as a contributor to the idea of an aesthetic appreciation of the bible.[30] Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* had a strong influence in England and an even greater reception in Germany, where his emphasis on appreciating the bible as a work of literature had a deep resonance and influenced nineteenth-century writers such as David Friedrich Strauss in his *Life of Jesus*. Jebb in his approach to the scriptures was to be particularly influenced by Lowth's idea that "He who would perceive the peculiar and interior elegancies of the Hebrew poetry, must imagine himself exactly situated as the persons for whom it was written, or even as the writers themselves; he is to feel them as a Hebrew."[31]

While Lowth provided one source of inspiration, another key influence for Jebb was once again Locke. It is often forgotten among those who are more familiar with Locke's writings on politics and epistemology that he was also the author of two classic works on biblical scholarship: *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695) and *Paraphrases and Notes on the Epistle of St. Paul* (published posthumously between 1705 and 1707). Jebb found comfort in the acknowledgment that Locke gave to the problem of public rancor directed to those who were honestly attempting to come to terms with their faith, though in ways that might be outside the accepted norms.

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[30] On Lowth, see Brian Hepworth, *Robert Lowth* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978.

[31] Stephen Prickett, *Words and The Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 106.

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For Locke, this censorious attitude came from a misguided desire for religious uniformity. In order to find common ground among Christians Locke suggested the approach to the study of scripture outlined in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*. Following Locke's guidance would encourage a result that Jebb also sought, as he acknowledged in his *Short Account*:

> His [Locke's] method of studying the scripture by making it its own interpreter, which has now been adopted by a numerous band of followers, opens to us the fairest prospect of succeeding in our attempts to investigate the real meaning of the sacred writers[32]

Locke's idea that one should read the bible as if you were the first to come across the text as well as to pursue the original intent of the evangelists, provided the underpinnings for Jebb's concept that it was impossible for the scriptures to be unintelligible, since this could never have been the intention of the authors. Jebb was to write, "I concluded, that it was their design to express whatever points of doctrine were necessary for us to know, in the simplest, plainest terms; and that, if they could have chosen a mode of speaking more likely to be understood by the persons to whom they addressed themselves, they would certainly have used it."[33] It is the search for the clear-cut message found in the scriptures which provided Jebb with the inspiration for his plan to encourage scriptural study among the students at Cambridge, since one of the benefits of such study was that God's message was readily comprehensible to anyone who simply read the text in a structured and diligent manner.

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[32] *Short Account*, p. 12.

[33] *Short Account*, 24.

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Thus inspired by Locke. Jebb in his *Short Account* set out to explain the method of study that he had urged upon the six students who had attended his lectures. His method consisted of each student receiving a piece of paper at the start of every lecture. with the paper being marked with four separate columns representing each of the evangelists. In the sample page Jebb provided, he listed one column each for Matthew 3.1-4. Mark 1.1-5. Luke 3.1-7 and John 1.6-9. all of which deal with the baptism of Jesus. The student. after reading each of the passages in a Greek text of the Bible, would then write a short paraphrase of the material to the left of the four columns. Afterwards, the student would go on to the next two chapters of Matthew and continue to create paraphrases, though in this case only a passage from Mark would be used for comparison, since the other two gospels don't mention, as in Matthew and Mark, the physical appearance of John the Baptist and the meaning of his mission. In all, students were expected to spend two hours a day on this comparative approach, with possibly four more hours spent analyzing with attempted precision the language used in the text. The result would be that by the time the lecture series ended, the students would have compiled a scripturally accurate account of the life and doctrines of Jesus.

Scriptural harmonies of this sort were becoming more popular in Jebb's day. Around the time of Jebb's work, another Cambridge man, Edward Evanson, published a *Harmony of the Four Gospels*.[34] Yet while his methodology was not new Jebb was fully

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[34] Evanson, like Jebb, eventually joined Theophilus Lindsey's London Unitarian congregation. Alexander Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian History* (London: Philip Green, 1895), p. 42.

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aware that it could cause trouble, because rather than emphasizing specific points of theological interpretation he was encouraging his students to reach conclusions which "might suggest to younger minds suspicions of a real opposition between the precarious doctrines of fallible men, and the absolutely pure and perfect word of the infallible God."[35] Despite the probability of this outcome, Jebb emphasized that he was merely introducing a method for approaching the study of the bible and was not seeking to expose his students to what he may have felt were fallacies in the doctrines of the Church of England. To that end, all six of his students added their signatures to Jebb's account of the content of his lectures which he had included in the *Short Account*, in order to attest to its veracity. While one of those students, Thomas Fyshe Palmer, a young man who was initially tied to the evangelical faction at Cambridge, did turn to Unitarianism upon hearing Jebb's lectures, it in no way appears that that was Jebb's intent.[36] Yet since Jebb's hope to "banish from the study of divinity, those physical and metaphysical speculations, which have too long obscured and disgraced it,"[37] led to his own doubt regarding certain doctrines such as the Trinity, it should not be surprising that some of his students would also follow in taking that path.

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[35] *Short Account*, 7.

[36] George Dyer, *Memoirs of Robert Robinson* (London, 1796), pp. 248-9.

[37] *Short Account*, p. 20.

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III

If Jebb hoped that publishing his *Short Account* would mark the end of the controversy surrounding his lectures, he was to be quite disappointed. However, William Warburton, the man who was most likely to have offered a public response to Jebb, was seriously hurt from a fall in his library from which he never fully recovered.[38] The individual who played the major role in publicly rebuking Jebb in print after the publication of the *Short Account* was none other than his cousin, Samuel Hallifax, who not only picked up Warburton's mantle symbolically as the defender of religious orthodoxy and the scourge of heretics, but took it up literally since he was chosen to replace Warburton as Bishop of Gloucester. In January 1771 Hallifax published his *Three Sermons Preached Before the University of Cambridge*, a work that Hallifax offered as his riposte to those who were advocating abolishing the requirement for clerical subscription to specific articles of faith. Linked to his central concern regarding the moral responsibility of the clergy was another topic that Hallifax wished to address:

> To specify the instances, in which the word of God has been corrupted by modern expositors; and to caution the minds of youth against the growing danger from those, who, under the pretence of promoting the greater purity of the gospel, have explained its most substantial doctrines into nothing.[39]

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[38] D.N.B. vol. xx, 766.

[39] Samuel Hallifax, *Three Sermons Preached Before the University of Cambridge*,, *Occassioned by an attempt to abolish Subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, third edition (Cambridge, 1772), p. i.

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While never naming Jebb nor ever directly mentioning his lectures, it was readily apparent that the expositor Hallifax was referring to was none other than his cousin.

Hallifax was concerned that rational arguments for religious belief, which is what he thought he saw in Jebb's work, ended up producing a theology that is "so very rational, as to have almost nothing to do with revelation."[40] This was an unfair attack on the part of Hallifax since Jebb was far from being a deist, but nevertheless, Jebb did propose what was in essence a link between reason and the study of the scriptures, as well as a certainty that following this method would bring about a genuine understanding of the word of God. Hallifax maintained that Jebb's methodical approach and his belief in the clarity of the doctrines contained in the bible was far too simplistic since "they will never allow it to contain such difficulties as really belong to it."[41] Among those difficult issues Hallifax referred to was the one that Jebb wished to avoid in his *Short Account*, the controversy over the scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Trinity

When Hallifax tried to get his work published he was temporally blocked by William Law, who once again acting as Jebb's defender claimed that the Cambridge University Press no longer printed sermons.[42] When that questionable premise failed to stop the press from printing the sermons, Hallifax was attacked in print in an anonymous pamphlet that appeared in March 1772. The question as to authorship was a poorly kept secret and in *Gentleman's Magazine* a letter from "M. X." revealed that:

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[40] Hallifax, *Short Account*, 19.

[41] Hallifax, *Three Sermons*, 36.

[42] British Library, Hardwicke Papers Add. MSS. 35,628, f. 136

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> It was said at Cambridge as I was told by one who was there at the last commencement, that the materials of this letter were furnished by a Mr. B-k-ll, of Emanuel College; and that the office of licking them into shape, such as it has, was committed to the piety of Mr. J-b.

M.X. went on to note that the remainder of the work was concerned "not in confuting a single position advanced in the sermons, but in abusing, without the least good breeding or urbanity, the orthodox clergy, and especially the bishops."[43]

Jebb was not left without supporters. One reader, angered over the tone of M.X's letter, rushed to Jebb's defense by writing in a letter to *Gentleman's Magazine* that:

> The contemptuous terms in which he [M.X.] speaks of Mr. Jebb's *abilities* and *piety*, are also evident marks of his own folly and immorality. That gentleman's character is too well established to be ever shaken by the breath of slander, and has never yet been attacked, but by the profligate enders of malignity, whose very nature and business it is, impudently to insult that *virtue* which they cannot, or dare not imitate."[44]

The identity of either correspondent in *Gentleman's Magazine* is not known, but quite possibly Jebb's defender was associated with Cambridge University, where the debate over Jebb's lectures continued.

The pamphlet that M.X made reference to did in fact come from the pen of someone from Cambridge. Samuel Blackall, a fellow of Emanuel College, was the author of the attack on Hallifax and it is quite possible that Jebb did have a hand in helping Blackall put the work together. Possibly the hostile tone contained in this pamphlet may

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[43] *Gentleman's Magazine* (September 1772), 405-6. Disney does not mention Jebb's participation in the writing of the pamphlet.

[44] *Gentleman's Magazine* (November 1772), 516.

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have been Jebb's contribution, since Jebb now felt genuine bitterness towards Hallifax, dating back to when the two men competed for the Arabic chair. As such Blackall/Jebb's pamphlet was not an objective piece of scholarship, but a piece which although blasting Hallifax for endeavoring to "cover his deficiency in *true* spirit, by a more than ordinary ebullition of *froth* and *foam*," contains more than its own share of froth. Hallifax contemptuously noted in the second edition of his *Three Sermons*, that while he was glad that someone responded to his work it was a shame "that answerer be no better and no brighter than a *Blackall*."

Besides possibly aiding Blackall with his pamphlet, Jebb took the opportunity to issue his own public response to Hallifax by placing an advertisement in the *Whitehall Evening Post* in November 1771. Jebb pointed out that the publication of his *Short Account* had brought opposition "of so extraordinary a nature," though it did not appear to him that any of his critics, including Hallifax, had shown that he "in a single instance, deviated from his original proposals."[45] Besides the writing of this public letter, Jebb decided that the best way to respond to the persistence of his critics was to reprint a revised edition of his *Short Account*, which would contain additional notes regarding the context of its publication as well as inclusion of Jebb's public letter to the *Whitehall Evening Post*.

While it was not surprising that those who were initially concerned with the content of his lectures would not be pleased with the defense Jebb offered in his *Short Account*, he also did not satisfy all of those who were sympathetic with his religious viewpoint. One naysayer was Joseph Priestley, who was more interested in the part of the work that

[45] *Short Account*, 40-41.

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contained the scriptural harmony, rather than Jebb's public defense of his lectures. After waiting with anticipation to see the revised edition of the *Short Account*, Priestley was somewhat disappointed when it finally appeared. To Theophilus Lindsey he wrote, "If I were to lecture in divinity I would not take his method. It must be very tiresome to students and would keep them too long to one thing to the neglect of the others. Besides, it is too timid a plan. Systems are the best for instruction, though they should be accompanied with particular criticism." Priestley was also not pleased with some of the sources that Jebb used and with some that he left out.[46] The following month, Priestley, while still clearly dissatisfied with the work yet anxious not to offend his friend, rethought his harsh criticism and told Lindsey, "I do not recollect what I said of Mr. Jebb's work, but I am sure I think of him and his undertaking with the greatest respect."[47]

Priestley clearly did have a high regard for Jebb's abilities. Several years later, when he was working towards the completion of his own scriptural harmony, he sought out Jebb's guidance. In a letter concerning Jebb's assistance Priestley thanked him and added:

> As you have been so obliging as to look over the bulk of my MS, I take the liberty to beg your attention to the additional parts I now send you, in the absence of Mr. Lindsey, as well as the preface that I sent you thro his hands. I should be sorry to take up much of your time, but I think a single evening will be sufficient for [the] whole, especially as the things are not of much consequence. If nothing should occur to you but small emendations, I wish you would make them as you read, and then send the MS to Johnson; but if you think there are more considerable oversights,

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[46] Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey, Jan. 27. 1771. Joseph Priestley, *Theological Works and Miscellaneous Works*. Edited by J.T. Rutt. Vol. 1. (London, 1832), p. 130.

[47] Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey, Jan. 27. 1771. Joseph Priestley, *Theological Works and Miscellaneous Works*. Edited by J.T. Rutt. Vol. 1. (London, 1832), p. 132.

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which cannot all be stated in a letter. send it to me by the coach.[48]

In the completed version of Priestley's *Harmony of the Gospels in English*. the notes marked with a "J" were the additions that Jebb made to the text. notes which Lindsey in a letter to Jebb said "show great attention. and an intimate knowledge of holy scripture."[49] The appearance of Priestley's Harmony provided Jebb with an opportunity to reflect on his own earlier work and he noted that "I have no such predilection to my own hypothesis as not to be well satisfied in seeing a very different one established in the manner he proposes." Just as Priestley was to find fault with aspects of Jebb's work. Jebb. perhaps having more proprietary pride in his own work than he would let on. commented that though he found Priestley's reasoning to be forceful. "my chief doubt is with respect to the transposition of the fifth and sixth chapters of St. John, which is necessary to the truth of his main idea." Jebb, however, graciously concluded that despite those doubts. "his intended publication will be of great consequence to the Christian world."[50]

While Priestley had a mixed reaction to Jebb's *Harmony of the Gospels*, Theophilus Lindsey, who would soon be leaving his benefices within the Church of England over the failure to win approval of the Feathers Tavern Petition, had no doubts concerning the merits of Jebb's system of scriptural study. In a letter sent many years after the appearance

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[48] Houghton Library, Harvard University, Joseph Priestley A.L.s to [John Jebb?]; Calne, 4 Jul 1777

[49] Priestley, Joseph. *Theological Works and Miscellaneous Works*. Edited by J.T. Rutt. London, 1832.

[50] Jebb to Lindsey, Jan. 26, 1775. Joseph Priestley, *Theological Works and Miscellaneous Works*. Edited by J.T. Rutt. London, 1832, p. 286.

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of Jebb's work. Lindsey recalled that "of all the persons I was ever concerned with he has the most critical knowledge of the scriptures and best method of interpreting them."[51]

Jebb also received a favorable response from an anonymous review that appeared in the *Monthly Review*. After a brief discussion of the context behind Jebb's need to publish the work in order to defend his reputation, the reviewer noted that: "The method which this author proposes for the study of Scriptures, and the plan of his lectures, appear to be rational, judicious, and well adapted to advance an accurate and critical knowledge of the sacred writings." This same reviewer also noted approvingly that "he discovers no bigoted attachment to any particular scheme or party, but seems willing to avail himself of real assistance from any quarter."[52] These words must have truly heartened Jebb, who by this time was involved in a new struggle, this time over the issue of mandatory clerical subscription to specific articles of faith.

IV

From the time of its birth during the reign of Henry VIII, the Church of England has constantly struggled to define its place within the Protestant world, as well as in its relationship with Rome. The decision to formulate articles of belief such as in the Thirty-Nine Articles is rooted in this search for definition and dates back to 1536, when its precursor, the Ten Articles, was first issued. This compilation, like those that followed, was not intended to serve as a complete set of religious creeds but as a means for the

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[51] John Rylands University Library. Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, Dec. 10, 1782.

[52] *Monthly Review*, vol. xliv (1771), 82-84.

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Church of England to provide a form of self-definition, marking the ways it differed from the Catholic Church on such fundamental issues as salvation and the role of the bible as a source of faith. Following other attempts to formulate a list of doctrines, including the Six Articles of 1539 and the Forty-Two Articles of 1553, the Church of England, meeting in Convocation in 1563, formulated the first text of the Thirty-Nine Articles. Since 1563 marked a time when Queen Elizabeth was still interested in partially placating Catholic opinion, Article 29, which attacked the Catholic practice of the Eucharist, was not included in the version finally sent to the printers. In 1571, when it was clear that the English Catholic community would not be completely absorbed into Elizabeth's attempted broad church, Article 29 was inserted back into the document where it has remained ever since. The ease with which articles could be abandoned or reinserted as the times required was just one reason why beginning in the seventeenth century questions emerged as to whether the whole exercise of mandating certain doctrines was for naught.

In 1772 an article in the *Kentish Gazette* noted: "A correspondent observes, that the Thirty-nine Articles, for these six months past, have been more *read* and more *noticed*, than for half a century before."[53] This was not truly accurate since the eighteenth-century controversy on the issue of subscriptions dates back to 1712, when Samuel Clarke published his *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*. In this work Clarke argues that since Christians regarded their doctrines as "human and fallible," the outward forms of the articles didn't truly matter. Moral laws as opposed to strict codes of practices were what

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[53] G. M. Ditchfield, "Ecclesiastical Policy under Lord North" in John Walsh *et. al.* (Ed.) *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1883* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 230.

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carried weight.[54] Clarke did not feel there was a need for a total rejection of the articles. since they were rendered harmless in that they allowed for a measure of personal interpretation and could therefore be sworn without compromising one's faith. Despite making his own peace with subscription. Clarke's writings became crucial for the later campaign against clerical subscription. This may have been to its detriment. since Clarke's *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* was Arian in its orientation. Jesus. according to Clarke. was pre-existent and divine. though subordinate to God the Father. Opponents of the campaign to overturn the articles argued that it was part of a heterodox challenge to the established teachings of the Church of England, using Clarke's own words to back up their argument.

Not everyone. however. who supported the challenge to mandatory subscription maintained an antitrinitarian theology. The inspiration behind the Feather's Tavern campaign against clerical subscription was Francis Blackburne. who consistently disavowed Unitarianism and even wrote a tract stating why he was not a Socinian.[55] Blackburne attended Cambridge, where he read Locke and Hoadley and later went on to become an archdeacon in the Church of England. In 1766 Blackburne published his *Confessional*,[56] a work which became the bible for those opposed to subscription. Blackburne was not

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[54] Martin Fitzpatrick, "Latitudinarianism at the parting of the ways: a suggestion" in John Walsh *et. al.* (Ed.) *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1883.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 213.

[55] Blackburne had the personal misfortune of having both his daughter and stepdaughter marry prominent Unitarians: John Disney and Theophilus Lindsey.

[56] The full title is: *The Confessional, or a full and Free Enquiry into the Right, Utility, and Success of Establishing Confessions of Faith and Doctrine in Protestant Churches.*

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against the idea of a state church: he saw the church as being one of the pillars of society and therefore for the sake of stability it was necessary to keep it under state control. He did, however, challenge the right of any church to create and mandate certain specific creeds.

The parliamentary campaign against subscription was inspired by Blackburne's *Proposals for an Application to Parliament for Relief in the matter of Subscription to the Liturgy and Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (1771). Here Blackburne wrote of the necessity of putting together a petition in order to place it before Parliament. Blackburne was fearful of the implications of his work, since he felt that the petitioning campaign would create great divisiveness and bitter feelings. He appeared so troubled by this that some of his friends jokingly suggested that another article be added to the thirty-nine which would simple state the need for "Public Peace."[57]

Almost immediately following the publication of Blackburne's *Proposals*, a movement to petition parliament began to take shape in London. Jebb was involved in the movement from the very beginning, and his travels from Cambridge to London to work on behalf of the petition caught the eye of his old enemy, William Cole, who sneered that, "He [Jebb] and his wife go up to London as they always do."[58] Jebb may have been paying more attention to the articles at this time since he was forced on several recent occasions to reaffirm them because he had been given a number of additional clerical

[57] J. H. Overton and F. Relton, *The English Church From the Accession of George I to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 210.

[58] B. L., Cole Manuscripts Add. MSS. 5873, f. 53.

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livings. In July 1769 he received the vicarage of Flixton in Suffolk, a clerical living in the possession of William Adair. To this was added the combined rectories of Homersfield and St. Cross, which adjoined Flixton. Around the same time Jebb was also named as the chaplain to the Earl of Harborough, a relative of Ann Jebb.[59]

Jebb's recent involvement in the controversy over his Cambridge lectures and the publication of his *Short Account* almost certainly provided him with a certain public standing, so that when he attended the first general meeting at Feather's Tavern in the Strand on July 17, 1771, he was elected to a committee to seek ways to obtain redress on the issue of subscription. Jebb also had a hand in writing the draft petition at the committee meeting on September 20, which was formally approved five days later at the second general meeting of the Feather's Tavern group. At this meeting it was decided that it was necessary to find a proper way to circulate the petition and so Jebb and some colleagues formed another committee, "For the purpose of considering the proper ways and means of introducing the petition into the House of Commons" This group eventually decided that it would be more effective to circulate a document explaining their position, rather than the petition itself, and Jebb was given the task of coming up with a tract. [60]

Jebb's pamphlet, known as the *Circular Letter*,[61] consists of two arguments: one maintaining the appropriateness of appealing to Parliament for redress on this issue and the

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[59] Disney, 26.

[60] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 33.

[61] The work appears among the "Miscellaneous Papers" in *The Works of John Jebb*, vol. III, pp. 12-23.

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second concerning the scriptural basis for challenging mandatory subscriptions. Even among supporters of ending subscription there was a legitimate question regarding the proper forum for addressing the issue. Richard Watson, Jebb's co-Moderator at Cambridge and later the Bishop of Llandaff, was not alone in advocating going to the bishops meeting in convocation rather than to parliament.[62] In the tract Jebb argues that since subscription is a matter of the law of the land it does not fall within the provenance of convocation, particularly because students at Cambridge and Oxford, as well as doctors and lawyers, were expected to subscribe.[63] Part of Jebb's implicit argument for support for the idea of a state church, was that rather than hoping for redress from clerics it was possible that the legislature "in every well constituted state," would "attend to, and redress, the religious grievances of the subject, although such remonstrance should proceed from the meanest of people," something that could never be achieved through the offices of convocation.[64] Like Francis Blackburne, Jebb believed that the state could legislate for the Church, but the Church had absolutely no legislative authority of its own. While Jebb does not mention it directly in this work, he and his readers would have been certainly aware that Convocation last met in 1717, making it all the less likely to be the locus for a debate on the issue.

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[62] Martin Fitzpatrick, "Latitudinarianism at the parting of the ways: a suggestion" in John Walsh *et. al.* (Ed.) *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1883.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 220-1. Watson contributed to the cause by writing *A Letter to the Members of the Honourable House of Commons; respecting the petition for Relief in the Matter of Subscription* (1772).

[63] Jebb, *Works*, vol. iii, p. 20.

[64] Jebb, *Works*, vol. iii, p. 21.

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While dealing with the appropriateness of addressing parliament on this issue was a significant concern even among supporters of the Feather's Tavern movement, the main thrust of the *Circular Letter* was addressed towards those who supported the imposition of mandatory articles of faith. Jebb, in an argument that reflects back on the theologian William Chillingworth's famous dictum that "The Bible is the religion of Protestants," claimed it to be the right of any Protestant to judge for himself the sense of the scriptures, and that this was one of the ways in which the Church of England differed from the "tyranny and bigotry of Rome."[65] This right could not be abridged from any authority, whether it be convocation or parliament. In addition, the authorities who drew up the petition were mortal men who were not infallible in their reasoning and the actual doctrines contained in the Articles were unclear and confusing, making it even less worthy of support. Placing such Articles on an equal basis with the bible should be seen, argued Jebb, as anathema to the whole spirit of Protestantism.

Since many supporters of the Thirty-Nine Articles believed it was one of the guarantees behind the Protestant ascendancy in the British state, Jebb also felt the need to address their concerns. If supporters of the articles were concerned with the security of the state, he argued, then they should consider the harm that has come from forcing people out of the Church and how this was the cause of religious divisions which had ultimately proved very costly to the state. If the state needed to provide guarantees for the

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[65] Jebb, *Works*, vol. iii, p. 16.

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continuation of Protestant domination, such matters were already dealt with through the oaths of supremacy and allegiance and through the outlawing of Catholicism.[66]

Once Jebb's pamphlet was printed and distributed (though how widely is not clear), the Feather's Tavern participants concerned themselves with getting signatures for the petition. Theophilus Lindsey, at the time Vicar of Catterick in Yorkshire, tirelessly traveled over two thousand miles on horseback to get signatures. There were some prominent supporters such as the Earl of Grafton, who thought the conduct of the petitioners "was perfectly suitable for their station"[67] Yet for all his troubles and sore rump, Lindsey succeeded in only collecting two hundred signatures from clerics and fifty from doctors and lawyers.[68] There may have been far greater support for the petition, but concerns regarding what would happen to their clerical careers if they publicly supported the petition made some reluctant to sign. William Paley was quite possibly speaking for others when in refusing to sign the petition he commented that, "he could not afford to keep a conscience" even though he favored the ideas contained within it.[69] Others may

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[66] Jebb, *Works*, vol. iii, p. 16.

[67] Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 195. As Chancellor of Cambridge he was entitled to an honorary doctorate, but Grafton refused it since it would have entailed having to subscribe to the articles. George Dyer, *History of the University and Colleges of Cambridge* vol. 2 (London, 1814), p. 31.

[68] Richard Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscious* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), 150.

[69] Gascoigne, p. 241. Paley later took a more active role on the issue. When the Bishop of Carlisle was attacked in print by Thomas Randolf, President of Corpus Christi College for his *Considerations on the Propriety of Requiring a Subscription to Articles of Faith* (1774), Paley responded with his *Defense of the Considerations*. George Meadley, *Memoirs of William Paley D.D* (London, 1809), pp. 47-8.

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have taken the stance of Edmund Law, a signer of the petition, who conceded that since the Thirty-Nine articles meant so little they were not so quite as onerous as the Feather's Tavern petitioners would have one believe. This element of utilitarianism in their approach was exactly what people such as Jebb and Blackburne saw as the essential problem with the articles.[70]

Jebb worked almost as ceaselessly as Lindsey on behalf of the petition. In January 1772, the four letters which Jebb had written over the winter and published in the *Whitheall Evening Post* under the signature Paulinus[71] were collected in a pamphlet under the title *Letters on the Subject of Subscription to the Liturgy and Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England.*[72] Ann Jebb also contributed a series of letters signed "Priscilla" and used the opportunity to blast an old enemy, Samuel Hallifax, who was a vocal critic of the petitioners. Ann's caustic missives thrilled her friend, the writer Henry Taylor, who wrote to Ann: "I hope you will favor the world with some more of them, for his [Hallifax] principles, or rather no-principles can not be too much exposed."[73] Another amused reader

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[70] Martin Fitzpatrick, "Latitudinarianism at the parting of the ways: a suggestion" in John Walsh *et. al.* (Ed.) *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1883* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 221.

[71] Paulinus was a wealthy fifth-century Roman who sold most of his estates to retire to Nola in order to write religious verse. When he asked for a papal audience to tell of his renunciation of this world, the pope refused to see him.

[72] *The Works of John Jebb*, vol. I, pp. pp. 137-222.

[73] Cambridge Manuscripts, Letter from Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, January 25, 1772. Add. 7901/3/1.

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was William Paley, who said after seeing the letters that "the Lord has sold Sisera into the hands of a woman."[74] Hallifax, not surprisingly, found them less humorous and asked the publisher of the *London Chronicle*, where her tracts appeared, to stop publishing any additional letters.[75]

All of this effort on the part of both Jebbs occurred on the eve of the fourth general meeting of the petitioners on January 23, 1772. At that meeting, perhaps knowing that they had drawn little clerical or public support for their campaign, the petitioners decided that it would be best to have their petition presented as soon as possible at the next session of the House of Commons, a task handled by Sir William Meredith, M.P. from Liverpool. The outcome came as little surprise to Theophilus Lindsey. In a letter he noted: "I do not believe we shall divide forty members, perhaps not twenty: yet the debate will do honour to the petitioners, thought at present no good to the cause." In the end the vote went somewhat better than Lindsey expected. The House of Commons voted 217 to 71 to preclude further debate on the issue.[76]

Opposition to the petition was widespread including the King and Lord North.[77] For many it was not a mere debate over theological points but concerned the Church-State

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[74] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 82.

[75] John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 9 (London, 1812-1816), p. 659.

[76] *Parliamentary History*, vol. XVII, note on page 248.

[77] Oxford was to reward North for his opposition to the petitioners with the office of Chancellor. Though ironically North as Chancellor did his best to try to persuade the University to relax its rules on subscription; Martin Fitzpatrick, "Latitudinarianism at the

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nexus. At Cambridge Cole wrote in his personal notebook that "there is a restless generation who will never be contended till they have overturned the constitution in church and state: they have been long working at this scheme, and now the false brethren of our own church lends a willing hand to the Dissenters of all denominations who are to be let in like a torrent."[78] In the House of Commons, Roger Newdigate echoed Cole's view when he stated during the debate on the petition that "Civil and religious establishments are so linked and incorporated together, that, when the latter fall, the former cannot stand. They seems to me to be as inseparably connected as the soul and body."[79] An argument can even be made that this presumed link between religious and political reform doomed the petition from the very beginning.[80]

It was in the aftermath of the defeat that Jebb, in the fall of 1772, wrote a letter to William Meredith, which he shortly thereafter published.[81] After thanking Meredith for his efforts on behalf of the petitioners, Jebb justified the labor of those who had gathered at Feather's Tavern to work on behalf of the cause over the past year. Jebb acknowledged

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parting of the ways: a suggestion" in John Walsh *et. al.* (Ed.) *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1883* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 231.

[78] Cole Manuscripts Add. MSS. 5873, fol. 53.

[79] Lucy S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell (Eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. V: *the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 167.

[80] John Gascoigne, "Anglican Latitudinarians and Popular Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century," *History* 71 (February 1986), p. 28.

[81] *A letter to Sir William Meredith, upon the subject of subscription to the liturgy and thirty-nine articles of the Church of England.* London, 1772. The work appears in *The Works of Jebb*, vol. I, pp. 223-262.

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what he believed to be the worthy qualities of the petition, most notably that it did not deal with issues such as what he personally believed to be the "absurdity" of articles of belief, or the fact that such articles directly contradicted the word of God as expressed in the Bible.[82] The problem here is that in his public pronouncements on these issues (such as in his *Circular Letter* or in his *Letters on the Subject of Subscription*), Jebb specifically made these points, so that even if the carefully worded petition itself was devoid of such phrases or ideas, it was known that he and other public supporters fully believed them to justify the elimination of subscription. Jebb was, however, fully cognizant of the contradictions of the other side: If they believed oaths were necessary, why was it that the majority of members of the Church of England were never asked to subscribe, so long as they were neither clergymen, lawyers or doctors? Or why did Bishops not subscribe at their consecrations.[83]

Whatever Jebb may have felt personally, he publicly stated in the letter that he was not disappointed because there was a sense that "we retired with the pleasing expectation, that [the House of Commons] might, upon a reconsideration of the subject, grant us that redress."[84] And as he pointed out to Meredith, there was some cause for optimism in a minor victory that had taken place at Cambridge.

