

Robert Abraham's  
Valdictory letter to  
readers of

TO READERS AND CORRESPONDENTS.

**The Whitehaven Herald.**

WHITEHAVEN, TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 1837.

"This is true Liberty; when freeborn men  
Having to advise the public, may speak out."  
MILTON.

TO THE READER.

By the time that this sheet issues from the press, it will be generally known to its readers, at least to all but the more distant of them, that my connection with the *Whitehaven Herald* has terminated, and that this week is the last of my editorial labours.

Between five and six years have now elapsed since the publication of the first number, and it would be ungrateful indeed were I to take my departure without expressing my gratitude to my friends in general, but more particularly to those whose personal aid and counsel have so largely contributed to cheer and guide me in a path beset with some difficulties, and fruitful with many recollections. Five years are but a few steps in the great march of time, but they occupy a large space in the life of an individual, and it is impossible for any person to look back on the manner in which five years have been spent without finding much food for reflection on the past, and deriving some instruction for the future,—without recalling emotions chequered both with pleasure and pain.

It is not my purpose, however, to intrude on my readers matters so purely selfish. But I cannot for the last time put my pen to paper for the purpose of addressing them, without expressing my deep sense of the personal kindness which I have ever experienced, and the gratitude I feel to those whose sympathy and support have done so much to smooth my path and lighten my labours. I came to Whitehaven an entire stranger, in a profession new to me, and, in the establishment of this paper, with a task somewhat arduous before me, and from the very first it was my lot to be assailed with the foulest abuse and the most unfounded calumnies. But abuse and calumny I did not need to learn were marks of distinction, when their shafts were systematically aimed at me in common with the most virtuous and honourable characters of the community; and I ceased to feel as a stranger, the moment I was enabled to appreciate the characters of those whom I had the good fortune to find my political associates and private friends. It might be unbecoming in me to say more, but it would be ungrateful were I to say less, than that, in my yet brief experience of men and parties, I have met with none more honourable, more zealous, and more singleminded, more patriotic in purpose, or more consistent in intention, than the Liberals of Whitehaven. If extraneous circumstances have rendered the severance of my connection with them desirable to me, I have not contemplated it without much unwillingness, nor effected it without deep regret. I part from them as I have lived among them, with feelings which I venture to hope are mutual, of regard and good will. The attachments I have formed will, I fondly hope, be permanent, and it is a high satisfaction to me to be able to leave the newspaper, in which my first introduction to Whitehaven originated, stable and prosperous.

Still less is it my purpose to enter into a recapitulation of the political principles on which this paper has been conducted. They have consistently been those on which I at first professed to conduct it. As they have met with the approbation of its readers, and of my own conscience, any justification of them as between me and those whom I address is entirely needless. In the numerous important questions which have been agitated since the concession of the Reform Bill, it has been my wish, and I hope my practice, to inform my readers what truly were their interests, to promote the cause of Reform and good government by all needful exposition of the principles on which they ought to be founded, and of the benefits which I expected to flow from them. Of the inadequacy of my feeble pen to this important task, no one can be more sensible than I. But I do claim credit for honesty of purpose, respect for the institutions of our country, and the desire to adapt them by prudent reform to the altering circumstances of society.

Nor is it my intention to pass in review the local politics of the district. The prostration of Whitehaven, and the temporary suspension of the liberties of West Cumberland, I have deplored, and done my best to avert. No one will rejoice more than I to learn that the electors are rousing from their apathy, and combining their desultory efforts into one grand and imposing array. I have no hesitation in expressing my opinion, let it offend whom it may, that nothing but the most shameless negligence, or the most gross mismanagement, can suffer West Cumberland to remain a Tory close borough. Warmly shall I rejoice to learn that the electors, instead of reposing in slothful indifference to their own honour and the welfare of the country, until roused from their slumbers by the din of an election, have learned and reduced to practice the rudiments of political tactics; that they have discovered that it is only by watching the register year by year, that just claims can be recorded and fictitious ones expunged, and that to have to seek a candidate when the contest has commenced, affords a but indifferent chance of winning it.

