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William Wilberforce

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### **The Correspondence of William Wilberforce**

William Wilberforce (1759–1833) was a politician, philanthropist and evangelical Christian, now best known for his work to end the slave trade. Elected to parliament in 1780, his early campaigns were unsuccessful attempts at penal and electoral reform. In 1787, at the encouragement of his friend William Pitt, he took up the cause of abolition at Westminster, while Thomas Clarkson and others collected evidence and mobilised popular opinion. Wilberforce also lobbied tirelessly for the cause, but humanitarian and ethical arguments were slow to overcome the economic interests of those who had made fortunes from the slave trade or use of slave labour. It was not until 1807 that the Abolition Bill was finally passed. Wilberforce continued his work for the emancipation of slaves (not achieved until 1833, just days before his death), and also campaigned for religious liberty until ill-health led to his withdrawal from public life. This work, edited by two of his sons and published in 1840, includes their reply to criticisms by Thomas Clarkson of their earlier biography, also reissued in this series.

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# The Correspondence of William Wilberforce

VOLUME 1

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

EDITED BY

ROBERT ISAAC WILBERFORCE

AND SAMUEL WILBERFORCE



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THE  
CORRESPONDENCE  
OF  
WILLIAM WILBERFORCE.

EDITED BY HIS SONS,

ROBERT ISAAC WILBERFORCE, M.A.

VICAR OF EAST FARLEIGH, LATE FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE;

AND

SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF SURREY, RECTOR OF BRIGHSTONE.

---

As he had a great number of friends of the best men, so no man had ever  
the confidence to avow himself to be his enemy. — LORD CLARENDON.

---

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

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## PREFACE.

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THE Correspondence of Mr. Wilberforce is given with some confidence to the public, after its reception of his "Life." To the defects of that work none are more alive than its compilers; but its general interest has been proved by a sale of 30,000 volumes, and by the almost unanimous voice of a host of critics. To these, however, there has been one important exception which seems to call for some specific answer. They have as yet taken no public notice of Mr. Clarkson's "Strictures" on their work, and they now approach them with the earnest hope that their long silence may enable them to avoid all controversy with a man to whom age and past services give so just a title to respect. Nothing but a regard to the fidelity of history could induce them to break at all the silence they have heretofore maintained; and in doing so at last, they rejoice to think that there are but two of their statements of fact which Mr. Clarkson controverts. The first occurs in Vol. I. p. 151. "Mr. Clarkson in the spring of 1787 was in London, and was introduced to Mr. Wilber-

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force." On this Mr. Clarkson remarks, that he "was introduced by no man to Mr. Wilberforce. I went to his door alone, with no other introducer than my book."

The other point asserted by Mr. C. to be a "mistake," is contained in the following sentences:— "He [Mr. Wilberforce] was busily employed pursuing these inquiries among the African merchants throughout the year 1786, and afterwards he got also together at his house, from time to time, persons who knew anything about the matter."\* (Vol. I. p. 149.) "As respects the date, 1786," says Mr. C., "I affirm, on my own responsibility, that this is a mistake." After making these exceptions, Mr. Clarkson states, though with a certain reservation, "I have anxiously sought for other contradictions between the biographer's story and my own, but I have found none." These, therefore, may be supposed to be the only parts of the narrative which he considers erroneous.

As to the first of these statements, even were Mr. Clarkson's contradiction conclusive, the error would be scarcely worth correction. It matters little whether Mr. Clarkson called on Mr. Wilberforce with Mr.

\* This passage is not quoted quite correctly in Mr. Clarkson's "Strictures." In the "Life" it is given in Mr. Wilberforce's own words, as it occurs in one of his memoranda in the possession of his family. It could only be from not adverting to this circumstance, that Mr. Clarkson could speak of the existence of these meetings as "probably learnt from my history."

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Ramsay's introduction or without it. As a clergyman of the church of England Mr. Clarkson would have been sure of a courteous reception, if his errand had been less interesting. But, though the fact is unimportant in itself, accuracy is of such importance that it is right to show that Mr. Clarkson's assertion cannot be considered as conclusive.

