

Chapter 1 : William Hazlitt: Systematic patrons of eternal war | Antiwar literary and philosophical selections

*Selections From William Hazlitt () [William Hazlitt, Will David Howe] on racedaydvl.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. This scarce antiquarian book is a facsimile reprint of the original.*

William Hazlitt On The Late War The systematic patrons of eternal war are always returning when they dare to the point from which they set out twenty years ago; the war with them has not yet lost its original character: We cannot but admire their candour as well as their consistency, and would wish to imitate it. This splendid reverie is not yet accomplished. The triumph of the Pitt-school over the peace-faction is not yet complete; but we are put in complete possession of what is required to make it so. As the war with them was a war of extermination, so the peace, not to fix a lasting stigma on their school and principles, must be a peace of extermination. This is what we always said and thought of those principles and that school. This is their triumph, their only triumph – the true crown of their hopes, the consummation of their utmost wishes, nothing short of which can satisfy their proud pretensions, or finish this just and necessary war, as it was begun. If they succeed in neither experiment, all that they have done is surely lost labour. But we shall let them feast alone: We did not approve it in its commencement or progress; nor will we hail its threatened conclusion. We have had, and we will have, no hand in the plot, the execution, the scene-shifting, or the decoration. In our opinion, lives enough have been thrown away to prove that the survivors are only born to bear fardels. This is the moral of the piece, if it succeeds on the principles of the Pitt-school and all short of that is mere gratuitous mischief. The war, as it was carried on from the first by the Pitt-school, and as they would now revive it, was not a national quarrel, but a question about a political principle. It had no more to do with France or England as geographical denominations, than the wars between the Guelphs and Ghibelines. It was not a war of mercantile advantage, or a trial of strength between two countries which must be decided by the turn of events, by the probable calculation of loss and profit, but a war against an opinion, which could, therefore, never cease, but with the extirpation of that opinion. Hence there could be neither safety, nor honour, nor justice, in any terms of peace with the French government, because, by the supposition, it was not with its power or its conduct, but with its existence, that we were at war. Hence the impossibility of maintaining the relations of peace and amity with France. Hence the ridiculousness asserted by The Courier, of even attempting negotiation with this hated power. Whether this was a just ground of war or not, is another question; but it was the true one – that which gave its character to the war, and accounts for all its consequences. It was a war of proscription against a great and powerful state, for having set the example of a people ridding itself of an odious and despicable tyranny. It was the question of the balance of power between kings and people; a question compared with which the balance of power in Europe is petty and insignificant. That what we have here stated, are the real and paramount grounds of this bloody and inveterate contest in the minds of the war-faction is what we apprehend they will not, in their present state of frenzy, deny. They are the only one that always survive the shock of accident and the fluctuation of the circumstances, and which are always recurred to when all others fail, and are constantly avowed in the face of day, whenever the least probability of success attends them. It has been declared again and again, month after month, and year after year, that no peace should be made with France, till the last remaining effort has been tried to attain this object. We were to bury ourselves with our great war-minister under the ruins of the civilized world, sooner than relax in our exertions or recede from our object. No sacrifices were to be held too dear – no sufferings too great in the prosecution of this sacred cause. No other than the last extremity was to force peace from us. Nothing short of the complete subjugation of France was to satisfy us – nothing short of our own ruin was to drive us to despair. We were like wrestlers struggling on the edge of a precipice, one or both of whom must be certain of destruction. Such were the mad, mischievous, and unprincipled terms on which a pampered crew of sycophants have played away the welfare, the repose, the liberties, and happiness of mankind, on which they would now urge us to stake our all again to realize their favourite scheme of the march to Paris, and the annihilation of the French people. The consequences of the Pitt project were inevitable. From the moment that the existence of France as a nation was declared to be incompatible with that of the surrounding states – that

she was denounced as a nuisance which must be abated, and set up as a mark for the vengeance of the rest of the world, the struggle necessarily became convulsive and the re-action terrible. Is it then a matter of wonder, that in this unnatural strife, France, proscribed, hunted down, put out of the pale of nations, endeavoured rather to reduce others to the last extremity than to be reduced to it herself? Or are we entitled to wreak that vengeance upon her which we could not at first execute, because the engine which we had prepared to crush her has recoiled with the greatest violence upon ourselves? It has been said that we less easily forgive the injuries we do or meditate against others than those we receive from them. There are, we know, persons to whom the celebrated line of the historian, is, at all times, applicable; *Odia in longum jaciens, quae conderet, auctaque promeret*. We are not surprised to find that the good intentions of those person towards France, though she did not submit to the original tender made to her of their kind interference and paternal care, have not spoiled by keeping. If Titus complained with so much bitterness that he had lost a day to virtue, what must not some modern friend to mankind feel when they reflect that they have lost so many years in the execution of their just and beneficent plans! But it may be said, do we mean to apply these remarks to Bonaparte? As far as relates to the merits of the war-faction. Was the iron scourge which he has held over Europe put into his hands by the peace-party? Were the battles of Austerlitz and Jena, were the March to Vienna, the possession of Berlin, the invasion of Spain, the expedition to Russia, and the burning of Moscow the consequences of the signing or the of the breaking of the treaty of Amiens? The author of the letters of *Vetus* who we suppose is silenced by *The Times*, for asserting that the Bourbons have no more a lawful right to the throne of France, at this moment, than the Stuarts had to the throne of England twenty years after the Revolution of , is of opinion that this war is merely national, merely the old grudge between the two countries; and that the Bourbons, the Republic, and Bonaparte, are equally hostile to England, and we to them. In this, as in most things else, our opinion is the opposite of hisâ€¦.