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[82] *Works of Jebb*, vol. I, p. 252.

[83] *Works of Jebb*, vol. I, pp. 243-4.

[84] *Works of Jebb*, vol. I, p. 226.

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V

During the same time that Jebb was a major participant in the national campaign against subscription through his work with the Feather's Tavern movement, he was also a driving force for the battle against student subscription at Cambridge. Jebb believed that it was an onerous burden that students who did not subscribe to the thirty-nine articles could pursue a course of study at Oxford and Cambridge but could not formally matriculate and receive a degree. This issue particularly struck home with him, inasmuch as within his own family there was the example of his uncle Samuel and his cousin Richard, who both attended Cambridge but left without formal degrees due to their commitment to the non-juring Church.

The excitement over the Feather's Tavern petition immediately began to influence affairs at Cambridge. The Master of Emmanuel College was so concerned over student interest that he threatened to discipline anyone who signed the petition.[85] Despite his and others concerns, the topic could not be contained so that even before the Feather's Tavern petition was formally introduced into Parliament it was officially debated at Cambridge. On June 11, 1771 a grace was put forward that subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles

[85] Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 195. At Oxford there was apparently very little interest in the issue. Nathan Wetherell, Vice-Chancellor of the University could write with a trace of smugness that while at Cambridge students were agitating for the end of subscription, "We have nothing of the sort here. Lucy S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell (Eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford,* Vol. V: *the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 166.

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should not be deemed a necessary qualification for any degree. This was easily defeated in the Caput, the committee that had to unanimously approve all measures before being introduced for consideration in the Cambridge Senate.[86]

Following this defeat Jebb urged a change in tactics. Recognizing that any perceived connection with the Feather's Tavern clerical subscription would be problematic, a second grace was offered to the Caput on December 1771, this time limited to exempting all Bachelor of Art students from subscription. [87] In addition, rather than having it offered by Jebb, which would have led to its instant defeat due to his numerous opponents,[88] it was put forward by his friend, Robert Tyrwhitte, a fellow of Jesus College. Despite these precautions, the altered grace was easily defeated in the Caput.[89]

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[86] Charles Henry Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1842-1908), p. 362.

[87] In a letter the Rev. Michael Tyson said Jebb made alterations to the original grace sent to the Senate. John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*. 9 vols. (London, 1812-1816), p. 571-2.

[88] The debate over subscription had once again made Jebb the focus of angry attention at Cambridge. There was a society at Cambridge that was established in 1757 by Wranglers called the Hyson Club. At a debate that was held to discuss possible changes that would be wrought by an end to mandatory subscriptions, Doctor Gordon, a fellow of Emmanuel College and a Tory critic of change attached Jebb by saying "You mean, Sir, to impose upon us a new church government." Before Jebb could respond Paley jumped in and said "You are mistaken Sir, Jebb only wants to ride his own horse, not to force you to get up behind him." Christopher Wordsworth, *Social Life at the English Universities in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1874), pp. 334-5.

[89] British Library, Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS. 35,628, f. 132. Tyrwhitt eventually resigned his fellowship at Jesus after becoming a Unitarian. Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 200.

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Subsequent to these two failures to even have the issue brought before the Cambridge Senate, the students decided to take the issue into their own hand. A sizable contingent of undergraduates presented a petition that was written by Charles Crawford, a fellow-commoner at Queens. The petition was rather clever: rather than challenging subscription itself as in the case of the two earlier bills placed before the Caput, the students took the time-honored tack of saying that they were overworked and that they lacked time to inquire "into the abstruser points of theology."[90] Because of their inability to give the Articles the attention they so obviously deserved, it was preferable to have the university drop the mandatory subscription. Perhaps not surprisingly, this argument did not succeed with many who sat in the Senate House.

In the end it was neither Jebb's work nor that of the students that pushed Cambridge to act: rather it was the threat that parliament would act where the university would not. As soon as the Feather's Tavern Petition was presented in February 1772 there was a discussion within the House of Commons about whether subscription for university degrees should continue.[91] William Meredith moved for a bill to abolish subscriptions on taking degrees at both Oxford and Cambridge. At Cambridge, the Heads of the College were stunned by this move and wondered whether universities even had the authority to end subscription on their own. Eventually they decided to surrender and rather than wait for the passage of Meredith's bill the Heads of the Colleges voted seven to three to abolish

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[90] Charles Henry Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1842-1908), p. 363.

[91] Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 200

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subscription for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, though they failed to pass a vote calling for an end to subscription for all lay degrees.[92] The Attorney-General then weighed in with an opinion that the university did have the power to abrogate subscription to the thirty-nine articles, but the Heads would not go beyond their earlier limit on subscriptions for Bachelor of Arts students.[93] While removing mandatory subscription, Bachelor of Arts students were still required to make a declaration that they were *bona fide* a member of the Church of England as by law established, something which still displeased Jebb, as he noted in his letter to William Meredith. "I am bona fide may mean more than mere conformity - it may imply an acceptance of the established doctrine," he wrote.[94] Jebb showed his continuing displeasure by shortly afterwards preaching a sermon before the university from Acts xv. 10. "Now, therefore, why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our father, nor we, were able to bear?"[95] - an obvious reference to subscription. On the next day, perhaps mindful that many were tired of the controversy, he decided against repeating such a controversial topic and instead spoke on

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[92] B. L. Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS. 35,628, f. 135. Cobbett, 1806-20, xvii, pp. 269-294.

[93] B. L. Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS. 35,628, f. 151. Oxford a year later failed to pass a similar proposal.

[94] *Works of Jebb*, vol. I, p. 259-60. In 1779 students completing bachelor degrees in Law, medicine and music and doctorates in music no longer were also allowed to take the oath stating they were *bona fide* members of the Church of England. Charles Henry Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1842-1908), p. 390.

[95] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 42.

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the spirit of benevolence - an attempt to remind people that even should they disagree they were still brethren.[96]

VI

The defeat of the Feather's Tavern petition left some of its advocates distraught. Theophilus Lindsey, believing that there was now no hope for bringing about needed change in the Church, resigned his living towards the end of 1773.[97] Lindsey explained his reasons in a letter to Jebb:

> I think you must have perceived in my letters, perhaps in my conversation, a dissatisfaction with our ecclesiastical impositions, and a tendency to relieve myself from them. This indeed had taken place long before our association was formed and the execution only suspended and retarded by it, though some pleasing expectation was formed, that Providence might unexpectedly give such a turn to our endeavors as might make me easy, or give me liberty to make myself easy. But as my chief dissatisfaction is with those Trinitarian forms which pervade the whole liturgy all hope of that kind is certainly cut off. The resolution that I have formed of retiring has been absolutely fixed for some time, and will take place in a few months.[98]

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[96] Disney notes that Jebb decided to reprint the sermon in 1780 and 1782, during times of political tension, and that for these later editions Jebb affixed a new prefix in which he hoped that the sermon "might tend to moderate our sentiments, and induce us, even in the midst of contending parties, to remember that we are brethren. Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 43.

[97] In the end it was not until 1865 that the requirement to subscribe was relaxed by more general adherence to the doctrines of the Church being agreeable to the word of God.

[98] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to John Jebb, no date given. Cited in Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Rev. Theophilus Lindsey* (London, 1812), pp. 49-50.

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For Lindsey the decision was excruciatingly difficult and he was extremely grateful for Jebb's correspondence during this period, which Lindsey said offered "much comfort and encouragement."[99]

Not everyone accepted the need to resign. The father of the petitioning movement. Francis Blackburne, wrote to Lindsey:

> I would not subscribe again, even tho' I were reduced to beg a piece of bread by my children. But as the thing is done in *ignorance* and unbelief .... I wrong or deceive nobody by holding my benefice by that Title, provided I bear testimony to every one and on all fitting occasions, that I do not hold myself any longer bound by those terms.[100]

One thing which made it easier for people such as Blackburne to stay in the Church of England was that Lord North's ministry did not seek to hound out of the church those 200 clergymen who had signed the petition, and possibly because of this the majority remained.[101]

Jebb remained in the Church of England for two more years, though this had little to do with any hope of the possibility of reform and everything to do with his desire to maintain legal status at Cambridge in order to participate in the Cambridge Senate. This

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[99] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to John Jebb, December 5, 1773. Cited in Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Rev. Theophilus Lindsey* (London, 1812), p. 50.

[100] Martin Fitzpatrick, "Latitudinarianism at the parting of the ways: a suggestion" in John _Walsh, *et. al.* (Ed.) *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1883* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 224.

[101] John Gascoigne, "Anglican Latitudinarians and Popular Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century," *History* 71 (February 1986): 22-68.

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would be necessary in order to bring about his plan for a reform of the examination system, which consisted of mandating that all students, including noblemen and fellow-commoners, should take exams in areas such as Latin, Greek and the natural sciences.[102]

Jebb was to spend the next two years offering graces to that effect for consideration by the Caput, but in the end his efforts came to little. Part of the problem was clearly the messenger: Philip Yorke, at the time an undergraduate at Queen's College, said of Jebb that "he is so obnoxious a person himself that every plan or proposal, however good in itself, provided it comes from him, is sure to be rejected."[103] Some individuals such as William Cole insisted on seeing a link between Jebb's advocacy of examination reform and his earlier battles: "But in short, this meddling Professor seeing that his religious project failed, has now thought of reforming the university; and if that fails and miscarries, his reforming genius, which cannot lie still, will prompt him to reform the charity schools, or

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[102] Jebb wrote extensively on the subject of exam reform. His published writings on this topic are: *An Address To The Gentlemen Of The University Of Cambridge, Who Intend Proposing Themselves, The Ensuing January, As Candidates For The Degree Of Bachelor Of Arts* (1771); *A continuation of the narrative of academical proceedings relative to the proposal for the establishment of annual examinations in the University of Cambridge; with observations upon the conduct of the committee, appointed by the Grace of the Senate on the 5th of July, 1773* (1773); *A narrative of academical proceedings relative to the proposal for the establishment of annual examinations in the University of Cambridge* (1773); *A plan for public examinations, Cambridge, May 11, 1774. The writer of this paper is justly sensible of the publications, which every member of the university is under to those worthy persons, who lately laboured with so much assiduity in the public service....* (1774); *A proposal for the establishment of public examinations* (1774); *Remarks upon the present mode of education in the University of Cambridge: to which is added a proposal for its improvement* (1774); *An address to the members of the senate of Cambridge* (1775).

[103] Denys Arthur Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 329.

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some other as little interesting project: in order that his name may be branded about and so make himself considerable."[104] But perhaps Jebb's work on this issue did make a difference. Nineteenth-century Cambridge would be a far different and more rigorous institution where all students sat examinations. As one historian of Cambridge has noted: "Jebb and his friends did more than they or their opponents realized. They aroused the University from a slumber of two centuries, and never again was it to enjoy quite the same peaceful sleep.[105]

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[104] B. L., Cole Manuscripts Add. MSS. 5873, fol. 69b.

[105] Denys Arthur Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 334.

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Chapter Three

A Life in Transition

I

Despite remaining within the Church of England in the immediate aftermath of the failure of the Feather's Tavern Petition, Jebb began soon after to discuss with his friends the possibility of resigning his preferments. In addition, his behavior in the pulpit was beginning to outwardly reflect his dissatisfaction. An example of this came during a visitation tour that Dr. Goodall, the archdeacon of Suffolk, made to Jebb's parish church in Flixton on September 25, 1773. According to Jebb's account:

> The archdeacon appointed prayers to be read in my church; I appointed myself preacher, and gave a discourse upon subscription. The archdeacon was enraged ... and publicly rebuked me before the clergy at the public house where we met: much altercation ensued, yet, I trust, I kept my temper. I told him, I had a right to preach every day in the week, if I thought proper; he was at liberty to retire, if he disliked my doctrine; he talked of authority, complaining to the diocesan, &c. but, I resolutely told him, I should have used the same language to the bishop, had I met with equal provocation. At last, he thought it best to hold his tongue, and be quiet. Much more was said, but this was the substance. For some days, I expected a summons to Norwich [to be brought before the Bishop], but have heard no more of it. I acted thus, with a view to call the attention of the Norwich clergy to our cause and have in part succeeded.[1]

In William Cole's version of the same story, which he says he heard directly from Goodall, Jebb started out with "a decent sermon for twenty minutes, but then attacked the liturgy, articles and clergy" while adding it was "no wonder the Christian religion was at

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[1] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 53-54.

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so low an ebb. when the clergy set so ill an example by their lives. morals and care of their flocks." Afterwards there was an angry confrontation where Goodall expressed his wish that Jebb "had left off [the sermon] where it had been proper" Jebb in turn got very angry and told Goodall that he would preach what he thought proper. The Archdeacon responded by telling him his discourse was improper and that if he continued in such a manner he should lay aside his preferments. Later that evening there was another angry confrontation between the two at a local pub.[2]

It would. however, be another year before Jebb finally decided that he had enough. By the time Jebb spent the day with Francis Blackburne in July 1775. he had clearly made the decision that it was time to resign his preferments. Jebb in a letter to John Disney recalls his exuberance on this occasion and "though I had not time to say a thousandth part of what I wanted to say; but I was happy in our conversation, and pleased to find that I stood high in the archdeacon's estimation."[3] Most likely Jebb did not end his visit to Blackburne with the latter's support for his decision, considering that Blackburne had several years earlier vehemently urged Theophilus Lindsey, who had married his stepdaughter, not to resign. Jebb's meeting ended on a positive note, unlike, however, poor Lindsey, who by the time he left Blackburne's presence was angrily being blamed by his father-in-law for the failure of the Feather's Tavern Petition.[4]

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[2] B. L., Cole Manuscripts Add. MSS. 5873, fol. 69b

[3] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 100-103.

[4] Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 197

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In September, while returning to Cambridge, Jebb stopped in Leicestershire, where he spent time with Lord Harborough, Ann Jebb's relative for whom Jebb had served as a personal chaplain. From there he informed his friend Disney of his final decision and the palpable sense of relief that it brought:

> My situation, I thank God, and a good friend, will not be distressing, though it will be precarious, as I act, I am afraid, in opposition to the inclination of those who, I have reason to think, have it in their power to serve me. But no more of this. I am easy in the thoughts of being delivered from what I esteem worse than Egyptian bondage.[5]

Subsequently Jebb officially resigned all his preferments. Before a notary public on September 29, 1775, he resigned the rectory of Homersfield, as well as the vicarage of Flixton. He also sent off a letter to Dr. Yonge, the Bishop of Norwich, informing him of the reasons for his decision. Jebb shortly thereafter published this letter in a tract entitled *A Short State Of The Reasons For His Late Resignation* (1775).[6]

In his *Short State* Jebb finally expressed his various doubts regarding certain creeds of the Church of England and explained why as long as they were a part of the teachings of the Church of England he could no longer serve the church:

> It has been for some time past my firm persuasion, that the doctrine of the Trinity, as explained in the creed of Athanasius; as propounded in the thirty-nine articles of the church of England; as established in the liturgy; and further guarded by penal sanctions in an act of parliament passed in the reign of William the third, is equally contrary to sound reason and the holy scriptures. I am fully satisfied that in the divine

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[5] Letter from John Jebb to John Disney, September 26, 1775, cited in Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 104.

[6] The tract appears in *The Works of John Jebb*, vol. ii, pp. 203-224.

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> nature there is no plurality of persons; but that the almighty author of the universe is, in the strictest sense of the expression ONE. And I think I have reason to believe that the present openly avowed adherence of most established churches to the contrary persuasion, which does not appear to be conformable to the sentiments of Christians in the earliest and the purest ages of the church, is not only one of the most powerful obstructions to the conversion of the Mahometans and the Jews; but is also an almost invincible objection to the cordial reception of the gospel by many serious well-disposed persons, in every rank of life, and in every state in Christendom.[7]

Jebb believed the Church of England was making a serious mistake in thinking that a state church could be organized along the narrow lines delineated by the thirty-nine articles. As his own beliefs fell outside those precepts, he was left with little choice but "to embrace the only measure that seemed to promise tranquility" - resignation.[8]

Jebb's pamphlet created quite a stir with three editions being printed over the course of six weeks. The *Short State* was reviewed favorably in the *Monthly Review*, which noted, "We cannot avoid expressing our concern, that the Church of England should be deprived of such valuable members."[9] Respectful doubt was expressed by Henry Taylor, who wrote to Ann Jebb that while he thought it praiseworthy of her husband to act from principle, he thought his "conscience is too squeamish and nervous .... surely a man can never think himself obliged to give up his preferment because he has changed his opinion from what it was when he received it without any such conditions." Taylor added: "I

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[7] *The Works of John Jebb*, vol. ii, p. 206.

[8] *The Works of John Jebb*, vol. ii, p. 208.

[9] *Monthly Review*, vol. liv (1776), pp. 86-72.

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almost wish you had taught Mr. J to make puddings and pies and kept him to that business as well as yourself."[10]

Most of Jebb's other friends were delighted with the work. John Disney informed Jebb, "Your letter to the bishop is admirable: you have assigned the reason for your resignation, and defended our like-minded brethren in the principle of the petition, in a language and spirit, worthy of yourself."[11] Perhaps no one was more pleased than Theophilus Lindsey, who saw the pamphlet as a vindication of his own earlier course of action.[12] In addition, an anonymous tract shortly appeared entitled *A letter to the rev. John Jebb, M.A. occasioned by his Short View*, which the author felt compelled to write in order to support Jebb's "truly conscientious and laudable conduct." The only regret the author expressed was that Jebb's resignation did not lead to a larger movement of the clergy out of the church.[13]

Not surprisingly, not all the reaction was favorable. An unsigned pamphlet from the pen of Edward Tew, a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, entitled *Resignation no proof: a letter to Mr. Jebb with occasional remarks on his spirit of Protestantism* (1776), attacked Jebb on his doubt concerning the Trinity. For Tew, "the Union of the divine and

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[10] Manuscript from the Cambridge University Library, Letter from Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, September 29, 1775, Add. 7901/3/11.

[11] Letter from John Disney to John Jebb, October 15, 1775, cited in Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 104-5.

[12] Manuscript Collection, John Rylands University Library, Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, October 19, 1775.

[13] *Monthly Review*, vol. lv (1776), p. 167.

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human nature in the person of Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the object of the New Testament" and no one claiming to be a Christian could doubt this proposition. "It must either be firmly established or Christianity must fall with it." Tew was unquestionably angry that the issues raised in the recently defeated Feather's Tavern petition were again being raised, since to do so "without anything new to offer in its support, is, however, trespassing too much on their patience."[14] Tew admitted that Jebb's resignation was a sign of sincerity.[15] But he was concerned that Jebb's resignation should not be taken by the public to be an indication of the truth of his beliefs.[16]

II

After resigning from all his clerical posts Jebb initially planned to stay at Cambridge and earn a living by tutoring students. He doubted the potential success of this

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[14] [Edward Tew] Anon. *Resignation no proof: a letter to Mr. Jebb with occasional remarks on his spirit of Protestantism* (London, 1776), p. 8.

[15] Hannah More was also struck by the sincerity of Jebb's actions. In a letter written to Horace Walpole several years after Jebb's death, she noted that one day while with a large party "who all inveighed against Lindsey, and Jebb, and other Socinians who had deserted the Church because they could not subscribe to the Articles, I happened to say that I thought sincerity such a golden virtue, that I had a feeling bordering on respect for such as had apostatized upon principle; for when a man gave such a unequivocal proof of his being in earnest, as to renounce a lucrative profession, rather than violate his conscience, I must think him sincere, and of course respectful [W. S. Lewis (Ed.), *Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 328-329

[16] Tew's work was reviewed negatively in the *Monthly Review*, which while noting that the work was weil-written perhaps unfairly states: "the author writes with an air of intolerance and arrogance which ill becomes him against such an opponent." *Monthly Review*, vol. liv (1776), pp. 195-6.

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plan, however, and expressed his concerns to Lindsey. Lindsey in turn informed a mutual friend that if Jebb does "not succeed with pupils at Cambridge, which I much fear he will not, he thinks of coming to London."[17] Jebb asked friends for help in finding students, but as he anticipated he could not earn enough from this to support himself and his wife.[18]

Another option was proposed by Jebb's cousin, Richard Jebb, who suggested that he consider a career in medicine and also offered Jebb his full support.[19] This was not just idle talk. Richard, the son of John Jebb's Uncle Samuel, was one of the most prominent doctors of the day. For several years he was employed by the royal family and in 1777 he was appointed physician-extraordinary to King George III and three years later was named physician-in-ordinary to the Prince of Wales. His service to the royal family led to a Baronetcy in 1778, but also to his premature death in 1787, when he caught a deadly case of the measles that had struck the royal princesses.[20]

John Jebb decided to follow the advice of his cousin and while still at Cambridge began to attend a series of anatomical lectures. However, it was necessary to leave the university, inasmuch as the growth of clinical studies as part of the training for medical

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[17] Manuscript Collection, John Rylands University Library, Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, October 19, 1775.

[18] Letter from John Jebb to Dr. Chambers, October 21, 1775. Cited in Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 106-8.

[19] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 121.

[20] The baronetcy went extinct when Richard Jebb died in 1787 without issue. John Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland for 1852* (London, 1852), p. 282.

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students involved training at hospitals in London.[21] On September 3, 1776 Jebb left Cambridge after a stay of almost twenty-two years. In his biography of Jebb Disney stated that he left "without bitterness."[22] Yet it is hard to imagine that he did not have numerous regrets over what he had failed to accomplish there. Upon his arrival in London Jebb settled in a house in Craven Street and immediately began to give lectures on the Greek New Testament to two young men to earn some money before the start of his medical career.

Over the next year Jebb studied anatomy, chemistry, physiology and botany, which must have been an elective. He also participated in clinical studies at St. Bartholomew's Hospital throughout the year. In March 1777 he received his diploma of Doctor of Physic from the University of St. Andrew's in Scotland and the following June was admitted as a licentiate by the College of Physicians, although he did not officially begin his practice until Feb. 5, 1778.[23]

In a letter from this period written to Disney, Jebb wrote, "I am now in my forty-second year, and my preparation for my profession has not gone through, and, therefore, am much engaged. Not that I am anxious about my success in it, far otherwise. I have met with so many kindnesses, that my situation has been rendered far easier than I could have hoped...."[24] His private notebook expresses this sense of optimism: "completed the

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[21] Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 182.

[22] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 122.

[23] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 128-9

[24] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 127.

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probation of two years: and. with God's blessing. have been upheld to apply myself with assiduity the greatest portion of it.....I see sufficient encouragement to go on cheerfully in my profession with 'faith in physic.'"[25] In this same notebook Jebb expressed the hope that he could carry out his new profession in as moral and upright a manner as possible. His personal Hippocratic oath consisted of three parts:

> 1. To forego every advantage and every prospect of success in my profession, rather than act contrary to the three principles laid down by Dr. Hartley, as the basis of right conduct, viz. piety, benevolence, and the moral sense.
>
> 2. Never to make a difference between the rich and poor, but so far as relates to my efforts to cure, to consider myself in equal manner, the servant of both, being very careful to manifest the same courtesy, mildness of speech, and manners, to every individual I may be called upon to assist.
>
> 3. To guard continually against deflecting from the proper line and duties of my profession through attention to ornamental branches of knowledge; yet, in all points, to act in perfect consistency with my former conduct, not abating in my zeal or the cause of civil or religious liberty; nor sacrificing my principles, even for a moment, through any views of interest, of whatever nature they may be considering the transitory science I am engaged in."

While Jebb was somberly compiling a personal code of conduct, his wife, Ann, was worried. She expressed her concerns in several letters to Henry Taylor who jokingly responded: "I hope the Doctor goes on with his new business with the same success as General Howe ... that he does not kill so many as might be expected."[26]

Ann was not alone in her concerns. Theophilus Lindsey wondered whether at his age Jebb could possibly meet with professional success, but he added hopefully, "No man

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[25] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 135-7.

[26] Manuscript from the Cambridge University Library, Letter from Henry Taylor to Ann Jebb, 1777, Add. 7901/3/14.

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enters the profession better informed"[27] For Jebb's assorted friends, one of the unfortunate aspects of his career change was that he no longer had an opportunity to write religious tracts. Lindsey wrote to a friend as follows: "I am much affected by what you say, my excellent friend, or rather repeat of the necessity for an address to Unitarians .... I am sorry I know none to undertake such a work. The firm, upright and able Dr. Jebb is so entirely swallowed up with his new profession as to have no time."[28] Joseph Priestley came up against the same problem; writing to Lindsey, Priestley informed him that he wanted Jebb to look over some of Priestley's recently completed scriptural tracts, "but he has not time and I am unwilling to trouble him."[29]

Despite his dedication, finding a position as a physician was no easier than finding an academic post had been at Cambridge. Jebb pursued one opening at St. Bartholomew's Hospital following the death of Dr. Petit, who had been one of his teachers. Disney believes that Jebb lost out on this post due to the interference of political notables, such as Lord North, who worked to make sure it went to the other candidate, a Dr. Budd. Another post opened at St. Thomas's Hospital, but Jebb decided against formally entering his name once he realized that he would once again be defeated.[30]

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[27] John Rylands University Library, Manuscript Collection, Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, January 28, 1778.

[28] John Rylands University Library, Manuscript Collection, Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, January 23, 1778.

[29] Joseph Priestley, *Theological Works and Miscellaneous Works* vol. 1 edited by J.T. Rutt. (London: 1832), pp. 300-1.

[30] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 157.

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Jebb's one notable success in this period consisted in being elected as a member of the Royal Society. Early members of the Royal Society, following its establishment in 1661, included Puritans who were ejected from clerical offices during the Restoration, Catholics, Anglican courtiers, Royalists, and Latitudinarians; in the period between 1720 and 1741 there even emerged a clique of radical deists.[31] With such a diverse membership it was unlikely that Jebb would be excluded merely on the basis of his religious or political beliefs. And since membership offered a certain measure of prestige it could only help a newly-minted physician who was looking for private patients.[32]

On November 12, 1778 the first stage of his nomination process took place when a certificate was read by his old friend Richard Watson recommending that "John Jebb M.D. of Craven Street who is desirous of becoming a fellow of the Royal Society, as highly deserving of that honor and likely to become a useful member."[33] Three months later, on February 18, 1779, Jebb was voted in with overwhelming support.[34] While grateful for being

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[31] James E. Force and Richard Popkin, *Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers), p. 143.

[32] In the late eighteenth century it was not uncommon for physicians who were not truly scientists to join the society. The librarian of the Royal Society told me that until the 1840s there wasn't really an attempt to make sure that potential members were active in the field of science.

[33] The petition was signed by Richard Watson, William Heberden, Thomas Brand Hollis, Edward Waring, Richard Jebb, Richard Price, John Lewis Petit, Richard Warren, William Hunter, Samuel Felton, William Sharpe, Edward Bridgen, Sir Ashton Lever, George Atwood John Lind, and Joseph Priestley. Royal Society, *Certificates of Election*, Cert IV. 6.

[34] *Journal Book of the Royal Society*, vol. 29, 1777-1780, p. 350. Disney writes that the vote was almost unanimous. Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 140.

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selected, it does not appear that he was active in the Society, since the minute books list only those who actively participated in meetings and Jebb's name does not appear in them.

Just as Jebb brought his reform-minded spirit to the issue of clerical subscription and examination reform, so he soon found that things in his new profession were not what he thought they should be. In a small pocketbook which he used throughout 1778, Jebb wrote, "I see every day more and more, the art of physic may be simplified like divinity, and that names of diseases must in time be forgotten, and the whole of a disorder be considered as a derangement in some part of the system, generally by inflammation, its adjuncts and consequences."[35] It was to this ordered, divinely inspired world of medicine that Jebb decided to suggest the utility of maintaining comparative case histories; every symptom and treatment over the course of the disease should be taken down in minute detail.

These ideas would be formally spelled out in the fall of 1782 when Jebb, while actively engaged in metropolitan politics, managed to find time to publish a study on paralysis.[36] After outlining his proposed methodology, Jebb presented examples from fifteen patients he had examined at St. Bartholomew's Hospital beginning in 1778. The majority of his patients were treated with caustics (chemicals that were supposed to burn away the infection), and perhaps surprisingly half of his patients showed signs of responding to the treatment.

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[35] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 139.

[36] John Jebb, *Select cases of the disorder commonly termed the paralysis of the lower extremities. To which is added, a case of catalepsy*. The work appears in *The Works of Jebb*, vol. ii, pp. 393-457

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Despite Jebb's belief that a career in medicine would allow him to eat "independent bread,"[37] the amount of money he earned from his new profession was never quite adequate. While few matched the success of John Fothergill, a Quaker who was the most successful doctor of the day and who earned over £10,000 annually by taking care of Wedgewoods, Darbys and other leading nonconformists,[38] Jebb found it particularly difficult to make money in part because of his generous insistence on seeing patients regardless of whether they were able to pay. In addition, the substantial time that he spent in his political work probably detracted from the success of his medical practice. Probably the most important reason for his inability to earn enough from his practice was that he was not able to work for long periods of time due to his endemic poor health, made far worse by conditions in filthy, germ-filled London hospitals. Jebb had caught a serious fever in his youth which permanently damaged his health. During the first year in his new profession Jebb suffered another violent fever and while on this occasion he was only in bed for two weeks, his health never recovered. His poor health led him to consider a career in the law and to that end he had himself admitted to Lincoln's Inn on November 9, 1780.[39] Perhaps the thought of a third career change at his age was too daunting, and so Jebb did not further pursue this path. Instead he continued to do his best to build up a

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[37] Disney, *Biography of Jebb*, p. 123.

[38] Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 59.

[39] *Records of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn.* Vol. 1 Admissions from A.D. 1420 to A.D. 1799 (London, 1896), p. 498. Folio 117 marks that on November 9, 1780 John Jebb of Craven Street., Strand

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medical practice with private patients. Certainly he never reached the professional success of his cousin Richard, and after his death he left his widow Ann in such straightened circumstances that she was forced to sell off Jebb's personal library and his friends felt it necessary to collect money on her behalf. Ann might have found some comfort in an article which appeared in *Gentleman's Magazine* after her husband's death in which the author recalled that "His [Jebb's] anxiety for his patients, and particularly for the poorest, was undescribable [sic]: it was of kindred temper to his patriotic solicitude for the welfare of his country."[40]

III

Leaving Cambridge to start a new career as a physician in London must have been a fairly wrenching experience, but one source of comfort for Jebb was that he could join others of a Unitarian[41] inclination in a newly created spiritual home in the metropolis. Ever since he had left the Church of England, Theophilus Lindsey had worked towards the creation of a new chapel that would provide a forum for his religious views. His dream finally came to fruition when on Sunday, April 17th, 1774 he stood before a crowd of

[40] *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 56 (1786), p. 195.

