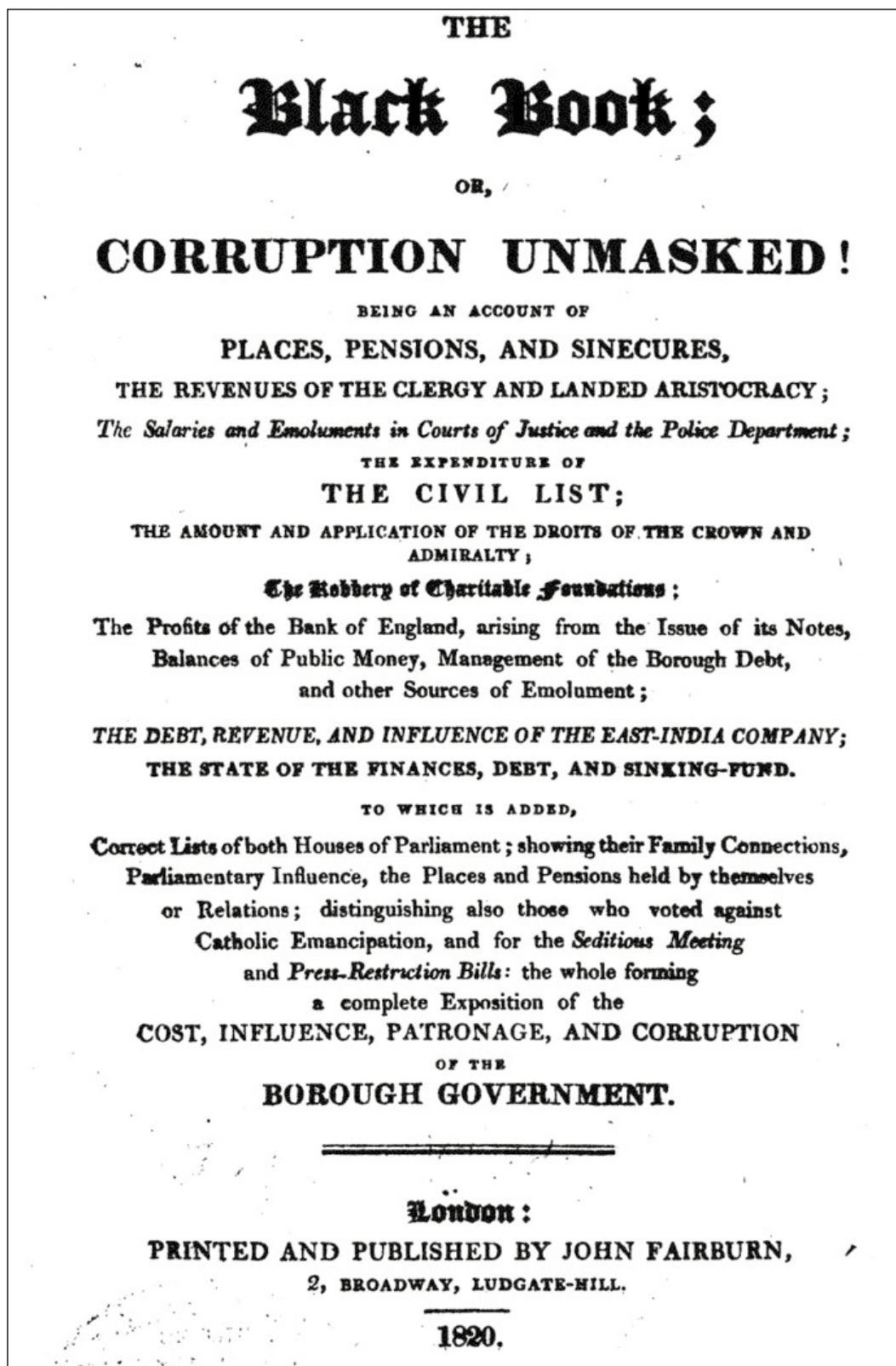


## Corruption and political reform

Ian Cawood traces the story of an exposé of establishment nepotism and venality 200 years ago, which reanimated the movement for parliamentary reform and contributed to the roots of Liberalism and to modern definitions of corruption and standards in public life.

# The *Black Book* and the Reform of Public



Frontispiece of the first edition of *The Black Book* (1820).

# Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain

**T**WO HUNDRED YEARS ago, a remarkable exposé of the nepotism and venality at the heart of the entire British establishment caused a sensation and not only reanimated the movement for parliamentary reform in the wake of Peterloo, but also helped to shape the principles of good governance, appointment on merit and the independence of the Civil Service, which some historians have suggested amounted to a 'liberal revolution in government'.<sup>1</sup> It has largely been forgotten by political commentators and dismissed by academics, but popular attitudes towards the purpose and the ethics of government were re-appraised by this book and the other works of its author. This article will attempt to outline the contribution of this work to the roots of liberalism in Britain and to modern definitions of corruption and the standards of public life.

Trust in the machinery of the British state was at a low ebb in the decades after the Napoleonic wars. Attacks on 'old corruption', wherein the politics of Britain was perverted to suit the needs of the rich and powerful, condemnations of institutional sclerosis, and denunciations of unpatriotic leadership, became familiar refrains in British political discourse until the 1850s.<sup>2</sup> Although most historical focus in this period has been placed on the ultimately disastrous campaign of mass meetings, led by the radical agitator Henry Hunt, which culminated with the massacre at Peterloo, it was at the same time that the ideas of Jeremy Bentham began to influence political thinking in Britain.<sup>3</sup> When he suggested that the purpose of governance was to benefit 'the common good', he offered a constructive alternative to romantic notions that there once existed an ideal 'ancient constitution' that needed to be restored, which most radical writers in post-war Britain, such as William Cobbett, claimed.<sup>4</sup> Bentham also rejected Tom Paine's idea of 'natural rights' as 'nonsense on stilts': hopelessly idealistic and potentially anarchic. Instead, Bentham's concept of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' led him to define a new attitude towards ethics in public life. He condemned 'efficiency to bad purposes, coupled

