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BURKE

BY

JOHN VISCOUNT MORLEY
O.M.

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CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE, AND FIRST WRITINGS

It will soon be a hundred and twenty years since Burke first took his seat in the House of Commons, and it is eighty-five years since his voice ceased to be heard there.[1] Since his death, as during his life, opinion as to the place to which he is entitled among the eminent men of his country has touched every extreme. Tories have extolled him as the saviour of Europe. Whigs have detested him as the destroyer of his party. One undiscriminating panegyrist calls him the most profound and comprehensive of political philosophers that has yet existed in the world. Another and more distinguished writer insists that he is a resplendent and far-seeing rhetorician, rather than a deep and subtle thinker. A third tells us that his works cannot be too much our study, if we mean either to understand or to maintain against its various enemies, open and concealed, designing and

[1] Written in 1867.

NOTE.—The present writer published a study on Burke some twenty years ago. It was almost entirely critical, and in no sense a narrative. The volume that is now submitted to my readers first appeared in the series of *English Men of Letters*. It is biographical rather than critical, and not more than about a score of pages have been reproduced in it from the earlier book. Three pages have been inserted from an article on Burke contributed by me to the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; and I have to thank Messrs. Black for the great courtesy with which they have allowed me to transcribe the passage here. These borrowings from my former self, the reader will perhaps be willing to excuse, on the old Greek principle that a man may once say a thing as he would have it said, *δὶς δὲ οὐκ ἐνδέχεται* —he can hardly say it twice.—J. M. (1888).

mistaken, the singular constitution of this fortunate island. A fourth, on the contrary, declares that it would be hard to find a single leading principle or prevailing sentiment in one half of these works, to which something extremely adverse cannot be found in the other half. A fifth calls him one of the greatest men, and, Bacon alone excepted, the greatest thinker, who ever devoted himself to the practice of English politics. Yet, oddly enough, the author of the fifth verdict will have it that this great man and great thinker was actually out of his mind when he composed the pieces for which he has been most widely admired and revered.

A sufficient interval has now passed to allow all the sediment of party fanaticism to fall to the bottom. The circumstances of the world have since Burke's time undergone variation enough to enable us to judge, from many points of view, how far he was the splendid pamphleteer of a faction, and how far he was a contributor to the universal stock of enduring wisdom. Opinion is slowly, but without reaction, settling down to the verdict that Burke is one of the abiding names in our history; not because he either saved Europe or destroyed the Whig party, but because he added to the permanent considerations of wise political thought, and to the maxims of wise practice in great affairs, and because he imprints himself upon us with a magnificence and elevation of expression that places him among the highest masters of literature, in one of its highest and most commanding senses. Those who have acquired a love for abstract politics amid the almost mathematical closeness and precision of Hobbes, the philosophic calm of Locke or Mill, or even the majestic and solemn fervour of Milton, are revolted by the unrestrained passion and the decorated style of Burke. His passion appears hopelessly fatal to success in the pursuit of Truth, who does not usually reveal

herself to followers thus inflamed. His ornate style appears fatal to the cautious and precise method of statement, suitable to matter not known at all unless known distinctly. Yet the natural ardour which impelled Burke to clothe his judgments in glowing and exaggerated phrase, is one secret of his power over us, because it kindles in those who are capable of that generous infection a respondent interest and sympathy. But more than this, the reader is speedily conscious of the precedence in Burke of the facts of morality and conduct, of the many interwoven affinities of human affection and historical relation, over the unreal necessities of mere abstract logic. Burke's mind was full of the matter of great truths, copiously enriched from the fountains of generous and many-coloured feeling. He thought about life as a whole, with all its infirmities and all its pomps. With none of the mental exclusiveness of the moralist by profession, he fills every page with solemn reference and meaning; with none of the mechanical bustle of the common politician, he is everywhere conscious of the mastery of laws, institutions, and government over the character and happiness of men. Besides thus diffusing a strong light over the awful tides of human circumstance, Burke has the sacred gift of inspiring men to use a grave diligence in caring for high things, and in making their lives at once rich and austere. Such a part in literature is indeed high. We feel no emotion of revolt when Mackintosh speaks of Shakespeare and Burke in the same breath as being both of them above mere talent. And we do not dissent when Macaulay, after reading Burke's works over again, exclaims, "How admirable! The greatest man since Milton."

The precise date of Burke's birth cannot be stated with certainty. All that we can say is

that it took place in either 1728 or 1729, and it is possible that we may set it down in one or the other year, as we choose to reckon by the old or the new style. The best opinion is that he was born at Dublin on the 12th of January 1729 (N.S.). His father was a solicitor in good practice, and is believed to have been descended from some Bourkes of County Limerick, who held a respectable local position in the time of the civil wars. Burke's mother belonged to the Nagle family, which had a strong connection in the county of Cork; they had been among the last adherents of James II., and they remained firm Catholics. Mrs. Burke remained true to the Church of her ancestors, and her only daughter was brought up in the same faith. Edmund Burke and his two brothers, Garret and Richard, were bred in the religion of their father; but Burke never, in after times, lost a large and generous way of thinking about the more ancient creed of his mother and his uncles.

In 1741 he was sent to school at Ballitore, a village some thirty miles away from Dublin, where Abraham Shackleton, a Quaker from Yorkshire, had established himself fifteen years before, and had earned a wide reputation as a successful teacher and a good man. According to Burke, he richly deserved this high character. It was to Abraham Shackleton that he always professed to owe whatever gain had come to him from education. If I am anything, he said many years afterwards, it is the education I had there that has made me so. His master's skill as a teacher did not impress him more than the example that was every day set before him, of uprightness and simplicity of heart. Thirty years later, when Burke had the news of Shackleton's death (1771), "I had a true honour and affection," he wrote, "for that excellent man. I feel something like a satisfaction in the midst of my concern, that I was

fortunate enough to have him once under my roof before his departure." No man has ever had a deeper or more tender reverence than Burke for homely goodness, simple purity, and all the pieties of life; it may well be that this natural predisposition of all characters at once so genial and so serious as his, was finally stamped on him by his first schoolmaster. It is true that he was only two years at Ballitore, but two years at that plastic time often build up habits in the mind that all the rest of a life fails to pull down.

In 1743 Burke became a student of Trinity College, Dublin, and he remained there until 1748, when he took his Bachelor's degree. These five years do not appear to have been spent in strenuous industry in the beaten paths of academic routine. Like so many other men of fine gifts, Burke in his youth was desultory and excursive. He roamed at large over the varied heights that tempt our curiosity, as the dawn of intelligence first lights them up, one after another, with bewitching visions and illusive magic. "All my studies," Burke wrote in 1746, when he was in the midst of them, "have rather proceeded from sallies of passion, than from the preference of sound reason; and, like all other natural appetites, have been very violent for a season, and very soon cooled, and quite absorbed in the succeeding. I have often thought it a humorous consideration to observe and sum up all the madness of this kind I have fallen into, this two years past. First, I was greatly taken with natural philosophy; which, while I should have given my mind to logic, employed me incessantly. This I call my *furor mathematicus*. But this worked off as soon as I began to read it in the college, as men by repletion cast off their stomachs all they have eaten. Then I turned back to logic and metaphysics. Here I remained a good while, and with much pleasure, and

this was my *furor logicus*, a disease very common in the days of ignorance, and very uncommon in these enlightened times. Next succeeded the *furor historicus*, which also had its day, but is now no more, being entirely absorbed in the *furor poeticus*."

This is from one of Burke's letters to Richard Shackleton, the son of his schoolmaster, with whom he had formed one of those close friendships that fill the life of generous youth, as ambition fills an energetic manhood. Many tears were shed when the two boys parted at Ballitore, and they kept up their intimacy by a steady correspondence. They discuss the everlasting dispute as to the ultimate fate of those who never heard the saving name of Christ. They send one another copies of verses, and Burke prays for Shackleton's judgment on an invocation of his new poem, to beauteous nymphs who haunt the dusky wood, which hangs recumbent o'er the crystal flood. Burke is warned by Shackleton to endeavour to live according to the rules of the Gospel, and he humbly accepts the good advice, with the deprecatory plea that in a town it is difficult to sit down to think seriously. It is easier, he says, to follow the rules of the Gospel in the country than at Trinity College, Dublin. In the region of profaner things the two friends canvass the comparative worth of Sallust and of Tully's *Epistles*. Burke holds for the historian, who has, he thinks, a fine, easy, diversified narrative, mixed with reflection, moral and political, neither very trite nor obvious, nor out of the way and abstract; and this is the true beauty of historical observation.

Some pages of verse describe to Shackleton how his friend passes the day, but the reader will perhaps be content to learn in humbler prose that Burke rose with the dawn, and strode forth into the country through fragrant gardens and the

pride of May, until want of breakfast drove him back unwillingly to the town, where amid lectures and books his heart incessantly turned to the river and the fir-woods of Ballitore. In the evening he again turned his back on the city, taking his way "where Liffey rolls her dead dogs to the sea," along to the wall on the shore, whence he delighted to see the sun sink into the waters, gilding ocean, ships, and city as it vanished. Alas, it was beneath the dignity of verse to tell us what we should most gladly have known. For,

> The muse nor can, nor will declare,
> What is my work, and what my studies there.

What serious nourishment Burke was laying in for his understanding we cannot learn from any other source. He describes himself as spending three hours almost every day in the public library; "the best way in the world," he adds oddly enough, "of killing thought." I have read some history, he says, and among other pieces of history, "I am endeavouring to get a little into the accounts of this, our own poor country,"—a pathetic expression, which represents Burke's perpetual mood, as long as he lived, of affectionate pity for his native land. Of the eminent Irishmen whose names adorn the annals of Trinity College in the eighteenth century, Burke was only contemporary at the University with one, the luckless sizar who in the fulness of time wrote the *Vicar of Wakefield*. There is no evidence that at this time he and Goldsmith were acquainted with one another. Flood had gone to Oxford some time before. The one or two companions whom Burke mentions in his letters are only shadows of names. The mighty Swift died in 1745, but there is nothing of Burke's upon the event. In the same year came the Pretender's invasion, and Burke spoke of those who had taken part in it in the same generous

spirit he always showed to the partisans of lost historic causes.

Of his own family Burke says little, save that in 1746 his mother had a dangerous illness. In all my life, he writes to his friend, I never found so heavy a grief, nor really did I well know what it was before. Burke's father is said to have been a man of angry and irritable temper, and their disagreements were frequent. This unhappy circumstance made the time for parting not unwelcome. In 1747 Burke's name had been entered at the Middle Temple, and after taking his degree, he prepared to go to England to pursue the ordinary course of a lawyer's studies. He arrived in London in the early part of 1750.

A period of nine years followed, in which the circumstances of Burke's life are enveloped in nearly complete obscurity. He seems to have kept his terms in the regular way at the Temple, and from the mastery of legal principles and methods which he afterwards showed in some important transactions, we might infer that he did more to qualify himself for practice than merely dine in the hall of his inn. For law, alike as a profession and an instrument of mental discipline, he had always the profound respect it so amply deserves, though he saw that it was not without drawbacks of its own. The law, he said, in his fine description of George Grenville, in words that all who think about schemes of education ought to ponder, "is, in my opinion, one of the first and noblest of human sciences; *a science which does more to quicken and invigorate the understanding than all the other kinds of learning put together*; but it is not apt, except in persons very happily born, to open and to liberalise the mind exactly in the same proportion."[1] Burke was never called to the Bar, and the circumstance

[1] *American Taxation.*

that, about the time when he ought to have been looking for his first guinea, he published a couple of books that had as little as possible to do with either law or equity, is a tolerably sure sign that he had followed the same desultory courses at the Temple as he had followed at Trinity College. We have only to tell over again a very old story. The vague attractions of literature prevailed over the duty of taking up a serious profession. His father, who had set his heart on having a son in the rank of a barrister, was first suspicious, then extremely indignant, and at last he withdrew his son's allowance, or else reduced it so low that the recipient could not possibly live upon it. This catastrophe took place some time in 1755,—a year of note in the history of literature, as the date of the publication of Johnson's *Dictionary*. It was upon literature, the most seductive, the most deceiving, the most dangerous of professions, that Burke, like so many hundreds of smaller men before and since, now threw himself for a livelihood.

Of the details of the struggle we know very little. Burke was not fond in after life of talking about his earlier days, not because he had any false shame about the straits and hard shifts of youthful neediness, but because he was endowed with a certain inborn stateliness of nature, that made him unwilling to waste thoughts on the less dignified parts of life. This is no unqualified virtue, and Burke might have escaped some wearisome frets and embarrassments in his existence, if he had been capable of letting the detail of the day lie more heavily upon him. So far as it goes, however, it is a sign of mental health that a man should be able to cast behind him the barren memories of bygone squalor. We may be sure that whatever were the external ordeals of his apprenticeship in the slippery craft of the literary adventurer, Burke never failed in keeping for his

constant companions generous ambitions and high thoughts. He appears to have frequented the debating clubs in Fleet Street and the Piazza of Covent Garden, and he showed the common taste of his time for the theatre. He was much of a wanderer, partly from the natural desire of restless youth to see the world, and partly because his health was weak. In after life he was a man of great strength, capable not only of bearing the strain of prolonged application to books and papers in the solitude of his library, but of bearing it at the same time with the distracting combination of active business among men. At the date of which we are speaking, he used to seek a milder air at Bristol, or in Monmouthshire, or Wiltshire. He passed the summer in retired country villages, reading and writing with desultory industry, in company with William Burke, a namesake but perhaps no kinsman. It would be interesting to know the plan and scope of his studies. We are practically reduced to conjecture. In a letter of counsel to his son in after years, he gave him a weighty piece of advice, which is pretty plainly the key to the reality and fruitfulness of his own knowledge. "*Reading*," he said, "*and much reading, is good. But the power of diversifying the matter infinitely in your own mind, and of applying it to every occasion that arises, is far better; so don't suppress the* vivida vis." We have no more of Burke's doings than obscure and tantalising glimpses, tantalising, because he was then at the age when character usually either fritters itself away, or grows strong on the inward sustenance of solid and resolute aspirations. Writing from Battersea to his old comrade, Shackleton, in 1757, he begins with an apology for a long silence that seems to have continued from months to years. "I have broken all rules; I have neglected all decorums; everything except that I have never

forgot a friend, whose good head and heart have made me esteem and love him. What appearance there may have been of neglect, arises from my manner of life; chequered with various designs; sometimes in London, sometimes in remote parts of the country; sometimes in France, and shortly, please God, to be in America."

One of the hundred inscrutable rumours that hovered about Burke's name was, that he at one time actually did visit America. This was just as untrue as that he became a convert to the Catholic faith; or that he was the lover of Peg Woffington; or that he contested Adam Smith's chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow along with Hume, and that both Burke and Hume were rejected in favour of some fortunate Mr. James Clow. They are all alike unfounded. But the same letter informs Shackleton of a circumstance more real and more important than any of these, though its details are only doubtfully known. Burke had married—when and where, we cannot tell. Probably the marriage took place in the winter of 1756. His wife was the daughter of Dr. Nugent, an Irish physician once settled at Bath. One story is that Burke consulted him in one of his visits to the West of England, and fell in love with his daughter. Another version makes Burke consult him after Dr. Nugent had removed to London; and tells how the kindly physician, considering that the noise and bustle of chambers over a shop must hinder his patient's recovery, offered him rooms in his own house. However these things may have been, all the evidence shows Burke to have been fortunate in the choice or accident that bestowed upon him his wife. Mrs. Burke, like her father, was, up to the time of her marriage, a Catholic. Good judges belonging to her own sex describe her as gentle, quiet, soft in her manners, and well-bred. She had the

qualities that best fitted and disposed her to soothe the vehemence and irritability of her companion. Though she afterwards conformed to the religion of her husband, it was no insignificant coincidence that in two of the dearest relations of his life the atmosphere of Catholicism was thus poured round the great preacher of the crusade against the Revolution.

About the time of his marriage, Burke made his first appearance as an author. It was in 1756 that he published *A Vindication of Natural Society*, and the more important essay, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful*. The latter of them had certainly been written a long time before, and there is even a traditional story that Burke wrote it when he was only nineteen years old. Both of these performances have in different degrees a historic meaning, but neither of them would have survived to our own day unless they had been associated with a name of power. A few words will suffice to do justice to them here. And first as to the *Vindication of Natural Society*. Its alternative title was, *A View of the Miseries and Evils arising to Mankind from every Species of Civil Society, in a Letter to Lord ——, by a late Noble Writer*. Bolingbroke had died in 1751, and in 1754 his philosophical works were posthumously given to the world by David Mallet, Dr. Johnson's beggarly Scotchman, to whom Bolingbroke had left half-a-crown in his will, for firing off a blunderbuss which he was afraid to fire off himself. The world of letters had been keenly excited about Bolingbroke. His busy and chequered career, his friendship with the great wits of the previous generation, his splendid style, his bold opinions, made him a dazzling figure. This was the late Noble Writer whose opinions Burke intended to ridicule, by reducing them to an absurdity in an exaggeration of Bolingbroke's

own manner. As it happened, the public did not readily perceive either the exaggeration in the manner, or the satire in the matter. Excellent judges of style made sure that the writing was really Bolingbroke's, and serious critics of philosophy never doubted that the writer, whoever he was, meant all that he said. We can hardly help agreeing with Godwin, when he says that in Burke's treatise the evils of existing political institutions, which had been described by Locke, are set forth more at large, with incomparable force of reasoning and lustre of eloquence, though the declared intention of the writer was to show that such evils ought to be considered merely trivial. Years afterwards, Boswell asked Johnson whether an imprudent publication by a certain friend of his at an early period of his life would be likely to hurt him. "No, sir," replied the sage; "not much; it might perhaps be mentioned at an election." It is significant that in 1765, when Burke saw his chance of a seat in Parliament, he thought it worth while to print a second edition of his *Vindication*, with a preface to assure his readers that the design of it was ironical. It has been remarked as a very extraordinary circumstance that an author who had the greatest fame of any man of his day as the master of a superb style, for this was indeed Bolingbroke's position, should have been imitated to such perfection by a mere novice, that accomplished critics like Chesterfield and Warburton should have mistaken the copy for a first-rate original. It is, however, to be remembered that the very boldness and sweeping rapidity of Bolingbroke's prose rendered it more fit for imitation than if its merits had been those of delicacy or subtlety; and we must remember that the imitator was no pigmy, but himself one of the giants. What is certain is that the study of Bolingbroke which preceded this excellent imitation left a permanent mark, and

traces of Bolingbroke were never effaced from the style of Burke.

The point of the *Vindication* is simple enough. It is to show that the same instruments which Bolingbroke had employed in favour of natural against revealed religion, could be employed with equal success in favour of natural as against what Burke calls artificial society. "Show me," cries the writer, "an absurdity in religion, and I will undertake to show you a hundred for one in political laws and institutions. . . . If, after all, you should confess all these things, yet plead the necessity of political institutions, weak and wicked as they are, I can argue with equal, perhaps superior force, concerning the necessity of artificial religion; and every step you advance in your argument, you add a strength to mine. So that if we are resolved to submit our reason and our liberty to civil usurpation, we have nothing to do but to conform as quietly as we can to the vulgar notions which are connected with this, and take up the theology of the vulgar as well as their politics. But if we think this necessity rather imaginary than real, we should renounce their dreams of society, together with their visions of religion, and vindicate ourselves into perfect liberty."

The most interesting fact about this spirited performance is, that it is a satirical literary handling of the great proposition that Burke enforced, with all the thunder and lurid effulgence of his most passionate rhetoric, five-and-thirty years later. This proposition is that the world would fall into ruin, "if the practice of all moral duties, and the foundations of society, rested upon having their reasons made clear and demonstrative to every individual." The satire is intended for an illustration of what with Burke was the cardinal truth for men, namely, that if you encourage every individual to let the imagination loose upon all subjects,

without any restraint from a sense of his own weakness, and his subordinate rank in the long scheme of things, then there is nothing of all that the opinion of ages has agreed to regard as excellent and venerable, which would not be exposed to destruction at the hands of rationalistic criticism. This was Burke's most fundamental and unswerving conviction from the first piece he wrote down to the last, and down to the last hour of his existence.

It is a coincidence worth noticing that only two years before the appearance of the *Vindication*, Rousseau had published the second of the two memorable *Discourses* in which he insisted with serious eloquence on that which Burke treats as a triumph of irony. He believed, and many thousands of Frenchmen came to a speculative agreement with him, that artificial society had marked a decline in the felicity of man, and there are passages in the *Discourse* in which he demonstrates this, that are easily interchangeable with passages in the *Vindication*. Who would undertake to tell us from internal evidence whether the following page, with its sombre glow, is an extract from Burke, or an extract from the book which Rousseau begins by the sentence that man is born free, yet is he everywhere in chains?—

> There are in Great Britain upwards of a hundred thousand people employed in lead, tin, iron, copper, and coal mines; these unhappy wretches scarce ever see the light of the sun; they are buried in the bowels of the earth; there they work at a severe and dismal task, without the least prospect of being delivered from it; they subsist upon the coarsest and worst sort of fare; they have their health miserably impaired, and their lives cut short, by being perpetually confined in the close vapour of these malignant minerals. A hundred thousand more at least are tortured without remission by the suffocating smoke, intense fires, and constant drudgery, necessary in refining and managing the products of those mines. If any man informed us that two hundred thousand

innocent persons were condemned to so intolerable slavery, how should we pity the unhappy sufferers, and how great would be our just indignation against those who inflicted so cruel and ignominious a punishment! . . . But this number, considerable as it is, and the slavery, with all its baseness and horror, which we have at home, is nothing to what the rest of the world affords of the same nature. Millions daily bathed in the poisonous damps and destructive effluvia of lead, silver, copper, and arsenic, to say nothing of those other employments, those stations of wretchedness and contempt, in which civil society has placed the numerous *enfans perdus* of her army. Would any rational man submit to one of the most tolerable of these drudgeries, for all the artificial enjoyments which policy has made to result from them? . . . Indeed the blindness of one part of mankind co-operating with the frenzy and villainy of the other, has been the real builder of this respectable fabric of political society: and as the blindness of mankind has caused their slavery, in return their state of slavery is made a pretence for continuing them in a state of blindness; for the politician will tell you gravely that their life of servitude disqualifies the greater part of the race of man for a search of truth, and supplies them with no other than mean and insufficient ideas. This is but too true; and this is one of the reasons for which I blame such institutions.

From the very beginning, therefore, Burke was drawn to the deepest of all the currents in the thought of the eighteenth century. Johnson and Goldsmith continued the traditions of social and polite literature that had been established by the Queen Anne men. Warburton and a whole host of apologists carried on the battle against deism and infidelity. Hume, after furnishing the arsenal of scepticism with a new array of deadlier engines and more abundant ammunition, had betaken himself placidly to the composition of history. What is remarkable in Burke's first performance is his discernment of the important fact that behind the intellectual disturbances in the sphere of philosophy, and the noisier agitations in the sphere of theology, there silently stalked a force that might shake the

whole fabric of civil society itself. In France, as all students of its speculative history are agreed, there came a time in the eighteenth century when theological controversy was turned into political controversy. Innovators left the question about the truth of Christianity, and busied themselves with questions about the ends and means of governments. The appearance of Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society* coincides in time with the beginning of this important transformation. Burke foresaw from the first what, if rationalism were allowed to run an unimpeded course, would be the really great business of the second half of his century.

If in his first book Burke showed how alive he was to the profound movement of the time, in the second he dealt with one of the most serious of its more superficial interests. The essay on the Sublime and Beautiful fell in with a set of topics on which the curiosity of the better minds of the age, alike in France, England, and Germany, was fully stirred. In England the essay has been ordinarily slighted; it has perhaps been overshadowed by its author's fame in weightier matters. The nearest approach to a full and serious treatment of its main positions is to be found in Dugald Stewart's lectures. The great rhetorical art-critic of our own day refers to it in words of disparagement, and in truth it has none of the flummery of modern criticism. It is a piece of hard thinking, and it has the distinction of having interested and stimulated Lessing, the author of *Laocoön* (1766), by far the most definitely valuable of all the contributions to aesthetic thought in an age that was not poor in them. Lessing was so struck with the *Inquiry* that he set about a translation of it, and the correspondence between him and Moses Mendelssohn on the questions Burke had raised, contains the germs of the doctrine as to poetry and painting which *Laocoön* afterwards

made so famous. Its influence on Lessing and on Kant was such as to justify the German historian of the literature of the century in bestowing on it the coveted epithet of epoch-making.

The book is full of crudities. We feel the worse side of the eighteenth century when Burke tells us that a thirst for Variety in architecture is sure to leave very little true taste; or that an air of robustness and strength is very prejudicial to beauty; or that sad fuscous colours are indispensable for sublimity. Many of the sections, again, are little more than expanded definitions from the dictionary. Any tyro may now be shocked at such a proposition as that beauty acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system. But at least one signal merit remains to the *Inquiry*. It was a vigorous enlargement of the principle, which Addison had not long before timidly illustrated, that critics of art seek its principles in the wrong place so long as they limit their search to poems, pictures, engravings, statues, and buildings, instead of first arranging the sentiments and faculties in man to which art makes its appeal. Addison's treatment was slight and merely literary; Burke dealt boldly with his subject on the base of the most scientific psychology that was then within his reach. To approach it on the psychological side at all was to make a distinct and remarkable advance in the method of the inquiry he had taken in hand.

