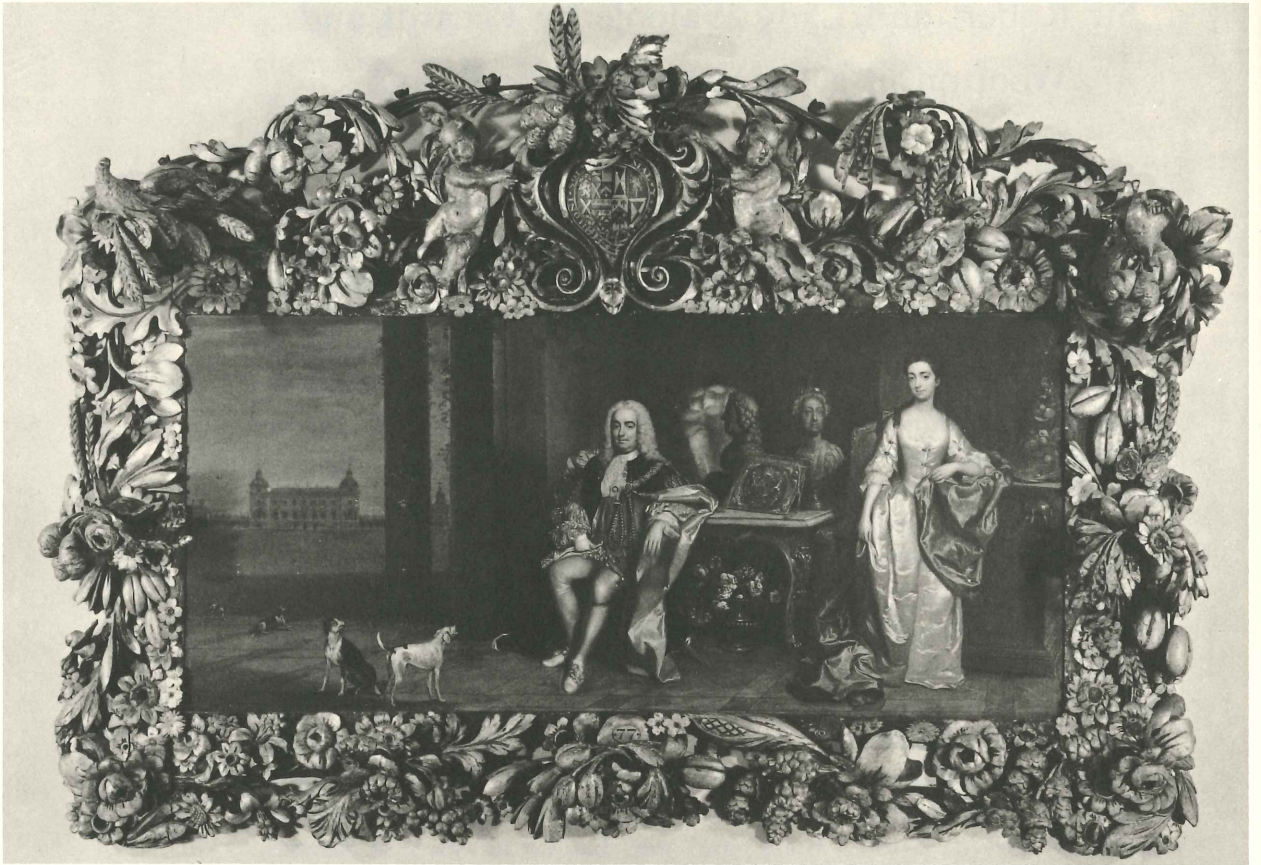


Choice 2

Sir Robert and Lady Walpole by Eccardt and Wootton in a Grinling Gibbons Frame

This frame hung in the Blue Bedchamber, as we learn from Walpole's *Description of Strawberry Hill*: "In a frame of black and gold carved by Gibbons, Sir Robert Walpole and Catherine Shorter; small whole lengths; by Eccardt, after Zincke: the hounds and view of Houghton by Wootton, Sir Robert is sitting; by him, on a table, is the purse of the chancellor of the exchequer, leaning against busts of George 1st and 2d to denote his being first minister to those kings: by Lady Walpole are flowers, shells, a pallet and pencils, to mark her love of the arts." William Cole, Horace Walpole's contemporary at Eton and Cambridge and his chief antiquarian correspondent, noted in his "Account of Some Pictures at Strawberry Hill" now in the British Library, "under the table stands a flower pot, and by Lady Walpole a grotto of shells. I remember when I was a school-boy at Eton, calling on Mr Walpole at Chelsea, where Sir Robert, his father, then lived, I found him learning to draw, with Mr Lens the painter with him; and he then showed me a most beautiful grotto of shell work in the garden, on the banks of the Thames, designed by his mother: probably this alludes to that grotto. The frame of this picture cost £30, being most exquisitely carved, painted black, and gilt, having all sorts of flowers, fruits, birds, and at top figures of boys."