[41] Unitarian was a term coined by Lindsey who was apparently quite the wordsmith; in 1765 he was the first to use the term "Sunday School" [Herbert McLachlan (Ed.), *The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey* (Manchester: The University Press, 1920), p. xi.]

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nearly 200 and preached the first sermon at the opening of his Unitarian chapel on Essex-Street.[42]

Jebb played an important role in the establishment of the chapel. According to Disney, himself a major participant in the early stages, "No important step was taken without consulting him [Jebb]; and many useful hints, and much assistance, was received from him."[43] One way in which Jebb made a contribution was by modifying the liturgy used at the chapel. It removed all trinitarian elements and was primarily based on changes that Samuel Clarke had proposed back in 1724.[44] The prayer book was not only from the hand of Jebb, however; others, including Theophilus Lindsey's wife, Hannah, played a role in the revisions.[45]

Lindsey went so far as to invite Jebb to join him in the pulpit. Lindsey recalled in 1775, that several years earlier, when he was just beginning to think of starting the chapel, "I expressed an earnest desire to have him [Jebb] engaged as a coadjutor, when I should have most gladly have shared with him the subscriptions to the Chapel, but he seemed to

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[42] Lindsey's first sermon from the pulpit was later published as *Book of common-prayer reformed.*

[43] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 83.

[44] Whitney Jones, *David Williams: The Anvil and the Hammer* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1986), p. 33.

[45] Disney had a negative view of her but this may be because she was his sister-in-law. Herbert McLachlan, "Fresh Light on the Life of Theophilus Lindsey," in *Essays and Addresses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), p. 44.

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decline continuing in the line of the ministry."[46] In a generous letter that Lindsey sent directly to Jebb he informed him that, "Our amount, all things paid, is one hundred pounds which I should be most glad to share annually."[47] Jebb politely declined these entreaties and instead John Disney, who had resigned his preferments from the Church of England in 1772, became Lindsey's colleague and later sole minister of the congregation between 1793 and 1805 following Lindsey's retirement.[48]

The expense of starting a chapel was underwritten by a number of subscribers of 100 pounds each, a list which included such notables as Lord Shelburne, the Duke of Grafton, Sir George Saville, and Charles James Fox.[49] Benjamin Franklin attended the chapel and also offered to help out by encouraging some of his numerous friends to take part and subscribe.[50] Despite the social prominence of many of the congregants, the chapel struggled in its early years and even the first day's attendance was disappointing. Only

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[46] Manuscript Collection, John Rylands University Library, Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, October 19, 1775.

[47] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to John Jebb, October 20, 1775. Cited in Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, M.A.* 2nd Edition (London, 1873), p. 86.

[48] Herbert McLachlan, "Fresh Light on the Life of Theophilus Lindsey," in *Essays and Addresses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), p. 40.

[49] Herbert McLachlan, "Fresh Light on the Life of Theophilus Lindsey," in *Essays and Addresses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), p. 52.

[50] Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, M.A.* 2nd Edition (London, 1873), p. 59.

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200 attended a chapel that was built to seat an additional 100 worshippers.[51] Jebb was a regular at the chapel and on at least one recorded instance he preached.[52] But as he made apparent in rejecting Lindsey's offer, his days as a clergyman were over. For the remaining years of his life Jebb's attention would be primarily drawn to the world of politics.[53]

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[51] Alexander Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian History* (London: Philip Green, 1895), p. 42. The original Essex Street Chapel was destroyed on a German bombing raid on July 28, 1944. At this time it was being used as a Unitarian headquarters. The congregation was moved to Essex Church, Notting Hill Gate in 1887. Herbert McLachlan, "Fresh Light on the Life of Theophilus Lindsey," in *Essays and Addresses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), p. 56.

[52] Manuscript Collection, John Rylands University Library, Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, May 26, 1778.

[53] Volume two of the Unitarian sermon book of 1808 contains Jebb's sermon entitled *Let your Light so Shine Before Men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven.*

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Chapter Four

The Early Stages of the Movement for Parliamentary Reform

I

There was a sense of anticipation among the group of men who gathered on December 20, 1779 at Free Mason's Tavern on Great Queen Street in Middlesex to discuss the issues of the day. Many probably thought that they were seeing a reprise of events ten years earlier, when John Wilkes on three separate occasions was barred from taking the parliamentary seat that was rightfully his after handily defeating the Grafton ministry's candidate, Colonel Luttrell. Ten years ago they were shouting for "Wilkes and Liberty" and a number of them on this December evening may have been wistfully hoping that they had a new Middlesex election issue on their hands, which could once again give rise to a wave of political activity. They had ample reasons to justify this expectation.

One month earlier a political dispute emerged in Middlesex over the vacancy for a parliamentary seat following the death of the current holder, John Glynn. Immediately, two sitting members of the House of Commons expressed their interest in representing Middlesex, which due to its size and prestige was one of the premier seats within the Parliament. The first candidate, George Tuffnell, was granted the Chiltern Hundreds[1] by Lord North, enabling him to resign his current seat and run in Middlesex, while the other potential candidate, George Byng, the M.P. for Hythe, was not granted the same right.

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[1] Granting the Chiltern Hundreds, a symbolic post within the government, provided a means for M.P.'s to resign their seats.

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Was this another example of the crown's ability to interfere in elections, and if so how could it be used as a means to attack the ministry? Lord North, however, was to show a steadier political touch than the Duke of Grafton possessed ten years earlier in the Wilkes controversy. North attempted to deflate the issue by saying that candidates who wished to stand for another constituency could do so without applying for the Chiltern Hundreds and in general, North showed little desire to continue with this prerogative right, one that he found to be somewhat embarrassing. But if he thought that this would be enough to appease the electors of Middlesex, he was to be disappointed.[2]

On November 13, 1779 the first meeting of the Middlesex freeholders took place concerning what to do regarding the electoral situation, with some advocating a petition to the crown, while a second meeting, seven days later, ended with the decision to meet next when Parliament was in session.[3] This third meeting took place on December 20, but in the interim there were other political developments that would prove to be far more significant than the dispute raised over the failure to grant the Chiltern Hundreds. This time, in what must have been a major surprise, the impulse for action did not come from the metropolis, but from the North of England, and in the end the Wilkites were going to find their issue of electoral freedom proved to not be significant in the ensuing debate. The attention at the meeting of the freeholders of Middlesex on December 20 may have initially been on the controversy over the granting of the Chiltern Hundreds, but quickly

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[2] The issue this time was resolved when Tuffnell decided not to run following a series of death threats, while the supporters of Wilkes supported the candidacy of Thomas Wood, who eventually ran unopposed.

[3] Butterfield, *George III, Lord North and the People*, p. 187.

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attention was drawn to Yorkshire, where Christopher Wyvill, a clergyman, was calling for the creation of a county association to look into the question of economical[4] and political reform. Perhaps in a desire to see that the political initiative was not taken out of their hands and given to the Yorkshiremen, the assembled freeholders of Middlesex listened to a political tract that had been sent to their chairman a short time earlier by a writer who was previously unknown for his political work. John Jebb, the author of this tract, that would later go through four editions under the title *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex*, offered to those assembled a major new direction in radical political thought and one far more radical than anything which Wyvill was offering.

Jebb in the *Address* was primarily concerned with how members of the House of Commons were to respond to instructions from their constituents. This issue arose since it was apparent that Middlesex was about to organize to send a petition to the House of Commons concerning the issue of freedom of elections arising out of the controversy over the granting of the Chiltern Hundreds and it was clear to Jebb that the House of Commons as it was presently constituted would ignore such a petition. Jebb was critical of the idea that members of parliament should think of themselves as representatives of the nation-at-large rather than as being bound by the specific instructions of those who elected them, and he used this pamphlet to express this concern.

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[4] Economical reform refers to the attempt to limit government expenses and corruption through the removal of government contractors and revenue officers from the House of Commons. For a major new study on the subject see: Philip Harling, *The Waning of 'Old Corruption': The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain 1779-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

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Jebb provided the hypothetical example of a M.P. who personally is against the slave trade and sits in an assembly where the majority of the members have been instructed by their constituents to support a bill providing for the abolition of this trade. However. this particular member has been instructed by his constituents that the majority of them are not in favor of this bill. While Jebb understood it was a wrenching decision given the brutal nature of the topic at hand. it would be necessary for the M.P. to either support the wishes of his specific constituents. or if he could not bring himself to that point. to resign his seat. Majority will in the nation as a whole. which Jebb understood had to be satisfied. would still triumph since the other representatives would be following a different set of instructions from their own constituents.

Jebb was aware. however. that so long as the present M.P.'s viewed their role as representatives of the nation at large. it was necessary to try a different tact. It was therefore necessary for the other counties to join with Middlesex in order to make their petition into more than just a localized affair. but rather a "public act of the combined counties" and to eliminate the objection of M.P.'s that a petition from a single county does not represent the will of the nation.[5]

This would still leave open the possibility that the House of Commons would not act towards redressing this issue. For Jebb, this led to the question of what should occur "When the ordinary delegation [parliament] ceases to express the people's will, are the commons [the common people] of this country altogether destitute of constitutional

[5] Jebb. *Complete Works*, vol. ii, p. 474.

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resource?"[6] Jebb's response to this question was a powerfully radical challenge to the existing political order. The committees that had formed in each of the counties to organize for the signing of the initial petition, now needed to reconstitute themselves for an even more important task: the creation of a general association of the country, a body which would have the authority, should it be deemed necessary, of declaring the present sitting parliament dissolved.[7]

This general assembly of the country, or alternative parliament, could act, Jebb believed, if it possessed the will, to totally reform the House of Commons:

> I am also of opinion, that whatever regulations, respecting the mode of electing representatives, and the forms of convoking future parliaments in this kingdom, might be agreed upon in such convention, and should afterwards be assented to by the nobles and king, ought to be regarded as constitutional ordinances of the sovereign power, until they are repealed by a similar authority; and that the acts of every future parliament, convoked in conformity to the regulations thus established, would have all the authority of law.[8]

This could lead, as Jebb sincerely hoped, to moving beyond the issue that first called them together - the ministerial granting of the Chiltern Hundreds - towards more significant reforms, such as the establishment of equal electoral districts, along with annual parliaments elected by universal male suffrage. Jebb, never one to think small, also speculated that a possible federal union could ensue with the Americans, who now

[6] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, p. 486.

[7] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, p. 479.

[8] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, p. 480.

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unfortunately, though correctly, "esteem it dangerous to be connected with a nation, so nearly allied to perdition."[9]

While the reaction of those assembled at Free Mason's Tavern who listened to the public reading of Jebb's *Address* is not known, the work received a favorable notice in the *Monthly Review*, where it was deemed to have come from the hands of a "close thinker and a sound reasoner."[10] The anonymous reviewer may not have been that startled by the implications of what Jebb put forward in part because in recent years similar notions regarding going outside of parliament for political reform had been floated in such publications as the *London Evening Post*, where an article appeared under the signature "Aratus," stating that "It is not by speaking or voting in the House of Commons, Sir, that this country is to be saved .... If they [Members of Parliament] mean to do us any service - let them return to their counties, mix among the yeomanry, explain to them their danger, put them in the CONSTITUTIONAL path to obtain a change of men and systems."[11]

Jebb, in a letter to Christopher Wyvill in 1781, noted that the ideas in his *Address* were part of a plan that he had submitted to the Yorkshire M.P. Sir George Savile in 1776. Additionally, in the years immediately prior to Jebb's authorship of the *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex* there appeared a number of pamphlets and books that Jebb had clearly mined for ideas. Works such as Granville Sharp's *The Natural Right of the People to Share in the Legislature* (1774), Richard Price's *The Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776),

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[9] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, p. 483.

[10] *Monthly Review*, vol. lxii (1780), p. 81.

[11] Butterfield, *George III, Lord North and the People*, p. 209.

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James Burgh's *Political Disquisitions* (1775), and John Cartwright's *Take Your Choice* (1777), were all read and studied by Jebb and clearly influenced his thinking.

The writings of James Burgh and John Cartwright were particularly significant for Jebb. James Burgh (1714-1775), viewed history as an "inexhaustible mine out of which political knowledge is to be brought up,"[12] and he used extracts from numerous historical sources, both ancient and contemporary, in order to argue in his *Political Disquisitions* for the necessity of establishing a parliament which would be free and independent. The way to achieve this would be through the steady rotation of members of the House of Commons as well as the introduction of universal male suffrage. Burgh clearly influenced Jebb in his advocacy of a national association, which would form at the parish level, to redress the deficiencies of the British constitution through petitioning members of parliament.

Major John Cartwright, who was to prove to be Jebb's closest colleague in the Westminster Committee and in the Society for Constitutional Information, became involved in radical politics directly as a result of the American Revolution. After declining a much desired military commission, since it would mean possibly fighting against the Americans, Cartwright began to publish a series of tracts on the conflict with the colonies in the *Public Advertiser* in 1774, while publishing in the same year a major pamphlet, *American Independence*. In these works Cartwright became one of the first in Great Britain to write on the need for American independence, while also urging that the newly formed nation should preserve her ties to Britain through a new concept of Empire, consisting of a union of independent and equal nations linked together through the crown.

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[12] Quoted from Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*, p. 364.

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an outcome that Jebb would also later advocate.[13] To reform the British parliament. Cartwright. in his *Take Your Choice*. called for a plan by which the number of all adult males in England would be divided by 515 to create districts consisting of approximately 2.900 men who would vote in secret for an M.P. Cities would return at least one M.P. while towns would be attached to the counties.[14] Like Burgh. he saw the necessity for parliaments to work independently of the executive and thought that annual parliaments combined with equal single-member constituencies was the way in which to achieve this. With his military background. Cartwright's work was devoid of the scholarly bent that Burgh or Jebb added to their writings. but perhaps because of the directness of his approach. he had the largest readership of any radical political author of the period.

While never reaching as large an audience as Cartwright, Jebb's *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex* instantly made him a significant participant in metropolitan politics. a position he would maintain until his death seven years later. It would be useful. however. to try and draw out Jebb's political involvement in the period prior to his overarching involvement in radical circles in the 1780s. To do this would mean starting with his connection with some of the nascent reform movements of the 1770s and then continuing on with his increased political awareness stemming from his concern over the conflict between the British government and the American colonists.

[13] Naomi Churgin. "Major John Cartwright: A Study in Radical Parliamentary Reform, 1774-1824" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1963), p. 45.

[14] Cartwright, *Take Your Choice*, p. 62.

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II

Jebb's growing involvement in politics was occurring at a time when many in England began to think that something had gone dreadfully wrong in their political system. The very first Junius[15] letter, dating from 1769, captures this disenchanted tone: "Perhaps there never was an instance of a change, in the circumstances and temper of a whole nation, so sudden and extraordinary as that which the misconduct of ministers has, within these very few years, produced in Great Britain."[16] That first Junius letter came on the eve of the first major political crisis that drew Jebb's attention - the cause of John Wilkes.

Wilkes, the son of a wealthy distiller who gained additional money through marriage to an even wealthier woman, was able to use his wealth to gain entry into the House of Commons where he attached himself to William Pitt. Wilkes used his newspaper, *The North Briton*, as a tool to defend Pitt against the attacks that supporters of Lord Bute had made against him in the public presses. In the famous issue no. 45, dated April 23, 1763, Wilkes began with an attack on Bute's peace treaty with France ending the Seven Years War and then moved on to flay other targets, including the new First Lord of the Treasury, George Grenville. Where Wilkes was seen as truly going over the line, however, was in implying that the King's dishonest ministers had put false words in his mouth when George III stood before Parliament and said the treaty was "honourable to my

[15] The "Junius" letters came from an anonymous writer who with wit and vitriol pointed out the political errors of the day.

[16] *The Letters of Junius*, edited by John Cannon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 16.

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crown and beneficial to my people." While issue no. 45 made no reference to the cause of parliamentary reform, the issue of general warrants and Wilkes's expulsion from the House of Commons brought many to the point of thinking critically about the overall political situation, just as the Feather's Tavern Petition, though not ostensibly about parliamentary reform, also brought some to that conclusion.

Jebb became involved in the political escapades of Wilkes in 1769 at the time of the disputed Middlesex election, which succeeded in raising public concerns about such issues as whether the House of Commons was superior to the electorate, and to questions regarding the possible expansion of the English electorate.[17] In the swirl of activity that accompanied the controversy over the seating of Wilkes, a petition from Middlesex openly referred to the "evil-minded persons" who had introduced "into every part of the administration ... a certain unlimited and indefinite discretionary power." In words that would become part of the common parlance of the radical movement in the 1780s, there were also references to the "dangerous influence" coming from the throne.[18]

The issue of electoral freedom sparked by the controversy in Middlesex began to spread throughout the rest of England. Jebb became involved in the controversy when in March 1769, an address was proposed to be sent by the University of Cambridge in support of Grafton's ministry in its dispute with Wilkes. The petition stated that:

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[17] John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 61.

[18] I. R. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), p. 35.

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> FULLY convinced that this or any other nation never enjoyed the invaluable blessings of Civil & Religious Liberty in a greater degree than what we experienced under your Majesty's mild & most gracious Government: we cannot but see, with concern and abhorrence, the evil designs of bad men, who, under specious pretenses of promoting the public good, are labouring to seduce the ignorant & unwary from their duty, by infusing into their minds needless fears & jealousies, as if the Constitution was in danger.[19]

This petition, with its harsh attack on Wilkes and his supporters, as well as its expressed doubt regarding the significance of the constitutional issues at play in the conflict between the administration and Wilkes, was proposed by Dr. Hinchliffe, Master of Trinity College and Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge. Hinchliffe was apparently instructed by the Grafton ministry to put forward the petition while on a trip to London that took place just prior to his advocacy of the petition.[20]

Royal petitions from the University, generally sent on such non-controversial occasions as the king's birthday, were voted in the two houses of the Cambridge University Senate, where they generally passed with no opposition and scarcely any comment. On the vote for Dr. Hinchliffe's petition, the non-regent house followed this traditional pattern, and despite the controversial topic at hand, there were no dissenting votes. In the regent house it would be a different story; two negative votes were placed, one by a Mr. Tyson and the other from Jebb.[21] Casting this vote took significant courage on Jebb's part: Grafton was more than the King's First Minister, he was also the Chancellor of

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[19] Charles Henry Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1842-1908), p. 354.

[20] Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS. 35,658, fol. 3.

[21] B.L. Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS. 35,658, fol. 3.

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Cambridge, and the vote occurred at a time when Jebb was still looking to find some sort of permanent post that would allow him to remain at Cambridge.

Jebb came into direct contact with John Wilkes in February 1771 when Wilkes was traveling through Cambridge on his way to King's Lynn to "take up the freedom of that town"[22] Wilkes was possibly informed of Jebb's support in the non-regent house two years earlier and sought him out. The Cambridge antiquarian Cole, who noticed everything that went on in his domain, remarked in his private notebooks that Jebb was the "only person almost that took any notice of him [Wilkes] and who walked about with him to show him the Colleges."[23] While there are no indications that Jebb was involved in the Society for the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, a Wilkite organization, Jebb's public attachment to the cause of Wilkes while at Cambridge shows his early sympathy for challenging the status quo of English politics, a sentiment that grew stronger with the advent of the American Revolution.

III

Prior to the British disaster at Saratoga in 1777, the war with the American colonists was supported by most of the propertied classes in England.[24] Edward Gibbon

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[22] *Cambridge Chronicle*, February 16 1771.

[23] B.L. Cole Manuscripts, Add. MSS. 5873, fol. 53

[24] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 68.

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was not exaggerating in noting that the war was the "favorite of the country."[25] But from the very start of the dispute, there was a minority within Britain for whom the Revolution meant something far more troubling. For Jebb, as for many of his colleagues in the parliamentary reform movement, the American Revolution was in many ways a defining moment.

Jebb never published a pamphlet that dealt specifically with the American conflict. This may be due to Jebb's attention being drawn during this time to the extraordinary demands of his new role as physician. Jebb did nevertheless stay informed of the situation in the colonies and in a series of personal letters to an unidentified correspondent outlined his concerns. The first of these letters dates from November 1774, coming at the end of a year that witnessed the closure of the port of Boston and in April the momentous first meeting of the Continental Congress. Similarly to Cartwright, Jebb by this time had concluded that the Americans should be allowed to move towards independence. The question was how to get the British to negotiate on this point. There was no question for Jebb concerning what he felt was the "absurdity of petitioning for redress" since "the English ministry must feel, before they will repent." Jebb was not looking for a situation that would lead to bloodshed; he preferred that the Americans implement an immediate suspension of trade with Great Britain, Ireland and the West Indies as a way of getting the British ministry to the bargaining table.[26]

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[25] Edward Gibbon, *Autobiography*, John Murray (ed.), p. 324.

[26] Letter from John Jebb to anon. November 21, 1774, Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 85-6.

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The first meeting of Parliament at the end of November. which followed a general election that resulted in the strengthening of North's support in the House of Commons. left Jebb more pessimistic regarding the possibility of bringing the conflict to a resolution without violence:

> I had indulged great hopes that the administration would have relaxed. and thereby have prevented that confusion which every man must lament, if he has any sensibility remaining. I did not think that despotism was so much a thing resolved on. I hope the Americans. by a temperate. manly. yet peaceful resistance. and the use of legal means. as opposed to force. will prevent that inhuman destruction of our fellow-creatures. which is threatened. Locke has shown me who are the real rebels. in a context of this kind: they are those. who. by unjust oppression. renew that state of war. which laws and society had banished.[27]

As with the political storm raised over John Wilkes. factions began to form within the Cambridge University community and among the inhabitants of Cambridgeshire over the question of what to do concerning the American colonies. On November 8. 1775. Jebb attended a large and boisterous meeting of the inhabitants of Cambridgeshire that was held at the Rose Tavern. The petition placed before the assembled, in an attempt to address their anxieties. stated:

> With the utmost affliction, and the most anxious apprehension, we behold a most ruinous civil war begun in America, which, we fear, if pursued, must totally alienate the affections of our fellow subjects in the colonies, and in the prosecution of which we can foresee no good effects that may arise to these kingdoms; even were our Majesty's arms victorious, desolated provinces and an exasperated people must be the only consequence of a continuance of this war.[28]

[27] Letter from John Jebb to anon. December 3, 1774, Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 86-7.

[28] Charles Henry Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge* vol. 4 (Cambridge: 1842-1908), pp. 378-9.

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The petition went on to pass with a large majority. While one critic of the petition referred to those who supported it as the "riffe-raffe" who had been "long infatuated by Republican principles,"[29] it was signed by the Mayor, one alderman, four bailiffs, eleven members of the common council and 143 others, and was promptly sent down to London to be presented to the King on November 29. Not to be outdone, supporters of the government's attempt to "reduce your deluded subjects in America ... to a due obedience to your Majesty" were able to put together their own petition signed by 96 Cambridgeshire inhabitants. At the University the academic community was split over the American crisis, with a petition from the Senate favoring North's ministry in their struggle with the colonists being carried by 46 to 21 in the non-regent house and by 38 to 25 in the regent house, with Jebb casting one of the negative votes in the latter.[30]

Within Cambridge, some who were among the most vocal of the anti-Americans viewed the conflict as another round in the larger struggle against religious heterodoxy. The cantankerous, though at times perceptive, William Cole, wrote at this time: "The University of Cambridge had been long divided into Parties, on occasion of the Articles of Religion, which had inflamed them and now an opportunity offered of showing their principles, and appeared by the opposition made by the dissatisfied faction, in relation to

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[29] B. L., Cole Manuscripts Add. MSS. 5842, f. 187.

[30] In the same year Oxford University sent a loyal address to the King on the question of handling the American colonies. There was much greater support for the government: only three voted no on the first ballot, none on the second in Convocation House.

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the 39 articles to any loyal address to the King, to inforce the laws against the rebels in America."[51] Certainly for Jebb, part of his interest in colonial affairs stemmed from his religious convictions. His struggles with the Church of England and his eventual conviction that his own life as a Christian required abandoning the church of his youth led to fears for the possibility of the imposition of an Episcopal structure on the colonies. Jebb was not being irrational in thinking this a possibility: throughout the eighteenth century there had been a number of plans to install an American Bishop, such as one formulated by Bishop Sherlock in 1750. Almost twenty-five years later, in 1774, the issue rose again when the Reverend Thomas Chandler, a New Yorker who was a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and an earlier author of a pamphlet in favor of creating an American episcopate, wrote a pamphlet defending Bishop Thomas Secker's plan of 1759 (which followed Bishop Sherlock's from a decade earlier).[52] Jebb had contempt for Chandler's plan and believed that the work "does harm to the cause of Christian liberty." He was rather incredulous that anyone could possibly think that the establishment of an episcopate could serve to address any of the issues behind the recent

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[51] B. L., Cole Manuscripts Add. MSS. 5842, f. 187.

[52] Chandler was writing in response to *The Critical commentary on archbishop Secker's letter, to the right honourable Horatio Walpole, concerning bishops in America* (1770), an attack on Secker's plan. Chandler's reply was entitled, *A free examination of the Critical commentary* (New York, 1774). Disney, *Life of Jebb* Letter from Jebb to anon. December 11, 1774, pp. 87-88

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agitation in the colonies. As he sarcastically noted in a letter: "Such is the infatuation, that many of the colonists, enemies of taxation, are for bishop."[33]

This continuing disenchantment with the government's handling of affairs in the American colonies led many radicals such as Jebb to search for a domestic cause. Unfortunately, the spurt of activity from the 1760s emanating out of the Wilkite agitation had come to a close. The breakup of Wilkes's Society of Supporters for the Bill of Rights in March 1771 is just one example of this decline of political activities. One of the reason why some radicals such as Jebb began to show such tremendous interest in the American cause was that they began to see America as a possible refuge from what they believed to be an intolerable political situation at home that showed no prospect for amelioration. Years before Joseph Priestley fled to the United States in the wake of the political backlash following the increasing radicalization of the French Revolution, Jebb was noting that "Matters are not so bad [domestically] as if America was enslaved ... Liberty has an asylum on that continent."[34] That was why Jebb was so eager to use his *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex* to help stir up a new wave of activity following the electoral conflict in Middlesex in 1779. What Jebb could not have known at the time that he was putting the finishing touches on his political pamphlet, was that there was a new political storm brewing coming from a rather unlikely corner, the county of York.

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[33] John Jebb to Anon., 11 December 1774, Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 87-8.

[34] John Jebb to Dr. Chambers, July 16, 1775, Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 92-9.

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IV

In the Junius letter of September 7, 1771, there was a call for the establishment of committees throughout England to look into the question of political reform.[35] The first attempt to do something of that nature was the Wilkes inspired Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights, the first national extraparliamentary reform association. In 1771 the Society put forward a radical plan for parliamentary reform. To some observers it looked as if something dramatically different was stirring in British politics. For the first time a specific piece of legislation was receiving extraparliamentary support from an organization that was working in conjunction with a parliamentary faction. Appearances were rather deceptive, however, since Rockingham had little genuine interest in a radical plan for parliamentary reform, while the Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights was hardly a massive pressure group, since at its height it only consisted of 50 members.

The creation of a large-scale, organized, extra-parliamentary reform movement, directed towards the transformation of the House of Commons was not to come from the urban boroughs of London, Westminster and Middlesex, as perhaps expected; instead it was in the more unlikely location of Yorkshire that Christopher Wyvill began to issue circular letters throughout the county in December 1779 calling for the creation of a county association that would meet to look into the question of economical reform and the possibility of creating a political association to organize in support of this issue. Once the issue of economical reform was addressed by this political association, Wyvill hoped it

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[35] John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 67.

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would work to bring about some further changes as part of his consciously vague call for "the other regulations which are thought necessary to restore the freedom of parliaments," such as the elimination of rotten boroughs.[36]

Christopher Wyvill was an Anglican clergyman who apparently, like Jebb, was radicalized in part from his growing identification with a Unitarian concept of the nature of God. Wyvill was involved in the Feathers Tavern Petition, though he was not one of the more active participants. Unlike Jebb and Theophilus Lindsey, Wyvill remained in the Church of England for many more years, waiting until 1806 to finally resign the last of his preferments. Wyvill could not be accused of holding on to these posts for financial gain, since he had a marriage which left him with a very sizable income and the freedom to totally engage his time in other pursuits.[37]

Wyvill was an honorable man who was to prove to be a tireless worker in pursuit of reform. While he lacked Jebb's formidable intellect, in many ways he outdid Jebb as a political operator. As a realist he focused on the less controversial issue of economical reform, rather than moving directly towards constitutional reform. Where he also differed from metropolitan radicals such as Jebb, was that he was extremely cautious in his political designs. While increasingly pleased with his role as one of the leaders of Yorkshire opinion, he took careful steps to not push his more conservative colleagues within the county in a political direction they had little interest in pursuing. Additionally, Wyvill,

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[36] The best work on Wyvill and the Association movement remains I. R. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962).

[37] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 71.

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while an advocate of political reform, was less interested than many of the metropolitan radicals in such ideas as universal suffrage.

Wyvill's care in preparing the groundwork for his extraparliamentary association is laid out in his *Political Papers*, a collection of letters and documents that he later published, which tell of his involvement with the Yorkshire Association. For example, the night before the first meeting of the Yorkshire committee, Wyvill met with a group at York Tavern to show those assembled the petition that he was going to present the next day and to provide proof that he was not embarking on a plan for radical reform, something opposed by the majority of electors in Yorkshire.[38] In the end all his footwork paid off: in front of a large group that included the Marquis of Rockingham and a handful of other peers, Wyvill on December 30 presented his petition which had been signed by more than 200 Yorkshiremen. The petition contained what would become the standard call for economical reform: first, to inquire into and correct the "gross abuses" of public money; secondly, to reduce all exorbitant emoluments. A third demand was a call to rescind and abolish sinecure places and unmerited pensions.[39]

In addition to this call for economical reform, those assembled at the York Tavern voted to form a committee consisting of sixty-one members who would carry on all correspondence for promoting the objectives of the petition and to prepare a plan for an Association on "legal and constitutional grounds" as well as "such other measures as may

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[38] One naysayer to the idea of a county association was Francis Blackburne, who informed Wyvill, "I have in the course of my life attended many county meetings, none of which (one excepted) produced any thing but disappointment. Wyvill Papers, v. iii, p. 133.