If my readers expect me to enter more particularly into the details of the Harbour Trust, with which I have been so closely connected, I must excuse myself under the plea that my sentiments have been often and very recently before the public, and that I have the strongest reason to believe they have met with their approbation. I would only remind my constituents that I have never been absent from a single meeting, or failed in laying a report of it before them. My votes are on record; and if it be an honour to struggle perseveringly against an overwhelming majority, I have had the honour to be in more minorities than any individual trustee—very often in minorities of one. The labour and disagreeableness of this task I believe no man can estimate who has not encountered it; and the unpleasantness of reporting, when the reporter is an active partisan, is what nothing but the sense of public duty would have induced me to encounter. If my toils have been fruitless, that is no fault of mine. Though unable to arrest the ruinous course of the trustees, I have opposed them and remonstrated with them at every step. If, at the election of 1832, eleven men had been returned sharing my sentiments, the town would have been something like fifty thousand pounds richer, and the harbour fifty per cent. better. I have done what I conceived to be my duty, and if the inhabitants think the course I have pursued a proper one, they will doubtless express their opinion by returning, at the next election, a majority of trustees of similar sentiments—that is, if the harbour and its funds be not by that time in such a condition as to make it utterly hopeless to attempt its restoration. If what was once the best dry harbour in England—a harbour, which a few years ago, before the "natural defences" so zealously guarded by the Act of Anne, were abandoned, possessed a clear surplus stock of eighteen thousand pounds, and a surplus revenue of four thousand,—if that harbour, the true theory of which was so clearly comprehended by Mr. Spedding, and so lamentably mistaken by his successors,—if that harbour, once so excellent and so wealthy, be not in August 1838, a mass of ruins and insolvent, I trust to hear that it is taken out of the hands of those who have shewn such amazing ingenuity and perseverance in error. I regret the circumstances which in the meantime may, to a certain extent, deprive of my humble assistance those whom I yet may call, and shall always regard as my townsmen, and I believe that I shall best serve their interests by doing myself the honour to pair off with my Lord Viscount Lowther for the rest of the triennial term.

But though I have said that it was disagreeable to pursue a constant, a useless, perhaps, apparently a vexatious opposition, in the face of an overwhelming majority, and unpleasant to report debates in which I myself took an active part, I should do an act of gross injustice if I were even to leave it to be inferred that my task was made disagreeable or unpleasant by the conduct of the gentlemen whom I had the honour to meet. As there is not one of them to whom I would not confidently appeal for vindication, were I accused of discourtesy, rudeness, or intentional misrepresentation, I feel bound on my own part to state, that I ever met with fair, liberal, and gentlemanly treatment. As I have not been much in the habit of saying anything in praise of those gentlemen, I trust the praise which I do bestow will be deemed sincere. And if, within the walls of the Trust, I have often been left to struggle for what I deemed the true interests of the town, almost, or altogether, unaided, I have had to complain of no want of sympathy or support out of doors. Whatever were the difficulties of the path, I have met with every encouragement to persevere in it, and in contending that every stone laid to the north, or to the north-west, was a nuisance and an evil, I have been backed by the whole seafaring population of the town, and the unanimous voice of three public meetings.

I have stated above that I leave the *Whitehaven Herald* stable and prosperous. I have the pleasure to inform my friends that its circulation has largely increased, and that, as a business concern, it is in the best condition that ever it was since I became connected with it. It is also a matter of unfeigned satisfaction to me that I have been able to transfer my interest in it to a gentleman of talent and experience, a consistent supporter of the political principles on which it has been conducted. Under his management, I have not the smallest doubt it will continue to prosper, and become a still more efficient organ of public opinion, and champion of the public rights. My personal superintendence of the paper will close before this address meets the eye of the reader, and I regret that a short period must elapse before my successor is able to assume the management. I trust, that the period will be very short, perhaps not more than a few days. Should, however, a publication or two have to appear, without the superintendence of a resident editor, I have only to repeat that the deficiency will be very temporary, and to request of those who have excused so much that perhaps might have been avoided, to excuse this which is inevitable.

I now respectfully take my leave of my private and political friends in West Cumberland, and, with every sentiment of regard, subscribe myself their obedient and grateful servant,

ROBERT ABRAHAM.

Whitehaven, March 11, 1837.