Chapter 2 : Selections From William Hazlitt

This volume gives, as far as space permits, essays of Hazlitt which distinguish him as a critic of painting, of the drama, of books, and Of life. If the lover Of Hazlitt fails to find here some favorite essay, let him take consolation from the fact that the present editor has again and again been.

Not entirely satisfied with his Presbyterian faith, he became a Unitarian minister in England. In he became pastor at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, where in he married Grace Loftus, daughter of a recently deceased ironmonger. Of their many children, only three survived infancy. The first of these, John later known as a portrait painter , was born in at Marshfield in Gloucestershire, where the Reverend William Hazlitt had accepted a new pastorate after his marriage. In , the elder Hazlitt accepted yet another position and moved with his family to Maidstone , Kent, where his first and only surviving daughter, Margaret usually known as "Peggy" , was born that same year. In , when he was two, his family began a nomadic lifestyle that was to last several years. From Maidstone his father took them to Bandon, County Cork , Ireland; and from Bandon in to the United States , where the elder Hazlitt preached, lectured, and sought a ministerial call to a liberal congregation. His efforts to obtain a post did not meet with success, although he did exert a certain influence on the founding of the first Unitarian church in Boston. Hazlitt would remember little of his years in America, save the taste of barberries. Priestley, whom Hazlitt had read and who was also one of his teachers, was an impassioned commentator on political issues of the day. This, along with the turmoil in the wake of the French Revolution, sparked in Hazlitt and his classmates lively debates on these issues, as they saw their world being transformed around them. While, out of respect for his father, Hazlitt never openly broke with his religion, he suffered a loss of faith, and left Hackney before completing his preparation for the ministry. He had read widely and formed habits of independent thought and respect for the truth that would remain with him for life. And, though harsh experience and disillusionment later compelled him to qualify some of his early ideas about human nature , he was left with a hatred of tyranny and persecution that he retained to his dying days, [22] as expressed a quarter-century afterward in the retrospective summing up of his political stance in his collection of Political Essays: I cannot sit quietly down under the claims of barefaced power, and I have tried to expose the little arts of sophistry by which they are defended. In September , he had met William Godwin , [24] the reformist thinker whose recently published Political Justice had taken English intellectual circles by storm. His intense studies focused on man as a social and political animal, and, in particular, on the philosophy of mind, a discipline that would later be called psychology. He also familiarized himself with the works of Edmund Burke , whose writing style impressed him enormously. In the meantime the scope of his reading had broadened and new circumstances had altered the course of his career. Yet, to the end of his life, he would consider himself a philosopher. From Fawcett, in the words of biographer Ralph Wardle, he imbibed a love for "good fiction and impassioned writing", Fawcett being "a man of keen intelligence who did not scorn the products of the imagination or apologize for his tastes". In large part, however, Hazlitt was then living a decidedly contemplative existence, one somewhat frustrated by his failure to express on paper the thoughts and feelings that were churning within him. This encounter, a life-changing event, was subsequently to exercise a profound influence on his writing career that, in retrospect, Hazlitt regarded as greater than any other. A minister at the time, Coleridge had as yet none of the fame that would later accrue to him as a poet, critic, and philosopher. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion. Rambling across the countryside, they talked of poetry, philosophy, and the political movements that were shaking up the old order. This unity of spirit was not to last: Hazlitt himself would recall disagreeing with Wordsworth on the philosophical underpinnings of his projected poem The Recluse, [40] just as he had earlier been amazed that Coleridge could dismiss David Hume , regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of that century, as a charlatan. Although he never abandoned his goal of writing a philosophical treatise on the disinterestedness of the human mind, it had to be put aside indefinitely. Still dependent on his father, he was now obliged to earn his own living. His brother, John, had by now become a successful painter of miniature portraits. So it occurred to William that he might earn a living similarly, and he began to take lessons from