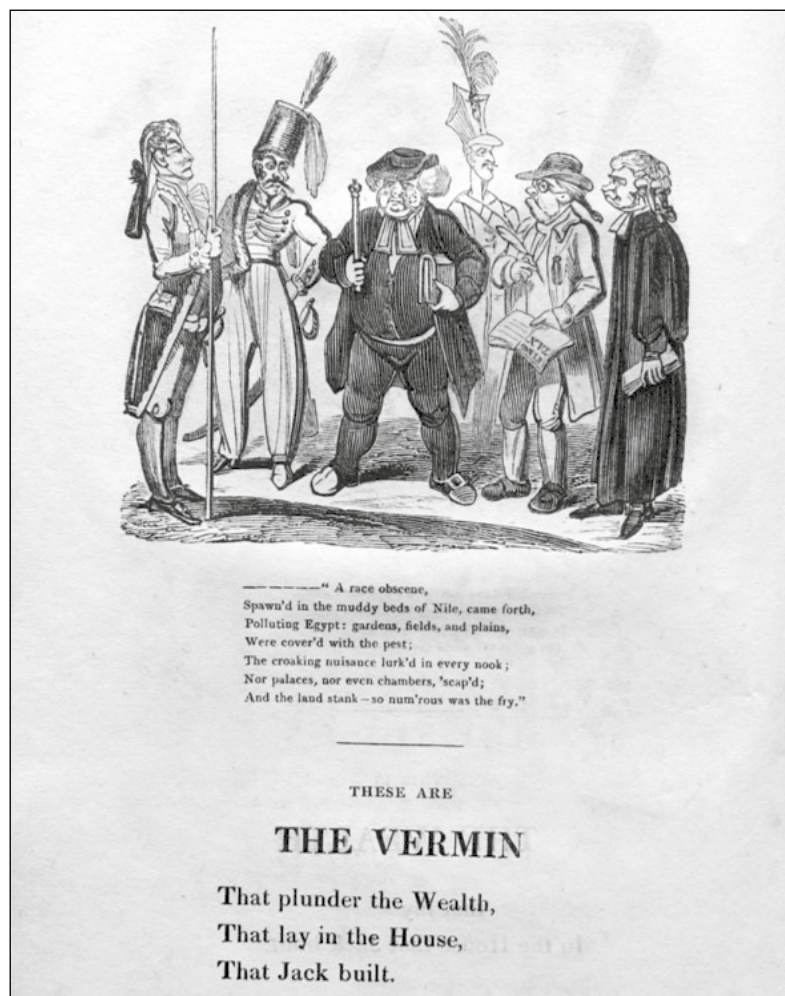
with inefficiency to good ones.'<sup>5</sup> In a pamphlet in 1810, Bentham quoted Burke's demands for 'industry, zeal and fidelity' in the public service as he attacked the way in which 'the decayed nobility' had captured the apparatus of the state and set it to enrich themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The only anti-corruption campaigner of the early nineteenth century who appreciated Bentham's critique was John Wade, a self-educated, former wool-sorter about whose early life nothing is known, but who rose to national prominence as the founding editor of *The Gorgon* (1818–1819), which, in the first lines of the first page of its first edition, in May 1818, declaimed ominously that 'corruption has not yet encountered a more formidable and dangerous enemy.'<sup>7</sup> Wade wrote widely on trade cycles, legal and social issues and history and social development.<sup>8</sup> In the *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, Robert Zegger comments:

Mindful that radical agitation was too often a matter of empty rhetoric, Wade sought to provide a solid basis of facts and elucidated what he considered the truths of political economy and utilitarian doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

Wade's greatest impact came with his 1820 exposé of corruption and self-interest, the *Black Book* (with a *Supplement* added in 1823 and then revised and updated as the *Extraordinary Black Book* in 1831 at the height of the crisis surrounding the debates on the reform bills), which E. P. Thompson described as 'greatly superior to any other Radical investigation of the kind.'<sup>10</sup> Wade's publication drew on a satirical trope dating back to Thomas Middleton's *Black Book* of 1604, but one which had recently been revived as a record of government embezzlement. *Le Livre Rouge*, the register of supposedly secret accounts of the Bourbon family, had been released in 1790 and had seriously undermined the legitimacy of the French monarchy.<sup>11</sup> The publication in December 1809 of P. F. McCallum's *The Livre Rouge, A New and Extraordinary Red Book*, which claimed that £92,929 11s 4d had been spent from the Civil List on pensions

