

## The Most Important Design I Ever Made

Hone the publisher's trial, you must find very amusing; & as Englishmen very encouraging—his Not Guilty is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's Emblazoning—Lord Ellenborough has been paid in his own coin— Wooler & Hone have done us an essential service.

John Keats<sup>1</sup>

The acquittal of Hone is enough to make one out of love with English Juries.

Dorothy Wordsworth<sup>2</sup>

Eighteen eighteen was a year of respite for the age and for George Cruikshank. The trade depression abated for about eighteen months, beginning in July 1817. By December of that year Wellesley-Pole could report to the British minister in Washington that there was calm in Downing Street and "Peace, Prosperity and Plenty, Capital, Confidence and Credit."<sup>3</sup> The new year commenced on the same note. Caricaturists, deprived of any major political crisis or scandal, turned instead to fashion: dandymania in all ranks of life swept the print shops.

Hone could not immediately take advantage of his three acquittals. His health, adversely affected by his ordeal, deteriorated, and he was

destitute. Of the three thousand pounds raised by subscription, only a third came to him; a thousand pounds was swallowed up in “expenses,” chiefly advertisements in the newspapers, and another thousand was embezzled by the secretary to the Subscription Fund, who decamped to America. Hone refused to trouble Waithman, the treasurer, who was campaigning for a seat from Westminster in the general election. Ten years later when the speculator returned to England and was living within the Rules for some other crime, he met Hone in the street, but they never spoke to one another.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of January Hone finally published the *Third Trial*, which had been delayed by the many personal messages of support and encouragement he had received. In an “Address” prefatory to the text, he announced his intention “to commence business as a Bookseller, upon a more respectable footing than hitherto” and promised to prepare at leisure “an enlarged Report” of the trials, which would include a full narrative of all the surrounding events, copies of every parody mentioned in court, and “reduced *facsimile* engravings of every print exhibited and referred to [in] the Trials ... executed with great care, and faithfully coloured in the same manner as the originals.” This book, illuminated by Cruikshank’s etchings, “handsomely printed in royal octavo,” and suitable for gentlemen’s libraries, would elevate the two-penny pamphlets into serious literary and graphic history, thereby somewhat lessening the objection levied in court that by publishing them inexpensively Hone guaranteed they would get into the “wrong” hands. Implicit class warfare is seldom absent from Radical propaganda of this period.<sup>5</sup>

But the “History of Parody” was never published. Cruikshank went so far as to pull india proofs of some of his reduced facsimiles. Hone advertised it intermittently between 1820 and 1824. But he was never able to bring it to fruition. During 1818, he attempted to recommence bookselling at new premises at 45 Ludgate Hill; however, the remnant of the subscription left him once again with insufficient capital. He turned back to the book-auction business but was unable to follow through on pending sales, owing to a prolonged breakdown. As he told John Childs, a Radical printer in Suffolk, on 8 January 1819, over a year after his trials:

I have been, and am, ill—dying, but not dead. Blood at the head, apoplectic affection—cupping—bleeding—blistering—lowering—a fortnight at Bath, &c.—vexation

at home and habitual melancholy which increases upon me; all these are indications of that sure and certain event which happeneth unto all, and which may happen to me in an instant. I am, in fact, in a very bad way— the Trials have given me a physical shake which has compelled me to abandon what I entered upon with alacrity and spirit, the sales by Auction of Libraries &c. for which I had made expensive and extensive arrangements and had neglected my other business to further. I have, therefore, now to begin the world afresh nearly.

From my bad health the Prospectus of the Trials has been delayed—of course the Trials themselves are not much forwarded. When the prospectus is ready I will send you some down, knowing they will be where they will be used.<sup>6</sup>

Since Hone was not able to commission any work, Cruikshank had to look elsewhere. Like his brother he had found occasional employment teaching art. On 15 July 1817 he commenced service as “Drawing master!!! at Mr. Newloves academy!!!”<sup>7</sup> That may have added a few shillings to his income. Other entries in his Day Book indicate that teaching private pupils was unprofitable. “Lady Burgogne is a Shabby Bitch,” he exclaimed, totting up how much he had spent on artists’ supplies for which presumably she never reimbursed him.<sup>8</sup>

In printmaking, George could no longer count on Robert as a steady collaborator, for his brother had married in July 1816, borrowing two pounds from Hone for the occasion, which was to be kept “a *secret*,” and assuring the publisher that his “brother and myself are as one in Business which you must be aware of.”<sup>9</sup> Sarah and Robert moved to King Street, Holborn, where their first son, Percy Robert, was born on 8 May 1817. A fortnight before Hone’s first trial, George, along with Mary and Margaret Eliza, joined in celebrating Percy’s christening at St. George’s, Bloomsbury. Sarah was soon pregnant again; their second son, Douglas Sharpe, was born 12 October 1818 and baptized in the same church the following summer.<sup>10</sup>