CHAPTER II

IN IRELAND—PARLIAMENT—BEACONSFIELD

BURKE was thirty years old before he approached even the threshold of the arena in which he was destined to be so great a figure. He had made a mark in literature, and it was to literature rather than to public affairs that his ambition turned. He had naturally become acquainted with the brother-authors who haunted the coffee-houses in Fleet Street; and Burke, along with his father-in-law, Dr. Nugent, was one of the first members of the immortal club where Johnson did conversational battle with all comers. We shall, in a later chapter, have something to say on Burke's friendships with the followers of his first profession, and on the active sympathy with which he helped those who were struggling into authorship. Meanwhile, the fragments that remain of his own attempts in this direction are no considerable contributions. His *Hints for an Essay on the Drama* are jejune and infertile, when compared with the vigorous and original thought of Diderot and Lessing at about the same period. He wrote an *Account of the European Settlements in America*. His *Abridgment of the History of England* comes down no further than to the reign of John. A much more important undertaking than his history of the past was his design for a yearly chronicle of the present. The *Annual Register* began to appear in 1759. Dodsley, the

bookseller of Pall Mall, provided the sinews of war, and gave Burke a hundred pounds a year for his survey of the great events that were then passing in the world. The scheme was probably born of the circumstances of the hour, for this was the climax of the Seven Years' War. The clang of arms was heard in every quarter of the globe, and in East and West new lands were being brought under the dominion of Great Britain.

In this exciting crisis of national affairs, Burke began to be acquainted with public men. In 1759 he was introduced, probably by Lord Charlemont, to William Gerard Hamilton, who only survives in our memories by his nickname of Single-speech. As a matter of fact, he made many speeches in Parliament, and some good ones, but none so good as the first, delivered in a debate in 1755, in which Pitt, Fox, Grenville, and Murray all took part, and were all outshone by the new luminary. But the new luminary never shone again with its first brilliance. He sought Burke out on the strength of the success of the *Vindication of Natural Society*, and he seems to have had a taste for good company. Horace Walpole describes a dinner at his house in the summer of 1761. "There were Garrick," he says, "and a young Mr. Burke, who wrote a book in the style of Lord Bolingbroke, that is much admired. He is a sensible man, but has not worn off his authorism yet, and thinks there is nothing so charming as writers, and to be one. He will know better one of these days." The prophecy came true in time, but it was Burke's passion for authorism that eventually led to a rupture with his first patron. Hamilton was a man of ability, but selfish and unreasonable. Dr. Leland afterwards described him compendiously as a sullen, vain, proud, selfish, canker-hearted, envious reptile.

In 1761 Hamilton went to Ireland as secretary to Lord Halifax, and Burke accompanied him in

some indefinite capacity. "The absenteeism of her men of genius," an eminent historian has said, "was a worse wrong to Ireland than the absenteeism of her landlords. If Edmund Burke had remained in the country where Providence had placed him, he might have changed the current of its history."[1] It is at least to be said that Burke was never so absorbed in other affairs as to forget the peculiar interests of his native land. We have his own word, and his career does not belie it, that in the elation with which he was filled on being elected a member of Parliament, what was first and uppermost in his thoughts was the hope of being somewhat useful to the place of his birth and education; and to the last he had in it "a dearness of instinct more than he could justify to reason." In fact the affairs of Ireland had a most important part in Burke's life at one or two critical moments, and this is as convenient a place as we are likely to find for describing in a few words what were the issues. The brief space can hardly be grudged in an account of a great political writer, for Ireland had furnished the chief ordeal, test, and standard of English statesmen.

Ireland in the middle of the eighteenth century was to England just what the American colonies would have been, if they had contained, besides the European settlers, more than twice their number of unenslaved negroes. After the suppression of the great rebellion of Tyrconnel by William of Orange, nearly the whole of the land was confiscated, the peasants were made beggars and outlaws, the penal laws against the Catholics were enacted and enforced, and the grand reign of Protestant Ascendancy began in all its odium and completeness. The Protestants and landlords were supreme; the peasants and the Catholics were prostrate in despair. The Revolution brought

[1] Froude's *Ireland*, ii. 214.

about in Ireland just the reverse of what it effected in England. Here, it delivered the body of the nation from the attempted supremacy of a small sect. There, it made a small sect supreme over the body of the nation. "It was, to say the truth," Burke wrote, "not a revolution but a conquest," and the policy of conquest was treated as the just and normal system of government. The last conquest of England was in the eleventh century. The last conquest of Ireland was at the very end of the seventeenth.

Sixty years after the event, when Burke revisited Ireland, some important changes had taken place. The English settlers of the beginning of the century had formed an Irish interest. They had become Anglo-Irish, just as the colonists still farther west had formed a colonial interest and become Anglo-American. The same conduct on the part of the mother country promoted the growth of these hostile interests in both cases. The commercial policy pursued by England towards America was identical with that pursued towards Ireland. The industry of the Anglo-Irish traders was restricted, their commerce and even their production fettered, their prosperity checked, for the benefit of the merchants of Manchester and Bristol. *Crescit Roma Albae ruinis.* "The bulk of the people," said Stone, the Primate, "are not regularly either lodged, clothed, or fed; and those things which in England are called necessaries of life, are to us only accidents, and we can, and in many places do, subsist without them." On the other hand, the peasantry had gradually taken heart to resent their spoliation and attempted extirpation, and in 1761 their misery under the exactions of landlords and a church that tried to spread Christianity by the brotherly agency of the tithe-proctor, gave birth to Whiteboyism — a terrible spectre, that, under various names and with various

modifications, has ridden Ireland down to our own time.

Burke saw the Protestant traders of the dependency the victims of the colonial and commercial system; the Catholic landowners legally dispossessed by the operation of the penal laws; the Catholic peasantry deeply penetrated with an insurgent and vindictive spirit; and the imperial government standing very much aloof, and leaving the country to the tender mercies of the Undertakers and some Protestant churchmen. The Anglo-Irish were bitterly discontented with the mother country; and the Catholic native Irish were regarded by their Protestant oppressors with exactly that combination of intense contempt and loathing, and intense rage and terror, which their American counterpart would have divided between the Negro and the Red Indian. To the Anglo-Irish the native peasant was as odious as the first, and as terrible as the second. Even at the close of the century Burke could declare that the various descriptions of the people were kept as much apart as if they were not only separate nations, but separate species. There were thousands, he says, who had never talked to a Roman Catholic in their whole lives, unless they happened to talk to a gardener's workman or some other labourer of the second or third order; while a little time before this they were so averse to have them near their persons, that they would not employ even those who could never find their way beyond the stables. Chesterfield, a thoroughly impartial and just observer, said in 1764 that the poor people in Ireland were used worse than negroes by their masters and the middlemen. We should never forget that in the transactions with the English government during the eighteenth century, the people concerned were not the Irish, but the Anglo-Irish, the colonists of 1691. They were an aristocracy,

as Adam Smith said of them, not founded in the natural and respectable distinctions of birth and fortune, but in the most odious of all distinctions, those of religious and political prejudices—distinctions that, more than any other, animate both the insolence of the oppressors and the hatred and indignation of the oppressed.

The directions in which Irish improvement would move were clear from the middle of the century to men with much less foresight than Burke had. The removal of all commercial restrictions, either by Independence or Union, on the one hand, and the gradual emancipation of the Catholics, on the other, were the two processes to which every consideration of good government manifestly pointed. The first proved a much shorter and simpler process than the second. To the first the only obstacle was the blindness and selfishness of the English merchants. The second had to overcome the virulent opposition of the tyrannical Protestant faction in Ireland, and the disgraceful but deep-rooted antipathies of the English nation. The history of the relation between the mother country and her dependency during Burke's life, may be characterised as a commercial and legislative struggle between the imperial government and the Anglo-Irish interest, in which each side for its own convenience, as the turn served, drew support from the Catholic majority.

A Whiteboy outbreak, attended by the usual circumstances of disorder and violence, took place while Burke was in Ireland. It suited the interests of faction to represent these commotions as the symptoms of a deliberate rebellion. The malcontents were represented as carrying on treasonable correspondence, sometimes with Spain and sometimes with France; they were accused of receiving money and arms from their foreign sympathisers, and of aiming at throwing off the English rule.

Burke says that he had means and the desire of informing himself to the bottom upon the matter, and he came strongly to the conclusion that this was not a true view of what had happened. What had happened was due, he thought, to no plot, but to superficial and fortuitous circumstances. He consequently did not shrink from describing it as criminal that the king's Catholic subjects in Ireland should have been subjected, on no good grounds, to harassing persecution, and that numbers of them should have been ruined in fortune, imprisoned, tried, and capitally executed for a rebellion that was no rebellion at all. The episode is only important as illustrating the strong and manly temper in which Burke, unlike too many of his countrymen with fortunes to make by English favour, uniformly considered the circumstances of his country. It was not until a later time that he had an opportunity of acting conspicuously on her behalf, but whatever influence he came to acquire with his party was unflinchingly used against the cruelty of English prejudice.

Burke appears to have remained in Ireland for two years (1761–63). In 1763 Hamilton, who had found him an invaluable auxiliary, procured for him, principally with the aid of the Primate, Stone, a pension of three hundred pounds a year from the Irish Treasury. In thanking him for this service, Burke proceeded to bargain that the obligation should not bind him to give to his patron the whole of his time. He insisted on being left with a discreet liberty to continue a little work which he had as a rent-charge upon his thoughts. Whatever advantages he had acquired, he says, had been due to literary reputation, and he could only hope for a continuance of such advantages on condition of doing something to keep the same reputation alive. What this literary design was, we do not know with certainty. It is believed to have been a

history of England, of which, as I have said, a fragment remains. Whatever the work may have been, it was an offence to Hamilton. With an irrational stubbornness, that may well astound us when we think of the noble genius he thus wished to confine to paltry personal duties, he persisted that Burke should bind himself to his service for life, and to the exclusion of other interests. "To circumscribe my hopes," cried Burke, "to give up even the possibility of liberty, to annihilate myself for ever!" He threw up the pension, which he had held for two years, and declined all further connection with Hamilton, whom he roundly described as an infamous scoundrel. "Six of the best years of my life he took me from every pursuit of my literary reputation, or of improvement of my fortune. . . . In all this time you may easily conceive how much I felt at seeing myself left behind by almost all of my contemporaries. There never was a season more favourable for any man who chose to enter into the career of public life; and I think I am not guilty of ostentation in supposing my own moral character and my industry, my friends and connections, when Mr. Hamilton first sought my acquaintance, were not at all inferior to those of several whose fortune is at this day upon a very different footing from mine."

It was not long before a more important opening offered itself, which speedily brought Burke into the main stream of public life. In the summer of 1765 a change of ministry took place. It was the third since the king's accession five years ago. First, Pitt had been disgraced, and the old Duke of Newcastle dismissed. Then Bute came into power, but Bute quailed before the storm of calumny and hate that his Scotch nationality, and the supposed source of his power over the king, had raised in every town in England. After Lord Bute, George

Grenville undertook the government. Before he had been many months in office, he had sown the seeds of war in the colonies, wearied Parliament, and disgusted the king. In June 1765 Grenville was dismissed. With profound reluctance the king had no other choice than to summon Lord Rockingham, and Lord Rockingham, in a happy moment for himself and his party, was induced to offer Burke a post as his private secretary. Rockingham was without either experience or knowledge. He felt, or friends felt for him, the advantage of having at his side a man who was chiefly known as an author in the service of Dodsley, and as having conducted the *Annual Register* with great ability, but who even then was widely spoken of as nothing less than an encyclopaedia of political knowledge.

It is commonly believed that Burke was commended to Lord Rockingham by William Fitzherbert. Fitzherbert was President of the Board of Trade in the new government, but he is more likely to be remembered as Dr. Johnson's famous example of the truth of the observation that a man will please more upon the whole by negative qualities than by positive, because he was the most acceptable man in London, and yet overpowered nobody by the superiority of his talents, made no man think worse of himself by being his rival, seemed always to listen, did not oblige you to hear much from him, and did not oppose what you said. Besides Fitzherbert's influence, we have it on Burke's own authority that his promotion was partly due to that mysterious person, William Burke, who was at the same time appointed an Under-Secretary of State. There must have been unpleasant rumours afloat as to the Burke connection, and we shall presently consider what they were worth. Meanwhile, it is enough to say that the old Duke of Newcastle hurried to the new Premier, and told him the appointment would never

do; the new secretary was not only an Irish adventurer, which was true, but he was an Irish Papist, which was not true; he was a Jesuit, he was a spy from Saint Omer's, and his real name was O'Bourke. Lord Rockingham behaved like a man of sense and honour, sent for Burke, and repeated to him what he had heard. Burke warmly denounced the truthlessness of the duke's tattle. He insisted that the reports his chief had heard would probably, even unknown to himself, create in his mind such suspicions as would stand in the way of a thorough confidence. No earthly consideration, he said, should induce him to continue in relations with a man whose trust in him was not entire; and he pressed his resignation. To this Lord Rockingham would not consent, and from that time until his death, seventeen years afterwards, the relations between them were those of loyal and honourable service on the one hand, and generous and appreciative friendship on the other. Six-and-twenty years afterwards (1791) Burke remembered the month in which he had first become connected with a man whose memory, he said, will ever be precious to Englishmen of all parties, as long as the ideas of honour and virtue, public and private, are understood and cherished in this nation.

The Rockingham ministry remained in office for a year and twenty days (1765–66). About the middle of this term (December 26, 1765) Burke was returned to Parliament for the borough of Wendover, by the influence of Lord Verney, who owned it, and who also returned William Burke for another borough. Lord Verney was an Irish peer, with large property in Buckinghamshire; he now represented that county in Parliament. It was William Burke's influence with Lord Verney that procured for his namesake the seat at Wendover. Burke made his first speech in the House

of Commons a few days after the opening of the session of 1766 (January 27), and was honoured by a compliment from Pitt, still the Great Commoner. A week later he spoke again on the same momentous theme, the complaints of the American colonists, and his success was so marked that good judges predicted, in the stiff phraseology of the time, that he would soon add the palm of the orator to the laurel of the writer and the philosopher. The friendly Dr. Johnson wrote to Langton that Burke had gained more reputation than any man at his first appearance had ever gained before. The session was a triumph to the new member, but it brought neither strength nor popularity to the administration. At the end of it the king dismissed them, and the Chatham government was formed—that strange combination which has been made famous by Burke's description of it as a piece of joinery so crossly indented and whimsically dovetailed, such a piece of diversified mosaic, such a tessellated pavement without cement, that it was indeed a very curious show, but utterly unsafe to touch and unsure to stand upon. There was no obvious reason why Burke should not have joined the new ministry. The change was at first one of persons rather than of principles or of measures. To put himself, as Burke afterwards said, out of the way of the negotiations that were then being carried on very eagerly and through many channels with the Earl of Chatham, he went to Ireland very soon after the change of ministry. He was free from party engagements, and more than this, he was free at the express desire of his friends; for on the very day of his return the Marquis of Rockingham wished him to accept office under the new system. Burke "believes he might have had such a situation, but he cheerfully took his fate with his party." In a short time he rendered his party the first of a long series of splendid literary

services by writing his *Observations on the Present State of the Nation* (1769). It was a reply to a pamphlet by George Grenville, in which the disappointed minister accused his successors of ruining the country. Burke, in answering the charge, showed a grasp of commercial and fiscal details at least equal to that of Grenville himself, then considered the first man of his time in dealing with the national trade and resources. To this easy mastery of the special facts of the discussion, Burke added the far rarer art of lighting them up by broad principles, and placing himself and his readers at the highest and most effective point of view for commanding their general bearings.

If Burke had been the Irish adventurer that his enemies described, he might well have seized with impatience the opening to office that the recent exhibition of his powers in the House of Commons had now made accessible to him. There was not a man in Great Britain to whom the emoluments of office would have been more useful. It is one of the standing mysteries in literary biography how Burke could think of entering Parliament without any means that anybody can now trace, of earning a fitting livelihood. Yet at this time Burke, whom we saw not long ago writing for the booksellers, had become affluent enough to pay a yearly allowance to Barry, the painter, in order to enable him to study the pictures in the great European galleries, and to make a prolonged residence at Rome. A little later he took a step that makes the riddle still more difficult, and has given abundant employment to wits who are *maximi in minimis*, and think that every question they can ask, yet to which history has not thought it worth while to leave an answer, is somehow a triumph of their own learning and dialectic.

In 1769 Burke purchased a house and lands known as Gregories, in the parishes of Penn and

Beaconsfield, in the county of Bucks. It has often been asked, and naturally enough, how a man who, hardly more than a few months before, was still contented to earn an extra hundred pounds a year by writing for Dodsley, should now have launched out as the buyer of a fine house and estate, that cost upwards of twenty-two thousand pounds, could not be kept up on less than two thousand five hundred a year, and of which the returns did not amount to one-fifth of that sum. Whence did he procure the money, and what is perhaps more difficult to answer, how came he first to entertain the idea of a design so ill-proportioned to anything we can now discern in his means and prospects? The common answer from Burke's enemies, and even from some neutral inquirers, might give an unpleasant shock. It is alleged that he had plunged into wild gambling in East India stock. The charge was current at the time, and it was speedily revived when Burke's abandonment of his party, after the French Revolution, exposed him to a thousand attacks of reckless virulence. It has been stirred by one or two pertinacious critics nearer our own time, and none of the biographers have dealt with the perplexities of the matter. Nobody, indeed, has ever pretended to find one jot of direct evidence that Burke himself took a part in the gambling in India or other stocks. There is evidence that he was a holder of the stock, and no more. But what is undeniable is that Richard Burke, his brother, William Burke, his intimate, if not his kinsman, and Lord Verney, his political patron, were all three at this time engaged together in immense transactions in East India stock; that in 1769 the stock fell violently; that they were unable to pay their differences; and that in the year when Edmund Burke bought Gregories, the other three were utterly ruined, two of them beyond retrieval. Again, it is clear that, after this, Richard Burke was engaged

in land-jobbing in the West Indies; that his claims were disputed by the government as questionable and dishonest; and that he lost his case. Edmund Burke was said, in the gossip of the day, to be deeply interested in land at Saint Vincent's. But there is no evidence. What cannot be denied is that an unpleasant taint of speculation and financial adventureship hung at one time about the whole connection, and that the adventures invariably came to an unlucky end.

Whether Edmund Burke and William Burke were relations or not, and if so, in what degree they were relations, neither of them ever knew; they believed that their fathers sometimes called one another cousins, and that was all they had to say on the subject. But they were as intimate as brothers, and when William Burke went to mend his broken fortunes in India, Edmund Burke commended him to Philip Francis—then fighting his deadly duel of five years with Warren Hastings at Calcutta—as one whom he had tenderly loved, highly valued, and continually lived with in an union not to be expressed, quite since their boyish years. "Looking back to the course of my life," he wrote in 1771, "I remember no one considerable benefit in the whole of it which I did not, mediately or immediately, derive from William Burke." There is nothing intrinsically incredible, therefore, considering this intimacy and the community of purse and home that subsisted among the three Burkes, in the theory that when Edmund Burke bought his property in Buckinghamshire, he looked for help from the speculations of Richard and William. However this may have been, from them came no help. Many years afterwards (1783) Lord Verney filed a bill in Chancery claiming from Edmund Burke a sum of £6000, which he alleged that he had lent at the instigation of William Burke, to assist in completing the purchase of Beaconsfield.

Burke's sworn answer denied all knowledge of the transaction, and the plaintiff did not get the relief for which he had prayed.

In a letter to Shackleton (May 1, 1768), Burke gave the following account of what he had done: "I have made a push," he says, "with all I could collect of my own, and the aid of my friends, to cast a little root in this country. I have purchased a house, with an estate of about six hundred acres of land, in Buckinghamshire, twenty-four miles from London. It is a place exceedingly pleasant; and I propose, God willing, to become a farmer in good earnest. You, who are classical, will not be displeased to know that it was formerly the seat of Waller, the poet, whose house, or part of it, makes at present the farmhouse within an hundred yards of me." The details of the actual purchase of Beaconsfield have been made tolerably clear. The price was twenty-two thousand pounds, more or less. Fourteen thousand were left on mortgage, which remained outstanding until the sale of the property by Mrs. Burke in 1812. Garret Burke, the elder brother, had shortly before the purchase made Edmund his residuary legatee, and it is guessed that of this bequest two thousand pounds were in cash. The balance of six thousand was advanced by Lord Rockingham on Burke's bond.

The purchase after all was the smallest part of the matter, and it still remains a puzzle not only how Burke was able to maintain so handsome an establishment, but how he could ever suppose it likely that he would be able to maintain it. He counted, no doubt, on making some sort of income by farming. The Irish estate, which he had inherited from his brother, brought in five hundred a year (Arthur Young's *Ireland*, ii. 193). For a short time he received a salary of seven hundred pounds a year as agent for New York. We may

perhaps take for granted that he made as much more out of his acres. He received something from Dodsley for his work on the *Annual Register* down to 1788. But when all these resources have been counted up, we cannot but see a great yearly deficit. The unhappy truth is that from the middle of 1769, when we find him applying to Garrick for the loan of a thousand pounds, down to 1794, when the king gave him a pension, Burke was never free from the harassing strain of debts and want of money. It has been stated with good show of authority, that his obligations to Lord Rockingham amounted to not less than thirty thousand pounds. When that nobleman died (1728), with a generosity not the less honourable to him for having been so richly earned by the faithful friend who was the object of it, he left instructions to his executors that all Burke's bonds should be destroyed.

We may indeed wish that all this had been otherwise. But those who press it as a reproach against Burke's memory, may be justly reminded that when Pitt died, after drawing the pay of a minister for twenty years, he left debts to the amount of forty thousand pounds. Burke, as I have said elsewhere, had none of the vices of profusion, but he had the quality that Aristotle places high among the virtues—the noble mean of Magnificence, standing midway between the two extremes of vulgar ostentation and narrow pettiness. At least, every creditor was paid in good time, and nobody suffered but himself. Those who think these disagreeable matters of supreme importance, and allow such things to stand between them and Burke's greatness, are like the people—slightly to alter a figure from a philosopher of old—who, when they went to Olympia, could only perceive that they were scorched by the sun, and pressed by the crowd, and deprived of comfortable means of bathing, and wetted by the rain, and

that life was full of disagreeable and troublesome things, and so they almost forgot the great colossus of ivory and gold, Phidias's statue of Zeus, which they had come to see, and which stood in all its glory and power before their perturbed and foolish vision.

There have been few men in history with whom personal objects counted for so little as they counted with Burke. He really did what so many public men only feign to do. He forgot that he had any interests of his own to be promoted, apart from the interests of the party with which he acted, and from those of the whole nation, for which he held himself a trustee. What William Burke said of him in 1766 was true throughout his life, "Ned is full of real business, intent upon doing solid good to his country, as much as if he was to receive twenty per cent from the Empire." Such men as the shrewd and impudent Rigby atoned for a plebeian origin by the arts of dependence and a judicious servility, and drew more of the public money from the Pay-Office in half a dozen quarter-days than Burke received in all his life. It was not by such arts that Burke rose. When we remember all the untold bitterness of the struggle in which he was engaged, from the time when the old Duke of Newcastle tried to make the Marquis of Rockingham dismiss his new private secretary as an Irish Jesuit in disguise (1765), down to the time when the Duke of Bedford, himself battening "in grants to the house of Russell, so enormous as not only to outrage economy, but even to stagger credibility," assailed the government for giving Burke a moderate pension, we may almost imagine that if Johnson had imitated the famous *Tenth Satire* a little later, he would have been tempted to apply the poet's cynical criticism of the career heroic to the greater Cicero of his own day. "I was not," Burke said,

in a passage of lofty dignity, "like his Grace of Bedford, swaddled and rocked and dandled into a legislator; *Nitor in adversum* is the motto for a man like me. I possessed not one of the qualities, nor cultivated one of the arts, that recommend men to the favour and protection of the great. I was not made for a minion or a tool. As little did I follow the trade of winning the hearts, by imposing on the understandings of the people. At every step of my progress in life, for in every step was I traversed and opposed, and at every turnpike I met, I was obliged to show my passport, and again and again to prove my sole title to the honour of being useful to my country, by a proof that I was not wholly unacquainted with its laws and the whole system of its interests both abroad and at home; otherwise no rank, no toleration even for me."