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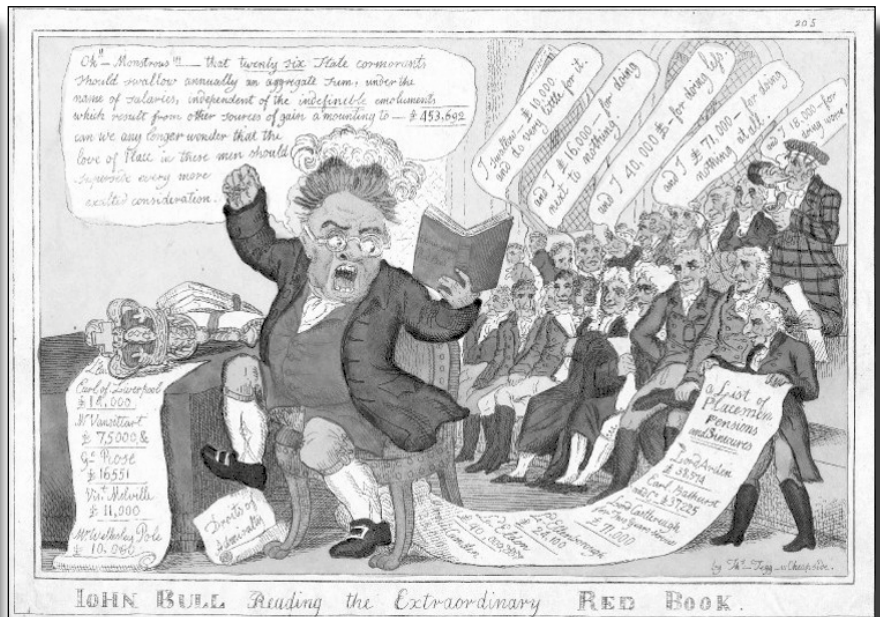
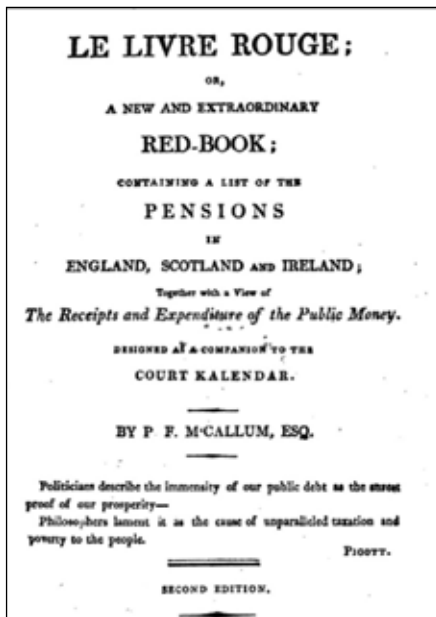
to aristocratic clients, instigated this detailed taxonomy of corrupt practice in British political debate.<sup>12</sup> Despite McCallum's death in 1812, the *Extraordinary Red Book* was anonymously revised and expanded in 1816 and extensively advertised in the leading London newspapers.<sup>13</sup> The fame of this second volume became increasingly embarrassing to a government facing the mass protests in the years following the Napoleonic Wars. It swiftly captured the public imagination, featuring in satirical cartoons such as those of William Elmes and J. Lewis Marks. Its principal accusations were presented in William Hone's sequel to *The Political House that Jack Built*, his 1820 pamphlet, *The Political 'A, Apple-Pie,' or, the "Extraordinary Red Book" Versified*, which was illustrated by George Cruikshank.<sup>14</sup> The work did not go unchallenged, however, with a comprehensive rebuttal of 'the contemptible work', anonymously published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in April 1817 and reproduced in loyal Tory newspapers, which laid out the 'palpable misstatements', 'artful and specious misstatements' and 'mass of mistakes' which the author claimed would 'undermine the safety and peace of the country.'<sup>15</sup> In response, 'a new, corrected and

Plate from William Hone, *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819).

enlarged edition' of the *Red Book* was published in November 1818.<sup>16</sup>

Wade's *The Black Book or Corruption Unmasked*, first appeared as a series of pamphlets but, following the success of Hone's pamphlet, it was published as a single volume in 1820. The work was published anonymously to escape sanction under the Blasphemous and Seditious Libel Act which, in the aftermath of Peterloo, toughened the law on anti-government and anti-clerical publications. Wade's writing was regarded as so dangerous by the authorities in Warwickshire that the Birmingham booksellers, John Osborne and George Ragg, were charged and found guilty of seditious libel against the Church for publishing 'Part 12' of the *Black Book* and sentenced to two months imprisonment at Warwick assizes in March 1820.<sup>17</sup> At the sentencing of Osborne, the prosecutor accused Wade of attempting 'to demoralize the lower orders' and attributed 'a number of crimes in the county of Warwick' to his influence.<sup>18</sup> This was condemned as unjust in many publications, on the grounds that Wade's book made no worse criticisms than those contained in Jeremy Bentham's 1818 *Church of Englandism and its Catechism Examined* and that the actual publisher of the *Black Book* was not charged.<sup>19</sup> No further prosecutions followed, however, and the attorney general and solicitor general gave their opinion that bringing a criminal prosecution for libel would be difficult against an anonymous publication and would produce unwanted publicity for the reformers' cause at a tumultuous time.<sup>20</sup> By 1822 the *Black Book* and its supplements were being openly advertised once again.<sup>21</sup>

Wade's chief target was the solipsistic behaviour of the elites that had, in his opinion, failed to uphold the public good in its civic role. His book listed positions without work, pensions without service, and appointments without competition, which, he estimated, cost the nation £1,373,490 a year.<sup>22</sup> His chief targets were the royal family and the aristocracy, but he also turned his ire on the legal forces of London, those who misused charitable endowments, bankers, the Church of England, the East India Company and even the Lottery, as it destroyed 'the morals and industrious habits of the people.'<sup>23</sup> At this stage, Wade placed little faith in the opposition carrying out reform as he believed that 'the two parties, Whig and Tory are ... confederated to plunder and delude the public; their quarrels and animosity arise merely from the division of the spoil.' He cited the Whigs' behaviour as soon as they had grasped the instruments of state in 1807 in



support of his claim that they demonstrated ‘equal greediness for the fat emoluments of office.’<sup>24</sup> His anti-elitism was confirmed when he scathingly defined the word ‘aristocracy’ in his satirical 1821 *Political Dictionary* as follows:

Aristocracy has become a sinecure order, swallowing enormous revenues, without discharging any necessary duties, so that the name is now almost synonymous [sic] with abuse, prejudice, imbecility, and the absence of every qualification useful or ornamental.<sup>25</sup>