Mr. Clarkson had been spending a month at Mr. Ramsay's house at Teston, and had there professed his resolution of devoting himself to the Abolition. He had undertaken to send Mr. Ramsay a weekly account of what he did. When he returned to town he was, he tells us, "introduced by letter to several members of parliament." He now adds that Mr. Wilberforce was not amongst the number; but this does not disprove the assertion of the Life. Mr. Ramsay for more than a year had corresponded on this very subject with Mr. W. through Sir C. Middleton: he had joined in the request that Mr. Wilberforce would bring it before parliament, and received his assurance that if no fitter person offered he would perform the task. It is most improbable that in this correspondence his guest Mr. Clarkson should not have been mentioned: when, therefore, this gentleman knocked at Mr. Wilberforce's door, though he believed himself to come "without an introduction," there can be little doubt that he was not unknown.



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Still more inconclusive is Mr. C.'s evidence upon the second point, "that Mr. W. had made no inquiries on the subject of the Slave Trade as soon as 1786." The grounds of his opinion are as follows:— "The first persons connected with Africa, whom Mr. Wilberforce ever saw for the purpose of obtaining knowledge on the subject of the African Trade, were a Mr. Nisbett, a surgeon residing in the Minories, London, Mr. Weuves, an African merchant, and Governor Miles of Cape Coast Castle, and the time of his seeing these persons was not till the spring of the year 1787. A prior possession of the knowledge which these gentlemen might have communicated to Mr. Wilberforce on the African part of the question is inconsistent with the degree of information I found him to possess on that subject when our acquaintance began." And again, "I found the subjects of slavery and the Slave Trade deeply impressed on his heart, but of the Slave Trade especially he had very little knowledge in detail. He had already learned from Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Latrobe much concerning the treatment of the slaves in the West Indies, but he knew very little of the African department of the subject." \*

\* The admission contained in this last sentence might lead to the remark, that some allusion to the sources of Mr. Wilberforce's information might have been expected in the "History of Abolition." Surely Mr. Clarkson himself must concur in the opinion, that it would have been better if he had done more ample justice to this part of his subject.

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These are the sole grounds of Mr. Clarkson's assertion. Were they absolutely uncontradicted, they would be but a slight basis for so confident a declaration. For to what do they amount? "I affirm," says Mr. Clarkson, "that Mr. Wilberforce had not inquired into the subject of the Slave Trade in 1786, because in 1787 I did not discover that he was possessed of information of which such inquiries would have made him master." But this slight negative evidence is by no means uncontradicted. For, first; Mr. Latrobe asserts distinctly, that it was not on slavery, but on the *Slave Trade* also, that Mr. Wilberforce inquired, and received information from himself before the date of Mr. Clarkson's visit in 1787; and one such positive witness would alone disprove all Mr. Clarkson's negative conclusions. But there are more behind. There is in the list of informants whom Mr. Clarkson asserts himself to have made known to Mr. Wilberforce, a variation between the text of the "History of Abolition," and its Commentary in the "Strictures," too remarkable to be passed over. In the latter Mr. Newton's name is silently omitted. It is evident that, when he penned his "History," Mr. Clarkson supposed that Mr. Newton was first made known by himself to Mr. Wilberforce. It is strange that he could read the "Life" without perceiving that, in the intimate intercourse which, without his knowledge, had previously subsisted for a

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year and a half between Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. Newton, there is the strongest disproof of his assumption. For we are not left to gather from mere probability that Mr. Newton spoke upon the subject. Remorse for his own early share in its iniquity kept it so constantly before that holy man, that Mr. Wilberforce frequently declared that “he never spent one half hour in his company without hearing some allusion to it.”