In his *Anecdotes of Painting in England* Walpole calls Gibbons (1648–1721) "An original genius" who was "a citizen of nature. . . . There is no instance of a man before Gibbons who gave to wood the loose and airy lightness of flowers, and chained together the various productions of the elements with a free disorder natural to each species." How did the frame get to Strawberry Hill? I have been saying for years that it was originally around a mirror at Houghton, Sir Robert's house in Norfolk, and that Walpole admired it so much his father gave it to him, a plausible explanation, but I can't prove it. In *Aedes Walpolianae*, 1747, Walpole's *catalogue*



Sir Robert and Lady Walpole by Eccardt and Wootton in a black and gold frame carved by Grinling Gibbons.

raisonné of his father's great collection of pictures at Houghton, he speaks of Gibbons's carvings there, but doesn't mention the frame. Walpole's copy at Farmington of *A Description of Strawberry Hill* "with such prices as I can recollect" says nothing about the £30 or where the frame came from, but we know that it was bought at the Strawberry Hill sale in 1842 by Lord Lansdowne and that it was No. 77 in Lansdowne House, Berkeley Square, until 1930 when it was sold at Christie's and given me by my wife.

Walpole's parents lived apart much of the time. There is at Farmington a letter from Sir Robert to his wife dated 10 July, 1702, when he was twenty-six and their eldest son, Robert, was only a year. The letter begins, "My Dearest Dear" and continues with mock devotion and surprise that she could have written him such unpleasant letters. "I am blind, cannot, would not, see anything in my dearest self but what is most agreeable," etc., etc. The hearty, red-necked Robert Walpole could be cutting and cruel. He and his wife came together occasionally. Edward was born in 1706, Horace in 1717. One hundred and twenty years after Horace's birth Lady Louisa Stuart printed the gossip of her day that he was not the son of Sir Robert, but of Carr Lord Hervey. How, the skeptics asked, could the red-faced, lusty Sir Robert have such a pale epicene son? Horace, it was noted, was more like the Herveys than the Walpoles. He wrote in his first Common Place Book (Choice 4), "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu said there were three sexes: Men, women, and Herveys." His mother's affair with Carr Lord Hervey was no secret, but if the Walpoles had doubts about Horace's paternity when he was born they rose above them: he was named for Sir Robert's younger brother who stood godfather for him; Lady Townshend, his father's sister, was his godmother and paid for the christening. It is not unlikely, as Romney Sedgwick pointed out, that the gossip about Horace's paternity came from John Lord Hervey's statement that Sir Robert believed his grandson and heir, George third Earl of Orford, was illegitimate.

Horace was brought up by his mother who lavished on him what he later called "extreme partiality." We get some idea of this from the bills now at Farmington for his toys that came to £39.11.9 and for two suits that cost £71, a total that is the equivalent of heaven knows how much today. Those bills were thoughtfully reported to me by J. H. Plumb; they were among the Walpole papers at Houghton that the late Lord Cholmondeley deposited in the Cambridge University Library for the use of scholars. The Cholmondeleys very kindly let me have them with other bills paid to Master Horace's writing master, schoolmaster, and footman, together with



eight of his Exchequer account books kept in the 1750s. His first letter to his mamma, written when he was eight, is also at Farmington. It hopes that she, his papa, and all his "cruataurs" are "wall," a concern that reflects a lifelong devotion to his parents and pets. He shared his mother's love of flowers and painting. At Farmington are three well drawn water-color copies of Watteau that he signed with his initials and dated 1736, 1737, 1738. We can picture Lady Walpole admiring the first and perhaps the second before she died in 1737 in Horace's twentieth year. So overwhelmed was he by her death that his friends feared for his sanity. The Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey permitted him to raise a cenotaph in the Henry VII Chapel to her memory. The drawing of it with a note by Walpole, "Design for Lady Walpole's tomb in Westminster Abbey by Rysbrack," was given me by Fritz Liebert.

On his wife's death Sir Robert promptly married Maria Skerrett, the mother of his daughter Mary, and Horace "got out of a house I could not bear." The new Lady Walpole died a few months later in childbirth. Seven of her books found their way into Horace's library; one of the three at Farmington is a copy of *Paradise Lost*. It was a wedding present from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu with the passage on the felicities of marriage transcribed on a fly-leaf by her. Walpole kept this book under lock and key in the Glass Closet of his library with the books he didn't want everyone to see.

