

INTRODUCTION

WE now come to the great Andean range of the Walpolean continent. The correspondence with the elder Horace Mann extends from Walpole's twenty-third year to his sixty-ninth, from 1740 to 1786, from the Age of Pope to the appearance of the Kilmarnock Burns. For sweep and variety and the procession of great events it is unrivalled among Walpole's correspondences: the reader who goes through it from beginning to end will acquire, we suggest, a fuller picture of the period than he can get from any other writer in it. And if these letters had been his only ones to survive, Walpole's place as a letter-writer would be just what it is.

The correspondence with Mann quickens and slows according to the pulse of national affairs. The present instalment ends quietly with the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, but the calm does not last long: 'Our King is returned and our Parliament met,' Walpole wrote on 2 December 1748, 'we expected nothing but harmony and tranquillity, and love of the peace; but the very first day opened with a black cloud, that threatens a stormy session.' The correspondence picks up and moves on briskly until the next quiet period. Mann and Walpole were conscientious correspondents; for the most part they wrote letter for letter, regularly, and with little divergence of opinion.

Mann's letters are here printed in full for the first time. They have not in the past been flatteringly described. Lord Dover called them 'particularly devoid of interest, as they are written in a dry, heavy style, and consist almost entirely of trifling details of forgotten Florentine society, mixed with small portions of Italian political news of the day, which are even still less amusing than the former topic.'¹ Cunningham said that they were 'absolutely unreadable.'² Even Dr Doran, who made in 1876 the selections from them that he called '*Mann*' and *Manners at the Court of*

1. *Letters of Horace Walpole . . . to Sir Horace Mann*, 1833, i. pp. ix-x.

2. *Letters of Horace Walpole, Fourth Earl of Orford*, 1857-9, i. p. xv.