Is it then conceivable that, after Mr. Wilberforce had promised Sir Charles Middleton in 1786 that, if no fitter person offered, he would bring the question of the Trade before the House of Commons, he should spend days in confidential intercourse with Mr. Newton, and yet make no inquiries on a subject to which his aged friend was perpetually reverting? From whom could he learn so easily, amply, and accurately? What knowledge did Mr. Clarkson at that time possess, which could be put in comparison with that of Mr. Newton, who had passed so many years on the African main, or in the middle passage? Did the subject never turn up during so many months? Is it not a far more reasonable hypothesis that, when called upon by a stranger, Mr. Wilberforce, now for three years member for the largest county in England, chose rather to observe than to dilate? It would have been as inconsistent with his character as with his station had he acted otherwise.

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One further strong presumption in favour of this view remains. It can be shown that, in a case exactly similar, Mr. Clarkson fell into the same mistake. In the spring of 1788 Mr. Clarkson saw Lord Grenville and Mr. Pitt on the same subject. He conversed freely with them both, and left them, impressed with the belief that to them, as to Mr. Wilberforce before, the subject was new. “Mr. Pitt appeared to me to have but little knowledge” of the matter; “Mr. Grenville had not more (knowledge) than Mr. Pitt.” “In the former case, I had given birth to an interest in favour of our cause.” But it is now known that a negotiation, of which Mr. Clarkson was totally ignorant, was carried on in the autumn of 1787 between France and England, with a view to a joint Abolition, and that Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville were not only interested in the subject, but had studied it with deep attention.\* What other subject was it which Mr. Pitt summoned Mr. Ramsay to his own † house to discuss in the month of January? And, singularly enough, one especial topic, the natural productions of Africa, which Mr. Clarkson describes as having so “astonished” the minister, was the very same on which he had communicated with Mr. Wilberforce in a letter written in the month preceding Mr. Clarkson’s visit.‡

\* *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. i. p. 161.

† *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. i. p. 167.

‡ *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. i. p. 162.

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It is clear, therefore, that Mr. Pitt's inquiries were suggested by his knowledge, and not, as it appeared to Mr. Clarkson, by his ignorance. And in this case, as in that of Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Clarkson, young, ardent, and unused to public life, drew an utterly unfounded inference from that silent attention which habits of public business tend so certainly to form.

But Mr. Clarkson argues further, that Mr. Wilberforce must have been ignorant upon the subject, because "he does not hesitate to assert that" his own essay "was the first act to enlighten the people of England on the subject of the commerce at least." Now without undervaluing the good accomplished by this essay, we must pronounce this one of those strong assertions which will bear no close examination. That Mr. Wilberforce might have been informed upon the matter by Mr. Latrobe, and still more by Mr. Newton, has been already shown; but there were other quarters, also, in which, in spite of general ignorance upon the subject, he might gain the necessary knowledge. In the summer of 1786 he became acquainted with the Wesley family, and then, if not before, he must undoubtedly have known those "Thoughts upon Slavery" in which the active mind of John Wesley had long before expressly thrown out the question, "In what numbers, and in what manner, are they (the slaves) carried to America?" A curious link of

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evidence remains to show that this question, and the answer to it, had probably been practically useful to Mr. Wilberforce; for that answer refers to the authority of Anderson on trade and commerce, and Mr. Pitt's papers supply us with proof that Mr. Wilberforce had not only used this reference himself, but had also made it known to the minister. Mr. Pitt writes —

“ Dear Wilberforce,

“ You may remember you promised me the use of your Anderson's Dictionary of Commerce, which you fancied was in your London collection. If you can find it and spare it, and will trust me with it, pray send it to Savile Street. Send me word at the same time that I shall see you at Brighton. I shall be in town to-morrow, and probably set out on Thursday.

“ Ever yours,

“ W. PITT.”

This letter is without date; but as it was addressed to Mr. Wilberforce at his lodgings, Conduit Street, Bond Street, it cannot have been written later than the summer of 1786, so that this may possibly have been the source whence Mr. Pitt derived an acquaintance with the African trade which dictated those inquiries which Mr. Clarkson attributed to his ignorance; and it therefore establishes the fact, that this peculiar branch of the question had thus early formed the sub-

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ject of intercourse between Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. Pitt.