With a growing family of his own to maintain, Robert now struck out as an independent caricaturist consistently supporting the Radicals.<sup>11</sup> His is the first print to glamorize Burdett since his exit from the Tower in 1812.<sup>12</sup> He also there praises Hone and Thomas Wooler, publisher of the *Black Dwarf*, the Radical paper that George was both

contributing to and satirizing, and Robert distinguishes them from the inflammatory rhetoricians Cobbett and Hunt, the latter assailed on the hustings during the 1818 Westminster election for allegedly being a colleague of the notorious spy Oliver.<sup>13</sup> Robert's caricatures dramatically increase in number: 1814—three; 1815—one; 1816—ten; 1817—seven; then 1818—twenty and 1819—thirty-one.<sup>14</sup> For Johnny Fairburn he worked jointly with George; he etched some designs by George Humphrey and several in 1819 by Sidebotham. But his biggest line was dandies, dressed in the most exaggerated ways or riding primitive bicycles called velocipedes, and these he churned out for Fores, Tegg, and Sidebotham by the dozens. A fashionable buck himself, he was all the more alert to the comic potential of eccentricity and extreme.<sup>15</sup>

On his own, George had an exceptionally productive year. If Dorothy George's attributions are correct, and the British Museum collection for 1818 is reasonably comprehensive, then including books, pamphlets, broadsides, and theatrical prints as well as separate caricatures Cruikshank designed, etched, or sketched woodcut vignettes for upwards of 180 images. In some cases he collaborated with his brother.<sup>16</sup> In others he copied or adapted plates by Rowlandson, Gillray, or Williams.<sup>17</sup> Some he later repudiated, though collectors and curators continue to accept them.<sup>18</sup> Cruikshank also participated in the craze for dandy prints and supplied six etchings apiece for books about dandified gamblers: *The Greeks* and *The Pigeons*, which he acknowledged, and *The Ton*, which he repudiated to one collector but accepted in other copies.<sup>19</sup> For J. H. Jameson, whose Theatrical Print Warehouse near Covent Garden housed one of the largest selections of prints and toys on that subject, George, along with Robert, executed many portraits (especially of Kean) and stage designs.<sup>20</sup> The latter, reduced from sketches of the actual scenery employed in popular productions, could be slipped into paper models of miniature theaters so that children could reenact the drama in authentic settings. And, adapting his 1810 portrait of Sir Francis Burdett, Cruikshank burnished out the head and replaced it with that of William Hone for an etching published a month after the trials.<sup>21</sup>

Cruikshank's most substantial, as well as oddest and least documented, collaboration of this year was with Captain Simon Hehl, assistant quartermaster general. Hehl had invented one subject for Cruikshank in 1814.<sup>22</sup> Four years later he seems to have come to an arrangement with Fores to supply designs for a number of subjects

relating to beaux and belles, dandies, fashionable clergy, droning dissenters, avaricious Jews, music, dancing, gaming, wooing, and other social activities.<sup>23</sup> Some were adaptations of earlier prints, British and French; others appear to be original efforts. All of these were apparently executed by or in imitation of Cruikshank, the majority in an innovative process of pen lithography that testifies to George's continuing experimentation. At first he attempts to make his prints resemble etchings, even employing his characteristic dot-and-lozenge crosshatching and stipple shading; but as he explores the potential of the medium the designs become bolder and effectively exploit the flat, textured line, setting off its dashing curves by broad watercolor washes. The figures, large and simplified, are striking; they are caricatured and sometimes excessively grotesque. In two instances the heads of musicians are replaced by their instruments.<sup>24</sup>

Fores evidently hoped these prints would fill the gap opened when Rowlandson virtually ceased making social caricatures. Many of the designs, subjects, and treatments are reminiscent of the older artist's work, but bolder and cruder. That the publisher gauged the market correctly may be inferred from the proliferation of copies circulating throughout London and as far afield as Dublin. The copyists, who probably included Robert Cruikshank, reproduced George's style, making it difficult to identify his own work, and they sometimes etched from a lithographic original.<sup>25</sup> Production of these plates continued in substantial numbers until 1819, when, as suddenly as they began, they stopped.