[39] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, p. 4.

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conduce to restore the freedom of Parliament."[40] Wyvill succeeded in making sure that the committee formed out of this meeting contained the stipulation that neither peers nor members of Parliament could be elected to it. He feared the great peers for two reasons. He believed that Rockingham, the leading noble within Yorkshire, would dominate the committee either through his own presence or by that of his parliamentary faction. Wyvill even felt compelled at this first general meeting of the county to let it be known that the idea of calling a committee had not originated with Rockingham as some were implying.[41]

In addition, Wyvill had another reason for not wanting Rockingham to participate at this time. From the beginning Wyvill had something more in mind than merely pushing for economical reform, the point where Rockingham's reform impulses stopped. He wanted to shorten the length of parliaments as well as to bring about some change in the electoral franchise, and to work towards these goals it would be necessary to remain out of the magnate's shadow. The result of this exclusion of Rockingham and his followers was revealed when the committee of 61 met for the first time at York Tavern on January 21, 1780 and produced a document that called for uniting the independent part of the county behind a plan that would include shortening the duration of parliaments and working for a more equal representation of the people. The committee also insisted that it would not back any candidate who did not publicly promise to support such ideas and to sign a document indicating approval of these measures.[42]

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[40] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, p. 2.

[41] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, p. 4.

[42] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 67-8.

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This early work towards political reform from Yorkshire met with significant support in the rest of the country. During January 1780, sixteen counties and several boroughs submitted petitions along the lines of Yorkshire, which Wyvill included years later in his published *Political Papers*.[43] In Middlesex, a petition dealing with economical reform along the lines of the Yorkshire petition was approved, while additionally a committee was established to look into the question of how to "restore and secure to the people the freedom and independence of Parliament."[44] Towards the end of the month, Wyvill sent word to the Middlesex committee that he would be in London to communicate with them on their petition.[45] He had another pressing reason why he wanted to be in London at this time. He wanted to check on the recent stirrings from the sleeping political giant of England - Westminster, where John Jebb was about to become one of the leaders of a radical clique that wanted to go significantly beyond what Wyvill felt was either possible or necessary for a reform of the political system.

V

Westminster was the premier electoral seat in England. Part of its prestige was due to its location as the seat of government. It was also the largest constituency in the nation, with every householder who paid scot and lot allowed to vote, creating an electorate of approximately 12,000. Not everyone was thrilled with the size of this constituency; in

[43] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 77.

[44] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 58-9.

[45] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 75-6.

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1754 the Duke of Bedford commented on the "vast expense that must necessarily attend any contest in Westminster."[46] In Jebb's day politics in Westminster was changing. The strength of traditional hierarchical authority can be seen by noting that between 1754 and 1790, the fourteen men who represented the borough in the House of Commons consisted of nine sons of peers, one Irish peer and 4 baronets.[47] Yet cracks in this wall of deference were beginning to appear. In 1770, Sir Robert Bernard, leader of the Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights, was elected in an uncontested vote, the first candidate returned against the government's wishes since 1741.

Far greater shocks to the political life of Westminster were to come ten years later. On February 2, 1780, an extraordinary meeting took place at Westminster Hall, where a group of electors met to discuss the contents of a petition that they were planning to submit to Parliament. For the previous several weeks there had been preliminary work on the form that the petition would take, and when they finally gathered on this day, the petition looked much like the Yorkshire model, with the same focus on economical reform, including attacks on "gross abuses of spending of the public money, exorbitant emoluments, abolishing sinecure places and unmerited pensions." This petition, presented by John Sawbridge who for many years had been introducing a motion into the House of Commons for annual parliaments, was unanimously approved by the assembled. In addition, a motion was carried that a committee made up of forty individuals should be appointed to

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[46] Lewis Namier, *The House of Commons, 1754-1790* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 336.

[47] Namier, *The House of Commons*, p. 336.

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correspond with other committees throughout the country. This was followed by a series of speeches. the first by John Wilkes on the waste of public money. Charles James Fox followed. and in a powerful speech he attacked the administration.[48] Charles Turner. an M.P. from York. stood up after Fox was finished and proposed Fox as a candidate for Westminster at the next election. an idea that was met with acclaim by all.

After the more famous speakers it was eventually the turn of John Jebb. who delivered his first public political address on this occasion.[49] Jebb's speech and the recording of it in the public presses led to a considerable shock for Horace Walpole. who confused Jebb with his cousin. the socially prominent physician Richard Jebb, at the time a physician to George III. Walpole was bewildered that the King's own physician could be so heavily involved in radical politics and he wrote in a letter to a friend: "But how came Dr. Jebb to be so considerable on that occasion in Westminster Hall .... There would be no end of my asking questions or of expressing my surprise." A month later Walpole recognized his mistake and informed his correspondent: "The orator Dr. Jebbe [sic], is not the physician but his brother [sic]."[50]

No wonder Walpole was shocked when one considers the words uttered by John Jebb on this occasion. Jebb was an active participant in the preliminary meetings leading

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[48] Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 1-3.

[49] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 146-9. Wyvill's account of this event refers to a speech given by Charles Turner, an M.P. for York, who also spoke that day, but does not mention the fact that Jebb also gave a speech.

[50] Letters from Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, March 11, 1780 and April 8, 1780. Cited in W. S. Lewis (Ed.), *Horace Walpole's Correspondence* v. 25 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 36.

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up to the presenting of the petition to the crowd in Westminster Hall and in his speech he acknowledged the worthiness of the petition in making the case for economical reform. Yet Jebb never viewed the latter as a true cure for the political system, since it did not address the essence of the problem. For Jebb, the real issue they needed to address was, "with respect to elections for members of parliament; the assumed power of the few to dictate to the many in a point of so much consequence as the representation of the people."[51] Other problems such as royal interference in elections, or the need for economical reform, stemmed from this fundamental issue. This would lead to numerous clashes between Jebb and more moderate members of the political reform movement, such as Wyvill, because Jebb always stood on the suffrage side of the political reform equation as the cure to what was ailing the political system, while the others focused more on economical reform or the elimination of rotten boroughs

Significantly, in his address Jebb publicly threw his support behind Fox, whom he extolled as "a man from whose abilities and firmness this nation had everything to hope" and he urged that they should bring forward Fox as their candidate for Parliament and provide him with all electoral expenses.[52] In backing Fox, Jebb was going along with the other speakers that day who wanted Fox to become the leader of the parliamentary reform movement in Westminster. Westminster, unlike Yorkshire, was to take no steps to exclude parliamentary members from involvement. Wyvill saw this as a mistake and wrote to Lord

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[51] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 148.

[52] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 146-9.

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Mahon. "My objection is not personally to Mr. Fox, but ... to all great Partizens and Parliamentary leaders of either house. The reason is an obvious one: the Public is jealous of such men, and their interference in the most important business of the petitioners would give it the air of party, to which I must withhold my consent."[53]

Fox, the man Jebb was supporting, entered Parliament in 1768 representing the rotten borough of Midhurst. His early career showed few tendencies as a reformer and he played a major role in the anti-Wilkes campaign that swirled around in his first year in parliament. He also attacked the idea of petitions and insisted that the people's voice should only be heard through their representatives in parliament. In 1774 he was forced out of a minor ministerial post for demanding tougher penalties against Wilkes than even North was considering.[54] Possibly the death of his father in 1774 played a role in moving Fox away from his early support for the crown, while Edmund Burke's attempt to tutor Fox on Whig principles may also have had an effect. If Fox was to represent Westminster, he would speak for a large constituency as opposed to his previous seat of Malmesbury which had 13 electors. This would provide him with a more appropriate popular platform for acting as a reformer.

Jebb also attended a second major event that day, the first meeting of the Westminster Committee. Similar to the Yorkshire Committee on which it was modeled, the major function of the Westminster Committee was to put together a plan of association

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[53] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. III, pp. 180-1.

[54] L. G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party* London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 6.

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"on legal and constitutional grounds, to support the laudable reform, and such other measures, as may conduce to restore the freedom of Parliament." Jebb was selected to a subcommittee within the Westminster Committee that was given the task of drawing up the plan for political association which was to be formally presented at the next general meeting of the Westminster electorate on April 6.[55]

Joining Jebb on the Westminster Committee were thirty-nine others, including Fox, Wilkes, Burke, the Duke of Portland, Lord Egremont, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the playwright. Rockingham, still annoyed over having been outmaneuvered by Wyvill in the creation of the Yorkshire Association, made sure that his supporters were out in force in Westminster and would dominate any new political organization that was created. At the following meeting held on February 9, the aristocratic makeup of the Committee was enhanced when the Duke of Devonshire joined Lord Shelburne and Lord Effingham in adding their names to the organization. While Jebb at this junction did not express concern, Wyvill was so concerned that he refused to attend these early meetings of the Westminster Committee, even though he was in London at the time.[56]

Since Fox was looking to create a political machine in Westminster for his own use, he must have been extremely pleased with these developments. Besides being prominently displayed to the electors in what was essentially a coming-out party for his designs on the Westminster parliamentary seat, Fox was also selected to chair the Westminster Committee, which was to meet on Wednesdays at noon at the King's Arms Tavern. As

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[55] B.L. 38,593 ff. 1-3.

[56] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 84.

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chair. Fox was given the considerable authority to call extra meetings as needed and to directly correspond with the chairmen of the other committees that had formed throughout the country. In this capacity Fox saw it as vital to work with the Yorkshiremen and he proceeded to send a letter to the York committee indicating that "you will perceive how desirous the committee are of acting in concert with all other Committees appointed for purposes similar to those for which they are themselves instituted."[57] In a surprising response, the Yorkshire committee requested that Fox not send the committee correspondence, but correspond directly with Christopher Wyvill. Perhaps Wyvill saw this as a useful way of limiting the influence of Fox within Yorkshire, although a similar letter was sent to the chairman of the Sussex County committee, which may indicate that Wyvill wanted to control all correspondence reaching the Yorkshire Association and not just Fox's.[58]

As the weekly meetings of the Westminster Committee commenced they began to pay attention to events in Parliament. They roundly criticized the Earl of Hillsborough, one of the King's Secretaries of State, who in a debate in the House of Lords claimed that the associated counties were promoters of sedition and rebellion. The Westminster Committee responded by calling his comments a "gross and unmerited insult on the proceedings and intentions of the committees and petitioners in general."[59] Another reason for keeping their eye on parliament at this time was that there were a slew of developments

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[57] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. I, p. 89.

[58] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. I, pp. 93-4.

[59] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 5.

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in the area of economical reform. In February Edmund Burke introduced into the House of Commons a plan for economical reform. Burke's plan differed from the plank on economical reform contained in the Yorkshire petition in that it did not propose to do away with sinecures and unmerited pensions. The members of the Westminster Committee voted their thanks to Burke for this effort, though they called for a continued push against sinecures and extravagant emoluments.[60] Burke was not the only M.P. interested in economical reform. Sir Philip Jennings Clark introduced a bill to bar government contractors from the House of Commons, while John Crewe, a MP from Cheshire, proposed a bill which would have disenfranchised all men holding posts in the revenue service. Economical reform had long been part of the political heritage of the Cathamites (supporters of the elder William Pitt) and Chatham's old disciple, Isaac Barre, entered the fray with a plan for a parliamentary committee to examine the public accounts. Besides supporting these moves to bring about economical reform, the Committee was censorious of Lord North's proposed bill for the appointment of a commission of accounts to inspect and regulate the expenditure of public money, thus weakening and coopting Barre's plan. They resolved that all members of the Westminster Committee who were also M.P.'s should pay attention "as from the unprecedented manner in which this business has been taken out of the hands of those from whom the proposal originated"[61]

Since he was skeptical of the efficacy of economical reform, Jebb was more involved with the growing interest within the association movement to gather together

[60] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 7.

[61] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,594, f. 13

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representatives from the various county committees for a general meeting. To achieve this end. Jebb and Thomas Brand Hollis represented Westminster at a preliminary meeting on February 24 at St. Albans Tavern to discuss plans for a general meeting. Eight committees sent delegates to the meeting, which Wyvill, a supporter of the idea, chaired. One of the first issues raised was whether members of Parliament who were involved in the county committees should be allowed to attend. This had been an essential point of difference between the Yorkshire and the Westminster committees and at this meeting the decision was made to follow the Yorkshire example and exclude them. Very interestingly, Jebb supported Wyvill on this point.[62] This may be an indication that Jebb was growing increasingly concerned over the direction taken by the Westminster Committee and its dominance by Fox and his parliamentary colleagues such as Sheridan and Richard Fitzpatrick.

Whatever his feelings about his Westminster Committee colleagues, Jebb was still not willing to go along with Wyvill's more limited concept of reform. Two days after the meeting at St. Albans Tavern, Jebb was chosen along with eight others at a special meeting of the Westminster Committee to confer with representatives from the committee that had formed in the City of London.[63] In Westminster there was a growing sense that any general meeting would be dominated by Wyvill and the Yorkshiremen and it was seen as essential to form a metropolitan counterweight to block such an outcome.

[62] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 109-110.

[63] B.L. Add MSS. 38,593, f. 9.

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The first general meeting took place on March 11, with opponents immediately attacking it as "a little Anti-parliament."[64] Jebb attended as a delegate for the county of Huntingdon, where he owned a small piece of property, while Richard Fitzpatrick, Thomas Grenville and Thomas Brand Hollis attended for Westminster and Jebb's close ally John Cartwright represented the committee from Nottingham. Pursuant to the organizing meeting held on February 24, there had been some success in creating greater interest in a general meeting and eventually 12 counties and four cities and boroughs sent representatives. Instead of the roughly forty attendees voting as individuals, it was determined at the first meeting that each delegation would have one vote.

At another early session it was determined to work in support of "such measures as tend to reduce the unconstitutional influence of the crown; and for that purpose to unite themselves in a General Association."[65] The problem was that there would be little agreement among the assembled as to what measures were needed to achieve this lofty goal. Not surprisingly, economical reform was the one area that united the various delegations. There was general agreement that there should be an examination of public finances and to limit electoral expenses, though rather problematically, no specific proposals were put forward on how to achieve these goals. This uniformity of opinion was to collapse once the topic went beyond economical reform.

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[64] Black, *The Association*, p. 51.

[65] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 118-9.

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Different factions began to emerge at the general meeting. For Jebb and his radical colleagues like Cartwright, the proposals they worked to introduce at the March 15 meeting went much further towards addressing what he felt to be the true faults within the British political system. There was a call for an additional 100 county members to be added to the House of Commons. Additionally, there was a demand for annual parliaments, which radicals like Jebb thought was the single most important way of creating a more responsive representative body. At this same meeting there was a call for the various associations to support these aims by only backing those candidates who joined the association or who promised to support these specific resolutions.[66]

Rockingham, who was carefully monitoring the proceedings, was very upset with the direction that the General Meeting was taking. He saw it as a direct challenge to the traditional authority of the great parliamentary oligarchs. Rockingham intensely disliked the idea that MPs should publicly promise to support the reform program. In a letter he complained, "I don't like the idea of *tests*, and especially on vague and unexplicit propositions. The being elected a representative, *if it implies a trust*, is most highly honourable, but if it is to lock up your reasoning faculties of deliberating and judging ... I think it would be a disgraceful bondage."[67] In this belief he did not differ from Lord North who said in a parliamentary debate at this time that the "People of England collectively could only be heard by their representatives in Parliament."[68]

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[66] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 119-121.

[67] Black, *The Association*, p. 53.

[68] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 34.

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Even among the attendees of the General Meeting there was dissatisfaction as to where things were heading. The result was that the more moderate members attempted to formulate their response to the demands of the radicals. Wyvill took the lead in setting up a subcommittee that would plan the creation of a national association. However, he could not successfully limit all radical input on this subcommittee, which contained in addition to Wyvill, Lord Mahon, the chairman of the Kent committee and son of the Earl of Stanhope; Chatham's son-in-law, Robert Bromley, who represented Middlesex; Richard Fitzpatrick; and William Baker, from Hertfordshire, who held views not very different from Jebb and Cartwright.[69]

Wyvill was not the only one who wished to block the more radical demands of Jebb and Cartwright. Lord Mahon opposed the idea of annual parliaments, while insisting that the subcommittee that Wyvill was heading should create a plan for a national association that would focus only on economical reform and the addition of one hundred new county members. The delegations from Westminster, Buckingham, Devon, Gloucester and Sussex proposed deleting the call for a more equal representation and annual parliaments; the result would have been to leave only economical reform on the table. The radicals withstood these onslaughts and even chalked up a few victories: they were able to block attempts by more conservative attendees who argued that making changes in the representation of parliament should not be an article of association, but rather "an object

[69] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 124-5.

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greatly deserving consideration." The radicals were also able to block an attack on the demand for shortening the length of parliament.[70]

By the time the last session of the general meeting was held on March 20 there was a sense of gloom in the air. This was justified by the news that the subcommittee that Wyvill headed voted not to recommend "a Plan of Association in any special form of words beyond those stated in our resolutions."[71] The fact that the various delegations would be going home without having created a plan of association to unite them on a national level was a tremendous failure. The best they could come up with was a *General Report*, which could not hide the conflicts that had plagued their sessions. The *General Report* began with the question: "What is our situation at present?" Not surprisingly given the respondents, the answer was essentially negative:

> By the operation of a despotic system, which has continued with very little intermission, near nineteen years, and is now almost completed by dangerous administration, the very vitals of the constitution have received a mortal wound...the whole capacity of popular freedom has been struck at. We are arrive at the crisis which the wisest of political writers have uniformly marked for the downfall of Britain, when the legislative body shall become as corrupt as the executive and dependent upon it.[72]

The report went on refer to the "unhappy war with America" as well as significant economic issues such as the "alarming fall in rents, the decay of manufactures, the accumulation of taxes, the stagnation of credit." The *General Report* represented a victory

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[70] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 126-8.

[71] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 122-3.

[72] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, p. 427.

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of sorts for Jebb's radical faction, since the solution offered went beyond the agreed upon idea of economical reform. Besides containing a section supporting the addition of one hundred new members for county seats to be added to the House of Commons, the *General Report* went on to note that "Annual parliaments are therefore the Ancient Constitution of England and the birth-rite of Englishmen," and to demand that they be restored.[73]

Wyvill knew that a *General Report* which supported annual parliaments would not go down well in Yorkshire, or for that matter in much of the rest of the country. To placate such opinion, Wyvill found it necessary to write a *Circular Letter* which was attached to the *General Report*. In order to placate more conservative opinion Wyvill wrote: "The Deputies trust their resolutions will be considered, not as offering to the Committee a complete and perfect system of political reformation, but as pointing out some principle objects of constitutional improvement." It was also acknowledged that in some counties it might be "inexpedient" to adopt a plan of association along the lines spelled out in the *General Report* and that the various committees around the country might find that the "proposition for shortening the duration of parliament may be postponed with less inconvenience in the original draught for Association, than any other proposition recommended by this meeting."[74]

The majority of the attendees left the last session convinced that they had achieved very little. A sign of their overall resignation was their final decision that only 150 copies

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[73] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, p. 434.

[74] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 439-441.

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of the *General Report* should be published.[75] Yet their gloom turned out to be misplaced. By April 1780 the number of constituencies sending in petitions for economical reform was over 40 and around one fifth of the British electorate signed these petitions.[76] These rather impressive numbers should not be taken as a sign that there still weren't some significant difficulties. Few constituencies were interested in the non-economical portion of the *General Report*. In Yorkshire, where there was significant will to go beyond mere economical reform, Wyvill correctly anticipated that his fellow Yorkshiremen would still have problems with some of what came out of the General Meeting. On March 25 the Yorkshire committee adopted the resolutions from the General Meeting with one major change: they wanted a three year maximum for Parliaments as opposed to annual parliaments. Once this was agreed on they voted to accept the plan three days later.[77]

In Westminster there were also stirrings from the General Meeting. The Westminster Committee felt inspired to "prepare a plan of an Association on legal and constitutional grounds to support the laudable reform and such other measures as may conduce to restore the freedom of parliament." Fox's steady ally Richard Brinsley Sheridan was named to chair this seven member subcommittee to which Jebb was also appointed. While Fox was hoping for a document that would not be too radical in order not to isolate him from his more conservative political allies, the wording of the subcommittee's instructions included the idea that "the duration of parliaments and the

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[75] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 124-5.

[76] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 97.

[77] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 101.

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state of the representation of the people are questions immediately under this description." This was to be used by Jebb and his fellow subcommittee member Thomas Brand Hollis as a means of creating what in many ways was a truly astonishing document, one which Jebb and other radical writers would use as the basis for many of their later writings.[78]

The first part of the document was intended to show the historical process by which annual parliaments, the "hereditary and indefeasible right of the people of England" were, over time, taken away from the people.[79] It was in the third year of the reign of William and Mary, the report claimed, that for the first time this ancient right was abridged through the imposition of the triennial act. The rights of the people were further restricted when during the first year of the reign of George I the septennial act was passed. The subcommittee noted that there was significant opposition at the time in parliament to this change since it marked a "direct infringement on the constitution and a flagrant breach of trust towards the constituent body." But in the end it passed as a temporary measure, a reflection of the threat in 1715 posed by the Jacobite rebellion.[80]

After establishing the historical basis for annual parliaments, the report went on to argue that another basic right of Englishmen had been slowly stripped away over time: the right to vote. The major culprit here was Henry VIII, who saw to the passage of an act to disenfranchise "the greater part of the constituents, by limiting the right of election for

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[78] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 13.

[79] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 16.

[80] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, ff. 16-17.

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Knights of the Shire, to persons having free lands or tenements, to the value of forty shillings." What this had wrought by 1780 was that in England and Wales there were five million people, of whom 1.2 million would have been eligible to vote prior to the restrictions imposed by Henry VIII. The result was that the franchise at this point was exclusively in the hands of only 214,000 people. Disenfranchisement was also combined with the loss of the right of many towns to send representatives to parliament, while there were boroughs under the influence of the crown, "some of which [were] without houses or inhabitants."[81]

Fox was in a dilemma over the report of this committee. Clearly there was a danger of his becoming isolated from potential political allies outside of London. After trying to delay the reading of the report to the Westminster Committee, Fox finally allowed it to be presented on March 20, where it was approved and sent to the printers and distributed to the other political committees throughout England. Significantly, he sent Jebb, Cecil Wray and Brand Hollis, three of the most radical members of the Westminster committee, to meet with the Earl of Shelburne. Their task was ostensibly to thank Shelburne for his support for economical reform in the last parliament, but perhaps Fox intended to show Shelburne that these men, despite their support for annual parliaments and their support of universal male suffrage, were not firebrands.[82] Fox realized that he had been outmaneuvered by Jebb and his allies over the direction taken in the subcommittee report. As plans progressed in late March and early April for the creation of

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[81] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, ff. 18.

[82] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 23.

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a formal political association in Westminster. Fox was to search repeatedly for a way to ensure his own ascendancy. While their relationship remained outwardly very cordial. Jebb and Fox were heading towards a confrontation over the very direction of politics in Westminster.

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Chapter Five

Opportunities and Disaster

I

Eighteenth-century Westminster witnessed few days like April 6. 1780. The day began with John Dunning's famous resolution in the House of Commons. which stated in a strikingly melodious manner: "the influence of the Crown has increased. is increasing. and ought to be diminished." What was so astounding about this was not so much the words themselves. but rather that his resolution passed with a majority vote in the House of Commons. While not binding members to any particular action. it was a sign of the possible changing fortunes of the North ministry. This day was not just for parliamentary activities, however. It was also filled with events outside which must have brought home to many M.P's the new power of extraparliamentary pressure.

At one in the afternoon, a crowd estimated to be from 2,000 to 6,000 carrying banners proclaiming "Annual Parliaments and Equal Representation" led Jebb. Fox and other Westminster political leaders to Westminster Hall, where a large meeting of the electors was subsequently held to approve the plan for the creation of a political association that the Westminster Committee had earlier put forward. The government was concerned about the potential for violence and it stationed the 3rd regiment of guards to stay in the area until midnight. Fox was the first to address what turned out to be an excited but well behaved crowd and delivered an impassioned speech in which he laid out why it was necessary for the

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electors in Westminster to create an extraparliamentary association to work towards the reform of parliament, though in his speech he failed to spell out specifically what reforms he meant to support. Jebb was to show far less reluctance when he followed Fox on the podium to address the crown. Jebb stated that Westminster must have candidates who would work "incessantly to procure annual parliaments, and a more equal distribution of the people." Using arguments from the subcommittee report that he had helped draft, Jebb spoke of the historical roots of annual parliaments and their traditional place in the framework of English liberties.[1]

Despite Jebb's upstaging of Fox on the speaker's platform, the plan for the Westminster Association that was officially approved at this meeting marked essentially the triumph of Fox's vision for reform over Jebb's. Fox had begun to worry about the implications of the first Westminster subcommittee report which had placed great emphasis on the need for annual parliaments. In order to make sure that he would dominate the planned political association in Westminster and utilize it as a political machine for his larger political aspirations and limit the impact of radicals such as Jebb, Fox chaired a subcommittee that was formed a few days before the April 6 meeting of the Westminster electors. This subcommittee was comprised of only Fox and his two loyal lieutenants, Col. Richard Fitzpatrick and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Together these three men sat down to prepare a plan of association without any outside influence.[2] On April 6 it was

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[1] *Remembrancer*, vol. ix, p. 249.

[2] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 24.

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this plan, prepared without any input from Jebb and his allies in the Westminster Committee, that was placed before the crowd in Westminster Hall.

Jebb would take no issue where the plan noted the "utter impoverishment of this country" and that "in these times of national difficulty and distress, a just redress of grievances can only be expected from a free and uncorrupted parliament, and measures tending in a legal and peaceful way, to restore the freedom of parliament cannot be effectually be supported but by a general union of independent men throughout parliament."[3] Where Jebb dissented was with the proposed remedies. Fox's plan included a call for economical reform and an addition of one hundred new county members. He also proposed a shortening of the length of parliament, though very significantly dropped the call for annual parliaments which was the core issue according to Jebb. By dropping the demand for annual parliaments, Fox was bringing his plan of association along the lines offered by the Yorkshire Committee and one that Jebb thought inadequate to the demanding task of reforming parliament particularly since it did not bring about any change in the suffrage.

Jebb had been outmaneuvered by Fox, but he was not willing to let the issue rest. He continued to offer his support for Fox and in his speech to the electors of Westminster he gave Fox a rousing endorsement and also proposed a resolution which later passed unanimously that the newly formed Westminster Association take measures to secure the parliamentary

[3] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 26.

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election of Fox.[4] It was because of this public support that Jebb was able to secure from Fox. when the Westminster Association met for the first time on April 12. the creation of a nine person subcommittee that was to consider the "means towards taking the suffrages of the people in order to prevent as much as possible bribery and undue influence."[5] What Fox must have thought was a small price to pay for the support of Jebb and the radicals in Westminster proved to be the opportunity Jebb was looking for to subvert the Westminster plan of association offered by Fox and to push his own far more radical agenda.

While Thomas Brand Hollis was the putative chairman of the subcommittee. Jebb dominated its deliberations.[6] Jebb used this opportunity to write the *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster*. one of the most important documents to be found in the British radical tradition of the late eighteenth century. Essentially, Jebb was presenting a critique of Wyvill and the entire association movement as it presently existed. The association movement, as envisioned by Wyvill, had its ultimate goal of organizing public opinion in support of petitions that would try to influence parliament to bring about reforms such as economical reform. For Jebb this left the essential problem untouched: the very structure of the British parliament. This was why reform was so difficult to achieve: "Every application, therefore, for the redress of the present grievances of the nation, that shall be made to a body of men, no longer under the influence of their constituents, but, on

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[4] *Remembrancer*, vol. ix, p. 322.

[5] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 28.

[6] Disney rightly considered Jebb to be the author of the report and duly included it in his compilation of Jebb's writings. Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. iii, pp. 403-423.

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the contrary, uniformly acting in subserviency to the views and interests of the crown, must of necessity be unsuccessful."[7]

At his core Jebb believed that "no effectual reformation of the abuses in question can take place, unless the people exercise their inherent and undoubted right of reviewing the whole plan of delegation."[8] In what was a breathtakingly bold point of view, Jebb argued that everything politically had to be on the table for effective reform to take place. In his earlier *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex*, he wrote that it might be necessary for democratically selected committees throughout Britain to declare the House of Commons dissolved and to work to constitute a new elected assembly. Jebb returned to that theme in the *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster* and suggested that this should be the true role of the association movement and not the previously held idea of petitioning for redress. It was the associations, representing the "great collective body of the nation" that could work towards "the restoration of the common's house of parliament to freedom and independency."[9]

This newly formed parliament, representing the true wishes of the people, would bring about what were for Jebb the three essential goals of effective reform: an equal representation of the people, annual parliaments and universal male suffrage. This was not a revolution, Jebb claimed, but merely a restoration of rights which Englishmen had

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[7] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. iii, p. 405.

[8] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. iii, p. 404.

[9] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. iii, p. 407.

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previously enjoyed going all the way back to "the times of the immortal Alfred" and which even the "wisest princes of the Norman line" also duly accepted.[10]

In this work Jebb sought to strip away the notion that political rights should be based on ownership of property. While property may unfortunately be, what Jebb referred to as "the grand enchantress of the world," it was a distortion to think that its possession was the sole criterion for political rights. Borrowing an idea that Locke had laid out in his chapter on property in the *Second Treatise on Government*, Jebb wrote, "A portion of the soil, a portion of its produce, may be wanting to many; but every man has an interest in his life, his kindred, and his country.[11] The fact that all men above a certain age were subject to serving in the militia was a sign of an obligation they owed to the community at large, regardless of whether they were property owners or not.

Attached to the final version of the *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster* was a *Plan for taking the suffrages of the people at the election of representatives to serve in Parliament*. While the *Report* was from the solitary pen of John Jebb, it is possible that the *Plan* was more of a collaborative work among the subcommittee members. In the event, the two works were linked in that the *Report* spelled out the nature of the problem, along with providing in general terms the means to correct it, while the *Plan* offered the specific steps necessary for a complete overhaul of the House of Commons. The ideas presented in this work were to serve as a clarion call for later generations of British

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[10] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. iii, pp. 409-410.

[11] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. iii, p. 412.

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reformers, notably the Chartists who based their Six Acts very closely on the ideas endorsed in Jebb's *Plan*.