While he was on the Grand Tour Sir Robert had him made a Member of Parliament for a family borough and so Horace was able to fight for his father in the final battle of Sir Robert's twenty-one year rule as Prime Minister. After Sir Robert fell in 1742 and became Earl of Orford, Horace was his constant companion until Sir Robert died three years later. Dr Ranby, Sir Robert's physician, in *A Narrative of the Last Illness of the Right Honourable the Earl of Orford*, 1745, acknowledged his indebtedness to "the journal of one of Lord Orford's sons," who was undoubtedly Horace. The journal has disappeared and Horace did not annotate his three copies of Ranby's printed *Narrative* at Farmington, but we do have Sir Robert's last words that Horace recorded on a scrap found at Upton. The "Lixivium" mentioned in the note was a violent concoction for the stone that was given Sir Robert by his earlier physician, Jurin. The note begins, "Dear Horace, this Lixivium has blown me up, it has tore me to pieces," and ends, "Tis impossible not to be a little disturbed at going out of the world, but you see I am not afraid." Sir Robert left Horace £5000, his house in Arlington Street, and an extra place in the Customs that

brought his income to £8000 in 1784, a sum equal to perhaps \$400,000 today without taxes. As long as he lived he wrote of his father's superiority to all other men and berated his enemies with unabated dislike.

Horace's much older brothers, Robert and Edward, detested their mother's favorite little boy. No letters between him and Robert have been found, but there is at Farmington a gift from Robert that Horace kept locked in his library's Glass Closet, "Callot's pocket-book, with a great number of exquisite original drawings by himself: a present to Mr Walpole from his brother Robert Earl of Orford: very valuable," an acknowledgment Walpole repeated on a fly-leaf of the book itself. When it was sold in 1842 for one of the highest prices in the library, the underbidder was William Beckford whose letters at Farmington to his bookseller show how badly he wanted the book. Sotheby's re-sold it in 1938. Philip Hofer and I were in London at the time and agreed not to bid against each other; but which of us should have it? The question was settled at a stag dinner given by Boies Penrose when somebody suggested sensibly that we cut for it. I see now the strong light on the card table and the white shirts of the diners standing round it as I leaned over and cut the ten of clubs and Phil cut the six of diamonds, and I remember the congratulations of the company. They proved premature because at the sale Dr Rosenbach soared above the limit that Phil and I had naively assumed was ample and bought the book for Lessing Rosenwald whom I didn't know at the time. After we had become close friends during the War Lessing was distressed to hear of the fiasco. "You ought to have it," he said, "but I've given it to our National Gallery." The Gallery was understandably loath to part with it until two fortunate things happened: Miss Agnes Mongan of the Fogg Museum at Harvard, the authority on Callot, said that the drawings were not by him and Lessing was elected to the National Gallery Board. At his first meeting he moved that the book be given to Yale for permanent deposit at Farmington, and that is how it rejoined sixty of its former neighbors in the Glass Closet.

Walpole had much more to do with Robert's son, George 3rd Earl of Orford, who is remembered chiefly for selling his grandfather's collection of pictures to Catherine of Russia. In his day he was celebrated as the last falconer in Britain, for driving four red deer in a phaeton, and for staging a race for £500 between five turkeys and five geese from Norwich to London. His style is shown in the "voyage" of nine boats that he conducted through the Fens with himself as Admiral of the Fleet and his mistress Patty Turk as its Vice-Admiral. "When the bridges on the smaller rivers

and dykes were too low," Wyndham Ketton-Cremer wrote in *A Norfolk Gallery*, "the crew dismantled them, to the dismay of the local inhabitants: and it can only be hoped that they were properly reerected before the fleet moved on." The unabridged manuscript of Walpole's "Short Notes" tells us that Orford first went mad in 1773. His mother, a great heiress who lived in sin at Florence, asked Walpole to take charge of him and his affairs, and was seconded by the "Old Horace" branch of the family at Wolterton, Edward refusing to be bothered with his ailing nephew. Horace surprised himself and everyone else by his business skill, selling horses and dogs and dealing with "the rascally attorneys" and "rookery of harpies" who had been battenning on his profligate nephew. Orford recovered his senses, and then with small thanks to his Uncle Horace got back the dismissed harpies. He was intermittently insane until he died in 1791. Horace then became, so he said, "the poorest earl in England." How little the new honor meant to him may be gauged by his not taking his seat in the House of Lords and by his verses,

Epitaphium Vivi Auctoris 1792.