Wade believed that corruption was so institutionalised in Britain by 1820 that he defined the term as ‘the constitution as by law established.’<sup>26</sup> As he announced in the first edition of *The Gorgon* in 1818, ‘we hate the present infernal system of corruption and injustice and our sole object is to effect either its reform or overthrow.’<sup>27</sup> He was not calling for violent insurrection, however, and instead used the pages of the journal to call for a boycott of taxed commodities to starve the corrupt system of its sustenance, claiming that the working man had sacrificed ‘two thirds of his patrimony’ to a ‘vile oligarchy’.<sup>28</sup> In this way, his critique overlapped that of critics of ‘Old Corruption’, who also claimed that the taxation of consumer goods was a central plank in the parasitical system, even while he derided Cobbett as ‘a fool’ and Hunt as a ‘coward’ and a ‘brazen-faced booby.’<sup>29</sup> As well as the abolition of the sinecures, pensions and useless offices, Wade also called for specific reforms such as free nondenominational education, universal suffrage (which included women) and legal reform, the latter of which was also taken up by the Edinburgh

Left: frontispiece for the second edition of the *Red Book* (1810)  
Right: ‘John Bull Reading the Extraordinary Red Book’ by William Elmes (1816)

Whig, Henry Brougham, who had been drawn into Bentham’s orbit.<sup>30</sup> Brougham, armed with Wade’s data and Bentham’s ideas, became the political figurehead of the anti-corruption campaign in the 1820s, as Robert Stewart has described.<sup>31</sup>

Wade is important in the development of the critique of corruption as he rejected much of the Radicals’ constitutional antiquarianism and challenged the establishment using modern terms such as ‘political economy’ and ‘general’ or ‘public utility’, stating that ‘the principle of Utility is consonant to human nature, when we adhere to it there is no danger either of error or inconsistency.’<sup>32</sup> He was also one of the first journalists to invoke the concept of ‘public opinion’, which was a term that indicated the educated and professional classes.<sup>33</sup> In his later *Extraordinary Black Book*, he commented ‘public opinion, not parliament, is omnipotent; it is that which has effected all the good which has been accomplished and it is that alone which must affect the remainder.’<sup>34</sup> He is probably most notable as the journalist whose work attracted both middle-class and working-class support, being funded by both Francis Place and Jeremy Bentham.<sup>35</sup> Wade was the first author to use the term ‘middle class’ in the title of a work.<sup>36</sup> Wade initially regarded the middle classes as complicit ‘journeymen’ or at least, apathetic in the face of the oppression of the working man and, as editor of *The Gorgon*, had called for an alliance ‘of the PRO-DUCTIVE CLASSES of the community.’<sup>37</sup> In early editions of the *Black Book* he continued to castigate those middle-class enablers of corrupt aristocrats in the Church and the Law for having ‘acquired their wealth and importance under what is denominated the Pitt

**A Summary Statement of Sinecure Offices, Pensions, and Reversions, exclusive of Allowances to Naval and Military Officers and their Relatives, on account of Naval or Military Service:—**

Royal Family . . . . .	£365,000
Pensions granted by Parliament as Compensation for eminent Public Services . . . . .	93,990
Pensions limited by law to £95,000 . . . . .	63,000
Pensions paid out of the Scotch Civil List . . . . .	85,588
Pensions, Ireland . . . . .	92,048
Sundry other Pensions, paid out of 4½ per cent. Duties, &c. . . . .	58,248
Pensions of the nature of Compensation for the Loss of Offices in England . . . . .	12,020
Ditto in Ireland . . . . .	89,245
Pensions in the nature of Superannuations for Services in the Public Offices . . . . .	97,271
Total Value of Sinecure Offices . . . . .	356,556*
Total Amount of Offices, granted in Reversion, and of Pensions on the Irish Pension-List for more than one life . . . . .	140,524
Grand Total . . . . .	£1,373,490

When the reader has reflected on this enormous sum, which excludes all salaries, properly so called, and allowances for naval and military services, let him turn to the extract from Mr. Preston, where it is asserted, that every eighteen pounds abstracted in this manner from the people, deprives 5 persons of sustenance; whence it follows, that 381,525 persons are deprived of sustenance by Pensioners and Sinecurists alone!!!

**COMPARATIVE STATEMENT  
OF THE  
Salaries of different Officers  
IN  
AMERICA AND ENGLAND.**

AMERICA.		ENGLAND.	
President . . . . .	£5090	King . . . . .	£120,000
Vice President . . . . .	1000	Prince Regent . . . . .	595,000

Extracts from the original *Black Book* (1820)

system.<sup>38</sup> In the aftermath of Peterloo, when some factory owners had sided with the magistrates and the yeomanry against the peaceful protesters, they had, to Wade's mind, 'lent their aid to stifle the complaints of misery and famine by the sabre, the bayonet and the dungeon!'<sup>39</sup> After his encounters with Bentham and other utilitarians such as Henry Bickersteth, however, Wade was increasingly willing to believe that the middle classes, especially those engaged in business, would eventually have 'sufficient virtue, sense and courage to come forward to frustrate the diabolical machinations of the Executive Government.'<sup>40</sup> He was, like Adam Smith before him, hopeful that 'the frugality and good conduct' of the majority of those who lived on wages and profits, rather than rents, would prove sufficient to enable them to make common cause against the aristocratic foe.<sup>41</sup>

The response of the middle-class press after 1819 seemed to indicate that Wade's hopes were well founded. Firstly, *The Times*, which had denounced the holding of the meeting at St Peter's Field on 19 August 1819, nevertheless used the superb eyewitness account of the massacre by its reporter, John Tyas, to acknowledge the 'dreadful fact' that:

nearly a hundred of the King's unarmed subjects have been sabred by a body of cavalry in the streets of a town in which most of them were inhabitants, and in the presence of those Magistrates whose sworn duty it is to protect and preserve the life of the meanest Englishman.<sup>42</sup>

The inquests into deaths of the victims of Peterloo roused further anger from the newspaper and it refused to be cowed by threats from the government. Its position moved closer to that of the Whig opposition and it used the 1820 Divorce Case against Queen Caroline (for whom Henry Brougham led the legal defence) to rally popular support against the government.<sup>43</sup> With the support of the *Manchester Guardian* (founded in response to Peterloo), the *Glasgow Chronicle*, the *Liverpool Mercury*, *The Scotsman* and the *Leeds Mercury*, *The Times* arguably shifted public opinion to a more critical position, in which the accusations of the *Black Book* were far more likely to be believed.<sup>44</sup> In the opinion of Robert Peel, the years after Peterloo saw the 'tone ... [of] public opinion' becoming 'more liberal ... than the policy of the Government.'<sup>45</sup>