Cruikshank's defection from this project may be explained by the revival of Hone's fortunes, but it is less easy to account for Hehl's total disappearance from any further print published through 1832. He never worked for any other publisher or etcher. A curious anecdote related by Percy Cruikshank implies that he was embarrassed into silence. Hehl, says Percy, used his position at the War Office to get at military scandals. He hired Fores and Cruikshank to produce his ideas, and all went smoothly until he quarreled with the publisher over the division of profits. Fores,

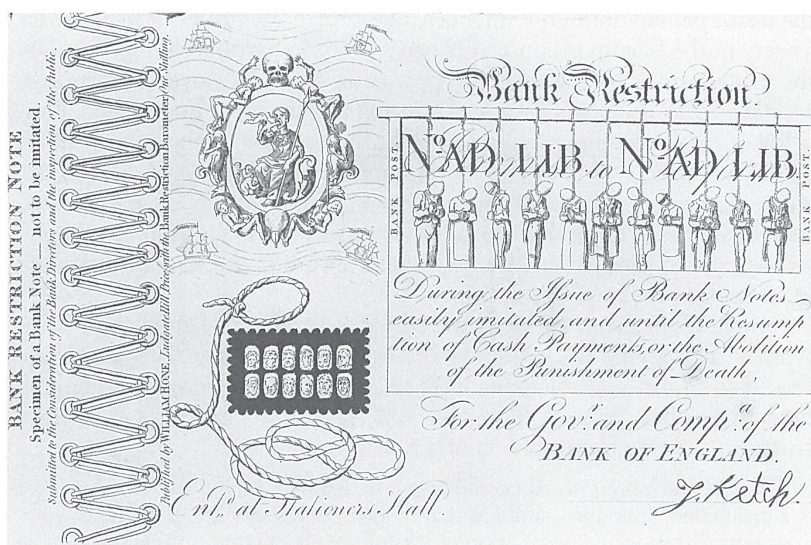
finding that nothing more was to be got out of the Captain, in revenge, placed one of the most offensive caricatures in the window, with the following notice, "This was designed by Captain H, of the Horse Guards"—Hungry place seekers soon carried the information to head quarters, when an

enquiry being instituted, the offender was cashiered, being left—without his sword—to carve a road to fortune, which consisted in having to quit the region of May Fair, and dabble in cheap pictures for an existence.<sup>26</sup>

Hehl may have been reprimanded by his superiors, but he kept his commission until 1826, when he retired on half-pay.<sup>27</sup> Cruikshank and C. W. Day often visited at the Hehls', where the captain's daughter would sit in the artist's lap while he sketched designs for their collaborative prints.<sup>28</sup> She grew up to be the famous actress Fanny Stirling, whom Cruikshank may have revisited when her husband Edward Stirling was adapting Cruikshank's illustrations for the 1842 Adelphi production of Ainsworth's *Miser's Daughter*. She had a long, distinguished career in comedy, starring as Dot in a dramatization of Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth* (1846) and as Peg Woffington (her most celebrated role) in Taylor and Reade's *Masks and Faces* (1852). Her father lapsed into such obscurity the *Dictionary of National Biography* doesn't even get his name right.<sup>29</sup> If he did caricature his fellow officers in prints now lost (or supply hints about the Mary Anne Clarke scandal, as Percy Cruikshank implies), it seems apparent that professional soldiers after the Napoleonic wars were no more amused by portraits *chargés* than the duke of Cumberland had been by the caricatures executed by his former officer George Townshend in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Despite Hone's gloomy letter of January 1819 complaining that he was dying, he shortly enjoyed a recovery both of health and business. As trade waned and the country slid into a severe recession, as distress and agitation increased throughout the countryside, Hone's fortunes, along with Cruikshank's, waxed. Together over the next three years (1819-1821) they produced no fewer than sixteen pamphlets, some of which sold in excess of a hundred thousand copies. In later years one or the other would claim responsibility for major legislation and for bringing the government to its knees over the Queen Caroline affair. Their joint productions helped to galvanize public opinion, to prompt the ministry to pass severely restrictive, though largely evaded, measures curtailing freedom of the Press, and to compel the new king to buy up unfavorable plates as the only way to limit the caricaturists' abuse. In the end, none of these measures was effective. George IV began his reign as the most unpopular monarch in a century.