An estate and an earldom at seventy-four!
 Had I sought them or wish'd them, 'twould add one fear more,
 That of making a countess when almost four-score.
 But Fortune, who scatters her gifts out of season,
 Though unkind to my limbs, has still left me my reason;
 And whether she lowers or lifts me, I'll try
 In the plain simple style I have liv'd in, to die;
 For ambition too humble, for meanness too high.

There are so many memorials at Farmington of Horace's second brother, Edward, and his family that I have put him in Choice 3.

Walpole's half-sister Mary, the daughter of Sir Robert and Maria Skerrett before they were married, is a shadowy figure; we don't even know the year of her birth, but she wasn't much younger than Horace. When her father became Earl of Orford she was legitimated by George II and was created an earl's daughter, an unprecedented act that submitted her to public abuse. Horace wrote that the wives and daughters of his father's enemies "declare against giving her place" and told how one day while driving through Hanover Square he met a mob carrying "a mawkin in a chair with three footmen, and a label on the breast, inscribed 'Lady Mary.'" There are glimpses of her at Houghton playing comet with Horace and singing for him at her harpsichord. She had, he wrote Mann,

"remarkable taste and knowledge of music," but being shy she sang for few. Her father's known partiality to her encouraged the belief that she was a great heiress and brought noble suitors. She rejected them for Charles Churchill, a natural son of the Marlborough family at Blenheim, a match that Horace called "foolish," but which turned out well. The only letter of his to Churchill that we have seen is written in his wittiest and easiest style. A letter from Churchill to Horace that announces the pending marriage of their daughter Mary to Lord Cadogan is at Farmington, but no more of their correspondence is known, a major loss in Walpole's history.

The first picture I ever bought was of Lady Mary Churchill, and like so many "finds" in collecting I came on it by chance. One morning in February 1925, while killing half an hour in the library of the University Club in New York, I happened to look at an auction catalogue of pictures for the first time in my life. The sale was that evening at the Anderson Gallery. Lot 26 was described, "Lady Mary Churchill by Francis Cotes." Webster's definition of "luck" is just right: "That which happens to one seemingly by chance." The "seemingly" allows for the possibility of divine intervention and extra-sensory perception, to both of which ardent collectors are susceptible. My hesitation before Hodgson's sale room in Chancery Lane illustrates these mysterious forces, and I believe my opening the sale catalogue in the University Club library was another intervention of the same nature. There was, however, no luck in the speed with which I hurried to see the picture. That was zeal fired by my resolve two months earlier to make the finest collection of Horace Walpole in existence.

Lady Mary appears in this portrait as a plain young woman sitting at a table with an open music book. She is looking up at us rather shyly. Her resemblance to Horace is strong, a significant circumstance because if the gossip about his paternity were true they would be no blood relation. I got the picture with only one opposing bid for \$175. The following morning, after paying my bill, I bundled Lady Mary into a taxi instead of sending her to Farmington by express. I was sailing for England in a few days and wanted to get the picture home before I left, but the wisdom of carrying it myself seemed doubtful when I got to the Grand Central. It was Saturday noon. The Anderson Gallery people, after recovering from their surprise at such an unorthodox delivery, advised me to carry the picture unwrapped to protect it from those who might stick their umbrellas through it unaware that it was a picture. As I walked down the wide stairs on to the concourse with Lady Mary clasped to my bosom I was

noticeable. The porter who had my bag slumped along in front, embarrassed. One youth regarding me with awe asked, "Is that over a hundred years old?" Another asked, "Say, did that come from Athens?" A friend who was going with me to Farmington for the week-end looked at me and hurried on without speaking.

When I got to the gate of my train the gateman sprang to attention. "You can't take that thing on here," he said, and threw a chain across the entrance. I rested Lady Mary on my toes. What was I to do? The train was leaving in a few minutes. My faithless friend was already on it; there was not another train for two hours. "I have my ticket on this train," I said, and added with what I hoped was an effective blend of authority and pitifulness, "I've got to make it."

The gateman hesitated, then said in a low, conspiratorial voice, "Follow me." We dashed off in the direction of the Graybar Building, my porter gloomily following. Our guide stopped before a little door I had never seen before, opened it, said, "Jeez, I'd get hell for this! What would happen to the express companies if everybody carried things like that?" He accepted my dollar bill as I sped through the gate with the porter and hurried back to his post, none the worse, I hope, for circumventing the express companies.