CHAPTER III

THE CONSTITUTIONAL STRUGGLE

FOREIGN observers of our affairs looked upon the state of England between the accession of George III. and the loss of the American colonies (1760–76) with mixed disgust and satisfaction. Their instinct as absolute rulers was revolted by a spectacle of unbridled faction and raging anarchy; their envy was soothed by the growing weakness of a power which Chatham had so short a time before left at the highest point of grandeur and strength. Frederick the Great spoke with contempt of the insolence of Opposition and the virulence of parties; and vowed that, petty German prince as he was, he would not change places with the King of England. The Emperor Joseph pronounced positively that Great Britain was declining, that Parliament was ruining itself, and that the colonies threatened a catastrophe. Catherine of Russia thought that nothing would restore its ancient vigour to the realm, short of the bracing and heroic remedy of a war. Even at home, such shrewd and experienced onlookers as Horace Walpole suspected that the state of the country was more serious than it had been since the Great Rebellion, and declared it to be approaching by fast strides to some sharp crisis. Men who remembered their Roman history, fancied they saw every symptom of confusion that preceded the ruin of the Commonwealth, and began to inquire

uneasily what was the temper of the army. Men who remembered the story of the violence and insatiable factiousness of Florence, turned again to Machiavelli and to Guicciardini, to trace a parallel between the fierce city on the Arno and the fierce city on the Thames. When the King of Sweden, in 1772, carried out a revolution, by abolishing an oligarchic council and assuming the powers of a dictator, with the assent of his people, there were actually serious men in England who thought that the English, after having been guilty of every meanness and corruption, would soon, like the Swedes, own themselves unworthy to be free. The Duke of Richmond, who happened to have a claim to a peerage and an estate in France, excused himself for taking so much pains to establish his claim to them, by gravely asking who knew that a time might not soon come when England would not be worth living in, and when a retreat to France might be a very happy thing for a free man to have.

The reign had begun by a furious outbreak of hatred between the English and the Scotch. Lord Bute had been driven from office, not merely because he was supposed to owe his power to a scandalous friendship with the king's mother, but because he was accused of crowding the public service with his detested countrymen from the other side of the Tweed. He fell, less from disapproval of his policy, than from rude prejudice against his country. The flow of angry emotion had not subsided before the whisper of strife in the American colonies began to trouble the air; and before that had waxed loud, the Middlesex election had blown into a portentous hurricane. This was the first great constitutional case after Burke came into the House of Commons. As, moreover, it became a leading element in the crisis that was the occasion of Burke's first remarkable essay

in the literature of politics, it is as well to go over the facts.

The Parliament to which he had first been returned, now approaching the expiry of its legal term, was dissolved in the spring of 1768. Wilkes, then an outlaw in Paris, returned to England, and announced himself as a candidate for the city. When the election was over, his name stood last on the poll. But his ancient fame as the opponent and victim of the court five years before, was revived. After his rejection in the city, he found himself strong enough to stand for the county of Middlesex. Here he was returned at the head of the poll after an excited election. Wilkes had been tried in 1764, and found guilty by the King's Bench of republishing Number Forty-five of the *North Briton*, and of printing and publishing the *Essay on Woman*. He had not appeared to receive sentence, and had been outlawed in consequence. After his election for Middlesex, he obtained a reversal of his outlawry on a point of technical form. He then came up for sentence under the original verdict. The court sent him to prison for twenty-two months, and condemned him to pay a fine of a thousand pounds.

Wilkes was in prison when the second session of the new Parliament began. His case came before the House in November 1768, on his own petition, accusing Lord Mansfield of altering the record at his trial. After many acrimonious debates and examinations of Wilkes and others at the bar of the House, at length, by 219 votes against 136, the famous motion was passed which expelled him from the House. Another election for Middlesex was now held, and Wilkes was returned without opposition. The day after the return, the House of Commons resolved by an immense majority that, having been expelled, Wilkes was incapable of serving in that Parliament. The following month

Wilkes was once more elected. The House once more declared the election void. In April another election took place, and this time the government put forward Colonel Luttrell, who vacated his seat for Bossiney for the purpose of opposing Wilkes. There was the same result, and for the fourth time Wilkes was at the head of the poll. The House ordered the return to be altered, and after hearing by counsel the freeholders of Middlesex who petitioned against the alteration, finally confirmed it (May 8, 1769) by a majority of 221 to 152. According to Lord Temple, this was the greatest majority ever known on the last day of a session.

The purport and significance of these arbitrary proceedings need little interpretation. The House, according to the authorities, had a constitutional right to expel Wilkes, though the grounds on which even this is defended would probably be questioned if a similar case were to arise in our own day. But a single branch of the legislature could have no power to pass an incapacitating vote either against Wilkes or anybody else. An Act of Parliament is the least instrument by which such incapacity could be imposed. The House might perhaps expel Wilkes, but it could not either legally or with regard to the less definite limits of constitutional morality, decide whom the Middlesex freeholders should not elect, and it could not therefore set aside their representative, who was then free from any disabling quality. Lord Camden did not much exaggerate, when he declared in a debate on the subject in the House of Lords, that the judgment passed upon the Middlesex election had given the constitution a more dangerous wound than any given during the twelve years' absence of Parliament in the reign of Charles I. The House of Commons was usurping another form of that very dispensing power, for pretending to which the last

of the Stuart sovereigns had lost his crown. If the House by a vote could deprive Wilkes of a right to sit, what legal or constitutional impediment would there be in the way, if the majority were at any time disposed to declare all their most formidable opponents in the minority incapable of sitting ?

In the same Parliament, there was another and scarcely less remarkable case of Privilege, " that eldest son of Prerogative," as Burke truly called it, " and inheriting all the vices of its parent." Certain printers were accused of breach of privilege for reporting the debates of the House (March 1771). The messenger of the Serjeant-at-arms attempted to take one of them into custody in his own shop in the city. A constable was standing by, designedly, it has been supposed, and Miller, the printer, gave the messenger into his custody for an assault. The case came on before the Lord Mayor, Alderman Wilkes, and Alderman Oliver, the same evening, and the result was that the messenger of the House was committed. The city doctrine was, that if the House of Commons had a Serjeant-at-arms, they had a Serjeant-at-mace. If the House of Commons could send their citizens to Newgate, they could send its messenger to the Compter. Two other printers were collusively arrested, brought before Wilkes and Oliver, and at once liberated.

The Commons instantly resolved on stern measures. The Lord Mayor and Oliver were taken and despatched to the Tower, where they lay until the prorogation of Parliament. Wilkes stubbornly refused to pay any attention to repeated summonses to attend at the bar of the House, very properly insisting that he ought to be summoned to attend *in his place* as member for Middlesex. Besides committing Crosby and Oliver to the Tower, the House summoned the Lord Mayor's clerk to attend

with his books, and then and there forced him to strike out the record of the recognisances into which their messenger had entered on being committed at the Mansion House. No Stuart ever did anything more arbitrary and illegal. The House deliberately intended to constitute itself, as Burke had said two years before, an arbitrary and despotic assembly. "The distempers of monarchy were the great subjects of apprehension and redress in the last century. In this, the distempers of Parliament."

Burke, in a speech he delivered in his place in 1771, warned the House of the evils of the course upon which they were entering, and declared those to be their mortal enemies who would persuade them to act as if they were a self-originated magistracy, independent of the people, and unconnected with their opinions and feelings. But these mortal enemies of its very constitution were at this time the majority of the House. It was to no purpose that Burke argued with more than legal closeness that incapacitation could not be a power according to law, inasmuch as it had neither of the two properties of law: it was not *known*, "you yourselves not knowing upon what grounds you will vote the incapacity of any man"; and it was not *fixed*, because it was varied according to the occasion, exercised according to discretion, and no man could call for it as a right. A strain of unanswerable reasoning of this kind counted for nothing, in spite of its being unanswerable. Despotic or oligarchic pretensions are proof against the most formidable battery that reason and experience can construct against them. And Wilkes's exclusion endured until this Parliament—the Unreported Parliament, as it was called, and in many respects the very worst that ever assembled at Westminster—was dissolved, and a new one elected (1774), when he was once again returned for Middlesex, and took his seat.

The London multitude had grown zealous for

Wilkes, and the town had been harassed by disorder. Of the fierce brutality of the crowd of that age we may form a vivid idea from the unflinching pencil of Hogarth. Barbarous laws were cruelly administered. The common people were turbulent, because misrule made them miserable. Wilkes had written filthy verses, but the crowd cared no more for this than their betters cared about the vices of Lord Sandwich. They made common cause with one who was accidentally a more conspicuous sufferer. Wilkes was quite right when he vowed that he was no Wilkite. The masses were better than their leader. "Whenever the people have a feeling," Burke once said, "they commonly are in the right: they sometimes mistake the physician." Franklin, who was then in London, was of opinion that if George III. had had a bad character, and John Wilkes a good one, the latter might have turned the former out of the kingdom; for the turbulence that began in street riots, at one time threatened to end in revolt. The king himself was attacked with savage invective in papers, of which it was said that no one in the previous century would have dared to print any like them until Charles was fast locked up in Carisbrooke Castle.

As is usual when the minds of those in power have been infected with an arbitrary temper, the employment of military force to crush civil disturbances became a familiar and favourite idea. The military, said Lord Weymouth, in an elaborate letter addressed to the Surrey magistrates, can never be employed to a more constitutional purpose than in the support of the authority and dignity of the magistracy. If the magistrate should be menaced, he is cautioned not to delay a moment in calling for the aid of the military, and making use of them effectually. The consequence of this bloody scroll, as Wilkes rightly called it, was that shortly afterwards an affray occurred between the crowd

and the troops, in which some twenty people were killed and wounded (May 10, 1768). On the following day, the Secretary of War, Lord Barrington, wrote to the commanding officer, informing him that the king highly approved of the conduct of both officers and men, and wished that his gracious approbation of them should be communicated to them.

Burke brought the matter before the House in a motion for a Committee of Inquiry, supported by one of the most lucid and able of his minor speeches. "If ever the time should come," he concluded, "when this House shall be found prompt to execute and slow to inquire; ready to punish the excesses of the people, and slow to listen to their grievances; ready to grant supplies, and slow to examine the account; ready to invest magistrates with large powers, and slow to inquire into the exercise of them; ready to entertain notions of the military power as incorporated with the constitution,—when you learn this in the air of St. James's, then the business is done; then the House of Commons will change that character which it receives from the people only." It is hardly necessary to say that his motion for a Committee was lost by the overwhelming majority of 245 against 30. The general result of the proceedings of the government from the accession of George III. to the beginning of the troubles in the American colonies, was in Burke's own words, that the government was at once dreaded and contemned; that the laws were despoiled of all their respected and salutary terrors; that their inaction was a subject of ridicule, and their exertion of abhorrence; that our dependencies had slackened in their affections; that we knew neither how to yield, nor how to enforce; and that disconnection and confusion, in offices, in parties, in families, in Parliament, in the nation, prevailed beyond the disorders of any former time.

It was in the pamphlet on the *Present Discontents*, published in 1770, that Burke dealt at large with the whole scheme of policy of which all these irregularities were the distempered incidents. The pamphlet was composed as a manifesto of the Rockingham section of the Whig party, to show, as Burke wrote to his chief, how different it was in spirit and composition from "the Bedfords, the Grenvilles, and other knots, who are combined for no public purpose, but only as a means of furthering with joint strength their private and individual advantage." The pamphlet was submitted in manuscript or proof to the heads of the party. Friendly critics excused some inelegancies that they thought they found in occasional passages, by taking for granted, as was true, that he had admitted insertions from other hands. Here for the first time he exhibited, on a conspicuous scale, the strongest qualities of his understanding. Contemporaries had an opportunity of measuring this strength, by comparison with another performance of similar scope. The letters of Junius had startled the world the year before. Burke was universally suspected of being their author, and the suspicion never wholly died out so long as he lived. There was no real ground for it beyond the two unconnected facts, that the letters were powerful letters, and that Burke had a powerful intellect. Dr. Johnson admitted that he had never had a better reason for believing that Burke was Junius, than that he knew nobody else who had the ability of Junius. But Johnson discharged his mind of the thought, at the instant when Burke voluntarily assured him that he neither wrote the letters of Junius, nor knew who had written them. The subjects and aim of those famous pieces were not very different from Burke's tract, but any one who in our time turns from the letters to the tract, will wonder how the author of the one could ever

have been suspected of writing the other. Junius is never more than a railer, and very often he is third-rate even as a railer. The author of the *Present Discontents* speaks without bitterness even of Lord Bute and the Duke of Grafton; he only refers to persons when their conduct or their situation illustrates a principle. Instead of reviling, he probes, reflects, warns; and as the result of this serious method, pursued by a man in whom close mastery of detail kept exact pace with wide grasp of generalities, we have not the ephemeral diatribe of a faction, but one of the monumental pieces of political literature.

The last great pamphlet in the history of English public affairs had been Swift's tract *On the Conduct of the Allies* (1711), in which the writer did a more substantial service for the Tory party of his day than Burke did for the Whig party of a later date. Swift's pamphlet is close, strenuous, persuasive, and full of telling strokes; but nobody need read it to-day except the historical student, or a member of the Peace Society, in search of the most convincing exposure of the most insane of English wars.[1] There is not a sentence in it that does not belong exclusively to the matter in hand: not a line of the general wisdom that is for all time. In the *Present Discontents* the method is just the opposite of this. The details are slurred, and they are not literal. Burke describes with excess of elaboration how the new system is a system of double Cabinets; one put forward with nominal powers in Parliament, the other concealed behind the throne, and secretly dictating the policy. The reader feels that this is worked out far too closely to be real. It is a structure of artificial rhetoric. But we pass over this lightly, on our way to more solid matter; to the exposition of the principles of a constitution, the

[1] This was not Burke's judgment on the long war against Louis XIV. (See *Regicide Peace*, i.)

right methods of statesmanship, and the defence of party.

It was Bolingbroke, and not Swift, of whom Burke was thinking, when he sat down to the composition of his tract. The *Patriot King* was the fountain of the new doctrines which Burke trained his party to understand and to resist. If his foe was domestic, it was from a foreign armoury that Burke derived the instruments of resistance. The great fault of political writers is their too close adherence to the forms of the system of state they happen to be expounding or examining. They stop short at the anatomy of institutions, and do not penetrate to the secret of their functions. An illustrious author in the middle of the eighteenth century introduced his contemporaries to a better way. It is not too much to say that at that epoch the strength of political speculation in this country, from Adam Smith downwards, was drawn from France; and Burke had been led to some of what was most characteristic in his philosophy of society by Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* (1748), the first high manual of the historic school. We have no space here to work out the relations between Montesquieu's principles and Burke's, but the student of the *Esprit des Lois* will recognise its influence in every one of Burke's masterpieces.

So far as immediate events were concerned, Burke was quick to discern their true interpretation. As has been already said, he attributed to the king and his party a deliberateness of system that probably had no real existence in their minds. The king intended to reassert the old right of choosing his own ministers. George II. had made strenuous but futile endeavours to the same end. His son, the father of George III., Frederick, Prince of Wales, as every reader of Dodington's *Diary* will remember, was equally bent on throwing off the yoke of the large Whig combinations, and making

his own Cabinets. George III. was only continuing the purpose of his father and his grandfather; and there is no reason to believe that he went more elaborately to work to obtain his ends.

It is when he leaves the artifices of a cabal, and strikes down below the surface to the working of deep social forces, that we feel the breadth and power of Burke's method. "I am not one of those," he began, "who think that the people are never wrong. They have been so, frequently and outrageously, both in other countries and in this. But I do say that *in all disputes between them and their rulers, the presumption is at least upon a par in favour of the people.*" Nay, experience perhaps justifies him in going further. When popular discontents are prevalent, something has generally been found amiss in the constitution or the administration. "The people have no interest in disorder. When they go wrong, it is their error, and not their crime." And then he quotes the famous passage from the *Memoirs* of Sully, which both practical politicians and political students should bind about their necks, and write upon the tables of their hearts: "The revolutions that come to pass in great states are not the result of chance, nor of popular caprice. . . . As for the populace, it is never from a passion for attack that it rebels, but from impatience of suffering."

What really gives its distinction to the *Present Discontents* is not its plea for indulgence to popular impatience, nor its plea for the superiority of government by aristocracy, but rather the presence in it of the thought of Montesquieu and his school, of the necessity of studying political phenomena in relation, not merely to forms of government and law, but in relation to whole groups of social facts which give to law and government the spirit that makes them workable. Connected with this, is a particularly wide interpretation and a particularly

impressive application of the maxims of expediency, because a wide conception of the various interacting elements of a society naturally extends the considerations which a balance of expediencies will include. Hence, in time there came a strong and lofty ideal of the true statesman, his breadth of vision, his flexibility of temper, his hardly measurable influence. These are the principal thoughts in the *Discontents* to which that writing owes its permanent interest. "Whatever original energy," says Burke, in one place, "may be supposed either in force or regulation, the operation of both is in truth merely instrumental. Nations are governed by the same methods, and on the same principles, by which an individual without authority is often able to govern those who are his equals or superiors; by a knowledge of their temper, and by a judicious management of it. . . . The laws reach but a very little way. Constitute Government how you please, infinitely the greater part of it must depend upon the exercise of powers, which are left at large to the prudence and uprightness of ministers of state. Even all the use and potency of the laws depends upon them. Without them, your Commonwealth is no better than *a scheme upon paper; and not a living, active, effective constitution.*" Thus early in his public career had Burke seized that great antithesis he so eloquently laboured in the long and ever memorable episode of his war against the French Revolution: the opposition between artificial arrangements in politics, and a living, active, effective organisation, formed by what he calls elsewhere in the present tract the natural strength of the kingdom, and suitable to the temper and mental habits of the people. When he spoke of the natural strength of the kingdom, he gave no narrow or conventional account of it. He included in the elements of that strength, besides the great peers and the leading landed gentlemen, the opulent

merchants and manufacturers, and the substantial yeomanry. Contrasted with the trite versions of government as fixed in King, Lords, and Commons, this search for the real organs of power was going to the root of the matter in a spirit at once thoroughly scientific and thoroughly practical. Burke had, by the speculative training to which he had submitted himself in dealing with Bolingbroke, prepared his mind for a complete grasp of the idea of the body politic as a complex growth, a manifold whole, with closely interdependent relations among its several parts and divisions. It was this conception from which his conservatism sprang. Revolutionary politics, on the other hand, have one of their sources in the idea that societies are capable of infinite and immediate modifications, without reference to the deep-rooted conditions that have worked themselves into every part of the social structure.

The same opposition of the positive to the doctrinaire spirit is to be observed in the remarkable vindication of Party, that fills the last dozen pages of the pamphlet, and is one of the most courageous of all Burke's deliverances. Party combination is exactly one of those contrivances which, as it might seem, a wise man would accept for working purposes, but about which he would take care to say as little as possible. There appears to be something revolting to the intellectual integrity and self-respect of the individual in the systematic surrender of his personal action, interest, and power, to a political connection in which his own judgment may never once be allowed to count for anything. It is like the surrender of the right of private judgment to the authority of the Church, but with its nakedness not concealed by a mystic doctrine. Nothing is more easy to demolish by the bare logical reason. But Burke was the sworn enemy of the rationalism of politics. He cared nothing about the bare logical reason, until it had

been clothed in convenience and custom, in the affections on one side, and experience on the other. Not content with insisting that for some special purpose of the hour, "when bad men combine, the good must associate," he contended boldly for the merits of fidelity to party combination in itself. Although Burke wrote these strong pages as a reply to Bolingbroke, who had denounced party as an evil, they remain as the best general apology ever offered for that principle of public action, against more philosophic attacks than Bolingbroke's. Burke admitted that when he saw a man acting a desultory and disconnected part in public life with detriment to his fortune, he was ready to believe such a man to be in earnest, though not ready to believe him to be right. In any case he lamented to see rare and valuable qualities squandered away without any public utility. He admitted, moreover, on the other hand, that people frequently acquired in party confederacies a narrow, bigoted, and proscriptive spirit. "But where duty renders a critical situation a necessary one, it is our business to keep free from the evils attendant upon it, and not to fly from the situation itself. It is surely no very rational account of a man that he has always acted right, but has taken special care to act in such a manner that his endeavours could not possibly be productive of any consequence. . . . When men are not acquainted with each other's principles, nor experienced in each other's talents, nor at all practised in their mutual habitudes and dispositions by joint efforts of business; no personal confidence, no friendship, no common interest subsisting among them, it is evidently impossible that they can act a public part with uniformity, perseverance, or efficacy."

In terms of eloquent eulogy he praised the sacred reverence with which the Romans used to regard the *necessitudo sortis*, or the relations that

grew up between men who had only held office together by the casual fortune of the lot. He pointed out to emulation the Whig junto who held so close together in the reign of Anne—Sunderland, Godolphin, Somers, and Marlborough—who believed "that no men could act with effect who did not act in concert; that no men could act in concert who did not act with confidence; and that no men could act with confidence who were not bound together by common opinions, common affections, and common interests." In reading these energetic passages, we have to remember two things: first, that the writer assumes the direct object of party combination to be generous, great, and liberal causes; and second, that when the time came, and when he believed that his friends were espousing a wrong and pernicious cause, Burke, like Samson bursting asunder the seven green withes, sundered the friendships of a life, and deliberately broke his party in pieces.[1]

When Burke came to discuss the cure for the disorders of 1770, he insisted on contenting himself with what he ought to have known to be obviously inadequate prescriptions. And we cannot help feeling that he never speaks of the constitution of the government of this country, without gliding into a fallacy identical with that which he himself described and denounced, as thinking better of the wisdom and power of human legislation than in truth it deserved. He was uniformly consistent in his view of the remedies which the various sections of Opposition proposed against the existing debasement and servility of the Lower House. The Duke of Richmond wanted universal suffrage, equal electoral districts, and annual parliaments. Wilkes proposed to disfranchise the rotten boroughs, to increase the county constituencies, and to give members to rich, populous, trading towns—a general

[1] See on the same subject, *Correspondence*, ii. 276, 277.

policy that was accepted fifty-six years afterwards. The Constitutional Society desired frequent parliaments, the exclusion of placemen from the House, and the increase of the county representation. Burke uniformly refused to give his countenance to any proposals such as these, which involved a clearly organic change in the constitution. He confessed that he had no sort of reliance upon either a triennial parliament or a place-bill, and with the reasonableness which as a rule was fully as remarkable in him as his eloquence, he showed very good grounds for his want of faith in the popular specifics. In truth, triennial or annual parliaments could have done no good, unless the change had been accompanied by the more important process of amputating, as Chatham called it, the rotten boroughs. Of these the Crown could at that time reckon some seventy as its own property. Besides those belonging to the Crown, there was also the immense number belonging to the Peerage. If the king sought to strengthen an administration, the thing needful was not to enlist the services of able and distinguished men, but to conciliate a duke, who brought with him the control of a given quantity of voting power in the Lower House. All this patrician influence, which may be found at the bottom of most of the intrigues of the period, would not have been touched by curtailing the duration of parliaments.

What then was the remedy, or had Burke no remedy to offer for these grave distempers of Parliament? Only the remedy of the interposition of the body of the people itself. We must beware of interpreting this phrase in the modern democratic sense. In 1766 he had deliberately declared that he thought it would be more conformable to the spirit of the constitution, "by lessening the number, to add to the weight and independency of our voters." "Considering the immense and

dangerous charge of elections, the prostitute and daring venality, the corruption of manners, the idleness and profligacy of the lower sort of voters, no prudent man would propose to increase such an evil."[1] In another place he denies that the people have either enough of speculation in the closet, or of experience in business, to be competent judges, not of the detail of particular measures only, but of *general schemes of policy*.[2] On Burke's theory, the people, as a rule, were no more concerned to interfere with Parliament than a man is concerned to interfere with somebody whom he has voluntarily and deliberately made his trustee. But here, he confessed, was a shameful and ruinous breach of trust. The ordinary rule of government was being every day mischievously contemned and daringly set aside. Until the confidence thus outraged should be once more restored, then the people ought to be excited to a more strict and detailed attention to the conduct of their representatives. The meetings of counties and corporations ought to settle standards for judging more systematically of the behaviour of those whom they had sent to Parliament. Frequent and correct lists of the voters in all important questions ought to be procured. The severest discouragement ought to be given to the pernicious practice of affording a blind and undistinguishing support to every administration. "Parliamentary support comes and goes with office, totally regardless of the man or the merit." For instance, Wilkes's annual motion to expunge the votes upon the Middlesex election had been uniformly rejected, as often as it was made while Lord North was in power. Lord North had no sooner given way to the Rockingham Cabinet than the House of Commons changed its mind, and the resolutions were expunged by a handsome majority

[1] *Observations on the State of the Nation. Works*, i. 105, b.
[2] *Speech on Duration of Parliaments.*

of 115 to 47. Administration was omnipotent in the House, because it could be a man's most efficient friend at an election, and could most amply reward his fidelity afterwards. Against this system Burke called on the nation to set a stern face. Root it up, he kept crying; settle the general course in which you desire members to go; insist that they shall not suffer themselves to be diverted from this by the authority of the government of the day; let lists of votes be published, so that you may ascertain for yourselves whether your trustees have been faithful or fraudulent; do all this, and there will be no need to resort to those organic changes, those empirical innovations that may possibly cure, but are much more likely to destroy.