Such are, in truth, the only questions of fact on which there is any disagreement between the editors and Mr. Clarkson. They think them points of no considerable interest, and they cannot allow that Mr. Clarkson's "Strictures" have at all disproved their former statement.

But when these are settled a long account remains behind. Mr. Clarkson complains in feeling language, and the complaint has been repeated in far different tones by injudicious friends, that a want of respect for him is manifest throughout the "Life." This charge is based on several counts; various expressions are noticed which are said to show contempt for Mr. Clarkson; some private letters which had passed between him and the editors are further put in evidence; too little also, it is asserted, is said of his exertions; and his pecuniary reimbursement is needlessly proclaimed; and, lastly, they are charged with having raised, without necessity, a fruitless question as to the priority of Mr. Clarkson's and their father's dedication to the great cause which they maintained in common.

On each of these points they feel compelled to say a few words, and they entreat for them a patient and impartial hearing.

On the first of these counts they cannot enter into

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the details which respect for the complaints of Mr. Clarkson demand at their hands, without, in the first place, satisfying their own feelings by the strongest and most entire denial of their having ever entertained any such thought or intention as that of “vilifying Mr. Clarkson.”\* They would add the sincere assurance of their hearty regret, that a single word which could be so interpreted has found its way into their pages; and their full determination to alter in the next edition of the “Life” every expression which he has pointed out as wearing that appearance. In all the goodly company who were collected around Mr. Wilberforce, they know of no second person who has thought himself excluded from that entire and affectionate respect with which they trust that they were naturally predisposed to treat their father’s friends. Was it probable that Mr. Clarkson should be an exception to a rule which reached to every other case? The truth they believe firmly to have been, that from the date of that correspondence, which preceded their publication, Mr. Clarkson’s mind was so possessed with the mistaken notion that he should be harshly and unkindly treated, that no possible statement of their case could have borne in his eyes any other aspect. This seems sufficiently established by one remarkable misquotation from those letters; for, as it was undoubtedly entirely unintended, it shows how strong

\* *Strictures.*



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was the bias which could lead Mr. Clarkson unawares into so strange a perversion of words which he had himself printed differently but a few pages back.

The history of that correspondence is soon told. When materials were first collected for the Life of Mr. Wilberforce, application was made to all his friends, and amongst the rest to Mr. Clarkson. But when the writers of the “Life” had entered on their task, it gradually dawned upon them, and was impressed by friends to whose judgment they most properly deferred, that to do their father justice they must protest against what had been commonly supposed\* to be the general drift of the “History of the Abolition,” and to follow up their protest by producing facts and papers, even at the risk of saying what might be disagreeable to Mr. Clarkson. Long were their consultations, and earnest was their desire to find, if possible, some mode of escaping from this necessity; but none appeared, and they resolved upon their line. As soon as this was determined, they felt it due to Mr. Clarkson’s age and services, to let him learn at once from themselves the necessity which seemed imposed upon them. Of this therefore he was acquainted in Mr. Robert Wilberforce’s letter of July 18. 1834, in

\* This impression was undoubtedly confirmed by the position given to Mr. Clarkson’s name in the chart which accompanies the “History of Abolition,” — a position which after being silently allowed to it for thirty years, is now happily admitted to have been an error of the engraver, and has been altered in the recent edition.

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reference to which occurs the remarkable perversion to which we have referred as indicating that mistaken impression on the mind of Mr. Clarkson, from which no care could have withheld offence. The letter closes with an assurance that the statement of those facts, of which the claims of truth and filial duty required the expression, should be made “in a manner *as far as possible*” (*quam longissime*) “from all insult and unkindly feeling.” How strangely is this unfeignedly respectful assurance turned by Mr. Clarkson into a declaration \* that “the book was to contain *as little insult as possible*” (sic); and again †, to implying “that all insult could not be avoided.” To that predisposition to receive offence which led Mr. Clarkson into this unintentional misrepresentation, the editors believe that many more of his “strictures” may be traced. They cannot but think that nothing else than this would have made the title of “agent,” or “active performer” of that which it had before been said that he had helped to plan, so offensive in his eyes; or led him for a moment to suspect that an intended falsehood lurked under the evident inaccuracy, which, after a specific mention of his name, summed up the committee as being, all but *two*, instead of three, members of the Quaker body.