22. George Cruikshank and William Hone, *Bank Restriction Note*, etching and engraving, Jan. 1819.

Their opening salvo was fired in January 1819 with the publication of a shilling broadside called the *Bank Restriction Barometer*.<sup>31</sup> This was a wrapper imprinted with the picture of a barometer indicating the good consequences of restoring payments in gold and the bad consequences of continuing the Bank of England's present policy of issuing paper currency. It was folded like an envelope around an enclosure, a *Bank Restriction Note* (fig. 22), which attacked two policies: the issuance of easily forged pound notes, and the capital penalty exacted for passing them.<sup>32</sup> Hone insisted that the two be sold together and prosecuted one street vendor who by inducing an errand boy in the printing office to steal a large quantity retailed the *Note* alone.<sup>33</sup>

The Bank of England had suspended payments for cash in 1797. To finance the war, Pitt and his successors printed notes for many times the value of gold reserves; Cruikshank criticized this policy in some of his earliest satires. The crude currency was easily counterfeited, and since it was a capital offence to steal privately from a shop anything valued at more than five shillings, anyone who, knowingly or innocently, passed a forged bill risked hanging or transportation

for life. Since the introduction of notes, over nine hundred persons had been convicted of forgery, and more than three hundred hanged.<sup>34</sup> Sir Samuel Romilly, campaigning against the death penalty for minor offences, questioned the justice of hanging for forgery in the Commons on 25 February 1818. In part he was prompted by the execution of two women the preceding week. A Royal Commission was formed to investigate ways of printing forgery-proof notes; the Chancellor of the Exchequer presented a preliminary report to the Commons on 22 January 1819.<sup>35</sup> But whenever an improved model was submitted, the bank engravers, jealous of their own professional skill, duplicated it, thereby demonstrating that the alternative was not proof against counterfeiting, and so the search for a new note continued and forgers continued to be transported until the 1830s.

George Cruikshank wrote to the editor of *Whitaker's Journal* on 12 December 1875 giving his version of the origin of the *Bank Restriction Note*. One day he saw several human beings, including two women, hanging from the gibbet opposite Newgate, and learned to his horror that their crime was passing forged one-pound notes.

The fact that a poor woman could be put to death for such a minor offence had a great effect upon me—and I at that moment determined, if possible, to put a stop to this shocking destruction of life for merely obtaining a few shillings by fraud; and well knowing the habits of the low class of society in London, I felt quite sure that in very many cases the rascals who forged the notes induced these poor ignorant women to go into the gin-shops to “get something to drink,” and thus *pass* the notes, and hand them the change.<sup>36</sup>

It sounds as though Cruikshank is speaking about February 1818, when the two women to whom Romilly alluded were executed; perhaps he conflated that distressing event with later ones. In any event, he claims that he went home to Dorset Street “and in ten minutes designed and made a sketch of this ‘*Bank-note not to be imitated*.’” Imitation bank notes were a familiar part of the caricature print repertoire. One series of twenty-five, running from 1803 to 1812, related to current events, promising to pay Bonaparte when the French became masters of the sea, or “Monsieur le Pap, alias the Pope,” when Roman Catholicism became the established religion in



England.<sup>37</sup> Cruikshank's variant indicates that he was thinking about the Royal Commission's efforts to devise a forgery-proof scrip: his is not an imitation bank note, but a "Specimen of a Bank Note—not to be imitated. Submitted to the Consideration of the Bank Directors and the inspection of the Public." It is therefore likely that his sketch was dashed off in January 1819, eleven months after the women's execution, when the commission's report was about to be submitted.

"About half an hour after this [design] was done," Cruikshank continues in his *Whitaker's* letter,

William Hone came into my room, and saw the sketch lying upon my table; he was much struck with it, and said, "What are you going to do with this, George?"

"To publish it," I replied. Then he said, "Will you let me have it?" To his request I consented, made an etching of it, and it was published.

Many years after Hone's death, his family took exception to this story, first when Cruikshank published a briefer report in the catalogue to his 1863 Exeter Hall exhibition, then at his death when Eliza Cruikshank advertised in the *Daily Telegraph* for the return of the steel plate of the Note.<sup>38</sup> Alfred Hone stated in his letter to her, as he had in an earlier letter to the *Athenaeum*, that "the Design originated with, and was made by, my father."<sup>39</sup> Mrs. Burn, Alfred's sister, "was much surprised to hear that George had claimed it. I remember distinctly the heads within the bars, as sketched by our father, and also the £ rope."<sup>40</sup> Hackwood reproduces a rough sketch, dated 12 January 1819, that purports to show Hone's pencilings, but the handwriting and the pen-and-wash reinforcements of the pencil sketch resemble Cruikshank's work.<sup>41</sup> Besides, it is doubtful that Hone, four days after announcing he was dying, would have sufficient energy to design a new work—but not impossible: perhaps Hone's children confused the Note with the *Barometer*. Hone may well have designed the latter, since he had made much of a parodic *Spiritual Barometer* in his trials.

The public took to the *Note* and *Barometer* in record numbers. The street in front of Hone's shop was blocked by customers, and Cruikshank sat up all night etching a second plate when the first wore out.<sup>42</sup> Both plates were printed on the post paper used by the bank so it would look like the flimsy currency then circulating. The general effect was of a counterfeit, but closer examination revealed