It is not surprising that so halting a policy should have given deep displeasure to many, perhaps to most, of those whose only common bond was the loose and negative sentiment of antipathy to the court, the ministry, and the too servile majority of the House of Commons. The Constitutional Society was furious. Lord Chatham wrote to Lord Rockingham that the work in which these doctrines first appeared must do much mischief to the common cause. But Burke's view of the constitution was a part of his belief with which he never paltered, and on which he surrendered his judgment to no man. "Our constitution," in his opinion, "stands on a nice equipoise, with steep precipices and deep waters upon all sides of it. In removing it from a dangerous leaning towards one side, there may be a risk of oversetting it on the other."[1] This image was ever before his mind. It occurs again in the last sentence of the great protest against all change and movement, when he describes himself as one who, when the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails may be endangered by overloading it upon one side, is desirous of carrying the small weight

[1] *Present Discontents.*

of his reasons to that which may preserve its equipoise.[1] When we think of the odious misgovernment in England which the constitution permitted, between the time when Burke wrote and the passing of Lord Sidmouth's Six Acts fifty years later, we may be inclined to class such a constitution among the most inadequate and mischievous political arrangements that any free country has ever had to endure. Yet it was this which Burke declared that he looked upon with filial reverence. "Never will I cut it in pieces, and put it into the kettle of any magician, in order to boil it with the puddle of their compounds into youth and vigour; on the contrary, I will drive away such pretenders; I will nurse its venerable age, and with lenient arts extend a parent's breath."

He was filled with the spirit, and he borrowed the arguments, which have always marked the champion of faith and authority against the impious assault of reason or innovation. The constitution was sacred to him as the voice of the Church and the oracles of her saints are sacred to the faithful. Study it, he cried, until you know how to admire it, and if you cannot know and admire, rather believe that you are dull, than that the rest of the world has been imposed upon. We ought to understand it according to our measure and to venerate where we are not able presently to comprehend. Well has Burke been called the Bossuet of politics.

Although, however, Burke's unflinching reverence for the constitution, and his reluctance to lay a finger upon it, may now seem clearly excessive, as it did to Chatham and his son, who were great men in the right, or to Beckford and Sawbridge, who were very little men in the right, we can only be just to him by comparing his ideas with those that were dominant throughout an evil reign. While he opposed more frequent parliaments, he still

[1] *Reflections on the French Revolution.*

upheld the doctrine that "to govern according to the sense, and agreeably to the interests, of the people is a great and glorious object of government." While he declared himself against the addition of a hundred knights of the shire, he in the very same breath protested that, though the people might be deceived in their choice of an object, he "could scarcely conceive any choice they could make, to be so very mischievous as the existence of any human force capable of resisting it." [1] To us this may seem very mild and commonplace doctrine, but it was not commonplace in an age when Anglican divines—men like Archbishop Markham, Dr. Nowell or Dr. Porteus—had revived the precepts of passive obedience and non-resistance, and when such a man as Lord Mansfield encouraged them. And these were the kind of foundations that Burke had been laying, while Fox was yet a Tory, while Sheridan was writing farces, and Grey was a schoolboy.

It is, however, almost demonstrably certain that the vindication of the supremacy of popular interests over all other considerations would have been bootless toil, and that the constitutional struggle from 1760 to 1783 would have ended otherwise than it did, but for the failure of the war against the insurgent colonies, and the final establishment of American Independence. It was this portentous transaction that finally routed the arbitrary pretensions of the House of Commons over the people, and put an end to the hopes entertained by the sovereign of making his personal will supreme in the Chambers. Fox might well talk of an early Loyalist victory in the war, as the terrible news from Long Island. The struggle which began unsuccessfully at Brentford in Middlesex, was continued at Boston in Massachusetts. The scene had changed, but the conflicting principles were the same. The War of Independence was virtually a

[1] *To the Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Meeting*, 1780.

second English civil war. The ruin of the American cause would have been the ruin also of the constitutional cause in England; and a patriotic Englishman may revere the memory of Patrick Henry and George Washington not less justly than the patriotic American. Burke's attitude in this great contest is that part of his history about the majestic and noble wisdom of which there can be least dispute.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROCKINGHAM PARTY—PARIS—ELECTION AT BRISTOL—THE AMERICAN WAR

THE war with the American colonies was preceded by an interval of stupor. The violent ferment that had been stirred in the nation by the affairs of Wilkes and the Middlesex election, was followed, as Burke said, by as remarkable a deadness and vapidity. In 1770 the distracted ministry of the Duke of Grafton came to an end, and was succeeded by that of Lord North. The king had at last triumphed. He had secured an administration of which the fundamental principle was that the sovereign was to be the virtual head of it, and the real director of its counsels. Lord North's government lasted for twelve years, and its career is for ever associated with one of the most momentous chapters in the history of the English nation and of free institutions.

Through this long, eventful period, Burke's was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. He had become important enough for the ministry to think it worth while to take pains to discredit him. They busily encouraged the report that he was Junius, or a close ally of Junius. This was one of the minor vexations of Burke's middle life. Even his friends continued to torment him for incessant disclaimers. Burke's lofty pride made him slow to deal positively with what he scorned as a malicious and unworthy imputation. To such a friend as

Johnson he did not, as we have seen, disdain to volunteer a denial, but Charles Townshend was forced to write more than one importunate letter before he could extract from Burke the definite sentence (November 24, 1771) :—" I now give you my word and honour that I am not the author of Junius, and that I know not the author of that paper, and I do authorise you to say so." Nor was this the only kind of annoyance to which he was subjected. His rising fame kindled the candour of the friends of his youth. They admonished him that he did not bear instruction ; that he showed such arrogance as in a man of his condition was intolerable ; that he snapped furiously at his parliamentary foes, like a wolf who had broken into the fold ; that his speeches were useless declamations ; and that he disgraced the House by the scurrilities of the bear-garden. These sharp chastenings of friendship Burke endured with the perfect self-command, not of the cold and indifferent egotist, but of one who had trained himself not to expect too much from men. He possessed the true solace for all private chagrins in the activity and the fervour of his public interests.

In 1772 the affairs of the East India Company and its relations with the government had fallen into disorder. The Opposition, though powerless in the Houses of Parliament, were often able to thwart the views of the ministry in the imperial board-room in Leadenhall Street. The Duke of Richmond was as zealous and as active in his opposition to Lord North in the business of the East Indies, as he was in the business of the country at Westminster. A proposal was made to Burke to go out to India at the head of a commission of three supervisors, with authority to examine the concerns of every department, and full powers of control over the company's servants. Though this offer was pressed by the directors, Burke, after

anxious consideration, declined it. What his reasons were, there is no evidence; we can only guess that he thought less of his personal interests than of those of the country and of his party. Without him the Rockingham connection would undoubtedly have fallen to ruin, and with it the most upright, consistent, and disinterested body of men then in public life. "You say," the Duke of Richmond wrote to him (November 15, 1772), "the party is an object of too much importance to go to pieces. Indeed, Burke, you have more merit than any man in keeping us together." It was the character of the party, almost as much as their principles, that secured Burke's zeal and attachment; their decorum, their constancy, their aversion to all cabals for private objects, their indifference to office, except as an instrument of power and a means of carrying out the policy of their convictions. They might easily have had office if they would have come in upon the king's terms. A year after his fall from power Lord Rockingham was summoned to the royal closet, and pressed to resume his post. But office at any price was not in their thoughts. They knew the penalties of their system, and they clung to it undeterred. Their patriotism was deliberate and considered. Chalcedon was called the city of the blind, because its founders wilfully neglected the more glorious site of Byzantium which lay under their eyes. "We have built our Chalcedon," said Burke, "with the chosen part of the universe full in our prospect." They had the faults to which an aristocratic party in opposition is naturally liable. Burke used to reproach them with being somewhat languid, scrupulous, and unsystematic. He could not make the Duke of Richmond put off a large party at Goodwood for the sake of an important division in the House of Lords; and he did not always agree with Lord John Cavendish as to what constitutes

a decent and reasonable quantity of fox-hunting for a political leader in a crisis. But it was part of the steadfastness of his whole life to do his best with such materials as he could find. He did not lose patience nor abate his effort, because his friends would miss the opportunity of a great political stroke rather than they would miss Newmarket Races. He wrote their protests for the House of Lords, composed petitions for county meetings, drafted resolutions, and plied them with information, ideas, admonitions, and exhortations. Never before nor since has our country seen so extraordinary a union of the clever and indefatigable party-manager, with the reflective and philosophic habits of the speculative publicist. It is much easier to make either absolutism or democracy attractive than aristocracy; yet we see how consistent with his deep moral conservatism was Burke's attachment to an aristocratic party, when we read his exhortation to the Duke of Richmond to remember that persons in his high station in life ought to have long views. "You people," he writes to the duke (November 17, 1772), "of great families and hereditary trusts and fortunes are not like such as I am, who, whatever we may be by the rapidity of our growth, and even by the fruit we bear, and flatter ourselves that, while we creep on the ground, we belly into melons that are exquisite for size and flavour, yet still we are but annual plants that perish with our season, and leave no sort of traces behind us. You, if you are what you ought to be, are in my eye the great oaks that shade a country, and perpetuate your benefits from generation to generation. The immediate power of a Duke of Richmond, or a Marquis of Rockingham, is not so much of moment; but if their conduct and example hand down their principles to their successors, then their houses become the public repositories and office of record for the constitution. . . . I do

not look upon your time or lives as lost, if in this sliding away from the genuine spirit of the country, certain parties, if possible—if not, the heads of certain families—should make it their business by the whole course of their lives, principally by their example, to mould into the very vital stamina of their descendants those principles which ought to be transmitted pure and unmixed to posterity."

Perhaps such a passage as this ought to be described less as reflection than as imagination—moral, historic, conservative imagination—in which order, social continuity, and the endless projection of past into present, and of present into future, are clothed with the sanctity of an inner shrine. We may think that a fox-hunting duke and a racing marquis were very poor centres round which to group these high emotions. But Burke had no puny sentimentalism, and none of the mere literary or romantic conservatism of men like Chateaubriand. He lived in the real world, and not in a false dream of some past world that had never been. He saw that the sporting squires of his party were as much the representatives of ancestral force and quality as in older days were long lines of Claudii and Valerii. His conservative doctrine was a profound instinct, in part political, but in greater part moral. The accidental roughness of the symbol did not touch him, for the symbol was glorified by the sincerity of his faith and the compass of his imagination.

With these ideas strong within him, in 1773 Burke made a journey to France. It was almost as though the solemn hierophant of some mystic Egyptian temple should have found himself amid the brilliant chatter of a band of reckless, keen-tongued disputants of the garden or the porch at Athens. His only son had just finished a successful school-course at Westminster, and was now entered a student at Christ Church. He was still

too young for the university, and Burke thought that a year could not be more profitably spent than in forming his tongue to foreign languages. The boy was placed at Auxerre, in the house of the business agent of the Bishop of Auxerre. From the Bishop he received many kindnesses, to be amply repaid in after years when the Bishop came in his old age, an exile and a beggar, to England.

While in Paris, Burke did all that he could to instruct himself as to what was going on in French society. If he had not the dazzling reception that had greeted Hume in 1764, at least he had ample opportunities of acquainting himself with the prevailing ideas of the time in more than one of the social camps into which Paris was then divided. Madame du Deffand tells the Duchess of Choiseul that though he speaks French extremely ill, everybody felt that he would be infinitely agreeable if he could more easily make himself understood. He followed French well enough as a listener, and went every day to the courts to hear the barristers and watch the procedure. Madame du Deffand showed him all possible attention, and her friends eagerly seconded her. She invited him to supper parties, where he met the Count de Broglie, the agent of the king's secret diplomacy; Caraccioli, successor of nimble-witted Galiani, the secretary from Naples; and other notabilities of the high world. He supped with the Duchess of Luxembourg, and heard a reading of La Harpe's *Barmecides*. It was high treason in this circle to frequent the rival *salon* of Mademoiselle Lespinasse, but either the law was relaxed in the case of foreigners, or else Burke kept his own counsel. Here were for the moment the headquarters of the party of innovation, and here he saw some of the men who were busily forging the thunderbolts. His eye was on the alert, now as always, for anything that might light up the sovereign problems of human government. A

book by a member of this circle had appeared six months before, which was still the talk of the town, and against which the government had taken the usual impotent measures of repression. This was the *Treatise on Tactics*, by a certain M. de Guibert, a colonel of the Corsican legion. The important part of the work was the introduction, in which the writer examined with what was then thought extraordinary hardihood, the social and political causes of the decline of the military art in France. Burke read it with keen interest and energetic approval. He was present at the reading of a tragedy by the same author, and gave some offence to the rival coterie by preferring Guibert's tragedy to La Harpe's. To us, however, of a later day, Guibert is known neither for his tragedy nor his essay on tactics, nor for a memory so rapid that he could open a book, throw one glance like a flash of lightning on to a page, and then instantly repeat from it half a dozen lines word for word. He lives in literature as the inspirer of that ardent passion of Mademoiselle Lespinasse's letters, so unique in their consuming intensity that, as has been said, they seem to burn the page on which they are written. It was perhaps at Mademoiselle Lespinasse's that Burke met Diderot. The eleven volumes of the illustrative plates of the Encyclopaedia had been given to the public twelve months before, and its editor was just released from the giant's toil of twenty years. Voltaire was in imperial exile at Ferney. Rousseau was copying music in a garret in the street that is now called after his name, but he had long ago cut himself off from society; and Burke was not likely to take much trouble to find out a man whom he had known in England seven years before, and against whom he had conceived a strong and lasting antipathy, as entertaining no principle either to influence his heart or to guide his understanding, save a deranged and eccentric vanity.

It was the fashion for English visitors to go to Versailles. They saw the dauphin and his brothers dine in public, before a crowd of princes of the blood, nobles, abbés, and all the miscellaneous throng of a court. They attended mass in the chapel, where the old king, surrounded by bishops, sat in a pew just above that of Madame du Barri. The royal mistress astonished foreigners by hair without powder and cheeks without rouge, the simplest toilettes, and the most unassuming manners. Vice itself, in Burke's famous words, seemed to lose half its evil by losing all its grossness. And there, too, Burke had that vision to which we owe one of the most gorgeous pages in our literature — Marie Antoinette, the young dauphiness, "decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy." The shadow was rapidly stealing on. The year after Burke's visit, the scene underwent a strange transformation. The king died; the mistress was banished in luxurious exile; and the dauphiness became the ill-starred Queen of France. Burke never forgot the emotions of the scene; they awoke in his imagination sixteen years after, when all was changed, and the awful contrast shook him with a passion that his eloquence has made immortal.

Madame du Deffand wrote to Horace Walpole that Burke had been so well received, that he ought to leave France excellently pleased with the country. But it was not so. His spirit was perturbed by what he had listened to. He came away with small esteem for that busy fermentation of intellect in which his French friends most exulted, and for which they looked forward to the gratitude and admiration of posterity. From the spot on which he stood there issued two mighty streams. It was from the ideas of the Parisian freethinkers, whom Burke so detested, that

Jefferson, Franklin, and Henry drew the theories of human society that were so soon to find life in American Independence. It was from the same ideas that later on the revolutionary tide surged forth, in which Burke saw no elements of a blessed fertility, but only a horrid torrent of desolating lava. In 1773 there was a date of strange repose in western Europe; the little break of stillness that precedes the hurricane. It was indeed the eve of a momentous epoch. Before sixteen years were over, the American Republic had risen like a new constellation into the firmament, and the French monarchy, of such antiquity and fame and high pre-eminence in European history, had been shattered to the dust. We may not agree with Burke's appreciation of the forces that were behind these vast convulsions. But at least he saw, and saw with eyes of passionate alarm, that strong speculative forces were at work, which must violently prove the very bases of the great social superstructure, and might not improbably break them up for ever.

Almost immediately after his return from France, he sounded a shrill note of warning. Some Methodists from Chatham had petitioned Parliament against a bill for the relief of dissenters from subscription to the Articles. Burke denounced the intolerance of the petitioners. It is not the dissenters, he cried, whom you have to fear, but the men who, "not contented with endeavouring to turn your eyes from the blaze and effulgence of light, by which life and immortality is so gloriously demonstrated by the Gospel, would even extinguish that faint glimmering of Nature, that only comfort supplied to ignorant man before this great illumination. . . . These are the people against whom you ought to aim the shaft of the law; these are the men to whom, arrayed in all the terrors of government, I would say, 'You shall not degrade us into

brutes.' . . . The most horrid and cruel blow that can be offered to civil society is through atheism. . . . The infidels are outlaws of the constitution, not of this country, but of the human race. They are never, never to be supported, never to be tolerated. Under the systematic attacks of these people, I see some of the props of good government already begin to fail; I see propagated principles which will not leave to religion even a toleration. I see myself sinking every day under the attacks of these wretched people." [1] To this pitch had he been excited by the vehement band of men, who had inscribed on their standard, *Écrasez l'Infâme.*

The second Parliament in which Burke had a seat was dissolved suddenly and without warning (October 1774). The attitude of America was threatening, and it was believed the ministers were anxious to have the elections over before the state of things became worse. The whole kingdom was instantly in a ferment. Couriers, chaises, post-horses, hurried in every direction over our island, and it was noted, as a measure of the agitation, that no fewer than sixty messengers passed through a single turnpike on one day. Sensible observers were glad to think that, in consequence of the rapidity of the elections, less wine and money would be wasted than at any election for sixty years past. Burke had a houseful of company at Beaconsfield when the news arrived. Johnson was among them, and as the party was hastily breaking up, the old Tory took his Whig friend kindly by the hand: "Farewell, my dear sir," he said, "and remember that I wish you all the success that ought to be wished to you, and can possibly be wished to you, by an honest man."

The words were of good omen. Burke was now

[1] *Speech on the Relief of Protestant Dissenters*, 1773.

rewarded by the discovery that his labours had earned for him recognition and gratitude beyond the narrow limits of a rather exclusive party. He had before this attracted the attention of the mercantile public. The Company of Merchants trading to Africa voted him their thanks for his share in supporting their establishments. The Committee of Trade at Manchester formally returned him their grateful acknowledgments for the active part that he had taken in the business of the Jamaica free ports. But then Manchester returned no representative to Parliament. In two Parliaments Burke had been elected for Wendover free of expense. Lord Verney's circumstances were now so embarrassed, that he was obliged to part with the four seats at his disposal to men who could pay for them. There had been some talk of proposing Burke for Westminster, and Wilkes, who was then omnipotent, promised him the support of the popular party. But the patriot's memory was treacherous, and he speedily forgot, for reasons of his own, an idea that had originated with himself. Burke's constancy of spirit was momentarily overclouded. "Sometimes when I am alone," he wrote to Lord Rockingham (September 15, 1774), "in spite of all my efforts, I fall into a melancholy which is inexpressible, and to which, if I give way, I should not continue long under it, but must totally sink. Yet I do assure you that partly, and indeed principally, by the force of natural good spirits, and partly by a strong sense of what I ought to do, I bear up so well that no one who did not know them, could easily discover the state of my mind or my circumstances. I have those that are dear to me, for whom I must live as long as God pleases, and in what way He pleases. Whether I ought not totally to abandon this public station for which I am so unfit, and have of course been so unfortunate, I know not." But he was always

saved from rash retirement from public business by two reflections. He doubted whether a man has a right to retire after he has once gone a certain length in these things. And he remembered that there are often obscure vexations in the most private life, that destroy a man's peace as effectually as anything that can occur in public contentions.

Lord Rockingham offered his influence on behalf of Burke at Malton, one of the family boroughs in Yorkshire, and thither Burke in no high spirits betook himself. On his way to the north he heard that he had been nominated for Bristol, but the nomination had for certain electioneering reasons not been approved by the party. As it happened, Burke was no sooner chosen at Malton than, owing to an unexpected turn of affairs at Bristol, the idea of proposing him for a candidate revived. Messengers were sent express to his house in London, and, not finding him there, they hastened down to Yorkshire. Burke quickly resolved that the offer was too important to be rejected. Bristol was the capital of the west, and it was still in wealth, population, and mercantile activity the second city of the kingdom. To be invited to stand for so great a constituency, without any request of his own and free of personal expense, was a distinction that no politician could hold lightly. Burke rose from the table where he was dining with some of his supporters, stepped into a post-chaise at six on a Tuesday evening, and travelled without a break until he reached Bristol on the Thursday afternoon, having got over two hundred and seventy miles in forty-four hours. Not only did he execute the journey without a break, but, as he told the people of Bristol, with an exulting commemoration of his own zeal that recalls Cicero, he did not sleep for an instant in the interval. The poll was kept open for a month, and the contest was the most tedious that had ever been known in the city.

New freemen were admitted down to the very last day of the election. At the end of it, Burke was second on the poll, and was declared to be duly chosen (November 3, 1774). There was a petition against his return, but the election was confirmed, and he continued to sit for Bristol for six years.

The situation of a candidate is apt to find out a man's weaker places. Burke stood the test. He showed none of the petulant rage of those clamorous politicians whose flight, as he said, is winged in a lower region of the air. As the traveller stands on the noble bridge that now spans the valley of the Avon, he may recall Burke's local comparison of these busy, angry familiars of an election, to the gulls that skim the mud of the river when it is exhausted of its tide. He gave his new friends a more important lesson, when the time came for him to thank them for the honour they had just conferred upon him. His colleague had opened the subject of the relations between a member of Parliament and his constituents; and had declared that, for his own part, he should regard the instructions of the people of Bristol as decisive and binding. Burke in a weighty passage upheld a manlier doctrine:

> Certainly, gentlemen, it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him; their opinions high respect, their business unremitted attention. It is his duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasure, his satisfactions, to theirs; and above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interest to his own. But his unbiassed opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.
>
> My worthy colleague says, his will ought to be subservient

to yours. If that be all, the thing is innocent. If government were a matter of will upon any side, yours, without question, ought to be superior. But government and legislation are matters of reason and judgment, and not of inclination; and what sort of reason is that in which the determination precedes the discussion, in which one set of men deliberate and another decide, and where those who form the conclusion are perhaps three hundred miles distant from those who hear the arguments? . . . *Authoritative* instructions, *mandates* issued, which the member is bound blindly and implicitly to obey, to vote, and to argue for, though contrary to the clearest convictions of his judgment and conscience — these are things utterly unknown to the laws of this land, and which arise from a fundamental mistake of the whole order and tenor of our Constitution.[1]

For six years the Bristol electors were content to be represented by a man of this independence. They never, however, really acquiesced in the principle that a member of Parliament owes as much to his own convictions as to the will of his constituents. In 1778 a bill was brought into Parliament, relaxing some of the restrictions imposed upon Ireland by the atrocious fiscal policy of Great Britain. The great mercantile centres raised a furious outcry, and Bristol was as blind and as boisterous as Manchester and Glasgow. Burke not only spoke and voted in favour of the commercial propositions, but urged that the proposed removal of restrictions on Irish trade did not go nearly far enough. There was none of that too familiar casuistry, by which public men argue themselves out of their consciences in a strange syllogism, that they can best serve the country in Parliament; that to keep their seats they must follow their electors; and that therefore, in the long run, they serve the country best by acquiescing in ignorance and prejudice. Anybody can denounce an abuse. It needs valour and integrity

[1] *Speech at the conclusion of the Poll.*

to stand forth against a wrong to which our best friends are most ardently committed. It warms our hearts to think of the noble courage with which Burke faced the blind and narrow selfishness of his own supporters. He reminded them that England only consented to leave to the Irish in two or three instances the use of the natural faculties that God had given them. He asked them whether Ireland was united to Great Britain for no other purpose than that we should counteract the bounty of Providence in her favour; and whether, in proportion as that bounty had been liberal, we were to regard it as an evil to be met with every possible corrective. In our day there is nobody of any school who doubts that Burke's view of our trade policy towards Ireland was accurately, absolutely, and magnificently right. I need not repeat the arguments. They made no mark on the Bristol merchants. Burke boldly told them that he would rather run the risk of displeasing than of injuring them. They implored him to become their advocate. "I should only disgrace myself," he said; "I should lose the only thing that can make such abilities as mine of any use to the world now or hereafter. I mean that authority which is derived from the opinion that a member speaks the language of truth and sincerity, and that he is not ready to take up or lay down a great political system for the convenience of the hour; that he is in Parliament to support his opinion of the public good, and does not form his opinion in order to get into Parliament or to continue in it." [1]

A small instalment of humanity to Ireland was not more distasteful to the electors of Bristol than a small instalment of toleration to Roman Catholics in England. A measure was passed (1778) repealing certain iniquitous penalties created by an Act of William the Third. It is needless to say that

[1] *Two Letters to Gentlemen in Bristol*, 1778.

this rudimentary concession to justice and sense was supported by Burke. His voters began to believe that those were right who had said that he had been bred at Saint Omer's, was a Papist at heart, and a Jesuit in disguise. When the time came, *summa dies et ineluctabile fatum*, Burke bore with dignity and temper his dismissal from the only independent constituency that he ever represented. Years before he had warned a young man entering public life to regard and wish well to the common people, whom his best instincts and his highest duties lead him to love and to serve, but to put as little trust in them as in princes. Burke somewhere describes an honest public life as carrying on a poor unequal conflict against the passions and prejudices of our day, perhaps with no better weapons than passions and prejudices of our own.