John. By , his work was considered good enough that a portrait he had recently painted of his father was accepted for exhibition by the Royal Academy. This was one of the great opportunities of his life. He also happened to catch sight of Napoleon , a man he idolised as the rescuer of the common man from the oppression of royal " Legitimacy ". Hazlitt aimed to create the best pictures he could, whether they flattered their subjects or not, and neither poet was satisfied with his result, though Wordsworth and their mutual friend Robert Southey considered his portrait of Coleridge a better likeness than one by the celebrated James Northcote. He had however grossly misread her intentions and an altercation broke out which led to his precipitous retreat from the town under cover of darkness. This public blunder placed a further strain on his relations with both Coleridge and Wordsworth, which were already fraying for other reasons. Godwin intervened to help him find a publisher, and the work, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action: Being an Argument in favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind*, was printed in a limited edition of copies by Joseph Johnson on 19 July . Although the treatise he valued above anything else he wrote was never, at least in his own lifetime, recognised for what he believed was its true worth, [60] it brought him attention as one who had a grasp of contemporary philosophy. He therefore was commissioned to abridge and write a preface to a now obscure work of mental philosophy, *The Light of Nature Pursued by Abraham Tucker* originally published in seven volumes from to , which appeared in [61] and may have had some influence on his own later thinking. Here he replaced the dense, abstruse manner of his philosophical work with the trenchant prose style that was to be the hallmark of his later essays. In the prefaces to the speeches, he began to show a skill he would later develop to perfection, the art of the pithy character sketch. He was able to find more work as a portrait painter as well. Miss Stoddart, an unconventional woman, accepted Hazlitt and tolerated his eccentricities just as he, with his own somewhat offbeat individualism, accepted her. Together they made an agreeable social foursome with the Lambs, who visited them when they set up a household in Winterslow , a village a few miles from Salisbury , Wiltshire, in southern England. The couple had three sons over the next few years, Only one of their children, William , born in , survived infancy. He in turn fathered William Carew Hazlitt. Through William Godwin, with whom he was frequently in touch, he obtained a commission to write an English grammar , published on 11 November as *A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue*. Though completed in , this work did not see the light of day until , and so provided no financial gain to satisfy the needs of a young husband and father. Hazlitt in the meantime had not forsaken his painterly ambitions. His environs at Winterslow afforded him opportunities for landscape painting, and he spent considerable time in London procuring commissions for portraits. A central thesis of the talks was that Thomas Hobbes , rather than John Locke, had laid the foundations of modern philosophy. After a shaky beginning, Hazlitt attracted some attention—and some much-needed money—by these lectures, and they provided him with an opportunity to expound some of his own ideas. Although he had demonstrated some talent, the results of his most impassioned efforts always fell far short of the very standards he had set by comparing his own work with the productions of such masters as Rembrandt, Titian , and Raphael. It did not help that, when painting commissioned portraits, he refused to sacrifice his artistic integrity to the temptation to flatter his subjects for remunerative gain. The results, not infrequently, failed to please their subjects, and he consequently failed to build a clientele. In John Milton moved into a "pretty garden-house" in Petty France. He lived there until the Restoration. Later it became No. Soon he met John Hunt , publisher of *The Examiner* , and his younger brother Leigh Hunt , the poet and essayist, who edited the weekly paper. Hazlitt admired both as champions of liberty, and befriended especially the younger Hunt, who found work for him. He began to contribute miscellaneous essays to *The Examiner* in , and the scope of his work for the *Chronicle* was expanded to include drama criticism , literary criticism , and political essays. A year earlier, with the prospect of a steady income, he had moved his family to a house at 19 York Street , Westminster , which had been occupied by the poet John Milton , whom Hazlitt admired above all English poets except Shakespeare. Hazlitt was to write extensively about both Milton and Bentham over the next few years. His low tolerance for any who, he thought, had abandoned the cause of liberty, along with his frequent outspokenness, even tactlessness, in social situations made it difficult for many to feel close to him, and at times he tried the patience of even Charles Lamb. His self-esteem received an added boost when he was invited to contribute to the quarterly *The*

Edinburgh Review his contributions, beginning in early , were frequent and regular for some years , the most distinguished periodical on the Whig side of the political fence its rival The Quarterly Review occupied the Tory side. Writing for so highly respected a publication was considered a major step up from writing for weekly papers, and Hazlitt was proud of this connection. Having idolised Napoleon for years, Hazlitt took it as a personal blow. The event seemed to him to mark the end of hope for the common man against the oppression of "legitimate" monarchy. His part-time work as a drama critic provided him with an excuse to spend his evenings at the theatre. Afterwards he would then tarry with those friends who could tolerate his irascibility, the number of whom dwindled as a result of his occasionally outrageous behaviour. Defection from the cause of liberty had become easier in light of the oppressive political atmosphere in England at that time, in reaction to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The Hunts were his primary allies in opposing this tendency. He competed with savage intensity, dashing around the court like a madman, drenched in sweat, and was accounted a good player. More than just a distraction from his woes, his devotion to this pastime led to musings on the value of competitive sports and on human skill in general, expressed in writings like his notice of the "Death of John Cavanagh" a celebrated Fives player in The Examiner on 9 February , and the essay "The Indian Jugglers" in Table-Talk There was an article on The Tatler itself. Mostly his political commentary was reserved for other vehicles, but included was a "Character of the Late Mr. Pitt ", a scathing characterisation of the recently deceased former Prime Minister. Written in , Hazlitt liked it well enough to have already had it printed twice before and it would appear again in a collection of political essays in The love of life is Some of his "paradoxes" are so hyperbolic as to shock when encountered out of context: Though nothing can bring back the hour Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower

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