The first *Black Book* is quoted by the historian Philip Harling as evidence of the perpetuation of the long-standing 'Old Corruption' critique alongside the *Red Books*, Richard Carlile's *The Republican* and William Benbow's *A Peep at the Peers*. As Kevin Gilmartin has explained, however, Wade's work took the radical critique of the unreformed establishment beyond rhetoric and employed 'modern textual and statistical procedures to dissect and classify the aristocracy's system of outdoor relief.'<sup>46</sup> The *Black Book* was explicit in its identification of the sources of the corruption which dominated the British state – the monarchy, the aristocracy, the Church and the Law had all been perverted by self-interest and indolence and, consequently, government had been reduced to 'a mere arena for aristocratical contention.'<sup>47</sup> Like the previous *Red Books*, Wade's book provided details of the places, pensions and sinecures of the establishment, but Wade cast his net far wider than previous cataloguers of corruption. He

identified that the ‘principal offices of the army, revenue and navy and ... every department of the government’ were as significant as loci of elite power and abuse as the aristocratic control of land, church patronage and the parliamentary system. He did not deny that many held positions within the bureaucratic state owing to ‘talents and industry’, but he concluded that too many:

condescend to fill the lucrative situations of clerk, registrar, messenger, usher, or receiver, and carry bags and wands at the tail of those whose ability alone has made them their superiors, and to whom they are compelled to pay this homage, as a penalty for their own imbecility.<sup>48</sup>

In place of the needs of the elite, Wade asserted the vital interests of ‘the community’.<sup>49</sup> Wade claimed, in terms consistent with most contemporary utilitarians and modern liberals, that ‘it is the legitimate object of good government to prevent the extremes of luxury and indigence, and spread equally through all classes the bounties of nature’<sup>50</sup> One may question the accuracy of his figures (although most of the named individuals were indeed guilty of using their public office to accumulate private wealth) or the relative significance to the Exchequer of such expenditure, but Wade had managed to publicly articulate an alternative mission statement for government and its ancillary services,

which more suited the needs of the modern society that was emerging in Britain at this point in its history.<sup>51</sup>

Wade’s work was highly valued by radicals, even by Hunt, who read extracts from the initial pamphlets in the series of public meetings which culminated in the disaster at St Peter’s Fields in 1819, which Wade described in his *Political Dictionary* as ‘Butchery’.<sup>52</sup> Hunt even extolled Wade’s book in an interview with the *Gazette de France* later that year, claiming that the *Black Book* would ‘unmask and brings before the public ... all the ministerial corruptions’.<sup>53</sup> It was worn in the hatbands of radicals, as colliery manager, John Buddle, reported to Henry Philpotts, the unpopular canon of Durham Cathedral and future Bishop of Exeter.<sup>54</sup> In the opinion of Clayson, Frow and Frow,

No longer were radicals restricted to the use of rhetoric when attacking contemporary abuses. *The Black Book* gave hard evidence of many evils inherent in the undemocratic political system of the age.<sup>55</sup>

It quickly became seen as ‘the Reformers’ Bible ... the sacred volume of English politics’.<sup>56</sup> The *Black Book* was revised in five editions in total as the Reform campaign developed, selling over 50,000 copies.<sup>57</sup> Wade also produced more scholarly texts on banking which led to him being offered a place on the permanent staff of *The Spectator* in 1828.<sup>58</sup> Next, Wade examined

Illustration (author unknown) on the flyleaf of the first edition of *The Extraordinary Black Book* (1831), showing John Bull (the typical Englishman) being tied down like Gulliver in order to be abused and tormented by his enemies, which include the Crown, the Army, lawyers, an official who has his head stuck in one of John Bull’s pockets, the Church, and MPs holding a sword over his head. Caption: ‘Twas your zealous want of sense, and sanctified impertinence: Obligated the State to talk about, and turn you root & branch all out.’