A like misapprehension pervades his account of the mode in which the editors made application for the early

\* Page 37.

† Page 9.

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records of the Abolition Committee. The “Strictures” state (pp. 34, 35.) that, as one of two surviving members of the Abolition Committee, Mr. Clarkson was in possession of these precious volumes; that the editors discovered this; and, conscious of their meditated wrong to Mr. C., “had not the courage to ask a favour of him, and applied therefore through” Mr. Buxton.

The insinuation is without foundation. At the time of which Mr. Clarkson speaks, Mr. William Smith, Mr. Richard Phillips, Archdeacon Corbett, Mr. Macaulay, and other members of the Abolition Committee were still alive. By some of these gentlemen the writers were informed that the original papers of the Abolition Committee must be in the possession of the African Institution, to which the residual effects of the elder society had been made over at its formal dissolution about the year 1820. On their applying to this body for the loan of these precious volumes, the answer was, that “they had been lent to Mr. Clarkson and never restored.” For this plain reason, and not for want of courage, the editors applied to Mr. Buxton, as a leading member of the African Institution, to obtain the books from Mr. Clarkson.

In this question the public has a direct interest. The volumes are not private property. They ought not to be left (as they at present are) in private hands: least of all in the hands of one so little able to appreciate their value as the tardily acknowledged carelessness of

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their late or present possessor\* shows him to be. The editors cannot but hope that Mr. Clarkson will see the propriety of reclaiming these volumes, and that, with the concurrence of the surviving members of the African Institution, he will store them among the national archives in the British Museum.

\* It is perhaps needful to make good this charge. In the appendix, which Mr. Clarkson has unwisely suffered to accompany his "Strictures," it is coarsely asserted that an entry, quoted in the "Life," from the committee's journals, "is not in them." The inventor of the charge has been since compelled to retract his accusation, and confess that the passage stands just where the editors had said it did. There is no reasoning with such loose assertors. In spite of all that has been said, the editors wish, and have ever wished, to speak of Mr. Clarkson with the respect his services and age command. If the compiler of the appendix required any notice, it must be in a far different tone. There are some persons with whom no wise man of any character will enter into controversy—and such the editors deem this compiler. They cannot reply to a writer who at first insinuated that they had probably forged a letter of their father's, and who now implies that they have discredibly printed others because they are a "saleable commodity;" who distinctly charges them with "wilfully garbling" a whole correspondence; and who attributed to them the fabrication of an original document, because he was too habitually careless to find it, though its place was plainly pointed out. They cannot think it necessary to prove, that when Mr. Wilberforce supplied the Abolition Committee with copies of his letter on the Slave Trade at cost price, he was not receiving remuneration from a society to which he himself contributed. Above all, they can enter into no controversy with one who has dared to insinuate that Mr. Wilberforce affectionately promised services which he never intended to perform (p. 75.), and harboured and transmitted schemes of secret vengeance, where, for years, he simulated friendship (p. 89.). Such allegations are their own best corrective.

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The second count in the charge of vilifying Mr. Clarkson rests upon the needless publication of the particulars of his pecuniary reimbursement. That in these five volumes there is no other instance in which the editors are even accused of pandering to the morbid curiosity of the public, is a *primâ facie* ground for supposing that there was some strong reason for their making this statement. The amount of their forbearance in all cases which are truly private can be known only to themselves. Mr. Clarkson himself would have no reason for satisfaction, could he have piqued them into publishing what they deemed it better to suppress. But the Abolition of the Slave Trade was a public matter. How the needful funds for its conduct were obtained, is a question of general interest, which must be answered in any complete history of that long struggle. So Mr. Clarkson seems to have perceived, since in the "History of Abolition" he expressly says that he felt it "a duty to divulge" the name of Mr. Whitbread as having incurred "considerable expense" in the cause of Abolition. The reviewer of Mr. Clarkson's work in the "Edinburgh Review" refers with great justice to this instance of "generosity," and expresses satisfaction at its publication. And could the biographers of William Wilberforce, whose purse was the first to be opened when the interests of the Abolition required it, be silent respecting his acts of liberality? No man had been more ready