The six years during which Burke sat in Parliament for Bristol, saw this conflict carried on under the most desperate circumstances. They were the years of the civil war between the English at home and the English in the American colonies. George III. and Lord North have been made scapegoats for sins that were not exclusively their own. They were only the organs and representatives of all the lurking ignorance and arbitrary humours of the entire community. Burke discloses in many places, that for once the king and Parliament did not act without the sympathies of the mass. In his famous speech at Bristol, in 1780, he was rebuking the intolerance of those who bitterly taunted him for the support of the measure for the relaxation of the Penal Code. "It is but too true," he said in a passage worth remembering, "that the love, and even the very idea, of genuine liberty is extremely rare. It is but too true that there are many whose whole scheme of freedom is made up of pride, perverseness, and insolence. They feel themselves in a state of thraldom, they imagine that their souls

are cooped and cabined in, unless they have some man, or some body of men, dependent on their mercy. The desire of having some one below them, descends to those who are the very lowest of all; and a Protestant cobbler, debased by his poverty, but exalted by his share of the ruling Church, feels a pride in knowing it is by his generosity alone that the peer, whose footman's instep he measures, is able to keep his chaplain from a gaol. This disposition is the true source of the passion which many men, in very humble life, have taken to the American war. *Our* subjects in America; *our* colonies; *our* dependents. This lust of party power is the liberty they hunger and thirst for; and this Siren song of ambition has charmed ears that we would have thought were never organised to that sort of music."

This was the mental attitude of a majority of the nation, and it was fortunate for them and for us that the yeomen and merchants on the other side of the Atlantic had a more just and energetic appreciation of the crisis. The insurgents, while achieving their own freedom, were indirectly engaged in fighting the battle of the people of the mother country as well. Burke had a vehement correspondent who wrote to him (1777) that if the utter ruin of this country were to be the consequence of her persisting in the claim to tax America, then he would be the first to say, *Let her perish!* If England prevails, said Horace Walpole, English and American liberty is at an end; if one fell, the other would fall with it. Burke, seeing this, "certainly never could and never did wish," as he says of himself, "the colonists to be subdued by arms. He was fully persuaded that if such should be the event, they must be held in that subdued state by a great body of standing forces, and perhaps of foreign forces. He was strongly of opinion that such armies, first victorious over

Englishmen, in a conflict for English constitutional rights and privileges, and afterwards habituated (though in America) to keep an English people in a state of abject subjection, would prove fatal in the end to the liberties of England itself."[1] The way for this remote peril was being sedulously prepared by a widespread deterioration among popular ideas, and a fatal relaxation of the hold that they had previously gained in the public mind. In order to prove that the Americans had no right to their liberties, we were every day endeavouring to subvert the maxims that preserve the whole spirit of our own. To prove that the Americans ought not to be free, we were obliged to depreciate the value of freedom itself. The material strength of the government, and its moral strength alike, would have been reinforced by the defeat of the colonists, to such an extent as to have seriously delayed or even jeopardised English progress, and therefore that of Europe too. As events actually fell out, the ferocious administration of the law in the last five or six years of the eighteenth century was the retribution for the lethargy or approval with which the mass of the English community had watched the measures of the government against their fellow-Englishmen in America.

It is not necessary here to follow Burke minutely through the successive stages of parliamentary action in the American war. He always defended the settlement of 1766; the Stamp Act was repealed, and the constitutional supremacy and sovereign authority of the mother country was preserved in a Declaratory Act. When the project of taxing the colonies was revived, and relations with them were becoming strained and dangerous, Burke came forward with a plan for leaving the General Assemblies of the colonies to grant supplies and aids, instead of giving and granting supplies in

[1] *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs.*

Parliament, to be raised and paid in the colonies. Needless to say that it was rejected, and perhaps it was not feasible. Henceforth Burke could only watch in impotence the blunders of government, and the disasters that befell the national arms. But his protests against the war will last as long as our literature.

Of all Burke's writings none are so fit to secure unqualified and unanimous admiration as the three pieces on this deep reactive struggle:—the *Speech on American Taxation* (April 19, 1774); the *Speech on Conciliation with America* (March 22, 1775); and the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777). Together they hardly exceed the compass of the volume that the reader now has in his hands. It is no exaggeration to say that they compose the most perfect manual in our literature, or in any literature, for one who approaches the study of public affairs, whether for knowledge or for practice. They are an example without fault of all the qualities that the critic, whether a theorist or an actor, of great political situations should strive by night and by day to possess. If the theme with which they deal were less near than it is to our interests and affections as free citizens, these three performances would still abound in the lessons of an incomparable political method. If their subject were as remote as the quarrel between the Corinthians and Corcyra, or the war between Rome and the Allies, instead of a conflict to which the world owes the opportunity of the most important of political experiments, we should still have everything to learn from the author's treatment; the vigorous grasp of masses of compressed detail, the wide illumination from great principles of human experience, the strong and masculine feeling for the two great political ends of Justice and Freedom, the large and generous interpretation of expediency, the morality, the vision, the noble temper. If ever, in the fulness of

time—and surely the fates of men and literature cannot have it otherwise—Burke becomes one of the half-dozen names of established and universal currency in education and in common books, rising above the waywardness of literary caprice or intellectual fashions, as Shakespeare and Milton and Bacon rise above it, it will be the mastery, the elevation, the wisdom, of these far-shining discourses in which the world will in an especial degree recognise the combination of sovereign gifts with beneficent uses.

The pamphlet on the *Present Discontents* is partially obscured or muffled to the modern reader by the space given to the cabal of the day. The *Reflections on the French Revolution* over-abounds in declamation, and—apart from its being passionately on one side, and that perhaps the wrong one—the splendour of the eloquence is out of proportion to the reason and the judgment. In the pieces on the American war, on the contrary, Burke was conscious that he could trust nothing to the sympathy or the prepossessions of his readers, and this put him upon an unwonted persuasiveness. Here it is reason and judgment, not declamation; lucidity, not passion; that produces the effects of eloquence. No choler mars the page; no purple patch distracts our minds from the penetrating force of argument; no commonplace is dressed up into a vague sublimity. The cause of freedom is made to wear its own proper apparel of equity, self-control, and reason.

Not one, but all those great idols of the political market-place whose worship and service has cost the race so dear, are discovered and shown to be the foolish uncouth stocks and stones that they are. Fox once urged members of Parliament to peruse the speech on Conciliation again and again, to study it, to imprint it on their minds, to impress it on their hearts. But Fox only referred to the

lesson he thought to be contained in it, that representation is the sovereign remedy for every evil. This is by far the least important of its lessons. It is great in many ways. It is greatest as a remonstrance and an answer against the thriving sophisms of barbarous national pride, the eternal fallacies of war and conquest; and here it is great, as all the three pieces on the subject are so, because they expose with unanswerable force the deep-lying faults of heart and temper, as well as of understanding, that move nations to haughty and violent courses.

The great argument with those of the war party who pretended to a political defence of their position, was the doctrine that the English government was sovereign in the colonies as at home; and in the notion of sovereignty they found inherent the notion of an indefeasible right to impose and exact taxes. Having satisfied themselves of the existence of this sovereignty, and of the right they took to be its natural property, they saw no step between the existence of an abstract right and the propriety of enforcing it. We have seen an instance of a similar mode of political thinking in our own lifetime. During the great civil war between the northern and southern states of the American Union, people in England convinced themselves—some after careful examination of documents, others by cursory glances at second-hand authorities—that the South had a right to secede. The current of opinion was precisely similar in the struggle to which the United States owed their separate existence. Now the idea of a right as a mysterious and reverend abstraction, to be worshipped in a state of naked divorce from expediency and convenience, was one that Burke's political judgment found preposterous and unendurable. He hated the arbitrary and despotic savour that clung about the English assumptions over the colonies. And his repulsion was heightened when he found that these assumptions were justified,

not by some permanent advantage their victory would procure for the mother country or for the colonies, or that would repay the cost of gaining such a victory; not by the assertion and demonstration of some positive duty, but by the futile and meaningless doctrine that we had a right to do something or other, if we liked.

The alleged compromise of the national dignity implied in a withdrawal of the just claim of the government, instead of convincing, only exasperated him. "Show the thing you contend for to be reason; show it to be common sense; show it to be the means of attaining some useful end; and then I am content to allow it what dignity you please." [1] The next year he took up the ground still more firmly, and explained it still more impressively. As for the question of the right of taxation, he exclaimed, "It is less than nothing in my consideration. . . . My consideration is narrow, confined, and wholly limited to the policy of the question. I do not examine whether the giving away a man's money be a power excepted and reserved out of the general trust of Government. . . . *The question with me is not whether you have a right to render your people miserable, but whether it is not your interest to make them happy.* It is not what a lawyer tells me I *may* do, but what humanity, reason, and justice tell me I *ought* to do. I am not determining a point of law; I am restoring tranquillity, and the general character and situation of a people must determine what sort of government is fitted for them." "I am not here going into the distinctions of rights," he cries, "not attempting to mark their boundaries. I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions. *I hate the very sound of them.* This is the true touchstone of all theories which regard man and the affairs of man: does it suit his nature in general?—

[1] *Speech on American Taxation.*

does it suit his nature as modified by his habits ? " He could not bear to think of having legislative or political arrangements shaped or vindicated by a delusive geometrical accuracy of deduction, instead of being entrusted to " the natural operation of things, which, left to themselves, generally fall into their proper order."

Apart from his incessant assertion of the principle that man acts from adequate motives relative to his interests, and not on metaphysical speculations, Burke sows, as he marches along in his stately argument, many a germ of the modern philosophy of civilisation. He was told that America was worth fighting for. " Certainly it is," he answered, " if fighting a people be the best way of gaining them." Every step that has been taken in the direction of progress, not merely in empire, but in education, in punishment, in the treatment of the insane, has shown the deep wisdom, so unfamiliar in that age of ferocious penalties and brutal methods, of this truth—that " the natural effect of fidelity, clemency, kindness in governors, is peace, good-will, order, and esteem in the governed." Is there a single instance to the contrary ? Then there is that sure key to wise politics,—" *Nobody shall persuade me when a whole people are concerned, that acts of lenity are not means of conciliation.*" And that still more famous sentence,—" *I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people.*"

Good and observant men will feel that no misty benevolence or vague sympathy, but the positive reality of experience, inspired such passages as that where he says,—" Never expecting to find perfection in men, and not looking for divine attributes in created beings, in my commerce with my contemporaries I have found much human virtue. The age unquestionably produces daring profligates and insidious hypocrites ? What then ? Am I not to avail myself of whatever good is to be found

in the world, because of the mixture of evil that is in it ? . . . Those who raise suspicions of the good, on account of the behaviour of evil men, are of the party of the latter. . . . A conscientious person would rather doubt his own judgment than condemn his species. He that accuses all mankind of corruption ought to remember that he is sure to convict only one. In truth, I should much rather admit those whom at any time I have disrelished the most, to be patterns of perfection, than seek a consolation to my own unworthiness in a general communion of depravity with all about me." This is one of those pieces of rational constancy and mental wholeness in Burke that fill up our admiration for him—one of the manifold illustrations of an invincible fidelity to the natural order and operation of things, even when they seemed most hostile to all that was dear to his own personality.

CHAPTER V

ECONOMICAL REFORM—BURKE IN OFFICE—FALL OF HIS PARTY

Towards 1780 it began to be clear that the ministers had brought the country into disaster and humiliation, from which their policy contained no way of escape. In the closing months of the American war, the Opposition pressed ministers with a vigour that never abated. Lord North bore their attacks with perfect good-humour. When Burke, in the course of a great oration, parodied Burgoyne's invitation to the Indians to repair to the king's standard, the wit and satire of it almost suffocated the Prime Minister, not with shame but with laughter. His heart had long ceased to be in the matter, and everybody knew that he only retained his post in obedience to the urgent importunities of the king, whilst such colleagues as Rigby only clung to their place because the salaries were endeared by long familiarity. The general gloom was accidentally deepened by the hideous outbreak of fanaticism and violence which is known as the Lord George Gordon Riots (June 1780). The Whigs, as having favoured the relaxation of the laws against popery, were especially obnoxious to the mob. The government sent a guard of soldiers to protect Burke's house in Charles Street, St. James's; but after he had removed the more important of his papers, he insisted on the guard being despatched for the protection of more important places, and he took

shelter under the roof of General Burgoyne. His excellent wife, according to a letter of his brother, had "the firmness and sweetness of an angel; but why do I say of an angel?—of a woman." Burke himself courageously walked to and fro amid the raging crowds with firm composure, though the experiment was full of peril. He describes the mob as being made up, as London mobs not rarely are, rather of the unruly and dissolute than of fanatical malignants, and he vehemently opposed any concessions by Parliament to the spirit of intolerance that had first kindled the blaze. All the letters of the time show that the outrages and alarms of those days and nights, in which the capital seemed to be at the mercy of a furious rabble, made a deeper impression on the minds of contemporaries than they ought to have done. Burke was not likely to be less excited than others by the sight of insensate disorder; and it is no idle fancy that he had the mobs of 1780 still in his memory, when ten years later he poured out the vials of his wrath on the bloodier mob that carried the King and Queen of France in wild triumph from Versailles to Paris.

In the previous February (1780) Burke had achieved one of the greatest of all his parliamentary and oratorical successes. Though the matter of this particular enterprise is no longer alive, yet it illustrates his many strong qualities in so remarkable a way that it is right to make some mention of it. We have already seen that Burke steadily set his face against parliamentary reform; he habitually declared that the machine was well enough to answer any good purpose, provided the materials were sound. The statesman who resists all projects for the reform of the constitution, and yet eagerly proclaims how deplorably imperfect are the practical results of its working, binds himself to vigorous exertions for the amendment of administration. Burke devoted himself to this duty

with a fervid assiduity that has not often been exampled, and has never been surpassed. He went to work with the zeal of a religious enthusiast, intent on purging his Church and his faith of the corruptions that lowered it in the eyes of men. There was no part or order of government so obscure, so remote, or so complex, as to escape his acute and persevering observation.

Burke's object, in his schemes for Economical Reform, was less to husband the public resources and relieve the tax-payer—though this aim could not have been absent from his mind, overburdened as England then was with the charges of the American war—than to cut off the channels which supplied the corruption of the House of Commons. The full title of the first project which he presented to the legislature (February 1780), was, A Plan for the Better Security of the Independence of Parliament, and the Economical Reformation of the Civil and other Establishments. It was to the former that he deemed the latter to be the most direct road. The strength of the administration in the House was due to the gifts that the minister had in his hands to dispense. Men voted with the side which could reward their fidelity. It was the number of sinecure places and unpublished pensions, that, along with the controllable influence of peers and nabobs, furnished the minister with an irresistible lever: the avarice and the degraded public spirit of the recipients supplied the required fulcrum. Burke knew that in sweeping away these factitious places and secret pensions, he would be robbing the court of its chief implements of corruption, and protecting the representative against his chief motive in selling his country. He conceived that he would thus be promoting a far more infallible means than any scheme of electoral reform could have provided, for reviving the integrity and independence of the House of Commons. In his eyes, the evil resided

not in the constituencies, but in their representatives; not in the small number of the one, but in the smaller integrity of the other.

The evil did not stop where it began. It was not merely that the sinister motive, thus engendered in the minds of too lax and facile men, induced them to betray their legislative trust, and barter their own uprightness and the interests of the State. The acquisition of one of these nefarious bribes meant much more than a sinister vote. It called into existence a champion of every inveterate abuse that weighed on the resources of the country. There is a well-known passage in the speech on Economical Reform, in which the speaker shows what an insurmountable obstacle Lord Talbot had found in his attempt to carry out certain reforms in the royal household, in the fact that the turnspit of the king's kitchen was a member of Parliament. "On that rock his whole adventure split,—his whole scheme of economy was dashed to pieces; his department became more expensive than ever; the Civil List debt accumulated." Interference with the expenses of the household meant interference with the perquisites or fees of this legislative turnspit, and the rights of sinecures were too sacred to be touched. In comparison with them, it counted for nothing that the king's tradesmen went unpaid, and became bankrupt; that the judges were unpaid; that "the justice of the kingdom bent and gave way; the foreign ministers remained inactive and unprovided; the system of Europe was dissolved; the chain of our alliances was broken; all the wheels of government at home and abroad were stopped. *The king's turnspit was a member of Parliament.*"[1] This office, and numbers of others exactly like it, existed solely because the House

[1] The civil list at this time comprehended a great number of charges, such as those of which Burke speaks, that had nothing to do with the sovereign personally. They were slowly removed, the judicial and diplomatic charges being transferred on the accession of William IV.

of Commons was crowded with venal men. The post of royal scullion meant a vote that could be relied upon under every circumstance and in all emergencies. And each incumbent of such an office felt his honour and interests concerned in the defence of all other offices of the same scandalous description. There was thus maintained a strong standing army of expensive, lax, and corrupting officials.

The royal household was a gigantic nest of costly jobbery and purposeless profusion. It retained all "the cumbrous charge of a Gothic establishment," though all its usage and accommodation had "shrunk into the polished littleness of modern elegance." The outlay was enormous. The expenditure on the court tables only was a thing unfathomable. Waste was the rule in every branch of it. There was an office for the Great Wardrobe, another office of the Robes, a third of the Groom of the Stole. For these three useless offices there were three useless treasurers. They all laid a heavy burden on the taxpayer, in order to supply a bribe to the member of Parliament. The plain remedy was to annihilate the subordinate treasuries. "Take away," was Burke's demand, "the whole establishment of detail in the household: the Treasurer, the Comptroller, the Cofferer of the Household, the Treasurer of the Chamber, the Master of the Household, the whole Board of Green Cloth; a vast number of subordinate offices in the department of the Steward of the Household; the whole establishment of the Great Wardrobe; the Removing Wardrobe; the Jewel Office; the Robes; the Board of Works." The abolition of this confused and costly system would not only diminish expense and promote efficiency; it would do still more excellent service in destroying the roots of parliamentary corruption. "Under other governments a question of expense is only a question

of economy, and it is nothing more; with us, in every question of expense, there is always a mixture of constitutional considerations."

Places and pensions, though the worst, were not by any means the only stumbling-block in the way of pure and well-ordered government. The administration of the estates of the Crown,—the Principality, the Duchy of Cornwall, the Duchy of Lancaster, the County Palatine of Chester,—was an elaborate system of obscure and wasteful expenditure. Wales had to herself eight judges, while no more than twelve sufficed to perform the whole business of justice in England, a country ten times as large and a hundred times as opulent. Wales, and each of the duchies, had its own Exchequer. Every one of these principalities, said Burke, has the apparatus of a kingdom, for the jurisdiction over a few private estates; it has the formality and charge of the Exchequer of Great Britain, for collecting the rents of a country squire. They were the field, in his expressive phrase, of mock jurisdictions and mimic revenues, of difficult trifles and laborious fooleries. "It was but the other day that that pert factious fellow, the Duke of Lancaster, presumed to fly in the face of his liege lord, our gracious sovereign—presumed to go to law with the king. The object is neither your business nor mine. Which of the parties got the better I really forget. The material point is that the suit cost about £15,000. But as the Duke of Lancaster is but agent of Duke Humphrey, and not worth a groat, our sovereign was obliged to pay the costs of both." The system involving these costly absurdities Burke proposed entirely to abolish. In the same spirit he wished to dispose of the Crown lands and the forest lands, which it was for the good of the community, not less than of the Crown itself, to throw into the hands of private owners.

One of the most important of these projected reforms, and one that its author did not flinch from carrying out two years later to his own loss, related to the office of Paymaster. This functionary was accustomed to hold large balances of the public money in his own hands and for his own profit, for long periods, owing to a complex system of accounts so rigorous as entirely to defeat its own object. The Paymaster could not, through the multiplicity of forms and the exaction of impossible conditions, get a prompt acquittance. The audit sometimes did not take place for years after the accounts were virtually closed. Meanwhile the money accumulated in his hands, and its profits were his legitimate perquisite. Lord Holland, or his representatives, held the balances of his office from 1765, when he retired, until 1778, when they were audited. During this time he realised, as the interest on the use of these balances, nearly two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Burke diverted these enormous gains into the coffers of the State. He fixed the Paymaster's salary at four thousand pounds a year, and was himself the first person who accepted the curtailed income.

Not the most fervid or brilliant of Burke's pieces, yet the speech on Economical Reform is certainly not the least instructive or impressive of them. It gives a suggestive view of the relations existing at that time between the House of Commons and the court. It reveals the narrow and unpatriotic spirit of the king and the ministers, who could resist proposals so reasonable in themselves, and so remedial in their effects, at a time when the nation was suffering the heavy and distressing burdens of the most disastrous war that our country has ever carried on. It is especially interesting as an illustration of its author's political capacity. At a moment when committees and petitions and great county meetings showed how thoroughly the national anger

was roused against the existing system, Burke came to the front of affairs with a scheme, of which the most striking characteristic proved to be that it was profoundly temperate. Bent on the extirpation of the system, he had no ill-will towards the men who had happened to flourish in it. "I never will suffer," he said, "any man or description of men to suffer from errors that naturally have grown out of the abusive constitution of those offices that I propose to regulate. If I cannot reform with equity, I will not reform at all." Exasperated as he was by the fruitlessness of his opposition to a policy he detested from the bottom of his soul, it would have been little wonderful if he had resorted to every weapon of his unrivalled rhetorical armoury, in order to discredit and overthrow the whole scheme of government. Yet nothing could have been further from his mind than any violent or extreme idea of this sort. Many years afterwards, he took credit to himself less for what he did on this occasion than for what he prevented from being done. People were ready for a new modelling of the two Houses of Parliament, as well as for grave modifications of the Prerogative. Burke resisted this temper unflinchingly. "I had," he says, "a state to preserve, as well as a state to reform. I had a people to gratify, but not to inflame or to mislead." He then recounts without exaggeration the pains and caution with which he sought reform, while steering clear of innovation. He heaved the lead every inch of way he made. It is grievous to think that a man who could assume such an attitude at such a time, who could give this kind of proof of his skill in the great, the difficult art of governing, only held a fifth-rate office for some time less than a twelvemonth.

The year of the project of Economic Reform (1780) is usually taken as the date when Burke's influence and repute were at their height. He

had not been tried in the fire of official responsibility, and his impetuosity was still under a degree of control that not long afterwards was fatally weakened by an overmastering irritability of constitution. High as his character was now in the ascendant, it was in the same year that Burke suffered the sharp mortification of losing his seat at Bristol. His speech before the election is one of the best-known of all his performances; and it well deserves to be so, for it is surpassed by none in gravity, elevation, and moral dignity. We can only wonder that a constituency which could suffer itself to be addressed on this high level, should have allowed the small selfishness of local interest to weigh against such wisdom and nobility. But Burke soon found in the course of his canvass that he had no chance, and he declined to go to the poll. On the previous day one of his competitors had fallen down dead. "*What shadows we are*," said Burke, "*and what shadows we pursue!*"

In 1782 Lord North's government came to an end, and the king "was pleased," as Lord North quoted with jesting irony from the *Gazette*, to send for Lord Rockingham, Charles Fox, and Lord Shelburne. Members could hardly believe their own eyes, as they saw Lord North and the members of a government that had been in place for twelve years, now lounging on the Opposition benches in their greatcoats, frocks, and boots, while Fox and Burke shone in the full dress that was then worn by ministers, and cut unwonted figures with swords, lace, and hair-powder. Sheridan was made an Under-Secretary of State, and to the younger Pitt was offered his choice of various minor posts, which he haughtily refused. Burke, to whom on their own admission the party owed everything, was appointed Paymaster of the Forces, with a salary of four thousand pounds a year. His brother, Richard Burke, was made Secretary of the Treasury. His

son Richard was named to be his father's deputy at the Pay-Office, with a salary of five hundred pounds.

This singular exclusion from Cabinet office of the most powerful genius of the party has naturally given rise to abundant criticism ever since. It will be convenient to say what there is to be said on this subject, in connection with the events of 1788 (below, p. 132), because there happens to exist some useful information about the ministerial crisis of that year, which sheds a clearer light upon the arrangements of six years before. Meanwhile it is enough to say that Burke himself had most reasonably looked to some higher post. There is the distinct note of the humility of mortified pride in a letter written in reply to some one who had applied to him for a place. "You have been misinformed," he says; "I make no part of the ministerial arrangement. Something in the official line may possibly be thought fit for my measure." Burke knew that his position in the country entitled him to something above the official line. In a later year, when he felt himself called upon to defend his pension, he described what his position was in the momentous crisis from 1780 to 1782, and Burke's habitual veraciousness forbids us to treat the description as in any way exaggerated. "By what accident it matters not," he says, "nor upon what desert, but just then, and in the midst of that hunt of obloquy which has ever pursued me with a full cry through life, I had obtained a very full degree of public confidence. . . . Nothing to prevent disorder was omitted; when it appeared, nothing to subdue it was left uncounselled nor unexecuted, as far as I could prevail. At the time I speak of, and having a momentary lead, so aided and so encouraged, and as a feeble instrument in a mighty hand—I do not say I saved my country—I am sure I did my country important service. There were few indeed

that did not at that time acknowledge it—and that time was thirteen years ago. It was but one view, that no man in the kingdom better deserved an honourable provision should be made for him." [1]

We have seen that Burke had fixed the Paymaster's salary at four thousand pounds, and had destroyed the extravagant perquisites. The other economical reforms that were actually effected fell short by a long way of those which Burke had so industriously devised and so forcibly recommended. In 1782, while Burke declined to spare his own office, the chief of the Cabinet conferred upon Barré a pension of over three thousand a year; above ten times the amount, as has been said, which, in Lord Rockingham's own judgment, as expressed in the new Bill, ought henceforth to be granted to any one person whatever. This shortcoming, however, does not detract from Burke's merit. He was not responsible for it. The eloquence, ingenuity, diligence, above all, the sagacity and the justice of this great effort of 1780, are none the less worthy of our admiration and regard because, in 1782, his chiefs, partly perhaps out of a new-born deference for the feelings of their royal master, showed that the possession of office had sensibly cooled the ardent aspirations proper to Opposition.