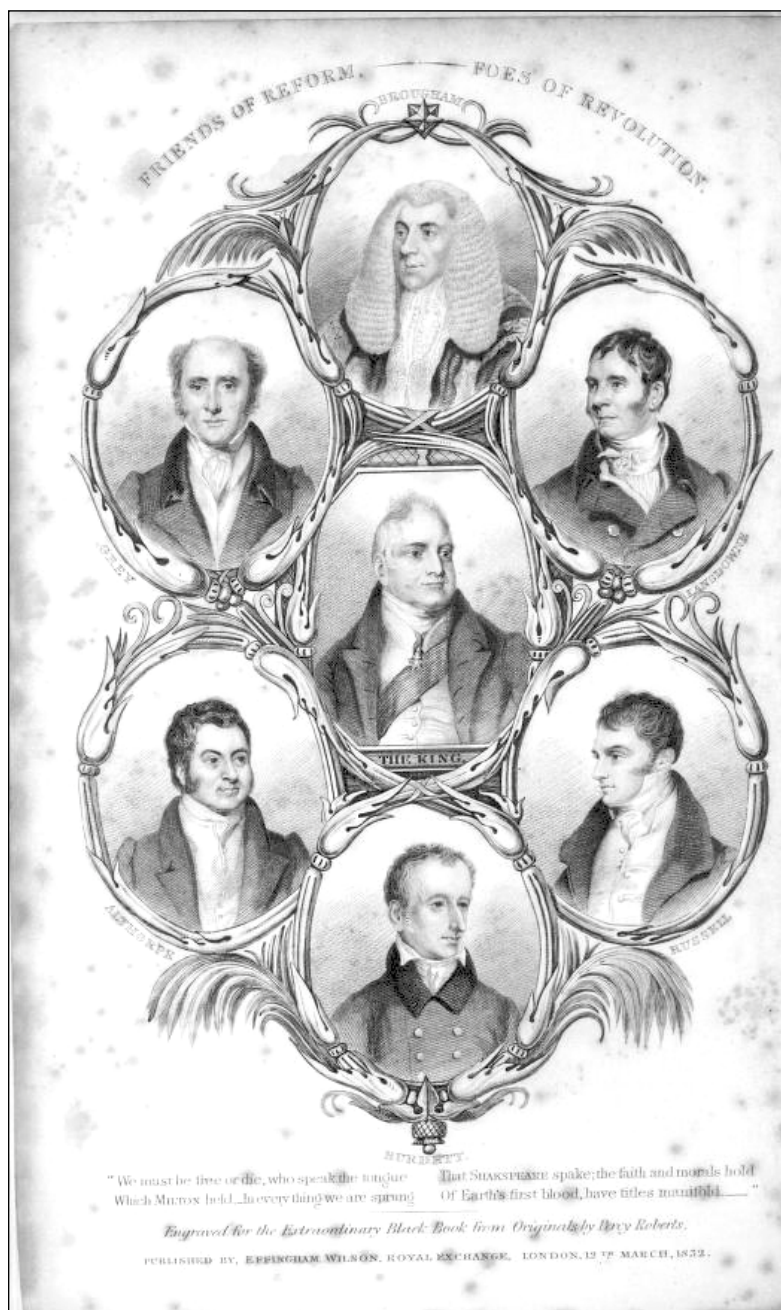


## The *Black Book* and the Reform of Public Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain

the misuse of charitable trusts in his 1828 book *An Account of Public Charities in England and Wales* and established that, in fact, the chief agent of malpractice was the established Church, which reanimated Henry Brougham's long-standing campaign against the abuse of these foundations.<sup>59</sup>

After the Whig takeover of government in 1830, the *Black Book* was considerably modified and retitled the *Extraordinary Black Book*. Although historians have never differentiated between the two books, the focus of Wade's work had shifted, and with it, the definition of corruption in British political discourse. Wade began to turn his criticism on the inability of public bodies to carry out their duties owing to the venal culture of their appointees. To the wasteful sectors of the economy he had identified in 1820, he now added 'municipal corporations, companies, guilds and fraternities' and castigated the lack of true representation in the unreformed House of Commons. In the second edition of the revised work, published in March 1832, the principal cause of a corrupt culture among the elite was identified as the established church, rather than the royal family, now that the hated Prince Regent was dead. It dedicated 137 pages, two chapters in all, to accusations of corruption in the Church of England.<sup>60</sup> Wade challenged the appropriation of money by the Church 'for their own use' instead of using it for educating the people.<sup>61</sup> He also argued that reform of the Church would 'benefit the many, and only temporarily injure the few'.<sup>62</sup> He noted that 'to the Church of England in the *abstract*, we have no weighty objection to offer; and should be sorry to see her spiritual functions superseded by those of any other sect'.<sup>63</sup> Wade also maintained a distinction between the 'rich pluralists' and the 'working clergy' when he described the curates of the Church as a 'useful and meritorious order which performs nearly the whole service of the national religion'.<sup>64</sup> But he castigated the cathedral authorities, reminding his audience of Bishop Philpotts's support for the magistrates in Manchester at the time of the Peterloo massacre, a passage which was picked up by the ultra-radical *Poor Man's Guardian* at the height of the Reform Crisis in 1832 and reprinted under the heading 'Bishop Fill Potts! Alias Fill Bags!!'<sup>65</sup>

Philip Harling has stated that although there is 'a good deal of truth in Wade's charges of corruption, he often relied on outdated information in order to convey the impression that official "abuses" cost the British taxpayer far more than they actually did'.<sup>66</sup> This may be true, as the earnings of individual clergy and



the wealth of the Church's assets were not made public, but Wade's evidence that the church was failing in its primary duty of spiritual care, was not that of salaries and land values. He claimed that, out of 10,801 clergy in 1811, over half (6,311 or 58 per cent) were non-resident.<sup>67</sup> In reality, the parliamentary returns of 1813 indicate that Wade actually underestimated the extent of the problem, as these give a figure of 6,375 non-resident clergy out of 10,558 parishes (60 per cent). When the figure was revisited in the 1832 edition of Wade's book, using more reliable figures from the 1827 diocesan returns, there was little improvement: out of 10,533 clergy, 6,120 (58 per cent) were still not resident.<sup>68</sup> As Matthew Andrews concludes, 'while many of [Wade's] accusations ... were exaggerated, they were not without foundation'.<sup>69</sup>

Illustration on the flyleaf of the second edition of *The Extraordinary Black Book* (1832): 'Friends of Reform – Foes of Revolution' (a very different tone from the illustration in the first edition)

The figures Wade gave of the Church's finances were widely reprinted across the British press and quoted in a succession of reform meetings. They even provoked a reaction in Scotland where *The Scotsman* questioned Wade's depiction of the Kirk as 'a model of economy' in 1832 and asserted that 'he is not aware that our Establishment, in some of its parts, makes a tolerable approximation to the one he has so well described!'<sup>70</sup>