In order to bring about a complete reform, the *Plan* endorsed the creation of equal electoral districts, along with annual parliamentary elections, with each new session beginning on the first Tuesday in November and lasting until the last day of April. In addition, the franchise should be extended to all males, with the exception of aliens, minors, criminals and the insane. Voters were to enjoy the right of a secret ballot. All those qualified to vote would also be eligible to sit in the House of Commons and members were to be paid for their service. The Commons would contain 513 members and the *Plan* included details as to how the seats were to be distributed, with most of the changes taking place through the elimination of rotten boroughs and the transfer of seats to more heavily populated areas, with, for example, Middlesex, Westminster and London sending a total of forty-five members to Parliament.[12]

Jebb and the subcommittee finished their work on May 27, although it would be a full month before Thomas Brand Hollis was to present it to the entire Westminster Association. Fox must have been aghast at what the subcommittee members had come up with and apparently he worked to postpone having to deal with it.[13] While the formal break between Jebb and Fox did not take place until the latter entered into his coalition with Lord North in 1782, the *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster* showed that their political marriage of convenience was heading towards its final chapter.

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[12] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. iii, pp. 418-423.

[13] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,593, f. 45.

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II

The *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster* was written at an interesting point in the evolution of the political reform movement. The last days of the Spring of 1780 brought reasons for modest optimism. John Sawbridge had just introduced into the House of Commons a measure calling for annual parliaments, an act that met with approval in the Westminster Association which grandly advised the livery of London that Sawbridge was worthy of their support in the next parliamentary elections.[14] In an even more dramatic move, the Duke of Richmond, having developed into a radical politician over the previous year, put forward a bill on June 3 that bore major similarities to the Westminster subcommittee *Plan*. His bill called for splitting England, Wales and Scotland into 558 equal electoral districts and enabling all males over eighteen years of age to vote.

Unfortunately, despite these hopeful signs, the summer of 1780 proved to be a complete disaster for the cause of political reform. On June 3, Sir Samuel Romilly entered Westminster Palace to hear the debate on the Duke of Richmond's bill. Richmond got up to speak in support of universal male suffrage but found himself interrupted by loud shouts outside the walls. Romilly went to investigate and was shocked to find "between the Parliament House and Westminster Abbey, all the avenues of the House and adjoining streets, thronged with people wearing blue cockades" [15] The blue cockades were worn by

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[14] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,594, f. 1.

[15] Sir Samuel Romilly, *Life of Sir Samuel Romilly* Third ed. 2 vols. (London, 1842), pp. 84-6.

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supporters of George Gordon, the leader of the Protestant Association, an organization that had sought the repeal of the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1778, and whose bigoted anger exploded throughout the streets of London over the course of a week.

For the Westminster Association the riots were a disaster. While as men of property they were horrified by the "abominable outrages committed by the lowest classes of the populace in London," they also complained that their cause was being unfairly defamed by these events. That Gordon's followers referred to themselves as being members of an "Association" was damaging to the Westminster Association and all other political reform associations throughout the country. But the riots were also used by opponents of political change as an example of the utter irresponsibility of the association movement in general and political reformers were blamed the for encouraging such behavior on the part of the urban underclass. The Westminster Association, in a defensive mood, was forced to declare, "That from whatever quarter these defamatory suggestions may have come, this committee doth hold them in contempt, as misrepresentations vainly contrived to intimidate and deter the Associated bodies from the prosecution of their just and necessary plan of public reformation."[16]

The Westminster Association was still trying to recover from the effects of the riots, when Parliament was dissolved on September 1, 1780, a year earlier than had been expected. For the Westminster seats Lord North's government supported the incumbent Lord Lincoln and also George Rodney, a popular admiral who at the time was engaged in warfare against the French and Spanish in the Caribbean and whose election was a foregone

[16] B.L. 38,593, f. 2.

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conclusion. Fox was so concerned about the possibility of losing that he arranged to also run in Bridgewater, where, as it turned out, he ended up fourth.[17] Fox proved to be more fortunate in Westminster. His involvement over the past year in metropolitan politics paid off with a victory over Lincoln, and in the end Fox found what he was looking for from the Westminster Association: a political machine that he could control. Unfortunately for Fox, it was a well-meaning but not efficient machine. Two months after his victory, the Westminster Association selected a treasurer who was instructed to set up a committee to look into organizing a subscription on Fox's behalf to pay off his campaign expenses, a committee on which Jebb served. But this committee operated with typical lassitude, and when it came time to report on their activities in the following April, they had nothing to show for their efforts except the suggestion that another committee be set up to look into the issue of raising money for Fox.[18]

In general the election of 1780 pleased neither the government nor its critics. The ministry ended up with a slightly diminished majority, a particularly poor showing considering that the fears of property owners over the Gordon riots were supposed to result in the backing of pro-ministry candidates. On the other hand, rather than supporting candidates who backed the radical program of the metropolis, most of the new M.P.s were independents with few ties to the cause of reform. After the election Jebb found himself defending his decision to back Fox, something which some of his friends were beginning to see as a mistake as they began to

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[17] L. Reid, *Charles James Fox: A Man for the People* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 116.

[18] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,594, f. 7.

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question Fox's commitment to genuine political reform. While the events of the spring and summer had somewhat weakened Jebb's enthusiasm for Fox, he tried to justify his choice in a letter to Disney: "I am determined to support Mr. Fox's election, having proposed him for his past parliamentary conduct; having met his ideas on toleration and on Lord Beauchamp's bill[19] and he having been the steady opponent of an administration aiming at rendering the king despotic, and being now opposed to that administration, it would be criminal to desert."[20] Nowhere, of course, did Jebb tell Disney that he saw Fox as the man who could bring about universal male suffrage and annual parliaments, the reforms that Jebb truly cared about.

Overall, Jebb was in a pessimistic mood, and he conveyed this to Wyvill. Right after the election he rushed off a letter in which he noted that "the present parliament will, in all probability, on the first day of its meeting, give us a foretaste of what we are to expect for the ensuing seven years, or, in other words, it will be as venal as the last."[21] Jebb was anticipating further attacks on English liberties under the guise of protecting the populace against additional riots like the Gordon affair, as well as a renewed commitment to putting down the revolt in the colonies.

In the face of such attacks on English liberties, Jebb wanted to convince Wyvill that the association movement should move well beyond economical reform. Certainly Burke's bill to better regulate the Civil Establishments left him unimpressed: "Moving the people

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[19] Lord Beauchamp introduced a bill in 1780 entitled "an act for relief of debtors" which was intended to relieve them under certain conditions from the possibility of imprisonment.

[20] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 152.

[21] North Yorkshire Record Office, ZFW 7/2/23. John Jebb to Christopher Wyvill, October 14, 1780.

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of England to carry out so small a reform, would be tempesting the ocean to drown a fly."[22] There was an upside to Burke's bill, however. If it failed (and Jebb had serious doubts that it would pass), "they [reform minded members of the House of Commons] will probably think with the Associations, that the shortening of Parliaments, and equalizing of the representation, will be necessary to preserve freedom, and will therefore more cordially unite with them."[23] This was a massive leap of faith on the part of Jebb, and Wyvill was no more likely than so-called reform minded members of the House of Commons to follow Jebb's logic and move from support of Burke's bill towards a complete overhaul of the British polity.

In his letters to Wyvill, Jebb continuously probed to see if he would support him in searching for some grand action that would show the continued strength of the association movement. Going back to points he had made in his *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex* and in the *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster*, Jebb asked Wyvill "In these circumstances, would it not be useful to assemble the Committees, if not the Counties, to appoint a delegation in some proportion to the number of the people, so that they may vote as individuals, and pass some resolves, particularly respecting the above points, to show that at the time we are contending for our own liberties?" Finally, he

[22] North Yorkshire Record Office, ZFW 7/2/23/3. John Jebb to Christopher Wyvill, Dec. 19, 1780.

[23] North Yorkshire Record Office, ZFW 7/2/23/3. John Jebb to Christopher Wyvill, Dec. 19, 1780.

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added. "All England looks to Yorkshire at this moment."[24] The man in Yorkshire to whom all were supposedly looking for leadership did not know how to respond to Jebb's call for aggressive action. Wyvill waited a full month before responding, and in a terse letter informed Jebb that, "For the present I must forbear taking any public part in the way you hint at."[25]

III

Almost immediately after the first General Meeting of the Associations in March 1780, plans were underfoot to try again, to bring about the measure of unity that up to now had evaded the reform movement. Relations between the political associations in Yorkshire and Westminster, already poor, were not improved by the decision of the Westminster Association to publish the Duke of Richmond's radical reform bill, which was essentially an attack on the policy of moderation pursued by the Yorkshire Committee. When the second General Meeting of the association movement convened on March 3, 1781 Jebb was once again representing Huntingdonshire, while remaining involved in the deliberations among the Westminster Association. The delegates to the Westminster Association, who included Fox, Sheridan, Fitzpatrick, the Earl of Effingham, William Wyndham, and John Churchill, were initially provided with instructions to support only economical reform and

[24] North Yorkshire Record Office, ZFW 7/2/23. Letter from John Jebb to Christopher Wyvill, October 14, 1780.

[25] North Yorkshire Record Office, ZFW 7/2/23/2. Letter from Christopher Wyvill to John Jebb, November 18, 1780.

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a vague brief to reduce the power of the crown. Jebb and his radical colleagues in the Westminster Association were able to add to these instructions support for a more equal and fair representation in the House of Commons, to be achieved by introducing 100 more county seats and shortening the length of parliaments.[26]

By comparison, Wyvill's instructions for the delegates from Yorkshire were more limited. They were told to work to reduce the power of the crown, including the implementation of economical reform and to support a plan for adding an additional one hundred members. Yorkshire, however, was not going to support a plan for shortening the length of parliaments. And to make sure their delegates did not go beyond these instructions, the Yorkshire delegates were told not to introduce anything else, or to accept anything introduced by other delegations.[27] For Wyvill, this was seen as necessary since "It behooves the friends of the constitution not to hazard the total loss of liberty, by aiming at theoretical, but unattainable perfection. In given circumstances, that is the most eligible plan of improvement, which is the best that can be attained."[28]

In order to counter support for the Westminster Association, Wyvill began to reach out to the ranks of the aristocracy, a group he had previously avoided. The Earl of Effingham, a mainstay of the Westminster Association, was given an opportunity to become a member of the Yorkshire Committee. Wyvill implied that this move towards allowing aristocratic participation in his committee was because the reform plan "has been

[26] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,594,, ff. 13-14.

[27] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 301-303.

[28] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 305.

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maturely digested and settled." But there is little doubt that it was part of his attempt to balance the strength of the Westminster Association.[29]

The General Meeting of Associations took place from March 3 to April 21. While the total number of participants, around forty, was around the same as in the previous year, there was a sign of trouble in that fewer constituencies were now represented. The key order of business at the first meeting was the selection of Wyvill to chair the gathering. As a result, he had a measure of control over all that followed. The next item to be considered was the submission of a new petition to parliament in support of economical reform. The recent defeat of Burke's bill meant that there was little to hope for on the subject of economical reform. For some of the attending committees, even support for economical reform went beyond their instructions. For example, the Kent delegation abstained from voting, while the Corporation of London not only abolished their committee of association and recalled their delegates, but also banned the representatives from the other associations from meeting in the Guildhall.[30]

Jebb was involved in the subcommittee that sought to draw up the petition. The crucial meeting on March 17 proved to be a rather uncomfortable one for Jebb as he continually tried to prod the other subcommittee members to take a more radical course. Jebb argued in favor of moving the petition into other areas such as parliamentary reform and in a proposal he introduced for annual parliaments. He received little support. Instead of annual parliaments, most of the committee members preferred triennial parliaments, and

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[29] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. 1, p. 262.

[30] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 129.

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eventually they devised a resolution which greatly displeased Jebb, that stated that after economical reform and reform of the composition of the House of Commons, the repeal of the septennial act would "form a strong barrier against the inroads of parliamentary corruption, and the alarming interest of the crown.[31] Undeterred by these earlier defeats within the petition drafting committee, Jebb recommended that committees of correspondence be set up to determine the best way of collecting the opinions of the people at large. This also was seen as far too radical, and it was voted down.

In a curious reminder of his days at Cambridge when he was campaigning for educational reform, the subcommittee voted, with Jebb alone in dissent, to dissolve their committee so that Jebb could introduce no additional measures. He felt extremely isolated at this point and noted that, "I cannot be unconscious, that, from my own report, I stand exposed to the charge of singularity in many parts of my conduct."[32] He understood why many of those who attended this second General Meeting, who might have supported his proposals under other circumstances, refused on this occasion to go along with him. Many reformers felt that they could reach a larger constituency in the country and be more effective with members of the House of Commons if they kept their demands moderate. For Jebb this attitude was part of what he saw as a "languor of patriotism." He added sadly, "They were inclined in the last year to adopt the most spirited measures; but,

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[31] Jebb, vol. ii, pp. 504-5.

[32] Jebb, vol. ii, p. 512.

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through the want of concord in their leaders, they now, alas! know not in whom they can confide."[33]

Despite his misgivings, Jebb joined with most of the other attendees of the General Meeting and signed the petition on March 19. It was then presented to Sir George Savile, who was instructed to present it to the House of Commons. Savile was an unfortunate choice: by 1781 he had served in parliament for over twenty years and was not in robust health. Certainly he was not the dynamic parliamentarian that the association movement desperately needed. Savile presented the petition on April 2, and after being discussed in committee it was voted down in the House of Commons 212-135. Part of the reason for the scope of its defeat may have been that even among members of the house who favored economical reform, there was a dislike of political associations and what they perceived to be a challenge to their parliamentary authority.[34]

Following the defeat of the petition, Jebb took the interesting step of writing a public letter to Sir Robert Bernard. Sir Robert was a Huntingdonshire baronet and a former leader of the Society for the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, until he left the organization following a dispute with John Wilkes. Jebb was concerned that the very nature of the association movement was left out of the petition, because they petitioned as independent freeholders instead of delegates of active political associations and that their style of address was far too "humble."[35] Jebb expressed doubts to Bernard about whether

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[33] Jebb, vol. ii, pp. 513-4.

[34] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 130.

[35] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 494-5.

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the House of Commons could even be entrusted to bring about a moderate measure of economical reform. Since a petition to the commons was the sole point of the second General Meeting. Jebb was questioning the very goals of the association movement and therefore felt that he had to justify in print the fact that he had signed the petition. He explained to Bernard that despite his fundamental doubts. "I thought it my duty to concur in an application to that purpose; perceiving it to be the general opinion of the delegates. that such application should take the lead of what. I own. has always appeared to me the most eligible plan of reformation: I mean that substantial reform in the representative body."[36]

Jebb continued:

> Ever since I took part in politics. I have esteemed it my duty to avow. and to bring forward, to the utmost of my power, those maxims. which I believed would promote the peace and prosperity of my country.... Many doctrines. now universally received, were, at one period, the opinions of a few private individuals. which though, for a time, opposed by the combinations of interest. an open appeal to the good sense of the community, at length hath carried into effect. An unreserved communication of sentiments is essential to freedom of discussion; and that persevering unanimity, which is the result of conviction. and flourish only where a free discussion hath previously prevailed. For these reasons. I conceive that the moment, in which truth first suggests itself to the mind. is the proper reason for declaring it.[37]

In the spirit of compromise Jebb had reluctantly accepted the proposed addition of one hundred members to the House of Commons. As he explained to Bernard, he hoped that "such an institution, which had already been approved by many of the associated

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[36] Jebb, "Letter to Sir Robert Bernard" reprinted in Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 491-516.

[37] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 513-14.

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counties, might be salutary in its consequences; and not inconsistent with those more enlarged schemes of reformation."[38] Jebb wanted to improve on this idea by proposing that the one hundred members be subtracted from the borough count so that the overall number of members of the commons would remain the same and that borough voters who lost their franchise would be compensated for their loss. This was not supported by the assembled delegates since they rejected Jebb's argument that an increase in members of the House of Commons without being accompanied by more dramatic reforms would lead to greater corruption and wasted expense.

Three days after publishing his letter to Sir Robert Bernard, Wyvill and Jebb began to exchange a series of letters which extended over the next half year. Wyvill chastised Jebb and his radical allies for their behavior and wrote with a measure of exasperation: "I own I do not expect any thing can be done, if the plan which has been adopted by several counties, and approved by the last General Deputation, is not considered by the friends to Mr. Cartwright's plan as deserving their support."[39] Wyvill denied that the counties were being unnecessarily cautious; he believed that the climate of the nation required such actions on their part. He knew that many who complained about the effects of economical reform had no real inclination to change the political system. Wyvill predicted the trouble from such a schism in the ranks of the reformers:

> If the gentlemen who wish for annual parliaments and the right of universal suffrage, will not join the counties, but will continue to represent their plan [the Yorkshire Plan] as not worth a struggle, you may depend upon it the consequence

[38] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, p. 496.

[39] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, p. 500.

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> will be not that the Counties adopt the more extensive plan, but that, finding themselves opposed by Government and nobility, and not supported by the more eager part of the popular body, they will grow tired of the contest so evidently unavailing, and dissolve their Committees: or if they keep together, it will be in such a state of inefficiency as the Aristocratical Party would gladly see them reduced to, namely, to serve the mere purpose of a County or City election.[40]

Jebb, however, was still positive that something could come out of the Association movement even if Wyvill's prediction of a split occurred:

> You say the future conduct of the Committees will much depend on circumstances, and particularly on the appearance of a better and more general support next winter: but why mention winter on this occasion? Is it because Parliament meets in the winter? Are our hopes of Reformation then still to depend upon Parliament; upon that Parliament which it ought to be the purpose of every Friend to his Country to reform? A Parliament which can only be reformed by a recurrence to the principles of the Constitution, and the strenuous exertions of the collective body? For my own part, I am satisfied that the People, in their own assemblies, may constitutionally appoint committees, with full power to correct the abuses of Representation, and are under no obligation to treat with any other parties than the nobility and the King. Upon every plan of application to our representatives for such a purpose, I am persuaded that disappointment and scorn will always be the result.[41]

Many years later when Wyvill was compiling his correspondence with Jebb for inclusion in his *Political Papers*, he added some additional comments. He noted that he had always disapproved of Jebb's plan for a deputation of the people to deal directly with the King and the House of Lords since, "it always appeared to him to be a proposition totally incompatible with any plan of moderate reform and pregnant with hazards to which his too speculative friend had not sufficiently adverted."[42] On the other hand, Jebb

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[40] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, p. 501.

[41] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, pp. 501-2.

[42] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, pp. 520.

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recognized that he could not convert Wyvill to his point of view but he continued to insist that genuine political reform could come only through the intervention of external committees made up of reform-minded individuals. As he noted to Capel Lofft, who shared such views:

> The question of parliamentary reformation lies with the committees. No persons, unless delegated by the people, are competent to determine upon the point. I mean that the mode of bringing the American war before the public, is by remonstrance; the mode of managing the parliamentary reformation is by the force of committees, appointed with sufficient powers. And I am more satisfied than ever in the idea, that the act of king, nobles, and such committees, would have more real constitutional force, than an act of king, lords and the present house of commons, were that house even disposed to do what we wish.[43]

IV

The failure of the petition that came out of the second General Meeting of the Associations left both the Yorkshire and Westminster organizations in search of a mission. At the October 17 meeting of the Yorkshire Committee there was a general acknowledgment that a new petition seemed pointless. Instead, they approved and distributed Wyvill's *Second Address to the Electors of Great Britain*, a document which sought to provide another alternative to either the extremely limited economical reform favored by Rockingham and the far-reaching overhaul of the political system advocated by Jebb and his supporters. Jebb's ideas came in for particular attack in this work, with

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[43] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 170-2.

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Wyvill wondering in print, "What is the superior efficacy of an impractical system?"[44] Instead of universal suffrage and annual parliaments, Wyvill wanted to continue with what he felt was the more realistic program agreed upon at the second General Meeting. Wyvill also hoped that his *Second Address* would serve as the beginning of a courtship process with the leaders of parliamentary opinion. His offensive worked with the Earl of Shelburne, the leader of what was left of the Chathamite faction, when Shelburne pledged to support the principles expressed in the *Second Address*.

In response to Wyvill's moves, Fox, John Churchill and Jebb were selected to meet representatives from the counties of Middlesex, Surrey, the City of London and the Borough of Southwark to confer on the current state of affairs. The first gathering, on December 3, marked the start of what shortly afterwards became known as the Quintuple Alliance. This informal organization marked an interesting development in metropolitan politics in that it was an acknowledgement that counties and boroughs had certain issues in common and that as parliamentary constituencies enjoying wide suffrage, they represented popular sentiment to a far greater extent than most parts of the kingdom. Rather disappointingly, Essex and Kent, which were invited to join the Alliance failed to do so, and in many ways the reality of the organization proved to be far less than its potential.[45]

Many years after these events took place Wyvill would write that concerning the Quintuple Alliance he knew "nothing with certainty."[46] This is not quite accurate, since

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[44] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 136.

[45] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, pp. 510-11.

[46] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, p. 363.

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Jebb kept him informed about what was going on in a series of letters. Jebb may have done this as a means of pressing Wyvill into supporting a more total reform program, though the information that Wyvill received just left him more displeased, since the Quintuple Alliance was essentially an attempt to try to outflank the Yorkshire Association for precedence in reform politics. One way the Quintuple Alliance and its member associations sought to achieve this preeminence was to publicize the need to reach a settlement to end the conflict with the Americans. Wyvill was particularly horrified when the Quintuple Alliance voted to support the ideas contained in the *Humble Address, Petition, and Remonstrance of the Electors and Inhabitants paying Taxes to Government, Resident in the City and Liberty of Westminster.* This petition, authored by Jebb, was an attack on the King's speech to parliament in which George III had urged the continuation of the American War. In response Jebb wrote, "Your majesty's ministers have, by false assertions and fallacious suggestions, deluded your majesty and the nation into the present unnatural and unfortunate war." The only way out of this dilemma was a willingness by the government to "relinquish *entirely* and for *ever* the plan of reducing our brethren in America to obedience by force."[47] Wyvill thought that the heat of Jebb's language would repulse potential allies and therefore weaken their ability to bring about any reform of parliament and he wrote with a measure of exasperation to Jebb's ally, Thomas Brand Hollis, expressing his hope that Brand Hollis might get Jebb to temper his views. Jebb was not at all pleased with Wyvill's comments and wrote with no small measure of annoyance

[47] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 516-18.

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to him: "That expression of yours to Mr. Hollis makes me think you suppose we are losing sight of the great object: quite the reverse."[48]

V

While Yorkshire and Westminster continued to disagree over the direction of political reform, extremely significant developments were taking place on the national political stage. Lord North, the reformers' bête noir, was increasingly becoming a weakened politician. The British defeat at the battle of Yorktown in November 1781 was the first stage of North's spiral to decline, which finally ended on March 20, 1782, when he formally resigned from the government. A new administration was formed with Lord Rockingham as first Lord of the Treasury and Lord Shelburne and Charles James Fox as the two secretaries of state. Jebb could not contain his joy at the collapse of North's ministry and rushed off a letter to Fox to express his gleeful sentiments. There were rumors at the time that with the change of ministry Jebb was offered a government position, perhaps the post of alderman in the Corporation of London, although Disney denies that any of this was true.[49]

Despite Jebb's joy, the fall of North was not an unmitigated blessing for those in favor of parliamentary reform, since it removed from the political scene one of the crucial elements that had united the disparate reformers. While they might have disagreed over issues such as universal male suffrage and annual parliaments, almost all members of the

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[48] Jebb to Wyvill, Dec. 12, 1781, Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. I, p. 515.

[49] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 173.

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association movement despised North and his government. The end of North's ministry also meant that while expectations were greatly increased for the possibility of reform, the new government was not unanimous on the proper course of change. While Shelburne and his supporters remained true to the ideas that the Yorkshire Committee had outlined in its *Second Address*, Rockingham and the Cavendishes were hostile to anything that went beyond economical reform.

Because of the new political situation, Wyvill thought it might be useful to bring a group of the leading reformers together for a series of discussions. If nothing else, he wanted to be reassured about where Jebb stood after receiving another letter from the latter in which he called for a more activist approach to the question of reform. Jebb stated to Wyvill that the "London people are much in earnest, and the Friends to Parliamentary Reform increase in Westminster. Without a single exception they are for addressing against the American war. Other measures are scheming, if remonstrance fails; all pursuing the line of peaceable opposition, and all tending to inform the people of their rights."[50] Clearly Jebb was not confident about the reformist potential of a Rockingham ministry and Wyvill wished to probe Jebb and his allies to see what actions they might be planning.

In April and May 1782 Wyvill gathered together in London Jebb, Granville Sharp, James Townsend, Richard Price and John Horne Tooke. They met at the Thatched House Tavern. William Pitt, who at this point in his youthful political career was siding with the reformers, took the minutes. Almost immediately there was a disagreement among them

[50] Jebb to Wyvill, Dec. 12, 1781, Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, , p. 515.

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when Jebb suggested they publicly express their gratitude to the Duke of Richmond for his plan supporting universal male suffrage and annual parliaments. In response. Wyvill stated his opposition to the idea since he thought that Richmond's plan was impractical.[51] Wyvill instead wanted their emphasis to remain on the creation of a petition of a rather general nature. a point on which his convictions had been strengthened by a series of letters he had received in the weeks leading up to the Thatched House Tavern meeting from such individuals as Lord Carysfort. the chair of the Huntingdonshire committee. Carysfort informed Wyvill that his committee was "persuaded that instructions to representatives to support specific propositions would be premature."[52] Jebb. while disappointed that greater enthusiasm was not shown towards the Duke of Richmond's bill. was also not adverse to keeping the petition general since he believed that a more specific petition would only contain those points favored by the moderate Yorkshiremen. The concurrence of Jebb and Wyvill on this point, though for different reasons, allowed for this measure to meet with approval by those assembled. The only specific point contained in the petition was support for the abolition of fifty rotten boroughs, a measure that was contained in the original Yorkshire program. Jebb won a small victory when it was also agreed that Wyvill should recommend that his Yorkshire committee adopt the principal of an "adequate abolition of the obnoxious boroughs, so that if the addition of Members proposed by the Associations

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[51] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. ii, pp. 25-6.

[52] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. ii, pp. 128-9.

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should be obtained, a suitable diminution of the nominal Representation also might be effected, and the number of the House of Commons might not be increased."[53]

Inspired by the Thatched House meeting, William Pitt on May 7, 1782 introduced his plan for setting up a parliamentary committee to look into the state of the representation. Rockingham, however, refused to offer his support for the measure and it went down in a surprisingly close vote of 161-141. These numbers provided enough encouragement that later in the same month Jebb joined with the other original participants for a second and final conference at the Thatched House Tavern. They supported Pitt's call for the establishment of a parliamentary committee to inquire into the state of representation.[54] The participants also agreed that they would not be able to draw up and distribute their petition before the close of the parliamentary session. Their efforts would have to be focused during the summer, a less promising time to push for political reform.

When summer arrived Wyvill decided to combine his efforts on behalf of the petition with a meeting with Rockingham to probe his inclinations on the question of reform. Unfortunately, Rockingham once again indicated that he had no interest in any measures other than economical reform. Rockingham was as good as his word on this subject and during his short tenure in office Clerke's Act was passed, which provided for the exclusion of government contractors from the commons, as well as Crewe's Act for the disenfranchisment of revenue officers and Burke's Civil Establishment Act abolishing a number of government and court appointments.

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[53] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, pp. 168-9.

[54] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 146.

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Having completed his task, Rockingham passed away on July 1, an event which completely altered the political dynamic. For Fox, the death of Rockingham seemingly opened up limitless possibilities, since he believed that his friend Portland would follow Rockingham in the Treasury. Unfortunately for Jebb and the cause of political reform, Fox immediately concluded that he had to distance himself from the Westminster Association and particularly from its more radical members such as Jebb. While Rockingham was still on his death bed, Fox sent a note to Jebb asking him not to use Fox's name when calling together the Westminster Association. Fox indicated that since there were other ways to call the Association together without his name being used he asked Jebb to accommodate him. "I have indeed a particular reason why I should not wish to have my name used just now," he wrote.[55] Fox was not alone in trying to maneuver for political power following the death of Rockingham and, in the event, it was Shelburne who stepped in as First Lord of the Treasury with Pitt as his Chancellor of the Exchequer. Fox had never got along with Shelburne and he strongly resented being outflanked by his political rival. He resigned from the government.

While these political issues were being played out on the national stage, within Westminster there was a more immediate concern: how to come up with another petition in order to address the need for parliamentary reform. On July 17 the electors of Westminster met to consider a petition calling for a more equal representation of the people. As agreed by the participants at the Thatched House Tavern, the petition was purposely worded in a vague manner which, Jebb noted, was necessary so as to "obviate

[55] Charles James Fox to John Jebb, June 30, 1783, B.L. Add. MSS. 47,588, f. 101;

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that diversity of sentiment which must necessarily take place, before the subject has been properly discussed."[56] For Jebb this vagueness was not a constraint. Rather, it left open the possibility for more radical reforms to be introduced and so he enthusiastically endorsed the plan at the meeting.

Before Jebb addressed the crowd, Fox stood up and complimented Pitt for introducing a resolution that a committee be set up to take into consideration the present state of parliament, while also encouraging the wording of a petition expressed in general terms. John Cartwright then offered his support for this idea and was followed by John Sawbridge, who read a copy of the petition they were proposing to send to parliament, a document which stated that the "present disproportioned and inadequate representation of the commons of this realm, and unconstitutional duration of parliament, are grievances of so great magnitude as to require immediate attention and effectual redress."[57]

Following the reading of the petition, Jebb stood up to speak. Having seen a number of petitions over the previous two years go nowhere, he was aware of the limits of this approach. Nevertheless, since the main business of the day was the presentation of a petition, he felt it necessary to address the issue and he reiterated his belief that the strength of this particular petition lay in its general terms, which he admitted was necessitated by a "diversity of sentiment" among those working for a reform of parliament, including supporters of annual parliaments like himself and Cartwright and those such as Wyvill who favored a triennial system. Jebb did, however, compare this petition unfavorably with a

[56] *Works*, vol. iii, p. 303.

[57] *Works*, vol. iii, p. 299.

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plan that he thought extremely highly of: the comprehensive program for universal male suffrage and annual parliaments proposed in the House of Lords by the Duke of Richmond.[58]

Since Jebb felt that petitioning was of limited value given the present makeup of the House of Commons, he proposed to the assembled that they consider a "second method" for bringing about change, one which he believed might be the only effective tool for the politically dispossessed to effect genuine changes. What Jebb was trying to push the crowd to accept was the necessity of perseverance in the face of the onslaught on their political rights as Englishmen, or, as he exclaimed, "until you have obtained substantial justice: and that nothing, but the concession of your constitutional demands, can induce you, without murmuring, to bear those numerous taxes, which, unless you be fairly represented, can by no means be equitably imposed."[59] There were a variety of methods that could be applied to M.P.s who were wary of supporting parliamentary reform. While Jebb asserted that he did not mean "to counsel you to any illegal act," anything short of this was fair game in the pursuit of such worthy goals.