The events of the twenty months between the resignation of Lord North (1782) and the accession of Pitt to the office of Prime Minister (December 1783) mark an important crisis in political history, and they mark an important crisis in Burke's career and hopes. Lord Rockingham had just been three months in office, when he died (July 1782). This dissolved the bond that held the two sections of the ministry together, and let loose a flood of rival ambitions and sharp animosities. Lord Shelburne believed himself to have an irresistible claim to the chief post in the administration; among other

[1] *Letter to a Noble Lord.*

reasons, because he might have had it before Lord Rockingham three months earlier, if he had so chosen. The king supported him, not from any partiality to his person, but because he dreaded and hated Charles Fox. The character of Shelburne is one of the perplexities of the time. His views on peace and free trade make him one of the precursors of the Manchester School. No minister was so well informed as to the threads of policy in foreign countries. He was the intimate or the patron of men who now stand out as among the first lights of that time—of Morellet, of Priestley, of Bentham. Yet a few months of power seem to have disclosed faults of character, that left him without a single political friend, and blighted him with irreparable discredit. Fox, who was now the head of the Rockingham section of the Whigs, had, before the death of the late Premier, been on the point of refusing to serve any longer with Lord Shelburne, and he now very promptly refused to serve under him. When Parliament met after Rockingham's death, gossips noticed that Fox and Burke continued, long after the Speaker had taken the chair, to walk backwards and forwards in the Court of Requests, engaged in earnest conversation. According to one story, Burke was very reluctant to abandon an office whose emoluments were as convenient to him as to his spendthrift colleague. According to another and more probable legend, it was Burke who hurried the rupture, and stimulated Fox's jealousy of Shelburne. The Duke of Richmond disapproved of the secession, and remained in the government. Sheridan also disapproved, but he sacrificed his personal conviction to loyalty to Fox.

If Burke was responsible for the break-up of the government, then he was the instigator of a blunder that must be pronounced not only disastrous but culpable. It lowered the legitimate spirit of party to the nameless spirit of faction. The

dangers from which the old liberties of the realm had just emerged have been described by no one so forcibly as by Burke himself. No one was so convinced as Burke that the only way of withstanding the arbitrary and corrupting policy of the court was to form a strong Whig party. No one knew better than he the sovereign importance and the immense difficulty of repairing the ruin of the last twelve years by a good peace. The Rockingham or Foxite section were obviously unable to form an effective party with serious expectation of power, unless they had allies. They might, no doubt, from personal dislike to Lord Shelburne, refuse to work under him; but personal dislike could be no excuse for formally and violently working against him, when his policy was their own, and when its success was recognised by them no less than by him as of urgent moment. Instead of either working with the other section of their party, or of supporting from below the gangway that which was the policy of both sections, they sought to return to power by coalescing with the very man whose criminal subservience to the king's will had brought about the catastrophe that Shelburne was repairing. Burke must share the blame of this famous transaction. He was one of the most furious assailants of the new ministry. He poured out a fresh invective against Lord Shelburne every day. Cynical contemporaries laughed as they saw him in search of more and more humiliating parallels, ransacking all literature from the Bible and the Roman history down to Mother Goose's tales. His passion carried him so far as to breed a reaction in those who listened to him. "I think," wrote Mason from Yorkshire, where Burke had been on a visit to Lord Fitzwilliam in the autumn of 1782, "that Burke's mad obloquy against Lord Shelburne, and these insolent pamphlets in which he must have had a hand, will do

more to fix him (Shelburne) in his office than anything else."

This result would have actually followed, for the nation was ill pleased at the immoral alliance between the Foxites and the man whom, if they had been true to their opinions a thousand times repeated, they ought at that moment to have been impeaching. The dissenters, who had hitherto been his enthusiastic admirers, but who are rigid above other men in their demand of political consistency, lamented Burke's fall in joining the Coalition, as Priestley told him many years after, as the fall of a friend and a brother. But Shelburne threw away the game. "His falsehoods," says Horace Walpole, "his flatteries, duplicity, insincerity, arrogance, contradictions, neglect of his friends, with all the kindred of all these faults, were the daily topics of contempt and ridicule; and his folly shut his eyes, nor did he perceive that so very rapid a fall must have been owing to his own incapacity." This is the testimony of a hostile witness. It is borne out, however, by a circumstance of striking significance. When the king recovered the reins at the end of 1783, not only did he send for Pitt instead of for Shelburne, but Pitt himself neither invited Shelburne to join him, nor in any way ever consulted him then or afterwards, though he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer in Shelburne's own administration.

Whatever the causes may have been, the administration fell in the spring of 1783. It was succeeded by the memorable ministry of the Coalition, in which Fox and Lord North divided the real power under the nominal lead of the Duke of Portland. Members saw Lord North squeezed up on the Treasury bench between two men who had a year before been daily menacing him with the axe and the block; and it was not North whom they blamed, but Burke and Fox.

Burke had returned to the Pay-Office. His first act there was unfortunate. He restored to their position two clerks who had been suspended for malversation, and against whom proceedings were then pending. When attacked for this in the House, he showed an irritation that would have carried him to gross lengths, if Fox and Sheridan had not by main force pulled him down into his seat by the tails of his coat. The restoration of the clerks was an indefensible error of judgment, and its indiscretion was heightened by the kind of defence which Burke tried to set up. When we wonder at Burke's exclusion from great offices, this case of Powell and Bembridge should not be forgotten.

The decisive event in the history of the Coalition Government was the India Bill. The Reports of the various select committees upon Indian affairs—the most important of them all, the ninth and eleventh, having been drawn up by Burke himself—had shown conclusively that the existing system of government was thoroughly corrupt and thoroughly inadequate. It is ascertained pretty conclusively that the Bill for replacing that system was conceived and drawn by Burke, and that to him belongs whatever merit or demerit it might possess. It was Burke who infected Fox with his own ardour, and then, as Moore justly says, the self-kindling power of Fox's eloquence threw such fire into his defence of the measure, that he forgot, and his hearers never found out, that his views were not originally and spontaneously his own. The novelty on which the great stress of discussion was laid was that the Bill withdrew power from the Board of Directors, and vested the government for four years in a commission of seven persons named in the Bill, and not removable by the House.

Burke was so convinced of the incurable iniquity of the company, so persuaded that it was not only

full of abuses, but, as he said, one of the most corrupt and destructive tyrannies that probably ever existed in the world, as to be content with nothing short of the absolute deprivation of its power. He avowed himself no lover of names, and that he only contended for good government, from whatever quarter it might come. But the idea of good government coming from the company he declared to be desperate and untenable. This intense animosity, which, considering his long and close familiarity with the infamies of the rule of the company's servants, was not unnatural, must be allowed, however, to have blinded him to the grave objections really existing to his scheme. In the first place, the Bill was indisputably inconsistent with the spirit of his revered constitution. For the legislature to assume the power of naming the members of an executive body was an extraordinary and mischievous innovation. Then, to put patronage, that has been estimated by a sober authority at about three hundred thousand pounds a year, into the hands of the House of Commons, was still more mischievous and still less justifiable. Worst of all, from the point of view of the projectors themselves, after a certain time the nomination of the Commissioners would fall to the Crown, and this might in certain contingencies increase to a most dangerous extent the ascendancy of the royal authority. If Burke's measure had been carried, moreover, the patronage would have been transferred to a body much less competent than the directors to judge of the qualities required in the fulfilment of this or that administrative charge. Indian promotion would have followed parliamentary and party interest. In the hands of the directors there was at least a partial security, in their professional knowledge, and their personal interest in the success of their government, that places would not be given

away on irrelevant considerations. Their system, with all its faults, ensured the acquisition of a certain considerable competency in administration before a servant reached an elevation at which he could do much harm.

Burke defended the Bill (December 1, 1783) in one of the speeches that rank only below his greatest, and it contains two or three passages of unsurpassed energy and impressiveness. Everybody knows the fine page about Fox as the descendant of Henry IV. of France, and the happy quotation from Silius Italicus. Every book of British eloquence contains the magnificent description of the young magistrates who undertake the government and the spoliation of India; how, "animated with all the avarice of age, and all the impetuosity of youth, they roll in one after another, wave after wave; and there is nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and of passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting." How they return home laden with spoil; "their prey is lodged in England; and the cries of India are given to seas and winds, to be blown about, in every breaking up of the monsoon, over a remote and unhearing ocean." How in India all the vices operate by which sudden fortune is acquired; while in England are often displayed by the same person the virtues dispensing hereditary wealth, so that "here the manufacturer and the husbandman will bless the just and punctual hand that in India has torn the cloth from the loom, or wrested the scanty portion of rice and salt from the peasant of Bengal, or wrung from him the very opium in which he forgot his oppression and his oppressors."

No degree of eloquence, however, could avail to repair faults alike in structure and in tactics. The whole design was a masterpiece of hardihood,

miscalculation, and mismanagement. The combination of interests against the Bill was instant, and it was indeed formidable. The great army of returned nabobs, of directors, of proprietors of East India stock, rose up in all its immense force. Every member of every corporation that enjoyed privilege by charter, felt the attack on the company as if it had been a blow directed against himself. The general public had no particular passion for purity or good government, and the best portion of the public was disgusted with the Coalition. The king saw his chance. With politic audacity he put so strong a personal pressure on the peers, that they threw out the Bill (December 1783). It was to no purpose that Fox compared the Lords to the Janissaries of a Turkish Sultan, and the king's letter to Temple to the rescript in which Tiberius ordered the upright Sejanus to be destroyed. Ministers were dismissed, the young Pitt was installed in their place, and the Whigs were ruined. As a party, they had a few months of office after Pitt's death, but they were excluded from power for half a century.

CHAPTER VI

BURKE AND HIS FRIENDS

Though Burke had, at a critical period of his life, definitely abandoned the career of letters, he never withdrew from close intimacy with the groups who still live for us in the pages of Boswell, as no other literary group in our history lives. Goldsmith's famous lines in *Retaliation* show how they all deplored that he should to party give up what was meant for mankind. They often told one another that Edmund Burke was the man whose genius pointed him out as the triumphant champion of faith and sound philosophy against deism, atheism, and David Hume. They loved to see him, as Goldsmith said, wind into his subject like a serpent. Everybody felt at the Literary Club that he had no superior in knowledge, and in colloquial dialectics only one equal. Garrick was there, and of all the names of the time he is the man whom one would perhaps most willingly have seen, because the gifts that threw not only Englishmen, but Frenchmen like Diderot, and Germans like Lichtenberg, into amazement and ecstasy, are exactly the gifts that literary description can do least to reproduce. Burke was one of his strongest admirers, and there was no more zealous attendant at the closing series of performances in which the great monarch of the stage abdicated his throne. In the last pages that he wrote, Burke refers to his ever dear friend Garrick, dead nearly twenty

years before, as the first of actors because he was the acutest observer of nature that he had ever known. Then among men who pass for being more serious than players, Robertson was often in London society, and he attracted Burke by his largeness and breadth. He sent a copy of his *History of America*, and Burke thanked him with many stately compliments for having employed philosophy to judge of manners, and from manners having drawn new resources of philosophy. Gibbon was there, but the bystanders felt what was too crudely expressed by Mackintosh, that Gibbon might have been taken from a corner of Burke's mind without ever being missed. Though Burke and Gibbon constantly met, it is not likely that, until the Revolution, there was much intimacy between them, in spite of the respect each of them might well have had for the vast knowledge of the other. When the *Decline and Fall* was published, Burke read it as everybody else did; but he told Reynolds he disliked the style, as very affected, mere frippery and tinsel. Sir Joshua himself was neither a man of letters nor a keen politician; but he was full of literary ideas and interests, and he was among Burke's warmest and most constant friends, following him with an admiration and reverence that even Johnson sometimes thought excessive. The reader of Reynolds's famous *Discourses* will probably share the wonder of his contemporaries, that a man whose time was so absorbed in the practice of his art, should have proved himself so excellent a master in the expression of some of its principles. Burke was commonly credited with a large share in their composition, but the evidence goes no further than that Reynolds used to talk them over with him. The friendship between the pair was full and unalloyed. What Burke admired in the great artist was his sense and his morals, no less than his genius; and to a man of his fervid and

excitable temper there was the most attractive of all charms in Sir Joshua's placidity, gentleness, evenness, and the habit, as one of his friends described it, of being the same all the year round. When Reynolds died in 1792, he appointed Burke one of his executors, and left him a legacy of two thousand pounds, besides cancelling a bond of the same amount.

Johnson, however, is the only member of that illustrious company who can profitably be compared with Burke in strength and impressiveness of personality, in a large sensibility at once serious and genial, in brooding care for all the fulness of human life. This striking pair were the two complements of a single noble and solid type, holding tenaciously, in a century of dissolvent speculation, to the best ideas of a society that was slowly passing. They were powerless to hinder the inevitable transformation. One of them did not even dimly foresee it. But both of them help us to understand how manliness and reverence, strength and tenderness, love of truth and pity for man, all flourished under old institutions and old ways of thinking, into which the forces of the time were even then silently breathing a new spirit. The friendship between Burke and Johnson lasted as long as they lived; and if we remember that Johnson was a strong Tory, and declared that the first Whig was the devil, and habitually talked about cursed Whigs and bottomless Whigs, it is an extraordinary fact that his relations with the greatest Whig writer and politician of his day were marked by a cordiality, respect, and admiration that never varied nor wavered. "Burke," he said in a well-known passage, "is such a man that if you met him for the first time in the street, where you were stopped by a drove of oxen, and you and he stepped aside to take shelter but for five minutes, he'd talk to you in such a manner that, when you

parted, you would say, This is an extraordinary man. He is never what we would call humdrum; never unwilling to begin to talk, nor in haste to leave off." That Burke was as good a listener as he was a talker, Johnson never would allow. "So desirous is he to talk," he said, "that if one is talking at this end of the table, he'll talk to somebody at the other end." Johnson was far too good a critic, and too honest a man, to assent to a remark of Robertson's, that Burke had wit. "No, sir," said the sage, most truly, "he never succeeds there. 'Tis low, 'tis conceit." Wit apart, he described Burke as the only man whose common conversation corresponded to his general fame in the world; take up whatever topic you might please, he was ready to meet you. When Burke found a seat in Parliament, Johnson said, "Now we who know Burke, know that he will be one of the first men in the country." He did not grudge that Burke should be the first man in the House of Commons, for Burke, he said, was always the first man everywhere. Once when he was ill, somebody mentioned Burke's name. Johnson cried out, "That fellow calls forth all my powers; were I to see Burke now it would kill me."

Burke heartily returned this high appreciation. When some flatterer hinted that Johnson had taken more than his right share of the evening's talk, Burke said, "Nay, it is enough for me to have rung the bell for him." Some one else spoke of a successful imitation of Johnson's style. Burke with vehemence denied the success: the performance, he said, had the pomp, but not the force of the original; the nodosities of the oak, but not its strength; the contortions of the sibyl, but none of the inspiration. When Burke showed the old sage of Bolt Court over his fine house and pleasant gardens at Beaconsfield, *Non invideo equidem*, Johnson said, with placid good-will, *miror magis*.

They always parted in the deep and pregnant phrase of a sage of our own day, *except in opinion not disagreeing*. In truth, the explanation of the sympathy between them is not far to seek. We may well believe that Johnson was tacitly alive to the essentially conservative spirit of Burke even in his most Whiggish days. And Burke penetrated the liberality of mind in a Tory, who called out with loud indignation that the Irish were in a most unnatural state, for there the minority prevailed over the majority, and the severity of the persecution exercised by the Protestants of Ireland against the Catholics exceeded that of the ten historic persecutions of the Christian Church.

The parties at Beaconsfield, and the evenings at the "Turk's Head" in Gerrard Street, were contemporary with the famous days at Holbach's country house at Grandval. When we think of the reckless themes that were so recklessly discussed by Holbach, Diderot, and the rest of that indefatigable band, we feel that, as against the French philosophic party, an English Tory like Johnson and an English Whig like Burke would have found their own differences too minute to be worth considering. If the group from the "Turk's Head" could have been transported for an afternoon to Grandval, perhaps Johnson would have been the less impatient and disgusted of the two. He had the capacity of the more genial sort of casuist for playing with subjects, even moral subjects, with the freedom, versatility, and ease that are proper to literature. Burke, on the contrary, would not have failed to see, as indeed we know he did not fail to see, that a social pandemonium was being prepared in this intellectual paradise of open questions, where God and a future life, marriage and the family, every dogma of religion, every prescription of morality, and all those mysteries and pieties of human life that have been sanctified

by the reverence of ages, were being busily pulled to pieces as if they had been toys in the hands of a company of sportive children. Even the *Beggar's Opera* Burke could not endure to hear praised for its wit or its music, because his mind was filled by thought of its misplaced levity, and he only saw the mischief such a performance tended to do to society. It would be hard to defend his judgment in this particular case, but it serves to show how Burke was never content with the literary point of view, and how ready and vigilant he was for effects more profound than those of formal criticism. It is true that Johnson was sometimes not less austere in condemning a great work of art for its bad morality. The only time when he was really angry with Hannah More was on his finding that she had read *Tom Jones*—that vicious book, he called it; he hardly knew a more corrupt work. Burke's tendency towards severity of moral judgment, however, never impaired the geniality and tenderness of his relations with those whom he loved. Bennet Langton gave Boswell an affecting account of Burke's last interview with Johnson. A few days before the old man's death, Burke and four or five other friends were sitting round his bedside. "Mr. Burke said to him, 'I am afraid, sir, such a number of us may be oppressive to you.' 'No, sir,' said Johnson, 'it is not so; and I must be in a wretched state indeed when your company is not a delight to me.' Mr. Burke, in a tremulous voice, expressive of being very tenderly affected, replied, 'My dear sir, you have always been too good to me.' Immediately afterwards he went away. This was the last circumstance in the acquaintance of these two eminent men."

One of Burke's strongest political intimacies was only less interesting and significant than his friendship with Johnson. William Dowdeswell had been Chancellor of the Exchequer in the short

Rockingham administration of 1765. He had no brilliant gifts, but he had what was then thought a profound knowledge both of the principles and details of the administration of the national revenue. He was industrious, steadfast, clear-headed, inexorably upright. "Immersed in the greatest affairs," as Burke said in his epitaph, "he never lost the ancient, native, genuine English character of a country gentleman." And this was the character in which Burke now and always saw not only the true political barrier against despotism on the one hand and the rabble on the other, but the best moral type of civic virtue. Those who admire Burke, but cannot share his admiration for the country gentleman, will perhaps justify him by the assumption that he clothed his favourite with ideal qualities that ought to have belonged to that position, even if they did not.

In his own modest imitation and on his own humble scale he was a pattern of the activity in public duty, the hospitality towards friends, the assiduous protection of neglected worth, that ought to be among the chief virtues of high station. It would perhaps be doubly unsafe to take for granted that many of our readers have both turned over the pages of Crabbe's *Borough*, and carried away in their minds from that moderately affecting poem, the description of Eusebius—

> That pious moralist, that reasoning saint!
> Can I of worth like thine, Eusebius, speak?
> The man is willing, but the muse is weak.

Eusebius is intended for Burke, and the portrait is a literary tribute for more substantial services. When Crabbe came up from his native Aldborough, with three pounds and a case of surgical instruments in his trunk, he fondly believed that a great patron would be found to watch over his transformation from an unsuccessful apothecary into a

popular poet. He wrote to Lord North and Lord Shelburne, but they did not answer his letters; booksellers returned his copious manuscripts; the three pounds gradually disappeared; the surgical instruments went to the pawnbroker's; and the poet found himself an outcast on the world, without a friend, without employment, and without bread. He owed money for his lodging, and was on the very eve of being sent to prison, when it occurred to him to write to Burke. It was the moment (1781) when the final struggle with Lord North was at its fiercest, and Burke might have been absolved if, in the stress of conflict, he had neglected a begging letter. As it was, the manliness and simplicity of Crabbe's application touched him. He immediately made an appointment with the young poet, and convinced himself of his worth. He not only relieved Crabbe's immediate distress with a sum of money that, as we know, came from no affluence of his own, but carried him off to Beaconsfield, installed him there as a member of the family, and took as much pains to find a printer for *The Library* and *The Village*, as if they had been poems of his own. In time he persuaded the Bishop of Norwich to admit Crabbe, in spite of his want of a regular qualification, to holy orders. He then commended him to the notice of Lord Chancellor Thurlow. Crabbe found the Tiger less formidable than his terrifying reputation, for Thurlow at their first interview presented him with a hundred-pound note, and afterwards gave him a living. The living was of no great value, it is true; and it was Burke who, with untiring friendship, succeeded in procuring something like a substantial position for him, by inducing the Duke of Rutland to make the young parson his chaplain. Henceforth Crabbe's career was assured, and he never forgot to revere and bless the man to whose generous hand he owed his deliverance.

Another of Burke's clients, of whom we hardly know whether to say that he is more or less known to our age than Crabbe, is Barry, a painter of disputable eminence. The son of a seafarer at Cork, he had been introduced to Burke in Dublin in 1762, was brought over to England by him, introduced to some kind of employment, and finally sent, with funds provided by the Burkes, to study art on the continent. It was characteristic of Burke's willingness not only to supply money, but what is a far rarer form of kindness, to take active trouble, that he should have followed the raw student with long and careful letters of advice upon the proper direction of his studies. For five years Barry was maintained abroad by the Burkes. Most unhappily for himself he was cursed with an irritable and perverse temper, and he lacked even the elementary arts of conduct. Burke was generous to the end, with the difficult and uncommon kind of generosity that moves independently of gratitude or ingratitude in the receiver.

From his earliest days Burke had been the eager friend of people in distress. While he was still a student at the Temple, or a writer for the booksellers, he picked up a curious creature in the park, in such unpromising circumstances that he could not forbear to take him under his instant protection. This was Joseph Emin, the Armenian, who had come to Europe from India with strange heroic ideas in his head as to the deliverance of his countrymen. Burke instantly urged him to accept the few shillings that he happened to have in his purse, and seems to have found employment for him as a copyist, until fortune brought other openings to the singular adventurer. For foreign visitors Burke had always a singular considerateness. Two Brahmins came to England as agents of Ragonaut Rao, and at first underwent intolerable things rather from the ignorance than the

unkindness of our countrymen. Burke no sooner found out what was passing than he carried them down to Beaconsfield, and as it was summer-time, he gave them for their separate use a spacious garden-house, where they were free to prepare their food and perform such rites as their religion prescribed. Nothing was so certain to command his fervid sympathy as strict adherence to the rules and ceremonies of an ancient and sacred ordering.

If he never failed to perform the offices to which we are bound by the common sympathy of men, it is satisfactory to think that Burke in return received a measure of these friendly services. Among those who loved him best was Dr. Brocklesby, the tender physician who watched and soothed the last hours of Johnson. When we remember how Burke's soul was harassed by private cares, chagrined by the untoward course of public events, and mortified by neglect from friends no less than by virulent reproach from foes, it makes us feel very kindly towards Brocklesby, to read what he wrote to Burke in 1788 :

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND—My veneration of your public conduct for many years past, and my real affection for your private virtues and transcendent worth, made me yesterday take a liberty with you in a moment's conversation at my house, to make you an instant present of £1000, which for years past I had by will destined as a testimony of my regard on my decease. This you modestly desired me not to think of; but I told you what I now repeat, that unfavoured as I have lived for a long life, unnoticed professionally by any party of men, and though unknown at court, I am rich enough to spare to virtue (what others waste in vice) the above sum, and still reserve an annual income greater than I spend. I shall receive at the India House a bill I have discounted for £1000 on the 4th of next month, and then shall be happy that you will accept this proof of my sincere love and esteem, and let me add, *Si res ampla domi similisque affectibus esset*, I should be happy to repeat the like every year.

The mere transcription of the friendly man's good letter has something of the effect of an exercise of religion. And it was only one of a series of kind acts on the part of the same generous giver.