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with his aid. When in one instance the abolitionists were exposed to an expensive prosecution, the cost devolved on him as the ostensible head of the party, and so largely, that Mr. Clarkson supposed (erroneously) that he must have been indemnified by others. How could they, under these circumstances, submit silently to the full effect hereafter of Mr. Clarkson's selection, and allow posterity to gather that the aid which Mr. Clarkson received from the wealthier friends of the Abolition was confined to the honourable example of Mr. Whitbread?

But if Mr. Clarkson's reimbursement was to be mentioned, no other mode of mention seemed so proper as a guarded extract of such passages as told the story in the language of the actors. Let those who have condemned this publication remember all the charges it has brought upon the editors, and then say whether they could safely have spoken on the matter except in the very words of the original documents. They found themselves in possession of papers establishing an event of historical importance, which, if it had not escaped Mr. Wilberforce's memory, had to their knowledge never escaped his lips. They were to speak, therefore, merely from written information. They were to speak in the lifetime of those who were concerned in the event, but had avoided all allusion to it. Even as it is, the charges of falsehood and forgery have been darkly hinted against them. For these, indeed, they little care. Such is ever the reception of

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unpalatable truths by minds of a certain class; only they must here protest, as utterly without foundation, against the allegation that any where or at any time they attempted to represent Mr. Clarkson as “hired” by the committee or by any one. They deemed it necessary to show, fully and throughout, the nature of their father’s contributions, and to do this they judged it essential to show in this case what Mr. Clarkson received, and how he received it. There may have been attendant circumstances which made the details of this act of justice painful to Mr. Wilberforce, whilst they throw so strong a light upon his character, that they could not be suppressed by the editors. But they cannot allow that the mere acceptance of such reimbursement implied any thing injurious to the character of Mr. Clarkson. It could be no disgrace to him to receive what it was right in Mr. Wilberforce to offer. They solemnly declare, that the idea of representing Mr. Clarkson’s zealous labours in this cause as having sprung in any sense, or in the least degree, from the desire or expectation of pecuniary remuneration, never for an instant visited their minds. They knew perfectly, and have never expressed the slightest doubt, that his energies were given to the cause at a sacrifice of private fortune, and without a notion of return.

Again, it is asserted in the “Strictures” that Mr. Clarkson’s share in the Abolition struggle is every-

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where suppressed. The charge is general, and the answer, therefore, must in great part be the same. The only particulars alleged are, first, the evident mistake of *two*, for three, in the general summary of the committee; secondly, that Mr. Clarkson is not stated to have been the originator of the Abolition Committee; and thirdly, that Mr. Clarkson is not mentioned as having been present at the last public meeting on the subject, over which Mr. Wilberforce presided. To these two instances, and to the general charge, the editors have one reply to make. They have not undertaken to write the History of the Abolition, but the Life of William Wilberforce. In keeping to this subject they did not, therefore, conceal what they should have stated, but only abstained from digressions which it was their duty to avoid. In the account of the meeting at Freemason's Hall Mr. Clarkson's name is not mentioned, but neither is the name of any one of the other "old friends of the cause," "all" of whom are said to have "gathered around Mr. Wilberforce."\* Why should this complaint have been made by Mr. Clarkson rather than by any other of those numerous and respected friends, except from that peculiarity in Mr. Clarkson which was long since noticed in the "Christian Observer," then under the direction of Zachary Macaulay †, as having led Mr. Clarkson to be-

\* *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. v. p. 317.

† *Christian Observer*, No. 169.