Public censure was one tool which Jebb thought might be effective in countering opposition and it should be applied if, as he expected, parliament refused to act on the petition at hand. Public censure could be a useful tool because while there was a "general disposition throughout England, to concur in this salutary work, and we have also at the head of public affairs, a set of men who have professed and manifested a zealous

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[58] *Works*, vol. iii, p. 300

[59] *Works*, vol. iii, p. 301.

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attachment to our cause," there were no guarantees that the present ministers would follow through on their promises.[60] Despite the presence of Fox in the audience. Jebb offered some kind words for the Earl of Shelburne as well as Pitt. the "illustrious son of that illustrious statesman. the Earl of Chatham." But Jebb warned Shelburne that should he fail to carry out the people's wishes. he would "justly incur that public censure. which I have before delineated. and lose all title to the estimation of his fellow citizens."[61]

When Jebb finished his speech the petition was passed unanimously and then given to Fox and Cecil Wray. the parliamentary representatives from Westminster. to present before the House of Commons. Once this was done. once again Jebb stood up on the podium and said there was another matter he wanted to discuss: the continuing war against the American colonies. He declared:

> It is not without some reason supposed, that notwithstanding late appearances. there still exists in the presiding power of this country. an indisposition to accede to the unqualified independence of America: nor is it possible that the contrary can be ascertained. as long as the concession of this independence shall be connected with the ratification of a general treaty of peace.[62]

Jebb accused the present ministry of making a serious mistake in trying to tie the treaty of peace with the colonies to the continuing dispute between Britain, France and Spain. He

[60] *Works*, vol. iii, p. 304.

[61] *Works*, vol. iii, p. 305.

[62] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. ii, p. 160.

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asserted that the only proper response of the government was "immediate recognition for the unqualified independence of America"[63]

But Jebb had something additional on his mind when he got up to speak for a second time: he felt a certain obligation to justify Fox's resignation from the government, since Jebb respected his reasons for doing so. Fox had differed with Shelburne over the direction of the peace negotiations with the Americans. Fox favored the immediate recognition of the independence of the American colonies, while Shelburne preferred to maintain some sort of relationship, with independence held back as a potential negotiating tool. These differences, while not so great, were enough for Jebb to justify Fox's resignation. He explained to the crowd:

> You, I trust, will therefore conclude, that your worthy representative [Fox] has, for just and sufficient motives, resigned the station he lately held in the Government of this country. Mr. Fox wished to acknowledge the independence of America in the most unconditional and unlimited terms, induced by a well-grounded conviction, that such recognition would not only be a measure just and honourable in itself, but also would be attended with the most signal advantages to this Country. It was not as presented in the Commons "a *trifling shade of difference*; but on the contrary, I am persuaded it constituted in fact the ESSENTIAL difference between PEACE AND WAR.[64]

Before finally sitting down Jebb proposed that those assembled vote their thanks to Fox. This would be the last time the two men were on the same public platform.

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[63] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. ii, p. 161.

[64] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. ii, p. 162.

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VI

Over the ensuing months Jebb remained firmly committed to Fox, while Wyvill thought that the cause of reform would meet with greater success through an alliance with Shelburne. After hearing that Wyvill was willing to work with him, Shelburne told the Rev. Frank Dodsworth to let Wyvill know that political reform was part of his agenda and that, "you may rely upon my best endeavors to promote this in the manner which I may find most effectual." For the present, however, he wanted his communications with the reformers to remain secret.[65]

After this tentative rapprochement between Wyvill and Shelburne, Wyvill and the Yorkshire Committee met on October 31, 1782 and resolved to poll national sentiment concerning a new petition. To that end they prepared a circular letter which was sent to the various committee heads as well as a plan for the elimination of fifty of the worst rotten boroughs [The present holders were to be provided with adequate compensation.][66] There would also be an addition of at least 100 county and borough members, while forty shilling copyholders would be added to the county electorate. The Yorkshire plan also included a provision for the complete overhaul of the Scottish electorate, which remained full of old manorial rights and fictitious voters.

Jebb immediately indicated his disappointment upon hearing of the Yorkshire plan. He felt that it was a betrayal of the consensus that had come out of the Thatched House Tavern meetings that petitions should remain general. Jebb's views on this were echoed by

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[65] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iii, p. 335.

[66] Wyill, *Political Papers*, vol. iii, p. 349.

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the Huntingdonshire Committee, while in Nottinghamshire John Cartwright swung into action. Together Cartwright and Jebb decided to summon the Quintuple Alliance in order to stand in opposition to the position of the Yorkshiremen. In a letter to Cartwright informing him on how this task was progressing, Jebb provided some encouraging news: He had visited the Duke of Richmond that very morning to request his attendance at the meeting of the Quintuple Alliance. He reported that Richmond had written, "such a letter to the Sussex meeting as would immortalize his name, if he was not before deserving of all respect. Never let us shift our ground, we never can stand on any other, as he has most ably shewn."[67] Despite these hopeful signs serious problems remained. For example, Pitt was clearly on the side of Wyvill and his plan. Jebb indicated to Cartwright the magnitude of the problem they were facing but assured his friend: "I have done what I can with friends to show them the advantage of going upon the plan of last year, and getting a parliamentary vote, that the representation is imperfect, ought to be reformed, and a committee of inquiry concerning the best plan, appointed; but I am afraid the idea is fixed."[68]

The threat of the Quintuple Alliance standing in opposition was enough to make Wyvill respond by indicating to Jebb that he was willing to moderate his plan by reducing the number of proposed new county members from 100 to 60. He also accepted that extinction of some rotten boroughs should take place. Trying to please Jebb and his allies created problems for Wyvill on his other flank. For example, these changes were not favored by Pitt or his brother-in-law Lord Mahon, with the latter maintaining that, "I am

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[67] John Jebb to John Cartwright, January 27, 1783. Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 180-181.

[68] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 180-1.

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not for doing less than ought to be done, but only for obtaining by degrees what can never be obtained at once."[69]

In response to these assorted criticisms of his original plan, Wyvill called another meeting of the Yorkshire Committee on December 18. He decided to drop the idea of giving members specific instructions, but indicated that if the points raised in the earlier proposed petition were carried, it would be "highly approved."[70] Ten thousand persons in Yorkshire signed this more generally worded petition, but even after making these changes few counties followed this example: while twenty-six counties had petitioned parliament in 1780, only twelve did so now. Some blamed radicals like Jebb for this poor showing. For example, Sir George Paul, chairman of the Gloucestershire committee, wrote that interest was fading in his county. "To account for it, I have only to observe the late publications of the constitutional society...together with the report of the former Westminster Committee."[71]

Jebb for the most part avoided taking part in the apportioning of blame following the poor showing of the petition. Instead he began to dedicate himself towards writing a number of articles for the public presses. Using the pseudonym "Alfred" for these articles, Jebb criticized a proposal for building warships by means of voluntary subscriptions, a desperate measure attempted by Shelburne who found it impossible to raise taxes.[72] Jebb

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[69] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 156.

[70] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, pp. 165-6.

[71] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, pp. 168.

[72] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 176.

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also found time to publish his study on paralysis during this period. Unfortunately, this personal idyll came to an end when he became extremely ill at the end of November, having developed a serious fever from a family he was treating. He was forced to stay in bed for six weeks, and while he had recovered by the spring, the state of public affairs was moving in a direction that was to cause him great distress.

By March of 1783 there were rumors in the air regarding the unthinkable: Fox and North were working on the creation of a possible coalition. Upon hearing of the discussions between North and Fox, Jebb frantically urged Fox to not take this disastrous step.[73] When the latter failed to respond to his entreaties, Jebb stood up before a meeting of the electors of Westminster at Shakespeare's Tavern on March 6, and delivered a long speech attacking the idea.[74]

Jebb declared himself incredulous as to the possibility that his long-time ally could join with North:

> The coalition, which it was rumoured, had been formed between his honourable friend, and the very men who had brought this unhappy country to the precipice on which it stood; men, who during the whole of this unfortunate reign, had evidenced, in every act of their conduct, a design to establish despotism, and to render the prince who sways the scepter of these kingdoms, as despotic as any of his most arbitrary neighbors; men who prosecuted that war, which had nearly brought us to utter ruin, and had prosecuted it contrary to their own convictions of its impropriety and impracticability.[75]

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[73] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 181.

[74] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 181-185.

[75] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 182.

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Such a coalition, warned Jebb, would prove to be, "ruinious to [Fox's] fair name, and destructive of the system, which, he sincerely believed, it was his intention to support."

Jebb also took the opportunity to express to the crowd his concern that at this important stage in the negotiations with the American colonies, the announcement of such a coalition would spell disaster. For the colonists, their trust in Fox and reliance on the idea that men like him could maintain their integrity within the British political system would be forever dashed by such a coalition. Jebb's dream of an independent America, fully reconciled with Britain, would never come to pass, "if America should see the man, whose character she thus revered, uniting with the very man who had laboured to enslave her?"[76]

After the Fox-North coalition government was formally announced on April 2, Jebb wrote to a friend attacking the coalition "with all the vehemence which the action called for, to the great offence of Fox's friends." At the same time, he stated that "Mr. Fox himself behaved with great candour and politeness."[77] Jebb was still publicly hoping that Fox could be made to see the error of his ways, though in a private letter to John Cartwright, he saw the issue as one of giving way to "expediency at the expense of right," and added somewhat self-righteously that unlike Fox, "It is not my nature, to give way to expediency at the expense of right. Moderation, when real, I honour, but timidity, or craft, under that appearance, I detest."[78]

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[76] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 183.

[77] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 185.

[78] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 185.

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Jebb was certainly not alone in feeling that the coalition was a betrayal. Wyvill saw it the same way. but perhaps with greater energy than wisdom he decided to work for a new national reform campaign at this time but could find no takers among the other counties. Despite the lack of extraparliamentary support. Wyvill encouraged Pitt to introduce a parliamentary reform bill in May. which was easily defeated 293 to 149. During the debate over this bill there was almost an eerie silence from the Westminster Association which was not to meet for another eight months. When it next met in February 1784. it was completely dominated by Fox and allies such as Fitzpatrick and Sheridan. Jebb, the angry opponent of the Fox-North coalition, had now become marginalized within the very political association he had played such a critical role in creating.

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Chapter Six

The End of the Movement for Parliamentary Reform

I

After being told by his father that no visit to London could be complete without a trip to Parliament, on a June day in 1784, John Quincy Adams, as a guest of William Vaughan, attended his first session of the House of Commons. As he recounted in a letter to his father, he stayed for nearly eleven hours, but that unfortunately, the subject brought up on that day "was a very dry, uninteresting one to me, it was the Westminster election."[1] John Quincy Adams might have found it more interesting if he was aware of the issues that were dividing Westminster and providing what William Pitt would later refer to as, "forty day's poll, forty day's riot and forty day's confusion."[2]

Following his complete break with Fox after the latter joined in a political coalition with North, Jebb searched for ways to lessen Fox's hold over the Westminster Committee. Jebb knew this was a difficult task and when the Committee met for the first time in almost a year, on February 18, 1784, he was almost the lone voice of dissent, particularly since one of his close allies, Thomas Oldfield, who had earlier served as secretary, was now replaced by Robert Cocker, a supporter of Fox. Jebb, however, was no stranger to this position, a place that he often held at Cambridge and within the Church of England

[1] Richard Alan Ryerson (Ed.), *The Adams Papers, Series II: Family Correspondence* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1993), pp. 339-340.

[2] John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt*. Vol. 2 (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969), p. 217.

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and once again he manfully did his best to express his convictions. Due to his congenital poor health he was unable to attend this meeting, but he fired off a letter which was read to the assembled in which he noted:

> As I am unable to attend the Westminster Committee this day I beg leave to observe by letter that in consequence of a resolution passed I think in April 1782, no question of a political nature can be debated unless notice shall have been given of it at a preceding meeting. I do not recollect the words of the resolution and it is possible the remembrance of it may have escaped many gentlemen who may be present today.[3]

Unfortunately for Jebb, his solitary cry of dissent proved to be no more effective in this new and hostile Westminster Committee than it did earlier in his life and the Westminster Committee ignored his request.

Jebb was not surprised by this reaction and had in fact been preparing in advance for this showdown in the Westminster Committee with Fox. Either Jebb or one of his close allies had written a pamphlet entitled *An Address to the High Steward Dean and the Court of Burgesses and other Householders of the City of Westminster*, in which there was a call for flooding the Fox-dominated Westminster Committee with one hundred new members.[4] To the Foxite members of the Westminster Committee, such a plan was declared to be "contrary to the usual open and fair mode of proceedings in this city" and they responded to the plan by refusing to admit any of the one hundred individuals as members of the Westminster Committee.[5]

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[3] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,595, f. 14.

[4] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,595, f. 14.

[5] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,595, f. 15-16.

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Because of his inability to transform the composition of the Westminster Committee, Jebb tried to marshal the dormant Quintuple Alliance as another weapon against Fox. Wilkes described this meeting of the Quintuple Alliance in a letter to his daughter:

> I was obliged to eat stale fish and swallow foul port, with Sir Cecil Wray, Mr. Martin the Banker, Dr. Jebb, & c. to promote the grand reform of Parliament. I was forced in to the chair, & was so far happy as to be highly applauded, both for a long speech, & my conduct as President through an arduous day.[6]

In spite of the poor victuals served at the Paul's Head Tavern, some important issues were addressed. This Quintuple meeting was geared towards supporting those freedoms which were the "birth-right of mankind, derived from the Author of their being." More specifically, they were to work for the purposes of short parliaments, extension of the suffrage and equal representation. One month later, on March 16, a second Quintuple Alliance meeting was held where there was a further commitment to these ideals as well as a recommendation that the Quintuple serve as the model for association for the rest of the country in order to effect a complete reformation of the constitution.[7]

Somewhat surprisingly given Wyvill's earlier expressed displeasure with the radical nature of the Quintuple Alliance, Jebb sought out Wyvill during this period and informed him of the proceedings of the Quintuple. Rather oddly, he even inquired of Wyvill whether he thought that copies of their resolutions should be dispersed to every parish and a book provided to receive the signatures of those who approved. Jebb wrote to Wyvill:

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[6] John Wilkes, *Letters to His Daughters*, vol. iii, p. 41.

[7] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, pp. 364-367.

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"The conduct of the Coalitionists is so fundamentally wrong, that with the fullest persuasion of no very good intentions in some near the throne, I most cordially wish intire rout to the party of Fox, Burke, and North. England, if expiring, could never be benefited by such men."[8] Wyvill, however, saw the actions of the Quintuple Alliance as just as significant a threat to the potential success of political reform as the Fox-North coalition. Many years later, while compiling his political papers for publication, Wyvill noted that:

> If this supposition [that English liberties were threatened due to the betrayal by Fox] were the fact, the friends of moderate reform could not, on any strong grounds of reason, expect that their objects would be promoted by a society [the Quintuple Alliance] so constituted. The formation of a Society collected for the population of these five districts, into one immense assembly, was likely to create disgust and alarm, for the novelty and irregularity of the measure from the natural tendency of such prodigious assemblies to confusion and violence; and from the want of any limitation of the nature of a compromise, in the Plan of the Association respecting a reform in the Representation.[9]

Rather than winning over Wyvill to the idea of the Quintuple, Jebb succeeded in providing Wyvill with a lesson that he wanted to pass down to future generations of potential political reformers, the lesson being that, "one must deprecate the formation of any future Association on a similar model."[10]

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[8] North Yorkshire County Record Office, John Jebb to Christopher Wyvill, May 23, 1784. ZFW 7/2/42

[9] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, p. 363.

[10] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, pp. 362-5.

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II

The centerpiece of Jebb's struggle with Fox in 1784 involved the clash over parliamentary elections for Westminster. The political season began in January when 2,834 electors in Westminster signed a petition attacking Fox's India bill as a "dangerous precedent, [which] created a new executive power unknown to the Constitution of this country" The petition also included thanks to the King for dismissing the ministers who had introduced this bill.[11] Fox and his supporters saw the hand of Cecil Wray, the other member of parliament for Westminster and who possessed radical credentials as President of the Society for Constitutional Information, behind this petition.

On February 14th there was a large meeting in Westminster attended by competing blocks of supporters of Fox and Wray. An argument broke out among the two factions as to who would chair the meeting. During this struggle a group of Fox's supporters lurched forward in the hall to support their leader. In the confusion, someone threw some chemicals at Fox's face and he fell. However, he was not seriously hurt and after the supporters of Wray left the hall Fox proceeded to give a speech.[12]

Afterwards, Jebb joined the other Wray supporters who left Westminster Hall and were now meeting on the steps leading to the Courts of Chancery and King's Bench. Jebb stood up and moved a series of resolutions, including one which stated that the "Coalition

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[11] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 49.

[12] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 60.

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framed between the Right Honourable Charles James Fox, and the Right Honourable Frederick Lord North, was injurious to the cause of freedom and of public virtue, and that the conduct of the consequent Administration was highly detrimental to the interests of great Britain and Ireland." Jebb pointed out that one significant problem with the coalition was that:

> Such defections from principle had ever an immediate tendency to lessen the confidence of the public in men, who hereafter should be disposed to serve them with fidelity and zeal; that the object of that hateful union was power, not the good of the country.[13]

The consequence of this grab for power was significant damage to the negotiations with the Americans, since the Americans could not trust the word of those representing the crown. In addition:

> The just claims of the Irish nation to a fair representation in parliament were thwarted by the combined influence of both factions; and that the bill introduced respecting the east-Indies, subversive of the constitution, and establishing regulations and a form of government, was in its consequences more oppressive to the natives than the unjust and unwarrantable domination it proposed to remedy; and, at the same time, creative of an influence at home, which would unavoidably lead to abuses of the most enormous kind.[14]

Jebb also launched an attack on the principles expressed by a group of country gentlemen who had met at St. Alban's Tavern on January 26, 1784, in order to try to convince Pitt and Fox to work together to avoid calling a general election. To Jebb this would inflict on the nation another unholy coalition created by a group of men who were seeking to stand in the way of

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[13] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 192-3.

[14] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 192-3.

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reform.[15] As it turned out, Jebb did not have to worry about this potential alliance. Pitt believed that Fox and his faction would eventually repulse the country gentlemen who had attended the St. Alban's meeting and he proved to be correct when the latter eventually moved into the camp of Pitt supporters.[16]

It was also left to Jebb to handle the last and most important task of the day: the nomination of Cecil Wray for another term in parliament. Jebb declared that he believed that the parliamentary conduct of Wray had been exemplary and that he trusted that it would remain so in the future. He asked Wray to assent to an oath which declared that "upon a fair significance of the wishes of a majority of my constituents, I will either act in conformity to their instructions, or embrace the first opportunity of vacating my seat," an oath to which Wray readily granted his assent.[17]

Unfortunately for Jebb, Wray was the weakest of the candidates in what proved to be a three-way race. The election of the third candidate, Admiral Hood, a popular naval hero who was the captor of the French ship *Ville de Paris*, was never in doubt. The supporters of Wray tried to attach their candidate to Hood and formed a joint committee that met every evening at seven at Wood's Hotel in Covent Garden. However, their cause was hurt by their lethargic candidate despite the best efforts of Cecil Wray's campaign manager, Lord Mahon, Pitt's brother-in-law. The poor performance of Wray on the stump even led to the spreading of a rumor that the government wanted to embarrass Fox by having him

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[15] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 194.

[16] Black, *The Association*, pp. 108-9.

[17] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 193.

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defeated by a second-rate candidate.[18] Wray said at the outset that he did not expect to spend a cent out of his own pocket and on this point he proved to be a man of his word.[19] This was a problem since elections were expensive and even the King was suggesting that corrupt methods, including bribery, might be necessary in order to defeat Fox.[20] After the election there were many claims that money was paid to voters which would have made for a very expensive election and as late as late as 1789, Charles Pelham was asking for contributions to pay off what remained of Fox's debt from 1784,[21] while the wife of the man who managed the campaign funds of Cecil Wray was given a pension in 1790 after Wray reminded Pitt what her late husband did for them.[22]

Fox's supporters began to regroup following the contentious meeting of the Westminster electors on February 14. After nominating a committee to look into the violence at the last meeting, Fox was busy preparing for the election and was acclaimed on March 19 as a candidate at a large meeting led by Sheridan and Fitzpatrick. Fox's supporters were also pushing an active pamphlet war on Wray and his backers with one of the works being a "Constitutional Gazette Extraordinary" that was issued purportedly by

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[18] L. Reid, *Charles James Fox: A Man for the People* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 200; *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 88.

[19] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 129.

[20] William Laprade, "William Pitt and Westminster Elections," *American Historical Review* xviii No. 2 (1913): 260.

[21] Historical MSS. Commission, *Fifteenth Report*, appendix, parat V., p. 158.

[22] William Laprade, "William Pitt and Westminster Elections," *American Historical Review* xviii No. 2 (1913): 261.

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"Admiral Fox. Commander of a squadron of ships in the service of the public." Among those listed in the "Enemy's Squadron" there appeared "Captain Jebb -- A very good ship. but badly manned."[23] Jebb, one of the most public of Wray's supporters, was also given his own stanza in a satirical song, *The Westminster Meeting; or, The Back Stairs Scour'd.* sung to the tune of *Mrs. Arne, Mrs Arne, it gives me confarn*:

> Doctor Jebb. Doctor Jebb
> Your are at a low ebb,
> When to arts such as these you descend.
> Your coachman to pay
> For to make away
> With *Charley*, who once was your friend.
> Doctor Jebb,
> With *Charley*, who once was your friend.[24]

The *kulturkampf* against Jebb continued in a pro-Fox poem:

> WHAT diseases (cries Jebb) in the Commons prevail?
> They're the vitals of England; and if they should fail,
> Let the foul *Primæ Vitæ* be scour'd; circulation
> will then go on to the health of the nation.
> But, if we may judge from some late resolutions,
> As you treat your poor patients of bad constitutions,
> when you vomit and bleed, bolus, potion, and pill 'em,
> Undertaking to *cure* 'em, dear Doctor, you'll *kill* 'em.[25]

Nor were the visual arts neglected. In an engraving entitled *The State of the Nation* (1784) George III and Pitt pull down Britannia from a platform supported on two broken pillars: one represented the Constitution and the other the House of Commons. Fox is standing on

[23] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), pp. 67-69.

[24] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), pp. 453-4.

[25] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 459.

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another platform trying to stem Britannia's fall. There are a cluster of shields representing the supporters of Fox and Pitt. On the Pitt side are Jebb, Price, Shelburne, Temple and Wilkes.[26]

The poems and songs show the intensity of feelings on the part of the supporters as well as the detractors of Fox. However, there were other issues in Westminster besides the Fox-North coalition. For example, there were disagreements over Chelsea Hospital, an institution that was largely used to house elderly veterans. Wray wanted to cut expenses and argued that since the cost per veteran in the hospital came to 51 pounds 5 shillings a head, why not give each man twenty pounds a year in order to find shelter on his own.[27] The veterans were so appalled by this idea that they placed an advertisement in a newspaper begging Wray to reconsider his position.[28] There were also disagreements on taxes: Wray opposed the stamp tax on receipts while Fox supported it. Wray likewise proposed a tax on manservants, which Fox opposed.[29]

The 1784 Westminster election was also noteworthy for the active participation of women, including the rather glamorous Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Georgiana, a Fox supporter, was a noted beauty. While out canvassing for Fox, she broke her shoe while stepping out of her carriage to go into the house of a butcher. She then kicked her shoe

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[26] Mary Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*. Vol. 6 (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), pp. 75-6.

[27] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), pp. 87-88.

[28] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 145.

[29] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 89.

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away and said. "I gladly serve my friends, even bare footed."[30] In response, a pro-Wray newspaper nastily reported that "We hear that the D...s of D..... grants favours to those who promise their votes and interests to Mr. Fox."[31] Besides the Duchess of Devonshire, there were so many women actively supporting the various candidates that at Coachmakers Hall a formal debate was held on the topic: "Is it consistent for the Female Sex to interfere at Elections?"[32]

Another woman who closely followed the election was Ann Jebb. She was far more realistic than her husband concerning Wray's prospects and was clearly concerned that Jebb would grow increasingly isolated by being tied to this cause. In a letter to Major Cartwright a week before the election, Ann wrote: "The Doctor took some steps this morning about a meeting here; but our party is a rope of sand, and we do no know where to find them, nor whether anyone would support us; if it failed many would throw all the blame on the Dr. for their conduct gives us no reason to expect honour."[33] Ann Jebb was always an important advisor to her husband and together they discussed whether to call another meeting of the Quintuple Alliance just prior to the election. In the end they both realized it would be to no avail.[34]

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[30] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 226.

[31] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 218.

[32] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 352.

[33] *Monthly Repository* (1812) p. 602.

[34] *Monthly Repository* (1812) p. 602.

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The voting began the first day of April at Covent Garden, with mutual agreement that it last for forty days. It became ugly right away as both sides employed thugs to keep electors away from the polls; in one incident, Pitt was attacked by a group of men with bludgeons but managed to escape without injury.[35] The worst violence took place on May 10 when a constable was killed.[36] The voting finished on May 17, the day before the summoning of a new parliament. The result was close:

Hood 6588
Fox 6126
Wray 5895

Even before the final tally was in Pitt wrote to the King to discuss the expediency of a scrutiny.[37] Thomas Corbett, the high bailiff of Westminster, decided to listen to the Wray supporters and agreed to a scrutiny of the votes, in part because the total number of votes seemed too high for Westminster.[38] Traditionally, when there was a scrutiny, the contesting candidates would attend parliament until the final outcome determined who won the seat. In this instance tradition was breached because it was decided that the new parliament would meet without a representative from Westminster. Fox, however, was not left without a seat in the Commons as he was returned for Kirkwall, in Tain Burghs, Scotland. He had anticipated that the election in Westminster would be a tough one.

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[35] L. Reid, *Charles James Fox: A Man for the People* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 199.

[36] *History of the Westminster Election* (London, 1784), p. 123.

[37] *Later Correspondence of George III*, I, p. 57.

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Pitt made a major miscalculation when he pushed for a scrutiny. Fox used the occasion to make a famous speech for the right of disputants in contested elections on June 8. which went far in restoring his rather battered prestige, and the resulting scrutiny did not change the ultimate results anyway since 107 votes were subtracted from Fox and 103 from Wray, while Hood lost 106.[39] Fox and Hood were officially declared the parliamentary members from Westminster on March 4, 1785. Several weeks later, despite his disappointment, Jebb could still write to a friend, "The prospect [for reform], at present, is most pleasing." He did feel it necessary to clarify this statement by adding, "I do not say, of immediate success, for that is scarcely to be hoped for."

III

Just as the American Revolution led some in England to question the adequacy of the British political system, so too in Ireland the war sparked a movement for political reform. Indeed, there was a sense among the English radicals that they were involved in a common struggle with repercussions that would impact on both sides of the Irish channel.[40]

[38] L. Reid, *Charles James Fox: A Man for the People* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 204.

[39] L. Reid, *Charles James Fox: A Man for the People* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 204.

[40] E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* deals with the Irish-English connection and how the Irish contributed to the English revolutionary tradition that developed in England in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

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Jebb sincerely wrote in a letter that. "If the liberties of Ireland be extinguished. the boasted liberties of England may not long survive."[41] Irish reformers would have been unlikely to mirror those sentiments. since while Jebb's comment may have been partly rhetorical. it also constituted a misreading of the Irish situation. The Ireland that emerged out of the "Century of Revolution" was operating within a political and religious framework that was far more dire than that found in England.

Ascendancy Ireland. the title by which Ireland in the eighteenth century is generally known.[42] was dominated by the Anglican gentry and nobility. The beautiful Georgian mansions of the period attest to their wealth and social standing. Nevertheless. it was an elite that felt insecure in its power. The Anglo-Irish elite could never shake its fear that England would challenge their political domination. and their fear and resentment was increased by their acknowledgment that as a minority within a hostile environment they might some day need to turn to the English government during an emergency for their salvation.

For Catholics, the overwhelming majority of the population, the glittering world of the Anglican elite, was far removed from their more dismal reality. It is true that in some of the larger towns there was the beginnings of a middle-class Catholic community who made their living from trade, though this group was to see their economic position decline as a result of

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[41] Letter from John Jebb to Mr. Griffith, Nov. 19, 1784, *Life of Jebb*, pp. 204-207

[42] The use of the term may be anachronistic. W. J. McCormack in *Ascendancy and Tradition* (Oxford, 1985), asserts that the term "Ascendancy" was first used in the 1790s, when Irish Protestants used the word in their attempt to stop the further relaxation of the penal laws. Other historians, however, claim that the term dates back to the 1780s. See, James Kelly, "The Genesis of "Protestant Ascendancy: The Rightboy Disturbances of the 1780s and Their Impact Upon Protestant Opinion" in Gerard O'Brien (Ed.), *Parliament, Politics and People: Essays in Eighteenth-Century Irish History* (Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1989), pp. 93-127

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the disruption in trade brought about by the American Revolution. For the majority of Catholics, living in the countryside, economic dislocation was a basic part of life. For all Catholics the civil and economic disabilities imposed by the Penal Laws had left them angry but with few opportunities to give vent to their rage.

Certainly they could not expect redress in the Irish Parliament. With its House of Commons and House of Lords, it looked like its English counterpart. But while over the course of the seventeenth century the English parliament had evolved into the dominant partner in its constitutional relationship with the monarch, this had not occurred in Ireland. What role the Irish parliament did have was further limited by the fact that the Irish system of representation was even more prone to aristocratic domination than its English counterpart.

Into this dismal political situation emerged the Irish Volunteer movement. Traditionally its start has been associated with the April 1778 raid of John Paul Jones on the British warship *Drake* off the coast of Ireland, yet this is simplifying the complex situation in eighteenth-century Ireland. Many in Ireland, far from recoiling in terror, were actually rooting for the Americans.[43] Towards the threat of a potential French invasion which arose in 1779 there was much less ambivalence, and it resulted in the spurt of activity that led to the formation of volunteer companies throughout Ireland. While the Volunteers would probably not have been a very effective fighting force in the event of a French landing, the British government did think enough of their potential during this crisis to see to it that they were supplied with rifles and cannons.

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[43] A. T. Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Origins of the United Irish Movement* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), p. 3.