It is always interesting in the case of a great man to know how he affected the women of his acquaintance. Women do not usually judge character either so kindly or so soundly as men do, for they lack that knowledge of the ordeals of practical life, which gives both justice and charity to such verdicts. But they are more susceptible than most men are to devotion and nobility in character. The little group of the blue-stockings of the day regarded the great master of knowledge and eloquence with mixed feelings. They felt for Burke the adoring reverence that women offer, with too indiscriminate a trust, to men of commanding power. In his case it was the moral loftiness of his character that inspired them, as much as the splendour of his ability. Of Sheridan or of Fox they could not bear to hear; of Burke they could not hear enough. Hannah More, and Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, the learned translator of Epictetus, and Fanny Burney, the author of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, were all proud of his notice, even while they glowed with anger at his sympathy with American rebels, his unkind words about the king, and his cruel persecution of poor Mr. Hastings. It was at Mrs. Vesey's evening parties, given on the Tuesdays on which the Club dined at the "Turk's Head," that he often had long chats with Hannah More. She had to forget what she called his political malefactions, before she could allow herself to admire his high spirits and good-humour. This was after the events of the Coalition, and her *Memoirs*, like the change in the mind of the dissenters towards Burke, show what a fall that act of faction was believed to mark in his character. When he was rejected for Bristol, she moralised

on the catastrophe by the quaint reflection that Providence has wisely contrived to render all its dispensations equal, by making those talents that set one man so much above another, of no esteem in the opinion of those who are without them.

Miss Burney has described her flutter of spirits when she first found herself in company with Burke (1782). It was at Sir Joshua's house on the top of Richmond Hill, and she tells, with her usual effusion, how she was impressed by Burke's noble figure and commanding air, his penetrating and sonorous voice, his eloquent and copious language, the infinite variety and rapidity of his discourse. Burke had something to say on every subject, from bits of personal gossip, up to the sweet and melting landscape that lay in all its beauty before their windows on the terrace. He was playful, serious, fantastic, wise. When they next met, the great man completed his conquest by expressing his admiration of *Evelina*. Gibbon assured her that he had read the whole five volumes in a day; but Burke declared the feat was impossible, for he had himself read it through without interruption, and it had cost him three days. He showed his regard for the authoress in a more substantial way than by compliments and criticism. His last act before going out of office, in 1783, was to procure for Dr. Burney the appointment of organist at the chapel of Chelsea.

We have spoken of the dislike of these excellent women for Sheridan and Fox. In Sheridan's case Burke did not much disagree with them. Their characters were as unlike and as antipathetic as those of two men could be; and to antipathy of temperament was probably added a kind of rivalry that may justly have affected one of them with an irritated humiliation. Sheridan was twenty years younger than Burke, and did not come into Parliament until Burke had fought the prolonged battle

of the American war, and had achieved the victory of Economic Reform. Yet Sheridan was immediately taken up by the party, and became the intimate and counsellor of Charles Fox, its leader, and of the Prince of Wales, its patron. That Burke never failed to do full justice to Sheridan's brilliant genius, or to bestow generous and unaffected praise on his oratorical successes, there is ample evidence. He was of far too high and veracious a nature to be capable of the disparaging tricks of a poor jealousy. The humiliation lay in the fact that circumstances had placed Sheridan in a position that made it natural for the world to measure them with one another. Burke could no more like Sheridan than he could like the *Beggar's Opera*. Sheridan had a levity, a want of depth, a laxity and dispersion of feeling, to which no degree of intellectual brilliancy could reconcile a man of such profound moral energy and social conviction as Burke.

The thought will perhaps occur to the reader that Fox was not less lax than Sheridan, and yet for Fox Burke long had the sincerest friendship. He was dissolute, indolent, irregular, and the most insensate gambler that ever squandered fortune after fortune over the faro-table. It was his vices as much as his politics that made George III. hate Fox as an English Catiline. How came Burke to accept a man of this character, first for his disciple, then for his friend, and next for his leader? The answer is a simple one. In spite of the disorders of his life, Fox, from the time when his acquaintance with Burke began, down to the time when it came to such disastrous end, and for long years afterwards, was to the bottom of his heart as passionate for freedom, justice, and beneficence as Burke ever was. These great ends were as real, as constant, as overmastering in Fox as they were in Burke. No man was ever more deeply imbued with the

generous impulses of great statesmanship, with chivalrous courage, with the magnificent spirit of devotion to high imposing causes. These qualities, we may be sure, and not his power as a debater and as a declaimer, won for him in Burke's heart the admiration which found such splendid expression in a passage that will remain as a stock piece of declamation for long generations after it was first poured out as a sincere tribute of reverence and affection. Precisians, like Lafayette, might choose to see their patriotic hopes ruined rather than have them saved by Mirabeau, because Mirabeau was a debauchee. Burke's public morality was of stouter stuff, and he loved Fox because he knew that under the stains and blemishes left by a deplorable education, was the sterling, inexhaustible ore in which noble sympathies are subtly compounded with resplendent powers.

If he was warmly attached to his political friends, Burke, at least before the Revolution, was usually on fair terms in private life with his political opponents. There were few men whose policy he disliked more than he disliked the policy of George Grenville. And we have seen that he criticised Grenville in a pamphlet which did not spare him. Yet Grenville and he did not refuse one another's hospitality, and were on the best terms to the very end. Wilberforce, again, was one of the staunchest friends of Pitt, and fought one of the greatest electioneering battles on Pitt's side in the struggle of 1784; but it made no difference in Burke's relations with him. In 1787 a coldness arose between them. Burke had delivered a strong invective against the French Treaty. Wilberforce said, "We can make allowance for the honourable gentleman, because we remember him in better days." The retort greatly nettled Burke, but the feeling soon passed away, and they both found a special satisfaction in the dinner to which Wilber-

force invited Burke every session. "He was a great man," says Wilberforce. "I could never understand how at one time he grew to be so entirely neglected."

Outside of both political and literary circles, among Burke's correspondents was that wise and honest traveller whose name is as inseparably bound up with the preparation of the French Revolution, as Burke's is bound up with its sanguinary climax and fulfilment. Arthur Young, by his *Farmer's Letters*, and *Farmer's Calendar*, and his account of his travels in the southern counties of England and elsewhere—the story of the more famous travels in France was not published until 1792—had won a reputation as the best-informed agriculturist of his day. Within a year of his settlement at Beaconsfield, we find Burke writing to consult Young on the mysteries of his new occupation. The reader may smile as he recognises the ardour, the earnestness, the fervid gravity of the political speeches, in letters which discuss the merits of carrots in fattening porkers, and the precise degree to which they should be boiled. Burke throws himself just as eagerly into white peas and Indian corn, into cabbages that grow into head and cabbages that shoot into leaves, into experiments with pumpkin seed and wild parsnip, as if they had been details of the Stamp Act, or justice to Ireland. When he complains that it is scarcely possible for him, with his numerous avocations, to get his servants to enter fully into his views as to the right treatment of his crops, we can easily understand that his farming did not help him to make money. It is impossible that he should have had time or attention to spare for the effectual direction of even a small farm.

Yet if the farm brought scantier profit than it ought to have brought, it was probably no weak solace in the background of a life of harassing

interests and perpetual disappointments. Burke was happier at Beaconsfield than anywhere else, and he was happiest there when his house was full of guests. Nothing pleased him better than to drive a visitor over to Windsor, where he would expatiate with enthusiasm "on the proud Keep, rising in the majesty of proportion, and girt with the double belt of its kindred and coeval towers, overseeing and guarding the subjected land." He delighted to point out the house at Uxbridge where Charles I. had carried on the negotiations with the Parliamentary Commissioners; the beautiful grounds of Bulstrode, where Judge Jeffreys had once lived; and the churchyard of Beaconsfield, where lay the remains of Edmund Waller, the poet. He was fond of talking of great statesmen—of Walpole, of Pulteney, and of Chatham. Some one had said that Chatham knew nothing whatever except Spenser's *Faery Queen*. "No matter how that was said," Burke replied to one of his visitors, "whoever relishes and reads Spenser as he ought to be read, will have a strong hold of the English language." The delight of the host must have been at least equalled by the delight of the guest in conversation that was thus ever taking new turns, branching into topical surprises, and at all turns and on every topic was luminous, high, edifying, full.

No guest was more welcome than the friend of his boyhood, and Richard Shackleton has told how the friendship, cordiality, and openness with which Burke embraced him was even more than might be expected from long love. The simple Quaker was confused by the sight of what seemed to him so sumptuous and worldly a life, and he went to rest uneasily, doubting whether God's blessing could go with it. But when he awoke on the morrow of his first visit, he told his wife, in the language of his sect, how glad he was "to find no

condemnation; but on the contrary, ability to put up fervent petitions with much tenderness on behalf of this great luminary." It is at his country home that we like best to think of Burke. It is still a touching picture to the historic imagination to follow him from the heat and violence of the House, where impatient squires derided the greatest genius of his time, down to the calm shades of Beaconsfield, where he would with his own hands give food to a starving beggar, or medicine to a peasant sick of the ague; where he would talk of the weather, the turnips, and the hay with the team-men and the farm-bailiff; and where, in the evening stillness, he would pace the walk under the trees, and reflect on the state of Europe and the distractions of his country.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW MINISTRY—WARREN HASTINGS—BURKE'S PUBLIC POSITION

THE six years that followed the destruction of the Coalition were, in some respects, the most mortifying portion of Burke's troubled career. Pitt was more firmly seated in power than Lord North had ever been, and he used his power to carry out a policy against which it was impossible for the Whigs, on their own principles, to offer an effective resistance. For this is the peculiarity of the king's first victory over the enemies who had done obstinate battle with him for nearly a quarter of a century. He had driven them out of the field, but with the aid of an ally who was as strongly hostile to the royal system as they had ever been. The king had vindicated his right against the Whigs to choose his own ministers; but the new minister was himself a Whig by descent, and a reformer by his education and personal disposition.

Ireland was the subject of the first great battle between the ministry and their opponents. Here, if anywhere, we might have expected from Burke at least his usual wisdom and patience. We saw in a previous chapter (p. 23) what the political condition of Ireland was when Burke went there with Hamilton in 1763. The American war had brought about a great change. The king had shrewdly predicted that if America became free Ireland would soon follow the same plan and be a

separate state. In fact, along with the American war we had to encounter an Irish war also; but the latter was, as an Irish politician called it at the time, a smothered war. Like the Americans, the Anglo-Irish entered into non-importation compacts, and they interdicted commerce. The Irish volunteers, first forty, then sixty, and at last a hundred thousand strong, were virtually an army enrolled to overawe the English ministry and Parliament. Following the spirit, if not the actual path, of the Americans, they raised a cry for commercial and legislative independence. They were too strong to be resisted, and in 1782 the Irish Parliament acquired the privilege of initiating and conducting its own business, without the sanction or control either of the Privy Council or of the English Parliament. Dazzled by the chance of acquiring legislative independence, they had been content with the comparatively small commercial boons obtained by Lord Nugent and Burke in 1778, and with the removal of further restrictions by the alarmed minister in the following year. After the concession of their independence in 1782, they found that to procure the abolition of the remaining restrictions on their commerce—the right of trade, for instance, with America and Africa—the consent of the English legislature was as necessary as it had ever been. Pitt, fresh from the teaching of Adam Smith and of Shelburne, brought forward in 1785 his famous commercial propositions. The theory of his scheme was that Irish trade should be free, and that Ireland should be admitted to a permanent participation in commercial advantages. In return for this gain, after her hereditary revenue passed a certain point, she was to devote the surplus to purposes, such as the maintenance of the navy, in which the two nations had a common interest. Pitt was to be believed when he declared that of all the objects of his political life this was, in

his opinion, the most important that he had ever engaged in, and he never expected to meet another that should rouse every emotion in so strong a degree as this.

A furious battle took place in the Irish Parliament. There, while nobody could deny that the eleven propositions would benefit the mercantile interests of the country, it was passionately urged that the last of the propositions, that which concerned the apportionment of Irish revenue to imperial purposes, meant the enslavement of their unhappy island. Their fetters, they went on, were clenched, if the English government was to be allowed thus to take the initiative in Irish legislation. The factious course pursued by the English Opposition was much less excusable than the line of the Anglo-Irish leaders. Fox, who was ostentatiously ignorant of political economy, led the charge. He insisted that Pitt's measures would annihilate English trade, would destroy the Navigation Laws, and with them would bring our maritime strength to the ground. Having thus won the favour of the English manufacturers, he turned round to the Irish Opposition, and conciliated them by declaring with equal vehemence that the propositions were an insult to Ireland, and a nefarious attempt to tamper with her new-born liberties. Burke followed his leader. We may almost say that for once he allowed his political integrity to be bewildered. In 1778 and 1779 he had firmly resisted the pressure his mercantile constituents in Bristol had endeavoured to put upon him; he had warmly supported the Irish claims, and had lost his seat in consequence. The precise ground that he took up in 1785 was this. He appears to have discerned in Pitt's proposals the germ of an attempt to extract revenue from Ireland, identical in purpose, principle, and probable effect with the ever-memorable attempt to extract revenue from the

American colonies. Whatever stress may be laid upon this, we find it hard to vindicate Burke from the charge of factiousness. Nothing can have been more unworthy of him than the sneer at Pitt in the great speech on the Nabob of Arcot's debts (1785), for stopping to pick up chaff and straws from the Irish revenue instead of checking profligate expenditure in India.

Pitt's alternative was irresistible. Situated as Ireland was, she must either be the subservient instrument of English prosperity, or else she must be allowed to enjoy the benefits of English trade, taking at the same time a proportionate share of the common burdens. Adam Smith had shown that there was nothing incompatible with justice in a contribution by Ireland to the public debt of Great Britain. That debt, he argued, had been contracted in support of the government established by the Revolution; a government to which the Protestants of Ireland owed not only the whole authority they enjoyed in their own country, but every security they possessed for their liberty, property, and religion. The neighbourhood of Ireland to the shores of the mother country introduced an element into the problem, that must have taught every unimpassioned observer that the American solution would be inadequate for a dependency lying at our very door. Burke could not, in his calmer moments, have failed to recognise all this. Yet he lent himself to the party cry that Pitt was taking his first measures for the re-enslavement of Ireland. Had it not been for what he himself called the delirium of the preceding session, which had still not subsided, he would have seen that Pitt was in truth taking his first measures for the effective deliverance of Ireland from an unjust and oppressive subordination. The same delirium committed him to another equally deplorable perversity, when he opposed, with as many excesses

in temper as fallacies in statesmanship, the wise treaty with France, in which Pitt partially anticipated the commercial policy of an ampler treaty three-quarters of a century afterwards.

A great episode in Burke's career now opened. It was in 1785 that Warren Hastings returned from India after a series of exploits as momentous and far-reaching, for good or evil, as have ever been achieved by any English ruler. For years Burke had been watching India. With rising wonder, amazement, and indignation he had steadily followed the long train of intrigue and crime that had ended in the consolidation of a new empire. With the return of Hastings he felt that the time had come for striking a severe blow, and making a signal example. He gave notice (June 1785) that he would, at a future day, make a motion respecting the conduct of a gentleman just returned from India.

Among minor considerations, we have to remember that Indian affairs entered materially into the great battle of parties. It was upon an Indian bill that the late ministry had made shipwreck. It was notoriously by the aid of potent Indian interests that the new ministry had acquired a portion of its majority. To expose the misdeeds of our agents in India was at once to strike the minister who had dexterously secured their support, and to attack one of the great strongholds of parliamentary corruption. The proceedings against Hastings were, in the first instance, regarded as a sequel to the struggle over Fox's East India Bill. That these considerations were present in Burke's thought there is no doubt, but they were purely secondary. It was India itself that stood above all else in his imagination. It had filled his mind and absorbed his time while Pitt was still an undergraduate at Cambridge, and Burke was looking forward to match his plan of economic reform with

a greater plan of Indian reform. In the Ninth Report, the Eleventh Report, and in his speech on the India Bill of 1783, he had shown both how thoroughly he had mastered the facts, and how profoundly they had stirred his sense of wrong. The masterpiece known as the speech on the Nabob of Arcot's debts, delivered in Parliament on a motion for papers (1785), handles matters of account, of interest turned into principal, and principal superadded to principal; it deals with a hundred minute technicalities of teeps and tuncaws, of gomastahs and soucaring; all with such a suffusion of interest and colour, with such nobility of idea and expression, as could only have come from the addition to genius of a deep morality of nature, and an overwhelming force of conviction. A space less than one of these pages contains such a picture of the devastation of the Carnatic by Hyder Ali as may fill the young orator or the young writer with the same emotions of enthusiasm, emulation, and despair that torment the artist who first gazes on the Madonna at Dresden, or the figures of Night and Dawn and the Penseroso at Florence. The despair is only too well founded. No conscious study could pierce the secret of that just and pathetic transition from the havoc of Hyder Ali to the healing duties of a virtuous government, to the consolatory celebration of the mysteries of justice and humanity, to the warning to the unlawful creditors to silence their inauspicious tongues in presence of the holy work of restoration, to the generous proclamation against them that in every country the first creditor is the plough. The emotions making the hidden force of such pictures come not by observation. They grow from the sedulous meditation of long years, directed by a powerful intellect and inspired by an interest in human well-being, which of its own virtue bore the orator into the sustaining air of the upper

gods. Concentrated passion and exhaustive knowledge have never entered into a more formidable combination. Yet when Burke made his speech on the Nabob of Arcot's debts, Pitt and Grenville consulted together whether it was worth answering, and came to the conclusion that they need not take the trouble.

Neither the scornful neglect of his opponents nor the dissensions of some who sat on his own side, could check the ardour with which Burke pressed on, as he said, to the relief of afflicted nations. The fact is, that Burke was not at all a philanthropist as Clarkson and Wilberforce were philanthropists. His sympathy was too strongly under the control of true political reason. In 1780, for instance, the slave-trade had attracted his attention, and he had even proceeded to sketch out a code of regulations providing for its immediate mitigation and ultimate suppression. After mature consideration he abandoned the attempt, from the conviction that the strength of the West India interest would defeat the utmost efforts of his party. And he was quite right in refusing to hope from any political action what could only be effected after the moral preparation of the bulk of the nation. And *direct* moral or philanthropic apostleship was not his function.

Macaulay, in a famous passage of dazzling lustre and fine historic colour, describes Burke's holy rage against the misdeeds of Hastings as due to his sensibility. But sensibility to what? Not merely to those common impressions of human suffering which kindle the flame of ordinary philanthropy, always attractive, often so beneficent, but often so capricious and so laden with secret detriment. This was no part of Burke's type. Nor is it enough to say that Burke had what is the distinctive mark of the true statesman, a passion for good, wise, and orderly government.

He had that in the strongest degree. All that wore the look of confusion he held in abhorrence, and he detected the seeds of confusion with a penetration that made other men marvel. He was far too wise a man to have any sympathy with the energetic exercise of power for power's sake. He knew well that triumphs of violence are for the most part little better than temporary makeshifts, leaving all the work of government to be encountered afterwards by men of essentially greater capacity than the hero of force without scruple. But he regarded those whom he called the great bad men of the old stamp, Cromwell, Richelieu, the Guises, the Condés, with a certain tolerance, because "though the virtues of such men were not to be taken as a balance to their crimes, yet they had long views, and sanctified their ambition by aiming at the orderly rule, and not the destruction of their country." What he valued was the deep-seated order of systems that worked by the accepted uses, opinions, beliefs, prejudices of a community.

This love of right and stable order was not all. That was itself the growth from a deeper root, partly of conviction and partly of sympathy; the conviction of the rare and difficult conjunctures of circumstance which are needed for the formation of even the rudest forms of social union among mankind; and then the sympathy that the best men must always find it hard to withhold from any hoary fabric of belief and any venerated system of government that has cherished a certain order and shed even a ray of the faintest dawn among the violences and the darkness of the race. It was reverence rather than sensibility, a noble and philosophic conservatism rather than philanthropy, which raised the storm in Burke's breast against the rapacity of English adventurers in India and the imperial crimes of Hastings. Exactly

the same tide of emotion which afterwards filled to the brim the cup of prophetic anger against the desecrators of the Church and the monarchy of France, now poured itself out against those who in India had "tossed about, subverted, and torn to pieces, as if it were in the gambols of boyish unluckiness and malice, the most established rights and the most ancient and most revered institutions of ages and nations." From beginning to end of the fourteen years in which Burke pursued his campaign against Hastings, we see in every page that the India which ever glowed before his vision was not the home of picturesque usages and melodramatic costume, but rather, in his own words, the land of princes once of great dignity, authority, and opulence; of an ancient and venerable priesthood, the guides of the people while living, and their consolation in death; of a nobility of antiquity and renown; of millions of ingenious mechanics, and millions of diligent tillers of the earth; and finally, the land where might be found almost all the religions professed by men—the Brahminical, the Mussulman, the Eastern and the Western Christian. When he published his speech on the Nabob of Arcot, Burke prefixed to it an admirable quotation from one of the letters of the Emperor Julian. And Julian too, as we all know, had a strong feeling for the past. But what in that remarkable figure was only the sentimentalism of reaction, in Burke was a reasoned and philosophic veneration for all old and settled order, whether in the free Parliament of Great Britain, in the ancient absolutism of Versailles, or in the secular pomp of Oude and the inviolable sanctity of Benares, the holy city and the garden of God.

It would be out of place here to attempt to follow the details of the impeachment. Every reader has heard that great tale in our history, and everybody knows that it was Burke's tenacity

and power that caused the tale to be told. The House of Commons would not, it is true, have directed that Hastings should be impeached, unless Pitt had given his sanction and approval, and how it was that Pitt did give his sanction and approval so suddenly, and on grounds ostensibly so slender, remains one of the secrets of history. In no case would the impeachment have been pressed upon Parliament by the Opposition, and assented to by ministers, if Burke had not been there with his prodigious industry, his commanding comprehensive vision, his burning zeal, and his power of kindling in men so different from him and from one another as Fox, Sheridan, Windham, Grey, a zeal only less intense than his own.

It was in the spring of 1786 that the articles of charge of Hastings's high crimes and misdemeanours, as Burke had drawn them, were presented to the House of Commons. It was in February 1788 that Burke opened the vast cause in the old historic hall at Westminster, in an oration in which at points he was wound up to such a pitch of eloquence and passion that every listener, including the great criminal, held his breath in an agony of horror; that women were carried out fainting; that the speaker himself became incapable of saying another word, and the spectators of the scene began to wonder whether he would not, like the mighty Chatham, actually die in the exertion of his overwhelming powers. Among the illustrious crowd who thronged Westminster Hall in the opening days of the impeachment was Fanny Burney. She was then in her odious bondage at court, and was animated by the admiration and pity for Hastings that at court was the fashion. Windham used to come up from the box of the managers of the impeachment to talk over with her the incidents of the day, and she gave him her impressions of Burke's speech, which were probably those of the majority of his hearers,

for the majority were favourable to Hastings. "I told him," says Miss Burney, "that Mr. Burke's opening had struck me with the highest admiration of his powers, from the eloquence, the imagination, the fire, the diversity of expression, and the ready flow of language with which he seemed gifted, in a most superior manner, for any and every purpose to which rhetoric could lead." "And when he came to his two narratives," I continued, "when he related the particulars of those dreadful murders, he interested, he engaged, he at last overpowered me; I felt my cause lost. I could hardly keep on my seat. My eyes dreaded a single glance towards a man so accused as Mr. Hastings; I wanted to sink on the floor, that they might be saved so painful a sight. I had no hope he could clear himself; not another wish in his favour remained. But when from this narration Mr. Burke proceeded to his own comments and declamation—when the charges of rapacity, cruelty, tyranny, were general, and made with all the violence of personal detestation, and continued and aggravated without any further fact or illustration; then there appeared more of study than of truth, more of invective than of justice; and, in short, so little of proof to so much of passion, that in a very short time I began to lift up my head, my seat was no longer uneasy, my eyes were indifferent which way they looked, or what object caught them, and before I was myself aware of the declension of Mr. Burke's powers over my feelings, I found myself a mere spectator in a public place, and looking all around it, with my opera-glass in my hand!"

In 1795, seven years after Burke's opening, the Lords were ready with their verdict. It had long been anticipated. Hastings was acquitted. This was the close of the fourteen years of labour, from the date of the Select Committee of 1781. "If I were to call for a reward," Burke said, "it would

be for the services in which for fourteen years, without intermission, I showed the most industry and had the least success. I mean the affairs of India; they are those on which I value myself the most; most for the importance; most for the labour; most for the judgment; most for constancy and perseverance in the pursuit."

The side that is defeated on a particular issue is often victorious on the wide and general outcome. Looking back across the years that divide us from that memorable scene in Westminster Hall, we may see that Burke had more success than at first appeared. If he did not convict the man, he overthrew a system, and stamped its principles with lasting censure and shame. Burke had perhaps a silent conviction that it would have been better for us and for India if Clive had succeeded in his attempt to blow out his own brains in the Madras counting-house, or if the battle of Plassey had been a decisive defeat instead of a decisive victory. "All these circumstances," he once said, in reference to the results of the investigation of the Select Committee, "are not, I confess, very favourable to the idea of our attempting to govern India at all. But there we are: there we are placed by the Sovereign Disposer, and we must do the best we can in our situation. The situation of man is the preceptor of his duty." If that situation is better understood now than it was so long ago, and that duty more loftily conceived, the result is due, so far as such results can ever be due to one man's action apart from the confluence of the deep impersonal elements of time, to the seeds of justice and humanity that were sown by Burke and his associates. Nobody now believes that Clive was justified in tricking Omichund by forging another man's name; that Impey was justified in hanging Nuncomar for committing the very offence for which Clive was excused or applauded, although forgery

is no grave crime according to Hindoo usage, and it is the gravest according to English usage; that Hastings did well in selling English troops to assist in the extermination of a brave people with whom he was at peace; that Benfield did well in conniving with an Eastern prince in a project of extortion against his subjects. The whole drift of opinion has changed, and it is since the trial of Hastings that the change has taken place. The question in Burke's time was whether oppression and corruption were to continue to be the guiding maxims of English policy. The personal disinterestedness of the ruler who had been the chief founder of this policy, and had most openly set aside all pretence of righteous principle, was dust in the balance. It was impossible to suppress the policy without striking a deadly blow at its most eminent and powerful instrument. That Hastings was acquitted, was immaterial. The lesson of his impeachment had been taught with sufficiently impressive force —the great lesson that Asiatics have rights, and that Europeans have obligations; that a superior race is bound to observe the highest current morality of the time in all its dealings with the subject race. Burke is entitled to our lasting reverence as the first apostle and great upholder of integrity, mercy, and honour in the relation between his countrymen and their humble dependents.