At home I sought for the first time confirmation of a Walpolian relic in the Strawberry Hill Catalogue. I found it among the family portraits in the Great Parlour: Twenty-first Day's Sale, lot 39, "a half-length of Lady Maria Walpole, only child of Sir Robert Walpole and Maria Skerrett, and wife of Charles Churchill, only son of General Churchill. ECCARDT. She is represented in a veil, with a music-book before her, a very charming picture." Most of this was taken from Walpole's *Description of Strawberry Hill*, but Walpole did not mention that Lady Mary is wearing a large diamond brooch. He spoke of the diamond years later when defending his father against the charge of receiving expensive presents from George II. Sir Robert was given only two, Horace said, "a crystal hunting bottle" and a large diamond with a great flaw in it, "both of which he gave to Lady Mary." I believe this is the diamond she is wearing in her portrait. Eccardt is a less valued artist than Francis Cotes, whose best pictures have been attributed to Reynolds, but Walpole placed him second only to Reynolds in a list of "Principal Painters now in London" that he made in 1761 and he commissioned Eccardt to paint Walpole himself and twenty-one members of his family and friends. Walpole's "The Beauties, An Epistle to Mr Eccardt, the Painter," was "handed about," he complained,



Lady Mary Churchill by Eccardt.

until it "got into print very incorrectly," yet the text follows closely the original manuscript of the verses in his Second Common Place Book, which is described in Choice 4.

A second portrait of Lady Mary by Eccardt is at Farmington. She is with her husband and their eldest little boy in a frame designed by Walpole. It hangs next to the Grinling Gibbons frame, as it did in the Blue Bed-chamber at Strawberry. Walpole tells us that it was taken "from the picture at Blenheim of Rubens, his wife and child." I owe it to Andrew Ritchie who when he was Director of the Yale Art Gallery found it at Colnaghi's in London and had it put aside for me. Such pictures bring with them the sense of life and color one has on regaining one's sight after a long interval. In this small conversation piece Lady Mary leaning towards her little son is more *grande dame* than a doting young mother and a more engaging woman than in the earlier Eccardt I carried home from New York. Walpole's fondness for her is reflected by Mme du Defand, who found her *très aimable, ses manières sont nobles, simples, et naturelles*. She became Housekeeper at Kensington and Windsor, lucrative and not too demanding posts. Two of her sons, George and Horace, flanked their Uncle as his aides-de-camps when he, aged 76, put on a sword to receive the "Queen and eight daughters of kings" at Strawberry Hill in 1794. His correspondence with Lady Mary was lifelong, but not one of his letters to or from her has appeared. At Farmington there is a portfolio from Upton that once contained letters to him. His list of the thirty correspondents is still inside the back cover. There are also a few stubs with their names: "From my Father, Sir Robert Walpole, afterwards Earl of Orford," "From my Brother Robert Earl of Orford," "From my Nephew George 3rd Earl of Orford," "From my Brother Edward Walpole," "From Lady Mary Walpole, since married to Charles Churchill Esq. son to Genl Churchill." The gap after the stub with her name is one of the widest in the book. Later evidence of his correspondence with her appears in his "Paris Journals" in which he recorded the letters he wrote on his five journeys to Paris between 1765 and 1775. Owen Morshead, the King's Librarian at Windsor, who performed miracles of discovery for me, recommended a skilled researcher at Somerset House. He sought out the wills of the Churchills, their seven children, and their children's children who spread throughout the Empire, a search that went on for months. I had given up when I met one of the descendants whose family name had appeared during the search and in whose country house was a portrait of Lady Mary on a horse. "Oh," she said, "I know all about Horace Wal-

pole's letters to Lady Mary Churchill. They belonged to my Uncle George who lived in Sussex." And what of him? "Uncle George went mad during the war and believed that the Germans were coming to get the letters. So he threw all of them into the fire shrieking with laughter." And that, I'm afraid, is just what happened.

Walpole learned by chance of another illegitimate daughter of his father's, Catherine Daye, who was living in great poverty with her mother. Horace told Cole that Sir Robert left her £100 a year and bought a rich living that he presented to a young clergyman with the understanding that he would marry Catherine when she came of age. The young clergyman took the living, married an heiress instead of Catherine, and went on to become Bishop of Chester and Ely. Horace brought Catherine to live at Strawberry Hill. Our only glimpse of her is from Cole who wrote that she was of "a squab, short, gummy appearance," but she died soon after she moved to Strawberry and when visitors came she perhaps had a tray in her own room. I like to think of her and her kindly younger brother visiting the Blue Bedchamber to pay their respects to their father's portrait in the Grinling Gibbons frame.