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The social composition of the Volunteers was varied. The removal of troops from Ireland to fight against the American colonists made the landed gentry nervous, since radical agrarian groups such as the Whiteboys and Oakboys had operated over the previous two decades and eighteenth-century armies generally played the role of police forces. Many of the leaders of the Volunteers were gentry who wanted to see the protection of private property as one of the major functions of the Volunteers.[44] Tradesmen and artisans were also part of the movement and they saw the Volunteers as being an invaluable tool for breaking up demonstrations by journeymen who were looking to form combinations.[45] Others simply joined for the colorful uniforms which were paid for out of a common budget. One historian of the Volunteers, writing in the throes of the troubled 1940s, argues that the movement provided an outlet for those who in his day would join the scouts, hiking groups, or fascist organizations.[46] Because of the Penal Laws the Volunteers were officially Protestant, but by late 1779 Catholics were beginning to be admitted to some of the Volunteer corps in such places as Dundalk, Kilkenny and Armagh, though their numbers only became significant following the February 1782 Volunteer meeting at Dungannon, at which time the Volunteers supported the idea of eliminating some of the Penal Laws.[47]

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[44] R. B. McDowell, *Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), pp. 51-2.

[45] R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 246.

[46] R. B. McDowell, *Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), p. 53.

[47] Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question 1690-1830* (Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble Books, 1992), p. 99, 101.

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For a while the Volunteers were linked with the Patriot movement. The Patriots, a contemporary label, were a loosely defined group within the Irish Parliament who wanted to push to make the Irish Parliament more independent, though without going so far as to break the link with Britain. The Patriots valued the common cultural, economic and political links between the two nations, but wished to see some of the balance of influence shifted from England to themselves.[48] Henry Grattan eventually emerged as the leader of this parliamentary faction and for a while he was quite willing to use the Volunteers as a tool to coerce the English into meeting his demands for legislative independence.

Grattan was not pleased, however, when the Volunteers progressed from drilling with their fancy uniforms to engaging in political debates. One of the key moments in this transition took place on November 4, 1779, the birthday of William III. Volunteers gathered in Dublin to demonstrate near the Parliament building, while draping their cannons with signs reading "Free Trade or This." At this potential threat of force, North's ministry backed down and granted the Irish the right to conduct free trade with all British colonies. This success led the Volunteers to consider what other concessions they might extract from Westminster.

This desire to create a political agenda led to the calling of a Volunteer convention to meet at Dungannon on February 15, 1782. Before the first session, a group of Irish Patriots, under the direction of Lord Charlemont, who held a seat in the Irish House of Lords and also served as Commander-in-Chief of the Volunteers, put together a set of resolutions for the Volunteers to consider including demands for political reform and a relaxation of some of the

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[48] R. B. McDowell, *Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), p. 62.

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Penal Laws. such as allowing Catholics greater latitude in property rights. though with the continuation of political liabilities. This was strongly supported by Grattan. though others felt that any concessions made to the Catholics would split the ranks of the Volunteers.[49]

The Dungannon Convention was attended by 250 delegates from 143 Volunteer companies. Those present overwhelmingly passed the above resolutions but they had as little success in influencing the Irish Parliament as the Association movement did in England.. Parliamentary bills inspired by the Volunteer resolutions called for the end of Poyning's Law (1494), which prevented Irish parliaments from meeting without royal approval. while also requiring that the King first approve the parliamentary agenda before it was discussed in the Irish parliament and the Declaratory Act (1720), which stated that the British Parliament had the right to make laws for Ireland and that the British House of Lords was the final court of appeals in Irish cases.

In late March Lord North's government resigned and Rockingham formed a new government, which sent the Duke of Portland to Ireland to serve as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Just as in England, the change in ministry raised political expectations. Hopes for reform had been encouraged by the Whigs in their years out of office and were increased by the words of Fox, who asked Lord Charlemont in the immediate aftermath of North's fall, "Why should not the complete change of system that has happened in this country have

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[49] A. T. Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Origins of the United Irish Movement* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), p. 36.

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the same effect there."[50] This was enough to give a fresh spurt to both the Volunteers and the Patriots. Grattan, though ill, once again brought a series of bills before the Irish Parliament and this time they were met with approval. In one stroke the latter eliminated the Declaratory Act, Poynings Law, and the Perpetual Mutiny Act, and granted complete independence for judges. In many ways what was achieved was mere window dressing, however, since there were basic issues concerning the relationship between the two Kingdoms that were not addressed, including the question of ministerial responsibility for the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin Castle and, perhaps the most vital question in all of Ireland; the very nature of the Anglo-Irish domination.

The series of legislative changes that established what became known as Grattan's Parliament also created a split within the ranks of the Volunteers. Henry Flood, a Colonel in the Volunteers, argued in opposition to Grattan, that repeal of the Declaratory Act was not enough, and that nothing short of "Renunciation" was acceptable. At the second Dungannon Convention on June 2, 1783 the Volunteers gave their support to Flood's Renunciation idea as well as a call for reform of the Irish Parliament. In response the British government passed a Renunciation Act, but the split still existed within the ranks of the Volunteers, leading some, like Grattan, to leave a movement that he now referred to as the "armed beggary of the nation."[51]

Since those who remained in the Volunteers were increasingly interested in the subject of Parliamentary reform, a general meeting was called for September 8, 1783 to address these

[50] L. G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 9.

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issues. In order to prepare for this meeting a committee was set up under the chairmanship of William Sharman, a Lt. Colonel of the Union Regiment of Volunteers and M.P. for the Borough of Lisburn, along with Henry Joy, the owner of the *Belfast Newsletter* as secretary, to contact the leading reformist political theorists of the day to collect their opinions. Those who were contacted were asked about the secret ballot, duration of parliaments, and compensation for borough owners in the event that decayed boroughs were enlarged or eliminated, as well as who should be considered qualified to vote.

Besides Jebb, responses came from individuals such as Benjamin Franklin, Christopher Wyvill, Abbé Raynal, William Pitt, Richard Price, John Cartwright and the Duke of Richmond. Eventually all their correspondence was compiled in *A collection of letters which have been addressed to the volunteers of Ireland on the subject of a Parliamentary reform* (1783), though Wyvill and Jebb took the additional step of independently publishing their letters.[52]

In what turned out to be the first of three letters that Jebb sent to the Volunteers, he began by trying to consider what was ultimately right for the Irish situation and what was politically expedient. In the politically expedient column was acceptance that under the present constitution a certain portion of legislative power was reserved to the House of

[51] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 256.

[52] Christopher Wyvill, *Letters Addressed to the Committee of Belfast on the proposed reformation of the parliament of Ireland* (London, 1783). A number of years later the Duke of Richmond's letter was published and became a major part of the radical credo over the next years. It was cited by Thomas Erskine in the trials of 1794 as being almost scriptural to reform societies and as late as 1859 was still being reprinted. Corrine Comstock Weston, *English Constitutional Theory and the House of Lords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 153.

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Commons. Members of the Commons, however, bear the responsibility of serving as delegates from the community at large and therefore any restriction on the franchise is not only politically inexpedient, since the representative's role as a delegate is limited in its effectiveness due to the disenfranchisement of some of his constituency, but also morally wrong as "an infringement of the law of nature."[53]

Jebb also challenged an idea which some of the Volunteers favored, which was that an increase in the number of county seats would help rectify the political system. Just as Jebb opposed additional county seats for the British House of Commons, he saw the same issues at play for Ireland: ministers would waste money in an effort to create a majority in the Commons, while the great landholders would dominate most of the additional seats that were created. But Jebb did accept what he considered to be the politically expedient idea of disenfranchising some of the rotten boroughs and providing compensation to those who lost their vote as a result.[54]

Jebb also offered a plan of action to the Volunteers. The first thing, he maintained, was to pass resolutions which categorically show the right of the people to investigate the entire system of representation as well as the franchise. They should then form a committee to put together a plan "which you shall judge to be effectual, the most expressive and liberal that the times will bear." This plan would be submitted to the Irish House of Commons with a proviso that there was a limited period of time in which this body could work on its plan, during which time the Volunteers were to adjourn. Jebb argued that should Parliament reject

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[53] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 520-1.

[54] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 521-2.

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their resolutions. the Volunteer Convention could serve the same role assigned to the Associations in Britain: is to begin to operate as an alternative parliament.[55]

On August 14. just one day after writing his first letter to the Volunteers. Jebb rushed off a second follow-up note. Besides including a packet of writings that he thought the Volunteers might find useful such as his *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster* and the *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex*, Jebb wanted to clarify some of the points from the first letter including his belief that it was necessary to have equal electoral districts, each electing one member. Jebb also wanted to touch once again on the issue of Catholic emancipation. In his first letter he had quickly noted that concerning Catholics:

> If men are allowed to hold property, to possess rights, to bear arms: I cannot see any substantial reason why they should not also be allowed a share in the appointment of those who make the laws. By such generous confidence, I should conceive, their prejudices would be softened, and their attachment to the public, of which they would then become a component part, increased.

This rather tepid endorsement of Catholic emancipation was then followed up by the following more enthusiastic statement: "At any rate, so far as regards Protestants, the right of suffrage may, with great propriety, be extended far beyond its present limits."[56]

Even addressing the Catholic questions in this summary fashion went further than some of Jebb's letter writing colleagues. For example, Cartwright and Richmond failed to address the franchise issue directly, though their call for universal male suffrage implied that Catholics were to be included. Other respondents, such as the Earl of Effingham,

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[55] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 524-5.

[56] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, p. 524.

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thought that more was needed to be known concerning the political inclinations of Catholics before such a step as granting the franchise could be taken, while Wyvill, though supportive of granting Catholics the right to vote, made it clear that he was against Catholics holding seats in Parliament.[57] Even Richard Price, a stalwart supporter of radical causes, while writing, "Why should not a papist be attached to the liberties of his country as well as a Protestant," noted in a personal letter to Henry Joy that while theoretically the principles of political liberty provided Catholics with the right to vote, in the specific case of Ireland "it cannot be said ... it is prudent or safe to admit them to the exercise of this right. This therefore makes one instance in which the principles of liberty cannot in practice be carried their full length."[58] In his second letter Jebb decided to give a much more forceful statement of support for Catholic emancipation. While allowing that "you have difficulties to struggle with peculiar to your country," he noted that "the objections ... which many entertain of danger, from admitting Roman Catholics to the entire rights of citizenship, may appear scarcely worthy of a moment's consideration at no very distant future.[59]

When the Volunteers met on September 8 the major decision was taken to call a National Convention to meet in Dublin on November 10. Holding it in Dublin, the home of the Irish Parliament, was in itself a provocative step. Fox wrote of his fear that if any concessions were granted by Parliament to the Volunteers, Ireland would face the tyranny of a

[57] Maurice O'Connell, *Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the Age of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965), p. 383.

[58] Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question 1690-1830* (Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble Books, 1992), p. 105.

[59] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 529.

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military-dominated government rather than a free institution.[60] In anticipation of this November 10 meeting Jebb wrote his third and final letter to the Volunteers.

Jebb had earlier received a reply from Colonel Sharman in response to his two previous letters. The latter tactfully noted that while Jebb's letters were "very obliging and useful," the Volunteers could not "in every point apply them to the situation in this Kingdom."[61] Instead of Jebb's conception of a complete overhaul of the Irish system, the Volunteers, Sharman informed Jebb, were going to petition the House of Commons on those select points on which unanimity could be achieved.

Jebb accepted this letter with good grace, but in his response he informed the Volunteers that he vehemently disagreed with their plan to petition parliament. He warned that, "Whether the specific mode of a parliamentary reform, which it may appear reasonable for public wisdom to adopt, originate with the people, or their present representatives, is not a question merely speculative; upon its just solution, in my idea, is founded every rational expectation of success." Also, while Jebb noted with some satisfaction that at the Dungannon Convention there was support for the idea of removing parts of the Penal Laws, in this third letter he returned to the theme of Catholic emancipation and in the strongest words he would utter on the subject stated uncategorically:

> I have long been persuaded, that the general practice of confining the enjoyment of civil privileges, within the pale of a particular communion, is equally intolerant and unwise; and have constantly contended, that every person in the community who preserves inviolate that common bond of

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[60] W. E. H. Leaky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* vol. ii (New York: D. Appledon and Company, 1893), p.

[61] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 534-5.

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> allegiance, which is the evidence of the union of its members, ought to be supported into the undisturbed possession of his right of rising to the attainment of every honour and emolument.[62]

Unfortunately, the Volunteer movement could not reach a consensus on the Catholic question at their general convention on November 10 and in the end the subject was dropped. The delegates did succeed after meeting for three weeks in coming up with a reform plan, which included the banning of nonresidents from voting unless they had a freehold or lease worth at least £20 a year. Rotten boroughs were to have their borders extended to include a set number of voters. On the suffrage question, all Protestant freeholders with a minimum of £10 a year were to receive the vote and all bylaws made by corporations to limit the vote were declared void. Finally, general elections were to be held every three years.[63] Henry Flood, an attendee at this convention, introduced these resolutions as bills in the Irish House of Commons where they were soundly defeated, 157 to 77. While Volunteer meetings were called for the fall of 1784 to seek further ways to influence Parliament, for the most part these calls went unheeded and it soon became clear that the influence of the Volunteer movement was rapidly dwindling. In the aftermath of the defeat of Flood's bills, Jebb wrote privately to Henry Joy that while he believed in the necessity of a federal union between England and Ireland, this would be "impracticable, until parliaments are elected, which shall fairly represent the real interests of each country, which shall promote the substantial interest of both, and, at the same time, prevent the possibility of future discord.[64] Sadly, it was Ireland's tragedy that

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[62] Jebb, *Complete Works*, vol. ii, pp. 543-4

[63] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, pp. 255-56.

[64] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 203.

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when union was brought about in 1800, it was completed under the exact circumstances that Jebb had rightly predicted would spell disaster.

IV

During Jebb's abbreviated lifetime one final push for the reform of the British parliament was to be made. Significantly, the main impetus this time around was not the association movement, but from the man at the top of the greasy pole: the Prime Minister, William Pitt. Pitt wrote in a letter in November 1784, "Parliamentary reform, I am still sure *must* sooner or later be carried in both countries. If it is well done, the sooner the better."[65] Pitt was operating under his youthful political convictions that some sort of reform was necessary and that it was worth expending some political capital to try to bring it about. To do this he would need allies and to that end he searched out Christopher Wyvill and asked him to act as his liaison with the Association movement. Wyvill was both flattered and sincerely interested, and he informed Pitt: "I do assure you, that I am perfectly satisfied every thing is rightly understood between us. You have placed in me a trust of the greatest consequence; and I am conscious of having acted in it with fidelity to the best of my judgment."[66]

Wyvill immediately wanted to get Jebb's reaction to Pitt's initiative. Twice he met with Jebb and attempted to convince him to activate the Westminster Association as well as the Quintuple Alliance on behalf of Pitt's plan. Wyvill informed Jebb of the limited nature

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[65] Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, p. 206.

[66] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, p. 14.

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of the bill Pitt proposed. It contained the elimination of thirty-six small boroughs and the transfer of their seats to the counties and the metropolis. Compensation would be paid to those borough voters who lost their vote. The bill included the enfranchisement of copyholders and some categories of leaseholders. The setting up of district polling centers was a conscious attempt to limit the expense of county elections and Jebb must have been pleased to learn that the bill avoided increasing the size of the House of Commons.[67] However, when Jebb found out that Pitt's plan did not include the repeal of the septennial act, he later told a friend, "my heart sank with me."[68]

Jebb, surveying the political scene in England, Scotland and Ireland over the previous four years, had grown tired of seeing even partial measures, ones he had hesitated to support due to their limited value in remedying the real problems of the British political system, go down to defeat in the House of Commons. His desire to stay out of the fray this time was reinforced by the simple fact that he did not trust Pitt. While admitting that it was good that a minister of the state was supporting a plan for reform, he preferred that the people outside of parliament, through the strength of their collective action should be able to bring about reform without having to depend on any one faction or minister.[69] He was also very

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[67] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, pp. 517-35.

[68] Frances Cartwright (Ed.), *Life and Correspondence of John Cartwright* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), vol. 1, p. 159.

[69] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 211.

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conscious that Pitt did not see reform in the same light that he did. As he informed Cartwright a year and a half earlier:

> A letter from Mr. Pitt has been communicated to the committee in Suffolk which I own gives me some uneasiness. He speaks that he is no well-wisher for a reform on the speculative principles of some that have given alarm; I fear he means the constitutional and truly practical principles of Cartwright, the Duke of Richmond and our society.[70]

He wanted to remind Cartwright not to place too much trust in Pitt, "who, I am satisfied, means to do as little as possible, or rather, has leave to do but little." Jebb knew that Wyvill would next be contacting Cartwright on this same matter and he warned his old colleague, though perhaps unnecessarily, to be "stern" when they got down to discussing the septennial bill.

Earlier Jebb had attended a meeting at the Shakespeare Tavern where there was talk of creating a third party in the House of Commons, which would represent "the people"[71] Jebb said the meeting was full of energy, but nothing came of the plan and once again there seemed to be nowhere else for reform-minded individuals to turn but to Pitt's proposed legislation. Some radicals actually made their peace with it. While it bore little resemblance to his own extensive plan for political reform, the Duke of Richmond decided to support it. The Westminster Association, however, would not follow suit. A week after Pitt's bill went down to defeat by a margin of 248 to 174, the Westminster

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[70] Frances Cartwright (Ed.), *Life and Correspondence of John Cartwright* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), vol. 1, pp. 154-156

[71] Frances Cartwright (Ed.), *Life and Correspondence of John Cartwright* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), vol. 1, p. 159.

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Association, whose meetings Jebb still periodically attended, declined to formally vote their opinion of the bill, as a means of showing their disapproval (though they gave the ostensible reason that the plan had not been formally submitted to them).[72]

Wyvill wanted to make one last attempt to bring about reform. Few reformers had responded to his previous entreaties and even within Yorkshire he was having trouble creating enthusiasm. Yet, he still believed that prospects for the eventual passage of Pitt's bill might be heightened if unity among the extraparliamentary reformers was achieved. In the spring he sent a note to Jebb inviting him to come to a meeting at the Thatched House Tavern.[73] Jebb responded with great politeness to Wyvill, for while he distrusted Pitt's motives he never questioned Wyvill's. While he censured the House of Commons for their failure to pass Pitt's bill, he reiterated his earlier opposition to the plan:

> Although I would on no account be understood to reprobate the whole of his plan, I cannot bring myself to approve. The extension of the right of the suffrage to copyholders is certainly just; and although I have objections to an increase of county representatives, yet the transfer of the election franchise from decayed boroughs to the metropolis and large towns, at present unrepresented, would certainly, when effected, be no inconsiderable advance towards constitutional perfection. Yet defects are evidently apparent upon the face of the system. No provision as yet appears for the relief of such boroughs as Bury, Yarmouth, Cambridge, Buckingham, &c. where reason requires, even upon Mr. Pitt's principles, that the right of suffrage should in them be extended far beyond its present limitations.[74]

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[72] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,595, f. 50.

[73] Christopher Wyvill to John Jebb, May 6, 1785, North Yorkshire Record Office, ZFW 7/2/182/4

[74] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iii, pp. 454-5.

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Despite Jebb's opposition, Wyvill was able to gather nineteen men for the first of a series of meetings at Thatched House beginning on May 7. At this meeting the attendees asked Pitt to submit his plan to them. When they reassembled on May 24, Jebb decided to attend but not to show his approval. He stood with a group who had packed the meeting in order to show their opposition, and voted with those who by a majority of 63 to 39, defeated a proposition that Pitt's bill "would form a substantial improvement of the constitution".[75] While Jebb had joined others such as Cartwright, John Sawbridge, Richard Fitzpatrick, and Fox in voting no, he complained that in some quarters he was now being, "censured as meaning to overthrow a question, in support of which I have sacrificed my fortune, health, and peace of mind, so far as peace of mind depends on external circumstances." He added that despite this criticism, "I will not swerve from principle, let them say what they please."[76]

For one last time on July 11, 1785, the Westminster Association met to deliberate on the political questions of the day. Jebb joined with fourteen others as they proposed that their parliamentary representatives should watch the progress of a police bill and to call or a meeting of all the inhabitants of Westminster in case "any articles or clauses

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[75] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iii, p. 460.

[76] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 214.

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should compromise the liberties of Englishmen."[77] This meeting never took place.

[77] B.L. Add. MSS. 38,595, f. 54.

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Chapter Seven

The Society for Constitutional Information

I

Of the various political societies that John Jebb was associated with in his life, none had as great an influence on the future course of radical reform than the Society for Constitutional Information (S.C.I.). It was also, not incidentally, an organization where Jebb played the dominant role not only at its formative stages, but throughout the time of his membership up until the time of his premature death in 1786. Certainly, Jebb was among the small group of men, who on a Tuesday evening, in early May 1780, gathered at No. 403 in the Strand. What they were discussing appeared to be minutiae: whether to use small pica type for their pamphlets and tracts and how to limit their paper costs to thirteen shillings and six pence a ream. More critical decisions had been made one week earlier, when these same individuals met for the first time to create a society for which there was no established precedent in English history. The S.C.I. was organized to fill the particular task of throwing "light upon the great constitutional questions now before the public," through the dissemination of political tracts urging the widespread reform of the British polity.[1]

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[1] S.C.I. Min. Bk. I, 1. The minutes of the Society for Constitutional Information are located in three volumes in the Public Record Office within the Treasury Solicitor Papers. The two

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The formation of the S.C.I. should be viewed as another attempt by Jebb and some of his radical colleagues to take the leadership of the political reform movement away from Christopher Wyvill and his Yorkshire Association. It is no coincidence that the first meeting of the S.C.I. took place one month after the first General Meeting of the Associations. Jebb had worked at the General Meeting to introduce a plan for annual parliaments as well as political litmus tests for candidates to see if they were truly committed to the cause of reform, ideas which were anathema to Wyvill. As a result of this difference of opinion, the attendees left the meetings without having produced a plan for a national political association, which had been the ultimate goal.[2] In the aftermath of this disastrous meeting, Jebb and Major Cartwright created the S.C.I., to serve as the mouthpiece for their plans for a fundamental overhaul of the political system and to voice in print their objections to the more limited goals of Wyvill and his Yorkshire Association.

Particularly in the early stages of the S.C.I., there was a strong link between it and the Westminster Committee, with many individuals serving as members of both organizations. This was significant since within the Westminster Committee Jebb was to find that some, such as Fox, were uncomfortable with the ideas contained in his *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster.* If it had been up to Fox the *Report* and the radical *Plan for taking the suffrages of the people at the election of representatives to serve in Parliament*, would have been quickly buried. Both works, were to be printed and

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volumes cited for this paper are volume I: TS 11/1133 (hereafter S.C.I. Min. Bk. I) and volume II: TS 961/3507 (hereafter S.C.I. Min. Bk. II.)..

[2] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. i, pp. 122-3.

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distributed by the S.C.I., which ensured that the ideas of late eighteenth-century radicalism left a much deeper impression in the British political consciousness and impact on movements like Chartism, situated in the mid-nineteenth century. By contrast, earlier reform organizations, such as Wilke's Society for the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, or even Wyvill's Associated Counties produced very little written material, and therefore left less of a legacy for later generations.[3]

For some reason, Cartwright is generally labeled in books and articles as the founder of the S.C.I.,[4] but since Cartwright was not living in London at this juncture, it was really Jebb who most actively brought about the formation of the S.C.I, though clearly he conferred with Cartwright on many issues regarding the organization. Under Jebb's guidance the S.C.I. drew up a set of rules. The first rule, which was apparently intended for the creation of a democratic society, stated: "That this society be unlimited in its number." Nevertheless, the one guinea annual subscription fee ensured that the organization was not open to artisans and other laborers. No one was allowed to pay in excess of five guineas per year, though a payment of fifty guineas ensured one's place as a perpetual member, a true act of faith considering the brief life of many reform organizations in the late eighteenth century.[5] It was also resolved that when the

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[3] John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 67.

[4] Black, *The Association*, p. 177.

[5] S.C.I. Min. Bk. I, 1.

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organization reached fifty members. a general meeting would be called to approve the rules that had been drawn up and that four regularly scheduled general meetings would be held each year. gatherings which functioned more as social events. since they were held at a local tavern and included many toasts paid for from the Society's funds.

The real work of the S.C.I. was not done at the general meetings. but rather at the twice weekly meetings attended by a small core of individuals. After the first flush of excitement, the meetings were reduced to one per week and a letter had to be sent to absent members to inform them of this change.[6] Within the S.C.I. no one was more of a regular attendee than Jebb with the possible exception of Dr. Richard Brocklesby. who. like Jebb. was a reform minded physician who became an active participant in the Westminster Committee. At these meetings decisions were made regarding the central mission of the Society: what should be published, in what quantities, and how was distribution to be handled?

The first item published by the Society, with a printing of 2,000 copies. was a general address to the public in which its rules were set forth, along with a general appeal for new members. The brief pamphlet expressed the urgent necessity for the existence of such an organization:

> The communication of sound political knowledge to the people at large must be of great national advantage, as nothing but ignorance of their natural rights, or inattention to the consequences of those rights to their interest and happiness, can induce the majority of the inhabitants of any

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[6] S.C.I. Min. Bk. 1, 14.

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> country to submit to any species of civil tyranny.[7]

One path selected in response to this dire need for the populace to be better informed of their rights was taken by Capel Lofft, who was given the daunting task of plowing through the works of Bracton, Fortesque, Selden, Bacon, Harrington, Coke, Blackstone and Priestley among others, in order to focus on "what relates to the rights of the Commons to an equal and complete representation in Parliament."[8] This points up another significant aspect of the history of the the S.C.I.: its role in introducing another British generation to the writings of significant Commonwealthmen, a term which refers to writers who published in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century and whose writings emphasized the liberty of free Englishmen standing in opposition to the threat posed by the proponents of royal absolutism. By the end of the eighteenth century, James Harrington and the political writings of Milton were not being read and certainly there was little interest shown in lesser known writers of this tradition like John Trenchard, who wrote an attack on standing armies during the reign of William III. Nonetheless, the members of the S.C.I. believed that the arguments made within those pages were relevant to their own age and saw to it that Trenchard was reprinted.

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[7] *Address to the Public from the Socity for Constitutional Information* (London, 1780).

[8] S.C.I. Min. Bk. I, 4.

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II

The S.C.I. was not just rooted to the writings of the past. They saw that a proper response to the issues raised in their first formal address to the public was to continue publicizing the reform program put forward by the Westminster committee, while also commissioning special works to appear in S.C.I. sanctioned pamphlets; these pamphlets would also contain articles that had appeared in the newspapers and speeches by radical members of Parliament, or selections from independently published works.
Jebb undertook the task of finding the best samples of contemporary radical thought after he was selected to choose the most persuasive essays in favor of annual parliaments and equal representation that had appeared in the public press since the previous Christmas.[9]

With evident modesty, Jebb discovered that one of the best pieces to have appeared in print was written by himself. In September he had published a letter "To the People of England" under the pseudonym "Alfred." The S.C.I. reprinted the work, which included a call for annual parliaments as well as Jebb's long-standing belief that extraparliamentary political associations could function in the place of a House of Commons, if the latter refused to reform an imperfect constitution.[10] Jebb also selected for reprinting Lord Carysfort's letter to the Huntingdonshire committee, urging the immediate implementation of a petitioning campaign for the reform of parliament, and a copy of the *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster*. In an attempt to include as much material as was feasible

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[9] S.C.I. Min. Bk. I, 6.

[10] Jebb, *Works*, vol. iii, pp. 285-8.

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for this first printing, the S.C.I. added a speech by Thomas Day, a member of the organization and enthusiast for the writings of Rousseau, who is best known as the author of the celebrated children's book *The History of Sandford and Merton.*[11] The society eventually printed three of the speeches of Day. Unfortunately, Day was a secondary political figure and the weak quality of his public utterances are an indication that the society, at least in its early stages, did not always have access to top quality original works.

An assessment of the first year and a half of activity by the S.C.I. reveals a mixed record. They succeeded in printing over 10,000 copies of the Westminster subcommittee report and the other works referred to above, but little else. Since the ability to publish depended on the number of dues-paying members, and no additional sources of funds were available, the apparent inability to generate additional members beyond the thirty who joined after the first month proved to be a major limitation. This was compounded by the problem of distribution, made all the more difficult because most of the members lived within London and its environs, and sending out tracts by coach was prohibitively expensive.[12] By the end of 1781, Jebb and the handful of other members who bothered to show up for the weekly meetings were tossing around the financially unrealistic goal of starting a political magazine, or trying to spice up their pamphlets by issuing an address to

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Black, 181.

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the public in the form of a dialogue "or in some other familiar and interesting form,"[13] which led to the publication of a rather silly *Ode in Imitation of Alcæus*:

> What constitutes a state?
> Not high-rais'd battlement or labour'd mound,
> Thick wall or mounted gate:
> Not cities proud with spires and turrets crown'd:
> Not bays and broad-arm'd ports,
> Where, laughing at the storm, rich navies ride
> Not starr'd and spangled courts,
> When low-brow'd baseness wafts perfume to pride.
> No: - MEN, high-minded MEN.[14]

Despite these problems, the work of the S.C.I. was gaining some attention, even overseas in the American colonies. Because he was familiar with London printers, as a result of his involvement with the S.C.I., Jebb was sought out on at least one occasion by the Americans as a conduit for printing pamphlets from the colonies. Jebb agreed to secretly print and distribute copies of *A Plain State of the Case in a Letter from an American at Bruxelles to his Old Acquaintance John Bull in England for the sagacity of making a speedy peace with America and her allies upon terms friendly to the commerce and Constitution of Great Britain*. The plan eventually went awry, as John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress, related in a letter:

> The inclosed papers were intended for the press but through the treachery of the person by whom they were sent from Bruxelles to London they fell into the hands of the British Ministry before they reached the hands of

[13] S.C.I. Min. Bk. I, 30, 77.

[14] Tracts published and Distributed Gratis by the Society for Constitutional Information (London, 1783), vol. i, pp. 1-2.

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> Dr. Jebb to whom they were directed for publication. As the Authors Family was in London and on account of the temper of the times critically situated it was thought most prudent not to publish this in England.[15]

It was the victory of the American colonists that, incidentally, ensured the continuation of the S.C.I. Clearly, the society was not flourishing. In August 1781, it even decided to postpone meeting for a month since so few members were attending.[16] Yet, the humiliating surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown in October 1781, and the fall of North's ministry in March of the following year, breathed new life into all reform-oriented political organizations.