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come his own biographer under the general title of Historian of the Abolition? Some of Mr. Clarkson's truest friends have not been induced by recent clamour to forget this truth. "What?" asked Mr. Southey, after critically reading the *Life of Wilberforce*, and giving to it the high praise that "it could not possibly have been better done," "What shall I say of Thomas Clarkson? That nothing of this sort would have happened if at the first he had followed my advice." That advice Mr. Southey goes on to specify as having been the professed publication of "*Passages in Mr. Clarkson's Life*," instead of a "*History of the Abolition*." Mr. Clarkson had been the foremost figure of the group in his own *History of Abolition*; the charge "*they do not notice me\**" is really little more than a complaint that he is not equally conspicuous in the biography of Wilberforce.

One more charge remains: —

The claim, it is asserted, of priority of public effort in the Abolition cause is mistakenly put forth for Mr. Wilberforce.

The answer is simple. No such claim is made. The editors declared that Mr. Clarkson's public efforts were the earlier. . . They have never stated more, than that Mr. Wilberforce's efforts were not, as the "*History*" implied, the fruits of Mr. Clarkson's. This point they

\* *Strictures*, p. 63.

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have abundantly established. All they would now say, is, why they thought it worth establishing. Interesting as it must be, merely as a fact, to trace the first steps which led William Wilberforce to the great object of his life, they might not, for that interest merely, have run the risk of irritating Mr. Clarkson's just admirers. So far as it concerned Mr. Wilberforce's fame alone, it could matter little whether Mr. Clarkson's writings, or some other cause, first awoke his interest in this question. But it seemed to the editors of this *Life* that there were higher and more sacred truths at stake. The great cause of Abolition has too often been debased to the low level of a party contest. In their view it was a far nobler and holier cause. If, then, their view was right, it was of no trifling importance to sever it as far as possible from such alliances. Nor could this be more effectually done than by tracing up the efforts of the leader in the cause to the holy fountain from which they sprung — by showing that the true fear and love of God had breathed into the soul of Wilberforce this true, bold, and patient love of man.

In this view, how high an example do the pages of his life exhibit. They are the history of one endowed by nature with no usual portion of human sensibility, and fitted by intellectual superiority for great attempts. Even in childhood, a subject of more than national interest takes possession of his mind. In the first open-

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ing of life, he has the opportunity of gaining such knowledge of its extent, as might have led him to devote to it the fortuitous endowments of influence and station. But the blight of worldly pleasure comes across this glorious prospect. At length a beam of sacred light bursts through the veil. Immediately his ancient impulse revives, and the youthful sympathies, which the atmosphere of the world had for a season stifled, shoot forth with all their natural strength. By a singular order of Providence, those whose acquaintance his religious wants prompted him to cultivate — Newton, the Middletons, Latrobe, Wesley — were all persons deeply interested and peculiarly conversant with the specific subject which had occupied his thoughts. After a short time he takes counsel with those public characters whom he was able to influence. He forms the resolution of bringing the monstrous enormity before the great council of the nation. At this very moment others meet him, who had been themselves preparing to bear their part in the same design. Their united efforts are harmoniously directed to this great attempt. For himself, no obstacle deters nor does any delay weary him, till, by the end of twenty years, the public feeling gradually attests the effect of his continuous and unceasing labours.

And is it possible to look on such a spectacle as this, and omit to do justice to that divine power, which dis-

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played itself as the fecundating principle of the otherwise fruitless promise of human sympathy? And can this be done without tracing Mr. Wilberforce's resolutions to their real source? Would it not be the most wilful blindness to attribute to the accidental influence of a fellow creature, that which Mr. Wilberforce himself refers to its true source, in the providential intimations of the Great Father of all wisdom? "Surely never had I more cause for gratitude than now, when carrying the great object of my life, to which A GRACIOUS PROVIDENCE DIRECTED MY THOUGHTS."

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The writers have to return thanks for some private communications on one or two subjects mentioned in the Life of Wilberforce, to which due attention shall be paid in a new edition. In particular, they feel that, from want of full information, they have not done adequate justice to the designs of Mr. Haldane for the establishment of a mission in the East Indies.

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