The fundamental truth of Wade's accusations is accepted by many historians of the Church. John McNeil wrote of a 'flood of evils with which the Church was infested in the early nineteenth century' and observed that:

the historical importance of the *Black Book* has little to do with the question of its reliability. Its importance lies in the success with which it focused attention on the abuses of the time, making it impossible for the intelligent Englishman to overlook.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, Geoffrey Best contends that the 'scale of ... pluralities and sinecures' may have been exaggerated but that they were 'bad enough, in all conscience.'<sup>72</sup> The accusations were discussed in the press as the new Whig government contemplated ecclesiastical reform. *The Sun* quoted Wade's book to question the accuracy of the Bishop of London's defence of Church finances in the House of Lords, when Blomfield actually referred to the *Black Book* on the floor of the chamber.<sup>73</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* used it to substantiate Lord Brougham's accusation of nepotism against Bowyer Sparke, the Bishop of Ely.<sup>74</sup> *The Scotsman* stated that the *Extraordinary Black Book* 'ought to be in the hands of all Reformers' and quoted the Book's statistics, concluding that they proved the Church of England to be 'the most inveterate and implacable enemy to the people's rights.'<sup>75</sup> It was Wade's expose of the failings of the Church leadership, as well as those in other public offices, which brought a less theological definition of corruption into the public debate, as what he was describing was the first instance what is the accepted definition of corruption in modern society – 'the misuse of public office'.<sup>76</sup>

The radicalism of Wade's criticism of the establishment owed far more to methods of opposition adopted by critics of the French ancien régime and moderate revolutionaries of 1789 than most of the other contemporary British radicals' attacks on the establishment. This parallel is apparent, not because Wade promoted violence, but because he supported the concept of the popular will. He was a rare

example of an actor in the British political sphere of the 1820s motivated by the same ideas of the Radical Enlightenment (to use Jonathan Israel's term) as stirred the leaders of the Third Estate in 1788–89, such as Sieyès, Mirabeau, Condorcet and Volney.<sup>77</sup> Wade was after all, a journalist, like the Third Estate's leaders in 1789 and the similarity of tone, language and argument between Sieyès' famous 1789 pamphlet, *What is the Third Estate?*, and Wade's writing is striking. Wade, like Sieyès, employed what William Sewell has termed a 'rhetoric of social revolution' by challenging the power and privileges of the aristocracy and seeking to harness the energy of bourgeois resentment for the cause of liberal political reform.<sup>78</sup> Wade's lament that the aristocracy had 'swallowed up not only the rights of the people and the prerogatives of the Crown, but also the immunities of the Church' was foreshadowed by Sieyès' complaint that 'la prétendue utilité d'un cadre privilégié pour la service public, n'est qu'une chimère.'<sup>79</sup> Like the revolutionaries of 1789, Wade believed that, once provided with true information as to the misgovernment of their nation, the public's anger would prove irresistible and lead to dramatic political change. The priorities of government would subsequently be reset to benefit the bulk of the population rather than the venal elites who had seized control of it. It is an ethic which still motivates serious journalists in all liberal democracies and one which places them in danger in illiberal states.

As the Reform Crisis unfolded in 1831, large passages of Wade's text were reprinted in newspapers as varied as the *Caledonian Mercury*, the *Windsor and Eton Express*, the *South-Eastern Gazette*, the *Chester Courant*, the *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier*, and even *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (which quoted Wade's condemnation of the inequitable Game Laws).<sup>80</sup> Wade was invited to write for the *Morning Advertiser* under the byline 'by the editor of the *Extraordinary Black Book*'.<sup>81</sup> Radical newspapers, such as the *Leicester Chronicle*, promoted it to its readership, encouraging the poor 'to club their pennies and their twopences to purchase it as a common stock ... [as] it is the very master-key to lay open all the sources of our present misery.'<sup>82</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* exhorted 'any disinterested man, be he Lord or be he Commoner' who had 'a rational doubt' on the need for parliamentary reform, 'we say to him again and again, read the "Extraordinary Black Book."<sup>83</sup> During the febrile 'Days of May' while the fate of the third Reform Bill hung in the balance, a meeting in Devizes

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heard that those who defended the constitution 'should look to the hundreds of millions paid to civil and military officers ... and also to the extraordinary black book [sic].'<sup>84</sup> Although the figures may have been deliberately inflated, the way in which the *Black Books* symbolised the popular anger with the establishment was palpable. Linda Colley sees Wade's undeniably popular book as crucial in questioning the integrity and ethics of the entire ruling order at this turning point in British history.<sup>85</sup>

In his new text, Wade did not entirely spare the political establishment, however. The Whig leadership largely wanted a return to what they considered the essential qualities of the British constitution, perverted, in their view, by decades of Tory rule. This limited their reforming zeal to the removal of the most notorious examples of 'rotten' and 'pocket' boroughs, the overturning of the Tory monopoly of patronage on public appointments and the introduction of some small degree of elected local government. Suspicion grew that all the Whigs really wanted was access to the trough of patronage, long denied to them, and that they would continue to maintain the culture of nepotism, jobbery and venality as soon as they took office; the memory of the disappointed hopes of Grenville's 1806 ministry still tarnished confidence in the Whigs' altruism and commitment to substantial reform. Wade had previously castigated the party thus in his *Political Dictionary*:

Alas, the poor Whigs the incorrigible Whigs. They have been proscribed from office sixty long years – for the last twenty they have been pulling for places and pensions like children for sugar plums – and now they talk of enlightening and reclaiming us. This is too much.<sup>86</sup>

Even the most out-spoken Whig statesman on the issue of corruption, Brougham, was noted for his 'most virtuous, undeviating consistency' under the entry for 'Irony' in Wade's *Dictionary*.<sup>87</sup> In the first edition of *Extraordinary Black Book* in 1831, although Wade acknowledged that 'we have seen nothing to throw suspicion upon the integrity of the Lord Chancellor, he supplied a long list of historical Whig misappropriations of state assets, attacking their 'profligacy and rottenness of their public principles.'<sup>88</sup> He attacked the Whigs for targeting the monarchy, when it was the abusive system of aristocratic privilege that was the enemy.<sup>89</sup> He described 'the whole system of the Whig-school' as 'void of public principle ... a mere scheme for the monopoly of power and emolument.'<sup>90</sup> And he

targeted their failure to reform the worse cases of sinecure in his new list of infamy, as in the case of the Duke of Argyll's appointment as Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland in 1830, with a salary of £1,850 p.a.:

Come gentlemen Whigs...! You have declared the days are past when government depends on patronage for support. Now to the proof: here is a complete sinecure, having no duties whatever attached to it; – why did you not cut it off on the resignation of the Duke of Gordon?<sup>91</sup>

He held the Whigs' feet to the fire of public opinion by asking directly 'will the Whigs, now that they are in power, enforce those plans of economy which they made [in opposition] ... or will they resort to some subterfuge ... [to preserve] sinecures as a source of patronage for themselves?'<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, Wade was prepared to allow the new government the chance to prove themselves worthy of the nation's trust and singled out Joseph Hume, James Graham, Henry Parnell, and, to some extent, even Earl Grey himself, for qualified approval, alongside that given to Lord Brougham.<sup>93</sup> Wade's ultimate measure of whether the Whigs had acknowledged 'the wishes and the wants of the community' was 'the one great question of PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.' If the Grey administration would pass a substantial reform bill, 'whatever has been alleged of their aristocracy, hollowness and selfishness will vanish in thin air.'<sup>94</sup> In the 'Dedication to the People', he expressed his ambiguous view of the new government succinctly: 'we have hope, but no confidence.'<sup>95</sup>

By March 1832, however, a very different tone was heard. A frontispiece was inserted to the second edition of the *Extraordinary Black Book* with portraits of the leading Whigs under the heading 'Friends of Reform; Foes of Revolution' (and Henry, now Lord, Brougham, the Lord Chancellor, at the top of the illustration). Wade noted in his preface that 'we are told ... intelligence, not patronage, is to form the pivot of public authority' and added optimistically, 'we wait in hope to see it practically realized.'<sup>96</sup> And in the 'Address to the New Edition' he developed his view of the Whig government:

In our dedication [to the first edition] we expressed a want of confidence in the Whig Ministry. In the interval, they have gained in our esteem. They mean well, but the difficulties they have to surmount are great. Arrayed against them are all the interests

Although the figures may have been deliberately inflated, the way in which the *Black Books* symbolised the popular anger with the establishment was palpable. Linda Colley sees Wade's undeniably popular book as crucial in questioning the integrity and ethics of the entire ruling order at this turning point in British history.

identified with public abuses and which have so long flourished by the ruin of the country.<sup>97</sup>

Wade went on to praise the Whig record in Ireland, Brougham's reform of the 'Augean stable of judicial abuses', and he noted that 'they have even touched their own salaries' and this had, in Wade's view 'conciliated the esteem of the People.'<sup>98</sup> He finished with a warning, however: 'so long as Ministers pursue national objects, they will be supported', but he added, ominously, 'while we seek for them popular aid, it is, we repeat, an aid accompanied with unceasing vigilance.'<sup>99</sup>

The political anger in Britain was stimulated by a sense of injustice and betrayal of the unspoken social contract between rulers and ruled – which explains the depth and the scale of the popular fury unleashed by Wade's revelations. Bentham himself described the country after two and a half decades of Tory rule in 1828, as 'cold, selfish, priest-ridden, lawyer-ridden, lord-ridden, squire-ridden, soldier-ridden England.'<sup>100</sup> It was at the peak of the *Black Book's* fame that Thomas Carlyle referred to the press as 'the true church of England' as only they seemed capable of censuring the establishment for their moral failures.<sup>101</sup> The influence of daily newspapers such as *The Times* and the *Morning Chronicle* was still developing at this stage in history, and it is to cheap single publications, written for a wide audience such as the *Black Book* that Carlyle was referring to at this point. The term 'Black Book' consequently became popularly established as a synonym for the exposure of corruption, cited in 'Captain Swing' letters and still used in an exposé of malpractice among public health officials at the Local Government Board as late as 1873.<sup>102</sup>

Wade's book had clearly lost some of its potency in the aftermath of the Great Reform Act and the Whig reforms of the Church and local government, however. He produced a final edition in 1835, but unlike previous ones it struggled to sell, being advertised in *The Times* in April 1836 as reduced in price from a guinea to ten shillings.<sup>103</sup> Wade himself attempted to adapt his writing to a new situation, writing a *History of the Middle and Working Classes* in 1833 and then a complete *British History, Chronologically Arranged* in 1839, but he found it hard to carve out a place in the literary establishment thereafter, despite continuing to write leader columns for *The Spectator*.<sup>104</sup> To save him from penury late in life, he was, ironically, awarded a pension of £50 by Lord Palmerston in 1861.<sup>105</sup> He died in Chelsea in 1875 as the middle-class

campaign for the reform of public institutions, which he had begun, had been partly realised in centralised administration under Palmerston and Gladstone and was now focused on the reduction of abuse in local government, most particularly in the City of London.<sup>106</sup>

This growing attention to the weight of public opinion in Britain coincided with a cultural change, largely as a result of the impact of evangelicalism, the rise of religious Nonconformity, and an increasingly vocal and economically powerful middle class. These groups prized merit, service, responsibility and accountability and no longer tolerated the gross misuse of Crown patronage, private connection and the sale of public office by the aristocratic elites of Britain,<sup>107</sup> as the enormous popularity of Wade's books made clear the cultural gulf between the elite and the newly emerging culture of the provincial 'middling sort'.<sup>108</sup> As Michael Brock succinctly explains, 'the system was increasingly in ill repute not so much because it was growing more corrupt, but because more was known about its corruption.'<sup>109</sup> The perception that corruption had become endemic in British civic institutions and needed to be excised was, finally, the point at which aristocratic Whigs, Edinburgh philosophers, Benthamite journalists, industrial entrepreneurs, evangelical Tories, Nonconformist dissenters and working-class radicals united in the 1820s. Without the discourse of corruption, originated by Cobbett and then defined, identified and articulated by Wade, it is unlikely that sufficient united pressure could have been brought to bear on a parliament and a monarch reluctant to reform, and to initiate, not merely a shift in political power, but also the cultural transformation of the role of the state and the nature of its institutions which began in 1832.

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## The *Black Book* and the Reform of Public Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain

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