These bucolic days for the reform movement were not to last for long. For one thing, the competing vision of reform offered by Wyvill and his Yorkshire committee was still compelling to many, much to the distress of Jebb and the other members of the S.C.I. Also, the formation of the Fox-North coalition in April 1783 not only served to fracture the Westminster Committee, but almost did the same with the S.C.I., since there were some Fox loyalists, like Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who were members. The intensity of feelings became even greater during the Westminster election of 1784, when the president of the S.C.I., Capel Lofft, ran against Fox. Fortunately for Jebb and his allies, they were continued to dominate the S.C.I. long after they had lost any hope of doing so within the Westminster Committee. And to their credit, the Society finally hit its stride during this period of turmoil in Westminster politics by finding its ultimate purpose: to continue the

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[15]James Smith to the President of Continental Congress [John Hancock], April 11, 1781. Papers of the Continental Congress, vo. 21, p. 257.

[16] S.C.I. Min. Bk. I, 72.

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fight for a more radical version of parliamentary reform no matter what effect such a position might have on the possibility for moderate change.

Jebb, Lofft, Cartwright and other members of the S.C.I. launched on behalf of the society a series of pamphlets stressing that the franchise was a natural right of freeborn Englishmen, to which they added an appeal to do away with rotten boroughs and end royal interference in the electoral process. To further these goals members of the S.C.I. began to undertake research for a series of tracts that attempted to provide the first accurate information regarding the number of voters within each borough and county so as to show the inequalities of the present system. This renewed zeal resulted in a more confident society, which took the very forward step of abstracting all its earlier writings on reform and printed 500 copies, so that they could be distributed to every member of the House of Commons.[17]

The renewed vigor of the society helped spread its influence into other localities. Members of the society had always hoped that their efforts could be replicated in the rest of England and also within Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In Edinburgh, a committee was organized to inform the S.C.I. that "We have determined after the example of the Society to circulate among our countrymen small tracts and pamphlets on the subject of constitutional liberty."[18] Jebb, who was not in London at the time due to poor health, was pleased to inform the S.C.I. in a letter that, "It has been, to much, the custom to represent

[17] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 8.

[18] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 37.

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the inhabitants of a neighboring kingdom [Scotland] as insensible to the feelings of true patriotism,"[19] and he encouraged the S.C.I. to send to Scotland, in gratitude, twenty-five complete sets of S.C.I. tracts.[20] In Ireland, where the political situation was becoming increasingly tense, sixteen copies of the tracts were sent to Dublin for the use of the armed Irish volunteers, who were beginning to agitate over the question of political reform. Bound copies of the society's tracts were also sent to the newly formed Constitutional Society of Dublin.[21]

The attempt to introduce a Welsh language translation of the society's tracts into Wales brought the S.C.I. new notoriety and made them significant players on the issue of a free press. William Davies Shipley, the Dean of St. Asaph, was asked to privately distribute within Wales copies of *A Dialogue between a Scholar and a Peasant*, a work by William Jones, a member of the society, who was also married to Shipley's sister. Like most requests coming from a brother-in-law, this led to trouble. Several weeks after having faithfully distributed the tracts, the Dean sent a rather melancholy letter to the S.C.I. in which he informed them that "their goodness [in sending him the material to distribute] has put me into a situation that is not a little distressing to a liberal mind."[22] He

[19] Jebb, *Works*, pp. 363-4.

[20] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 2.

[21] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 94-95.

[22] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 17.

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went on to relate that he was being brought into court to answer for a private prosecution for seditious libel.

The society saw this as the perfect opportunity to increase their public presence and immediately informed the Dean that it was "the intention of this society to interest themselves, as far as they can with propriety, in the prosecution commenced against him."[23] An extraordinary meeting was called on May 2, 1783 to deal with the case, at which time the society took the hazardous position of publicly accepting responsibility for the printing of the dialogue.[24] Jebb rushed into print an open letter to the judge in the case in which he stated that, "The censorial power of the people, by which I mean the freedom of the press, which is the bulwark of English liberties, cannot be duly exercised, unless every individual be allowed freely to canvass the public actions of public men."[25] Words like these, published under the imprimatur of the S.C.I., brought about the possibility of prosecution and yet the Society held firm. At a meeting which Jebb chaired it resolved that:

> It is the opinion of the society that notwithstanding some late aspersions thrown out at Wrexham, the publication of extracts relative to the rights and duties of juries, and asserting the right of Englishmen, and the dispersion of them in any part of the Kingdom, is, in the strictest degree, legal and Constitutional, and peculiarly proper in a society professedly established for the purpose of promoting constitutional information.[26]

[23] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 6.

[24] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 8.

[25] Jebb, *Complete Works*, p. 369.

[26] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 31.

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Eventually, a sympathetic jury found the Dean "guilty of publishing only" and when his lawyer moved for no judgment to be given due to the confusion posed by the jury's reluctance to give a firm decision, the judge agreed to this request.[27] In the immediate aftermath, the Dean of St. Asaph, somewhat embarrassed by all the attention, was rewarded for his courage by being nominated and granted membership in the S.C.I.[28] More importantly, this case helped provide the background for the passage of Fox's Libel Act of 1792, which took the right to decide the fact of libel away from judges and left it in the hands of juries.

The rush of activity over the Dean of St. Asaph's case was in many ways the high water mark for the S.C.I. Financial problems continued to plague the organization, with many members in arrears, in some instances for several years with the result that a subcommittee was formed to look into records maintained "from books very inaccurately kept."[29] The S.C.I. continued to pay attention to a number of issues, including the slave trade,[30] and also worked to support the Quintuple Alliance in its attempt to create a metropolitan counterweight to the Yorkshire Association. Jebb subsequently wrote a

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[27] Thomas Howell (Ed.), *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, XXI (London, 1820), 846-876.

[28] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 74.

[29] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 60.

[30] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 76.

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number of tracts for the organization but the combination of declining health and the fact that his attention was focused on the contentious election in Westminster limited his participation for a time.

When Pitt made his final attempt to bring about a reform of parliament, Wyvill, who was given the task of trying to bring over extraparliamentary support to Pitt's side, attempted to court the members of the S.C.I. The first meeting he attended was on December 28, 1784, and broached the topic, while in May he returned to explain the provisions of the bill to the members. While Jebb found the bill lacking, he graciously supported the yes vote which approved the printing and distribution of 2,000 copies of it.[31] This was to be the last major decision made by the Society during Jebb's lifetime. The next major discussion did not take place until March 1786, when they considered how to commemorate the passing of John Jebb, the very heart and soul of the Society.[32]

[31] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 108.

[32] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 128.

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Epilogue

I

One of the central aspects of the life of John Jebb was his intense love of the scriptures. This was to provide tremendous solace when towards the end of his life, he saw with despair how the House of Commons stood in the way of reform; factional struggles weakened the effectiveness of the Westminster Committee and the Society for Constitutional Information; and his trust in Charles James Fox turned out to be greatly misplaced. In a reflexive mood, Jebb wrote in his personal diary of the links between political duplicity and a flawed moral underpinning:

> I am more and more persuaded that the evils of government and the want of felicity in the governed, as well as deficiency in true patriotism, arise from the want of a moral and religious principle, which the religion of the gospel, unveiled in its excellence can alone afford. Let this animate to push on the combined causes of a diffusion and right arrangement of political power, and of philosophical knowledge of the scriptures.[1]

As a means of finding some anchor in a tumultuous world, Jebb returned to his first passion: the study of scriptures.

Fortunately, he had a group of colleagues who became interested in forming an organization which would publish critical studies of the scriptures. Theophilus Lindsey,

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[1] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 189.

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the creative force behind the formation of what became known as the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures. invited Jebb to attend the first meeting of the organization, which was held on September 29, 1783. Eventually the Society had 30 members with 10 living in London and able to actively participate.[2] At the first meeting Jebb presented his *Sketch of the Plan of the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures* (1783). In many ways he was the perfect choice to put together a workable plan for the Society, since to a great extent it was organized in similar fashion to the S.C.I., with both organizations having as their primary function the publishing of tracts. Even the language that Jebb used for his *Sketch* could have come out of the S.C.I. plan: "It is another part of the design of the society, to reprint such tracts or papers, upon those important subjects, as shall be thought worthy of renewed attention."[3]

Jebb's *Sketch* laid out the work that the Society hoped to achieve. This was to analyze detached portions of scriptures rather than larger pieces such as chapters. Since the bible was eminently rational, much could be comprehended through a close textual reading, instead of what Jebb referred to as the usual "injudicious and indeed preposterous method of inquiry." It was of paramount importance that the right of private judgment be absolute. No single methodology or interpretation was to be demanded by the society of

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[2] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, October 22, 1783. John Rylands University Library.

[3] John Jebb, *A Sketch of the Plan of the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures* (1783), p. 252.

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its authors. The end result, for both authors and readers, would be an increase in piety and a greater spirit of benevolence among men.[4]

Jebb could not put together his plan for the Society without including criticism of the Church of England. That the Society was supposed to be the enemy of dogmatism meant that it was directly attacking the Church of England, which had always emphasized certain basic tenets of faith, such as those laid out in the Thirty-nine Articles. Instead of the preconceptions which divines of the Church of England invariably brought to the table as being established by early authorities and declared to be essential teachings of the church, scriptural study should be a "laborious investigation into fact." No interpretation should be attempted until a close reading of the text had been made.[5]

The reaction by some within the Church of England to Jebb's *Sketch*, as well as to the formation of the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures, was, not surprisingly, rather harsh. Lindsey was particularly angered by an attack on Joseph Priestley and the Society that was published in the *Monthly Review*.[6] In response Lindsey maintained to a friend, "We are not formed for controversy." But he was willing to respond in print to

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[4] John Jebb, *A Sketch of the Plan of the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures* (1783), pp. 239-240.

[5] John Jebb, *A Sketch of the Plan of the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures* (1783), pp. 240-1.

[6] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, October 10, 1783. John Rylands University Library.

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these attacks, since "the enemy take undue advantage, and publish that we have associated for nothing else" other than to denigrate the established Church.[7]

Lindsey was very pleased with Jebb's plan and informed another member, William Tayleur, that "I persuade myself that you will be much pleased with this sketch. It will stand very properly at the head of any publications that may follow when bound up together."[8] Eventually 1250 copies were printed, though formal invitations to join the society were sent only to a few individuals who Lindsey thought might be sympathetic to its goals.[9] One who refused an invitation was the irascible Francis Blackburne. In a letter Lindsey noted that his father-in-law "has returned rather a rough answer: but such is his nature, with those particularly when he has some right to make free with. He has some sort of Trinity or Divinity of Christ, what it is he would never reveal, which keeps him from all union with those he calls Socinians, whom he has sometimes declared that he hardly regards as Christians, and this keeps him aloof."[10]

A pamphlet was printed on the day of the first meeting of the society entitled *Rules for the Regulation of a Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures*. It provided

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[7] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, October 10, 1783. John Rylands University Library.

[8] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, November 11, 1783. John Rylands University Library.

[9] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, November 11, 1783. John Rylands University Library.

[10] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, October 18, 1783, John Rylands University Library.

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that meetings were to take place on the first Monday of every month. Members had to pay a subscription of between one and five guineas. The leadership was to consist of a rotating presidency, though only a simple majority of the members was needed to approve the publishing of a pamphlet.[11] And while there was a tremendous desire to "publish, occasionally, in successive numbers and at irregular intervals, such papers as have been approved," raising adequate funds was the immediate concern.[12] While a number of individuals signed up for subscriptions, including Edmund Law, John Cartwright and Joseph Priestley, the numbers were never adequate to cover the expenses of printing. The financial situation improved somewhat when Lindsey's close friend William Tayleur sent one hundred pounds to the society[13] and at the second meeting of the society on November 7, it was decided somewhat prematurely, that since they had enough money to meet their expenses for the next year, they would not ask the members to pay subscription fees.[14]

Jebb was an active participant in the Society and sat on a committee to examine a paper on a new interpretation of a passage in the Gospel of John.[15] However, after

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[11] *Rules for the Regulation of a Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures* (London, 1783), p. 4.

[12] John Jebb, *A Sketch of the Plan of the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures* (1783), p. 253.

[13] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Turner, December 5, 1783, Dr. Williams Library, 12:44:44

[14] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Turner, November 6, 1783, Dr. Williams Library, 12:44:40.

[15] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Turner, November 6, 1783, Dr. Williams Library, 12:44:40.

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attending a meeting on July 6, 1784, he left London due to his failing health. In his absence the Society underwent some fundamental changes. They debated whether they should alter their initial plans and circulate tracts on more controversial issues such as the Trinity. Eventually, the majority indicated that they were interested in such changes but the issue was never formally resolved.[16] Lindsey favored a more radical approach since he hoped the Society might become a more prominent mouthpiece for the Unitarian cause. For instance, one pamphlet met with Lindsey's disapproval because it did not spell out explicitly the author's Unitarian viewpoint, which Lindsey believed meant that the author had "missed an opportunity of doing himself honour and serving the cause of both."[17]

By 1785 Lindsey noted with great disappointment that "our society does not flourish at the present."[18] Still, pamphlets appeared from time to time, though Jebb was too ill to contribute and as late as July 14, 1786, Joseph Priestley wrote to Lindsey, "I shall be glad to see the new number of your Connections. The last was particularly valuable. If you were to write ever so often in defense of Unitarianism, you would always, I think, find something new, and it must be exhibited in every view, to counteract

[16] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, August 20, 1784, John Rylands University Library.

[17] Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, June 5, 1784, John Rylands University Library.

[18]Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, M.A.* 2nd Edition (London, 1873), p. 114.

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the attempts of the Trinitarians, who leave no stone unturned to promote their cause.[19] Soon after this letter, however, the Society disbanded due to lack of funds.[20]

II

Illness continued to plague Jebb. Once again, in the fall of 1785, he left London, this time for Cheltenham, where he hoped to regain his shattered health. While in Cheltenham he spent his time studying Old English along with law and history. He also became very interested in the question of prison reform and completed the last publication of his life, his *Thoughts on the construction and polity of prisons with hints for their improvement* (1785).[21]

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[19] Joseph Priestley, *Theological Works and Miscellaneous Works*. Edited by J.T. Rutt (London, 1832), pp. 394-395.

[20] Lindsey was still keen on the idea of having a publication that would voice the Unitarian point of view and in 1791 a Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge was established to be shortly thereafter renamed the New Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. It was more doctrinaire than the earlier organization and in the preamble to the plan for the new society, Thomas Belsham called the worship of Christ "adolatrous"[20] Lindsey had learned a number of lessons from the failure of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and was able to make a success of this later organization.

[21] Jebb was not the only contemporary radical to think about prisons. The Duke of Richmond, the author of a plan for universal male suffrage, decided as Lord Lieutenant of Sussex to reform the jail at Horsham. He had his personal architect, William Ride, design a new prison, with 40 cells in a two story building, a design which was accepted in 1775. Likewise in the United States, Benjamin Rush, in May 1787, organized the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons. See: Robin Evans, T*he Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

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Part of the reason that radicals like Jebb may have been interested in the question of imprisonment was that the prison population was rising rapidly in the late eighteenth century. [The causes for this increase are still being debated, with the end of the punishment of transportation, due to the war with the American colonies, serving as one possibility.][22] Between 1775 and 1795, at least 45 new prisons were built in England.[23] Also, the medical field, Jebb's other profession, was becoming increasingly concerned about prison ventilation, particularly since this was believed to be the cause of a disease which contemporaries referred to as goal fever.[24] Jebb maintained in his pamphlet that places of confinement had to be ventilated frequently and that the walls of prisons should be made lower to allow fresh air to circulate.[25]

For Sidney and Beatrice Webb, writing in the early twentieth century, the blame for the failings of the eighteenth-century prison system stemmed from the "amazing administrative device, at that time almost universally adopted, of converting the keeping of a prison into a profit-making private business.[26] Jebb would have agreed with this and he supported the work of the contemporary prison reformer, John Howard, who wrote in his

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[22] Margaret DeLacy, *Prison Reform in Lancashire, 1700-1850* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 57-71.

[23] Robin Evans, T*he Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 94.

[24] Robin Evans, T*he Fabrication of Virtue*, pp. 94-117.

[25] Jebb, *Works*, vol. ii, p. 559.

[26] Sidney Webb & Beatrice Webb, *English Prisons Under Local Government* (London, 1922), p. 18.

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State of Prisons in England and Wales [1774] that "It is impossible to place any degree of *profit* in competition with the prospect of meliorating the minds of our fellow creatures."[27] Jebb was greatly influenced by the pioneering work of Howard, who after being selected as Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1773, made an extended tour of every prison in England in Wales in preparation for his book.[28] What Jebb admired about Howard's work was that it attempted to list in a rational, organized manner, the conditions found in each of the prisons he visited. Jebb also admired Howard's proposed solutions to the problem, including his proposals to place prisons outside populated areas and limit their height to two stories.[29]

Jebb's work anticipated Bentham's panoptikon in his emphasis on creating prisons in which the jailer would be able to monitor the activity of the prisoners from one central station, without having to place himself in danger by having to make rounds on foot. Where Jebb would differ greatly from Bentham was in his insistence that the army not be involved in any part of maintaining prisons:

> The utmost care should be taken, that the restraint of liberty, even in the case of the most atrocious crimes, should be as mild as the circumstances will admit: that the establishment of the proper rules and orders, and the mode of carrying them into execution, should be entirely under the control of the magistrates and gentlemen of the district; that in no particular, or possible circumstance, they should be liable to the interference of the established army: and with every proper caution guarded against the tyranny or over-bearing

[27] Evans, p. 120.

[28] Evans, p. 10.

[29] Jebb, *Works*, vol. ii, p. 561.

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> influence of any man, or set of men, who hold their appointment from the crown. Better, far better, that all the present evils and disorders, however grievous, should continue, than that, under specious pretenses, liberty, the choicest gift of heaven to man, without which no other blessing can convey real enjoyment of the rational mind, should be impaired, perhaps totally destroyed, by the introduction of a French system of police, even into our gaols.[30]

On the other hand, Bentham wanted the force guarding his Panopticon to be made up of regular soldiers, and thought that writers like Jebb were infected with too ardent a "zeal for liberty."[31] It was a suitable epigram for a life that was about to come to a close.

III

In February 1786 Jebb moved to Egham for several weeks in an attempt to regain his health. For the previous several weeks he had been seriously ill, but still insisted on seeing his patients. At Egham Jebb wrote to Brand Hollis: "The sight of nature in her first exertions, is itself enough to make a man better. I think I feel its force."[32] Unfortunately, nature was not planning to be beneficent. Jebb returned to his house on Parliament Street in late February and died on the evening of Thursday, March 2, 1786.

One week later a group of mourners gathered at Bunhill Fields. Among the mourners were the Duke of Richmond, John Adams, Price, Sharp, Lofft, and Brand Hollis. Jebb was buried on unconsecrated ground with the service being performed by

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[30] Jebb, *Works*, vol. ii, pp. 564-5.

[31] Janet Semple, *Bentham's Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 121.

[32] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 225.

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Theophilus Lindsey. Towards its end someone read a little poem written especially for the occasion:

Good, learned, sensible, sincere, farewell.
Thy worth my heart, but not my tongue can tell.

After it was read it to the assembled mourners, the poem was set on fire.[33]

The grief of Jebb's friends was intense. Brand Hollis was not alone in wondering, "Where shall we find a substitute of equal worth."[34] Wyvill also fondly remembered a man he had so often disagreed with:

> He was a man of great abilities, of extensive learning; eloquent in his writing and in debate; amiable for his candour and benevolence; exemplary for his piety, and the strict morality of his private life; and in his public conduct he maintained Truth with the intrepidity of a Martyr.[35]

Meanwhile, an anonymous tribute appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which noted that when acting as a preacher, Jebb possessed, "simplicity, clearness, peculiar power of persuasion, energy, the advantages of voice and manner, judgment, candour and simplicity."[36] Nor was Jebb forgotten as the years passed. In his autobiography written shortly before his death in 1816, Richard Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, fondly

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[33] *Gentlemen's Magazine*, vol. 56 (1786), p. 267.

[34] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 236.

[35] Wyvill, *Political Papers*, vol. iv, p. 520.

[36] *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 56 (1786), p. 194.

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remembered his old friend and said, "I am desirous that my name should go down to posterity, as the friend of Dr. John Jebb."[37]

The S.C.I. immediately formed a subcommittee to look into how to honor their founder. Besides voting their thanks to John Adams for honoring Jebb by attending his funeral, they convened a special meeting to organize a subscription to pay for a portrait bust by the noted sculpture Flaxman, though oddly the motion to raise funds for the bust was withdrawn and it was left to Jebb's loyal friend Cecil Wray to pay for the bust out of his own pocket.[38] The bust is today apparently lost, but in the first edition of Jebb's complete works there is an engraving of Jebb by John Hall, which shows a thin face, delicate features, a long thin nose and wide eyes. It was most likely based on the bust by Flaxman. The impecuniousness of the Society in its final years meant that while they continued for the next several years to toast the memory of Jebb at their banquets, they rejected the idea of purchasing 100 copies of his pamphlet on prisons. However, eventually Wray once again came to the rescue and purchased and distributed them.[39]

While the S.C.I. made a rather poor showing of honoring their colleague, the sorrow of Jebb's friends was compounded by their concerns for the well-being of Ann Jebb. Brand Hollis wrote to Disney: "Poor Mrs. Jebb! I dread to inquire concerning her; her loss is beyond the conception of common minds. 'Tis not merely of a husband, a

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[37] Richard Watson, *Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson, bishop of Llandaff* (London, 1818), p. 101.

[38] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 142-3.

[39] S.C.I. Min. Bk. II, 143.

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partner in a common interest: but her guardian and protector, her guide, philosopher and friend."[40] Shortly after his death Jebb's friends raised some money for the maintenance of Ann.[41] though financial problems were a continuing problem and in the following year Jebb's books were auctioned off.[42] Ann Jebb, who never remarried, died in 1812 and was buried next to her husband.

Almost immediately after Jebb's death steps were undertaken to raise money to publish his collected writings together with a biography written by Jebb's dear friend, John Disney.[43] Ann Jebb, for unspecified reasons, had doubts regarding the publication.[44] Others, however, were more enthusiastic, and after it appeared in print, Priestley wrote to Lindsey, "I have received Dr. Jebb's Works. It is much beyond my expectations, and does Dr. Disney much credit."[45] The biography was republished on three separate occasions and, appropriately, it was also sent to Jebb's friends in the United States, whose struggle for independence had always been close to his heart.

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[40] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 235.

[41] Joseph Priestley, *Theological Works and Miscellaneous Works*. Edited by J.T. Rutt (London, 1832), p. 412.

[42] *A Catalogue of Books Including the Libraries of John Jebb, M.D. L.D. Nelme, Esq. And Several Other Collections*. Thomas and John Egerton, 1787.

[43] Disney, *Life of Jebb*, p. 20.

[44] Herbert McLachlan, (Ed.), *The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey* (Manchester: The University Press, 1920), p. 104.

[45] Joseph Priestley, *Theological Works and Miscellaneous Works*. Edited by J.T. Rutt (London, 1832), p. 410.

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IV

The life of John Jebb reveals much about the nature of political reform in Great Britain on the eve of the French Revolution, including how we can account for the rise of the parliamentary reform movement that played such a significant role in British politics in the last decades of the eighteenth century. While the means towards becoming involved in the reform cause was just as varied as the number of individuals who were involved in it, there were certain major patterns for which John Jebb can serve as a model. His life serves as a telling example of the link between religious dissent and radicalism, and the way in which disenchantment with practices of the Church of England could ultimately lead to political disenchantment. Jebb was strongly influenced by the agitation over the Feather's Tavern Petition. The failure of the petition, in the face of Parliamentary opposition in 1772, more than any other event convinced religious reformers like Jebb that the House of Commons could never serve as an agent of change for the Church, and this led to a belief that it could also not bring about a substantive reform of the political culture.

Once he arrived in London, Jebb found that there was a new momentum for change growing out of disenchantment over the conflict with the American colonies. Unlike John Cartwright and his *Take Your Choice!*, Jebb never wrote a major piece on the conflict with the colonies. Nevertheless, the American Revolution provided an important stimulus for Jebb's political thought. Following the failure of the Feather's Tavern Petition, the American Revolution provided an additional focus for Jebb's disenchantment with political

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life in Great Britain. From this sense of uneasiness with the state of the British polity came Jebb's involvement in metropolitan politics.

Jebb's most significant contribution to British radicalism came from his ability to translate radical ideas into a program for action. In this regard he was a precursor to the activist radicalism of the first half of the nineteenth century, which by mid-century had reached its peak with the Chartist movement. Nowhere can this been seen more clearly than in his *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex*, in which Jebb argued that the people had the right to create new representative bodies should the Commons refuse to not just accept the need for reform, but also immediately begin to implement the necessary changes. While it seems unlikely that Jebb was "thinking of the barricades,"[46] he does offer a theoretical justification for later groups, such as the Chartists, for whom barricades were a distinct possibility. In his other important pamphlet, the *Report of the Subcommittee of Westminster*, Jebb offered a powerful argument in support of universal male suffrage, based on attachment to one's community that went beyond mere property ownership, a theme that would be repeated by political reformers throughout the nineteenth century.

Jebb also made a significant contribution to radicalism through his ability as a propagandist. Unlike Wyvill and Cartwright, for example, Jebb was an intellectual who framed his arguments in the language of Newton and Locke. Yet he was also an organizer who played a significant role in the creation of Society for Constitutional Information.

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[46] Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthmen* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 383.

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Thomas Hardy, the radical shoemaker who was the founder of the London Corresponding Society, a leading radical organization in the 1790s, not only read Jebb, but learned how to set up committees of correspondence from Jebb's work with the Society for Constitutional Information.[47]

Any biography of Jebb has to confront the issue that in his lifetime none of his reformist ideas came to fruition. At the time of his death the Church of England was still mandating clerical subscriptions and holding to doctrines that Jebb felt lacked a scriptural basis, exam reform had failed at Cambridge, hospitals were still places to avoid if one hoped to get well, prisoners were still not treated in a humanitarian fashion, and in perhaps the greatest setback of all, the House of Commons remained unreformed. Yet to say that his life was a failure would not be correct. According to Benjamin Rush, Jebb's favorite saying was "no good effort is lost."[48] Jebb was always aware of the strength of the forces which opposed him and never underestimated their potential to stand in his way. Perhaps what was most extraordinary about him was his desire to go on with the struggle even with that knowledge.

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[47] *Selections From the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*. Edited by Mary Thale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 5.

[48] L. H. Butterfield (Ed.), *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1951), pp. 825-827.

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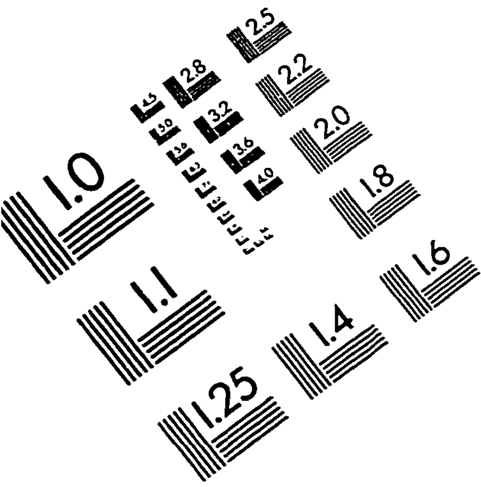

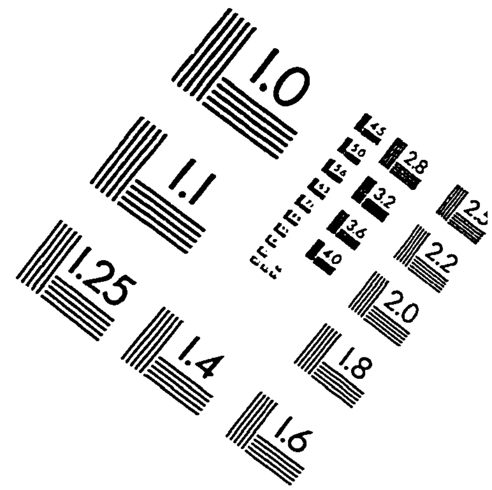

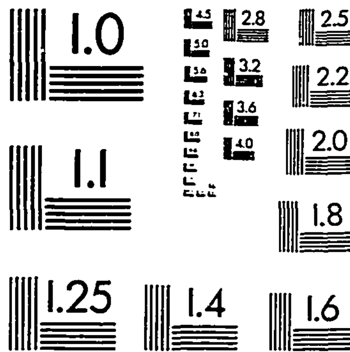

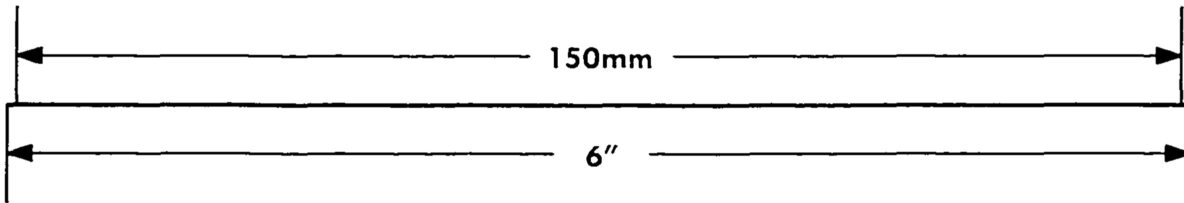

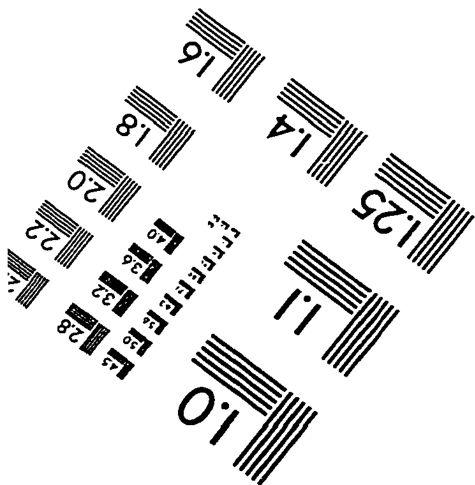

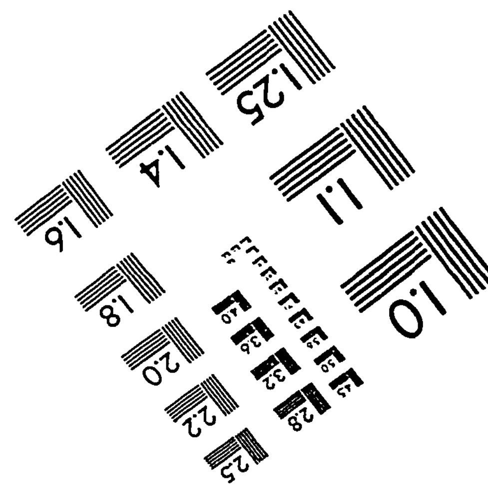

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