He shared the common fate of those who dare to strike a blow for human justice against the prejudices of national egotism. But he was no longer able to bear obloquy and neglect, as he had borne it through the war with the colonies. When he opened the impeachment of Hastings at Westminster, Burke was very near to his sixtieth year. Hannah More noted in 1786 that his vivacity had diminished, and that business and politics had impaired his agreeableness. The simpletons in the House, now that they had at last found in Pitt

a political chief who could beat the Whig leaders on their own ground of eloquence, knowledge, and dexterity in debate, took heart as they had never done under Lord North. They now made deliberate attempts to silence the veteran by unmannerly and brutal interruptions, of which a mob of lower class might have been ashamed. Then suddenly came a moment of such excitement as has not often been seen in the annals of party. It became known one day in the autumn of 1788 that the king had gone out of his mind.

The news naturally caused the liveliest agitation among the Whigs. When the severity of the attack forced the ministry to make preparations for a Regency, the friends of the Prince of Wales assumed that they would speedily return to power, and hastened to form their plans accordingly. Fox was travelling in Italy with Mrs. Armstead, and he had been two months away without hearing a word from England. The Duke of Portland sent a messenger in search of him, and after a journey of ten days the messenger found him at Bologna. Fox instantly set off in all haste for London, which he reached in nine days. The three months that followed were a time of unsurpassed activity and bitterness, and Burke was at least as active and as bitter as the rest of them. He was the writer of the Prince of Wales's letter to Pitt, sometimes set down to Sheridan, and sometimes to Gilbert Elliot. It makes us feel how naturally the style of ideal kingship, its dignity, calm, and high self-consciousness, all came to Burke. Although we read of his thus drawing up manifestoes and protests, and deciding minor questions for Fox, which Fox was too irresolute to decide for himself, yet we have it on Burke's own authority that some time elapsed after the return to England before he even saw Fox; that he was not consulted as to the course to be pursued in the grave and difficult questions

connected with the Regency; and that he knew as little of the inside of Carlton House, where the Prince of Wales lived, as of Buckingham House, where the king lived. "I mean to continue here," he says to Charles Fox, "until you call upon me; and I find myself perfectly easy, from the implicit confidence that I have in you and the Duke, and the certainty that I am in that you two will do the best for the general advantage of the cause. In that state of mind I feel no desire whatsoever of interfering." Yet the letter itself, and others which follow, testify to the vehemence of Burke's interest in the matter, and to the persistency with which he would have had them follow his judgment, if they would have listened. It is as clear that they did not listen.

Apart from the fierce struggle against Pitt's Regency Bill, Burke's friends were intently occupied with the reconstruction of the Portland cabinet, which the king had so unexpectedly dismissed five years before. This was a sphere in which Burke's gifts were neither required nor sought. We are rather in distress, Sir Gilbert Elliot writes, for a proper man for the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. "Lord J. Cavendish is very unwilling to engage again in public affairs. Fox is to be Secretary of State. Burke, it is thought, would not be approved of, Sheridan has not the public confidence, and so it comes down therefore to Grey, Pelham, myself, and perhaps Windham." Elliot was one of Burke's most faithful and attached friends, and he was intimately concerned in all that was going on in the inner circle of the party. It is worth while, therefore, to reproduce his account from a confidential letter to Lady Elliot, of the way in which Burke's claim to recognition was at this time regarded and dealt with.

Although I can tell you nothing positive about my own situation. I was made very happy indeed yesterday

by co-operating in the settlement of Burke's, in a manner which gives us great joy as well as comfort. The Duke of Portland has felt distressed how to arrange Burke and his family in a manner equal to Burke's merits, and to the Duke's own wishes, and at the same time so as to be exempt from the many difficulties which seem to be in the way. He sent for Pelham and me, as Burke's friends and his own, to advise with us about it; and we dined yesterday with him and the Duchess, that we might have time to talk the thing over at leisure and without interruption after dinner. We stayed accordingly, engaged in that subject till almost twelve at night, and our conference ended most happily and excessively to the satisfaction of us all. The Duke of Portland has the veneration for Burke that Windham, Pelham, myself and a few more have, and he thinks it impossible to do too much for him. He considers the reward to be given to Burke as a credit and honour to the nation, and he considers the neglect of him and his embarrassed situation as having been long a reproach to the country. The unjust prejudice and clamour which has prevailed against him and his family only determine the Duke the more to do him justice. The question was how ? First, his brother Richard, who was Secretary to the Treasury before, will have the same office now; but the Duke intends to give him one of the first offices which falls vacant, of about £1000 a year for life in the customs, and he will then resign the Secretary to the Treasury, which, however, in the meanwhile is worth £3000 a year. Edmund Burke is to have the Pay-Office, £4000 a year; but as that is precarious and he can leave no provision for his son, it would, in fact, be doing little or nothing of any real or substantial value unless some permanent provision is added to it. In this view the Duke is to grant him on the Irish establishment a pension of £2000 a year *clear* for his own life, and the same sum to Mrs. Burke for her life. This will make Burke completely happy, by leaving his wife and son safe from want after his death, if they should survive him. The Duke's affectionate anxiety to accomplish this object, and his determination to set all clamour at defiance on this point of justice, was truly affecting, and increases my attachment for the Duke. . . . The Duke said the only objection to this plan was that he thought it was due from this country, and that he grudged the honour of it to Ireland; but as nothing in England was ready, this plan was settled.

You may think it strange that to this moment Burke does not know a word of all this, and his family are indeed, I believe, suffering a little under the apprehension that he may be neglected in the general scramble. I believe there never were three cabinet counsellors more in harmony on any subject than we were, nor three people happier in their day's work.[1]

This leaves the apparent puzzle where it was. Why should Burke not be approved of for Chancellor of the Exchequer? What were the many difficulties described as seeming to be in the way of arranging for Burke in a manner equal to Burke's merits and the Duke of Portland's wishes? His personal relations with the chiefs of his party were at this time extremely cordial and intimate. He was constantly a guest at the Duke of Portland's most private dinner-parties. Fox had gone down to Beaconsfield to recruit himself from the fatigues of his rapid journey from Bologna, and to spend some days in quiet with Windham and the master of the house. Elliot and Windham, who were talked about for a post for which one of them says that Burke would not have been approved, vied with one another in adoring Burke. Finally, Elliot and the Duke think themselves happy in a day's work that ended in consigning the man who not only was, but was admitted to be, the most powerful genius of their party, to a third-rate post, and that most equivocal distinction, a pension on the Irish establishment. The common explanation that it illustrates Whig exclusiveness, cannot be seriously received as adequate. It is probable, for one thing, that the feelings of the Prince of Wales had more to do with it than the feelings of men like the Duke of Portland or Fox. We can easily imagine how little that most worthless of human creatures would appreciate the great qualities of such a man as Burke. The painful fact which we are unable to

[1] *Life and Letters of Sir G. Elliot*, i. 261-263.

conceal from ourselves is, that the common opinion of better men than the Prince of Wales leaned in the same direction. His violence in the course of the Regency debates had produced strong disapproval in the public, and downright consternation in his own party. On one occasion he is described by a respectable observer as having "been wilder than ever, and laid himself and his party more open than ever speaker did. He is folly personified, but shaking his cap and bells under the laurel of genius. He finished his wild speech in a manner next to madness." Moore believes that Burke's indiscretions in these trying and prolonged transactions sowed the seeds of the alienation between him and Fox two years afterwards. Burke's excited state of mind showed itself in small things as well as great. Going with Windham to Carlton House, Burke attacked him in the coach for a difference of opinion about the affairs of a friend, and behaved with such unreasonable passion and such furious rudeness of manner, that his magnanimous admirer had some difficulty in obliterating the impression. The public were less tolerant. Windham has told us that at this time Burke was a man decried, persecuted, and proscribed, not being much valued even by his own party, and by half the nation considered as little better than an ingenious madman.[1] This is evidence beyond impeachment, for Windham loved and honoured Burke with the affection and reverence of a son; and he puts the popular sentiment on record with grief and amazement. There is other testimony to the same effect. The fourth Lord Lansdowne, who must have heard the subject abundantly discussed by those who were most concerned in it, was once asked by a very eminent man of our own time, why the Whigs kept Burke out of their Cabinets. "Burke!" he cried; "he was so violent, so overbearing, so arrogant, so intractable, that to

[1] Windham's *Diary*, p. 213.

have got on with him in a Cabinet would have been utterly and absolutely impossible."

On the whole, it seems to be tolerably clear that the difficulties in the way of Burke's promotion to high office were his notoriously straitened circumstances; his ungoverned excesses of party zeal and political passion; finally, what Sir Gilbert Elliot calls the unjust prejudice and clamour against him and his family, and what Burke himself once called the hunt of obloquy that pursued him all his life. The first two of these causes can scarcely have operated in the arrangements that were made in the Rockingham and Coalition ministries. But the third, we may be sure, was incessantly at work. It would have needed social courage alike in 1782, 1783, and 1788 to give Cabinet rank to a man round whose name there floated so many disparaging associations. Social courage is exactly the virtue in which the constructors of a government will always think themselves least able to indulge. Burke, we have to remember, did not stand alone before the world. Elliot describes a dinner-party at Lord Fitzwilliam's, at which four of these half-discredited Irishmen were present. "Burke has now got such a train after him as would sink anybody but himself:—his son, who is quite *nauseated* by all mankind; his brother, who is liked better than his son, but is rather offensive with animal spirits and with brogue; and his cousin, Will Burke, who is just returned unexpectedly from India, as much ruined as when he went many years ago, and who is a fresh charge on any prospects of power that Burke may ever have." It was this train, and the ideas of adventurership that clung to them, the inextinguishable stories about papistry and Saint Omer's, the tenacious calumny about the letters of Junius, the notorious circumstances of embarrassment and neediness—it was all these things that combined with Burke's own defects of temper and

discretion, to give the Whig grandees as decent a reason as they could have desired for keeping all the great posts of state in their own hands.

It seems difficult to deny that the questions of the Regency had caused the germs of a sort of dissatisfaction and strain in the relations between Fox and Burke. Their feelings to one another have been well compared to the mutual discontent between partners in unsuccessful play, where each suspects that it is the mistakes of the other that lost the game. Whether Burke felt conscious of the failures in discretion and temper, that were the real or pretended excuse for neglect, we cannot tell. There is one passage that reveals a chagrin of this kind. A few days after the meeting between the Duke of Portland and Elliot, for the purpose of settling his place in the new ministry, Burke went down to Beaconsfield. In writing (January 24, 1789) to invite Windham and Pelham to come to stay a night, with promise of a leg of mutton cooked by a dairymaid who was not a bad hand at a pinch, he goes on to say that his health has received some small benefit from his journey to the country. "But this view to health, though far from unnecessary to me, was not the chief cause of my present retreat. I began to find that I was grown rather too anxious; and had begun to discover to myself and to others a solicitude relative to the present state of affairs, which, though their strange condition might well warrant it in others, is certainly less suitable to my time of life, in which all emotions are less allowed; and to which, most certainly, all human concerns ought in reason to become more indifferent than to those who have work to do, and a good deal of day and of inexhausted strength to do it in." [1]

The king's unexpected restoration to health two or three weeks later, brought to naught all the hope

[1] *Correspondence*, iii. 89.

and ambition of the Whigs, and confirmed Pitt in power for the rest of Burke's lifetime. But an event came to pass in the world's history, that transformed Burke as if in an instant from a man decried, persecuted, proscribed, into an object of exultant applause all over Europe.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

We have now come to the second of the two momentous changes in the world's affairs, in which Burke played an imposing and historic part. His attitude in the first of them, the struggle for American independence, commands almost without alloy the admiration and reverence of posterity. His attitude in the second of them, the great Revolution in France, has raised controversies that can only be compared in heat and duration to the master controversies of theology. If the history of society were written as learned men write the history of the Christian faith and its churches, Burke would figure in the same strong prominence, whether deplorable or glorious, as Arius and Athanasius, Augustine and Sabellius, Luther and Ignatius. If we ask how it is that now, so many years after the event, men are still discussing Burke's pamphlet on the Revolution as they are still discussing Bishop Butler's *Analogy*, the answer is that in one case as in the other the questions at issue are still unsettled, and that Burke offers in their highest and most comprehensive form all the considerations belonging to one side of the dispute. He was not of those, of whom Coleridge said that they proceeded with much solemnity to solve the riddle of the French Revolution by anecdotes. He suspended it in the same light of great social ideas and wide principles, in which its authors and

champions professed to represent it. Unhappily he advanced from criticism to practical exhortation, the most mischievous and indefensible that has ever been pressed by any statesman on any nation. But the force of the criticism remains, its foresight remains, its commemoration of valuable elements of life that men were forgetting, its discernment of the limitations of things, its sense of the awful emergencies of the problem. When our grandchildren have made up their minds as to the merits of the social transformation that dawned on Europe in 1789, then Burke's *Reflections* will become a mere literary antiquity, and not before.

From the very beginning Burke looked upon the proceedings in France with distrust. He had not a moment of enthusiasm or sympathy of which to repent. When the news reached England that the insurgents of Paris had stormed the Bastille, Fox exclaimed with exultation, how much it was the greatest event that had ever happened in the world, how much the best. Is it an infirmity to wish for an instant that some such phrase of generous hope had escaped from Burke; that he had for a day or an hour undergone the fine illusion that was lighted up in the spirits of men like Wordsworth and Coleridge? Those fine poets, who were destined one day to preach even a wiser and a loftier conservatism than his own, have told us what they felt—

> When France in wrath her giant limbs upreared,
> And with that oath, which smote air, earth, and sea,
> Stamped her strong foot, and said she would be free.

Burke from the first espied the looming shadow of a catastrophe. In August he wrote to Lord Charlemont that the events in France had something paradoxical and mysterious about them; that the outbreak of the old Parisian ferocity might be no more than a sudden explosion, but if it should

happen to be *character* rather than accident, then the people would need a strong hand like that of their former masters to coerce them; that all depended upon the French having wise heads among them, and upon these wise heads, if such there were, acquiring an authority to match their wisdom. There is nothing here but a calm and sagacious suspense of judgment. It soon appeared that the old Parisian ferocity was still alive. In the events of October 1789, when the mob of Paris marched out to Versailles and marched back again with the king and queen in triumphal procession, Burke felt in his heart that the beginning of the end had come, and that the catastrophe was already at hand. In October he wrote a long letter to the French gentleman to whom he afterwards addressed the *Reflections*. "You hope, sir," he said, "that I think the French deserving of liberty. I certainly do. I certainly think that all men who desire it deserve it. We cannot forfeit our right to it, but by what forfeits our title to the privileges of our kind. The liberty I mean is *social* freedom. It is that state of things in which liberty is secured by equality of restraint. This kind of liberty is, indeed, but another name for justice. *Whenever a separation is made between liberty and justice, neither is in my opinion safe.*" The weightiest and most important of all political truths, and worth half the fine things that poets have sung about freedom — if it could only have been respected, how different the course of the Revolution! But the engineer who attempts to deal with the abysmal rush of the falls of Niagara, must put aside the tools that constructed the Bridgewater Canal and the Chelsea Waterworks. Nobody recognised so early as Burke that France had really embarked among cataracts and boiling gulfs, and the pith of all his first criticisms, including the *Reflections*, was the proposition that to

separate freedom from justice was nothing else than to steer the ship of state direct into the maelstrom. It is impossible to deny that this was true. Unfortunately it was a truth that the wild spirits then abroad in the storm made of no avail.

Destiny aimed an evil stroke when Burke, whose whole soul was bound up in order, peace, and gently enlarged precedent, found himself face to face with the portentous man-devouring Sphinx. He who could not endure that a few clergymen should be allowed to subscribe to the Bible instead of to the Articles, saw the ancient Church of Christendom prostrated, its possessions confiscated, its priests proscribed, and Christianity itself officially superseded. The economical reformer who, when his zeal was hottest, declined to discharge a tide-waiter or a scullion in the royal kitchen who should have acquired the shadow of a vested interest in his post, beheld two great orders stripped of their privileges and deprived of much of their lands, though their possession had been sanctified by the express voice of the laws and the prescription of many centuries. He who was full of apprehension and anger at the proposal to take away a member of Parliament from St. Michael's or Old Sarum, had to look on while the most august monarchy in Europe was overturned. The man who dreaded fanatics, hated atheists, despised political theorisers, and was driven wild at the notion of applying metaphysical rights and abstract doctrines to public affairs, suddenly beheld a whole kingdom given finally up to fanatics, atheists, and theorisers, who talked of nothing but the rights of man, and deliberately set as wide a gulf as ruin and bloodshed could make, between themselves and every incident or institution in the history of their land. The statesman who had once declared, and habitually proved, his preference for peace even over truth, who had all his life surrounded himself with a

mental paradise of order and equilibrium, in a moment found himself confronted by the stupendous and awful spectre that a century of disorder had raised in its supreme hour. It could not have been difficult for any one who had studied Burke's character and career, to foretell all that now came to pass with him.

It was from an English, and not from a French point of view, that Burke was first drawn to write upon the Revolution. The 4th of November was the anniversary of the landing of the Prince of Orange, and the first act in the Revolution of 1688. The members of an association calling itself the Revolution Society, chiefly composed of dissenters, but not without a mixture of churchmen, including a few peers and a good many members of the House of Commons, met as usual to hear a sermon in commemoration of the glorious day. Dr. Price was the preacher, and both in the morning sermon, and in the speeches which followed in the festivities of the afternoon, the French were held up to the loudest admiration, as having carried the principles of our own Revolution to a loftier height, and having opened boundless hopes to mankind. By these harmless proceedings Burke's anger and scorn were aroused to a pitch that must seem to us, as it seemed to not a few of his contemporaries, singularly out of all proportion to its cause. Deeper things were doubtless in silent motion within him. He set to work upon a denunciation of Price's doctrines, with a velocity that reminds us of Aristotle's comparison of anger to the over-hasty servant, who runs off with all speed before he has listened to half the message. This was the origin of the *Reflections*. The design grew as the writer went on. His imagination took fire; his memory quickened a throng of impressive associations; his excited vision revealed to him a band of vain, petulant upstarts persecuting the

ministers of a sacred religion, insulting a virtuous and innocent sovereign, and covering with humiliation the august daughter of the Caesars; his mind teemed with the sage maxims of the philosophy of things established, and the precepts of the gospel of order. Every courier that crossed the Channel supplied new material to his contempt and his alarm. He condemned the whole method and course of the French reforms. His judgment was in suspense no more. He no longer distrusted; he hated, despised, and began to dread.

Men soon began to whisper abroad that Burke thought ill of what was going on over the water. When it transpired that he was writing a pamphlet, the world of letters was stirred with the liveliest expectation. The name of the author, the importance of the subject, and the singularity of his opinions, so Mackintosh informs us, all inflamed the public curiosity. Soon after Parliament met for the session (1790), the army estimates were brought up. Fox criticised the increase of our forces, and incidentally hinted something in praise of the French army, which had shown that a man could be a soldier without ceasing to be a citizen. Some days afterwards the subject was revived, and Pitt, as well as Fox, avowed himself hopeful of the good effect of the Revolution upon the order and government of France. Burke followed in a very different vein, openly proclaiming the dislike and fear of the Revolution that was to be the one ceaseless refrain of all he spoke or wrote for the rest of his life. He deplored Fox's praise of the army for breaking their lawful allegiance, and then he proceeded with ominous words to the effect that, if any friend of his should concur in any measures which should tend to introduce such a democracy as that of France, he would abandon his best friends and join with his worst enemies to oppose either the means or the end. This has

unanimously been pronounced one of the most brilliant and effective speeches that Burke ever made. Fox rose with distress on every feature, and made the often-quoted declaration of his debt to Burke: "If all the political information I have learned from books, all which I have gained from science, and all which my knowledge of the world and its affairs has taught me, were put into one scale, and the improvement which I have derived from my right honourable friend's instruction and conversation were placed in the other, I should be at a loss to decide to which to give the preference. I have learnt more from my right honourable friend than from all the men with whom I ever conversed." All seemed likely to end in a spirit of conciliation until Sheridan rose, and in the plainest terms he could find expressed his dissent from everything Burke had said. Burke immediately renounced his friendship. For the first time in his life he found the sympathy of the House vehemently on his side.

In the following month (March 1790) this unpromising incident was succeeded by an aberration no rational man will now undertake to defend. Fox brought forward a motion for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. He did this in accordance with a recent suggestion of Burke's own, that he should strengthen his political position by winning the support of the dissenters. Burke himself had always denounced the Test Act as bad, and as an abuse of sacred things. To the amazement of everybody, and to the infinite scandal of his party, he now pronounced the dissenters to be disaffected citizens, and refused to relieve them. Well might Fox say that Burke's words had filled him with grief and shame.

Meanwhile the great rhetorical fabric gradually arose. Burke revised, erased, moderated, strengthened, emphasised, wrote and rewrote with

indefatigable industry. With the manuscript constantly under his eyes, he lingered busily, pen in hand, over paragraphs and phrases, antitheses and apophthegms. The *Reflections* was no superb improvisation. Its composition recalls Palma Giovine's account of the mighty Titian's way of working; how the master made his preparations with resolute strokes of a heavily-laden brush, and then turned his picture to the wall, and by and by resumed again, and then again and again, redressing, adjusting, modelling the light with a rub of his finger, or dabbling a spot of dark colour into some corner with a touch of his thumb, and finally working all his smirches, contrasts, abruptnesses, into the glorious harmony that we know. Burke was so unwearied in this insatiable correction and alteration that the printer found it necessary, instead of making the changes marked upon the proof-sheets, to set up the whole in type afresh. The work was upon the easel for exactly a year. It was November (1790) before the result came into the hands of the public. It was a small octavo of three hundred and fifty-six pages, in contents rather less than twice the present volume, bound in an unlettered wrapper of grey paper, and sold for five shillings. In less than twelve months it reached its eleventh edition, and it has been computed that not many short of thirty thousand copies were sold within the next six years.

The first curiosity had languished in the course of the long delay, but it was revived in its strongest force when the book itself appeared. A remarkable effect instantly followed. Before the *Reflections* was published the predominant sentiment in England had been one of mixed astonishment and sympathy. Pitt had expressed this common mood both in the House of Commons and in private. It was impossible for England not to be amazed at the uprising of a nation whom they had been

accustomed to think of as willing slaves, and it was impossible for her, when the scene did not happen to be the American colonies or Ireland, not to profess good wishes for the cause of emancipation all over the world. Apart from the natural admiration of a free people for a neighbour struggling to be free, England saw no reason to lament a blow to a sovereign and a government who had interfered on the side of her insurgent colonies. To this easy state of mind Burke's book put an immediate end. At once, as contemporaries assure us, it divided the nation into two parties. On both sides it precipitated opinion. With a long-resounding blast on his golden trumpet Burke had unfurled a new flag, and half the nation hurried to rally to it — the half that had scouted his views on America; had bitterly disliked his plan of economic reform; had mocked his ideas on religious toleration, and a moment before had hated and reviled him beyond all men living for his fierce tenacity in the impeachment of Warren Hastings. The king said to everybody who came near him that the book was a good book, a very good book, and every gentleman ought to read it. The universities began to think of offering the scarlet gown of their most honourable degree to the assailant of Price and the dissenters. The great army of the indolent good, the people who lead excellent lives and never use their reason, took violent alarm. The timorous, the weak-minded, the bigoted, were suddenly awakened to a sense of what they owed to themselves. Burke gave them the key that enabled them to interpret the Revolution in harmony with their usual ideas and their temperament.

Reaction quickly rose to a high pitch. One preacher in a parish church in the neighbourhood of London celebrated the anniversary of the restoration of King Charles II. by a sermon, in which

the pains of eternal damnation were confidently promised to political disaffection. Romilly, mentioning to a friend that the *Reflections* had got into a fourteenth edition, wondered whether Burke was not rather ashamed of his success. It is when we come to the rank and file of reaction, that we find it hard to forgive the man of genius who made himself the organ of their selfishness, their timidity, and their blindness. We know that the parts of his writings on French affairs to which they would fly, were not likely to be the parts that calm men now read with sympathy, but the scoldings, the screamings, the unworthy vituperation with which, especially in the latest of them, he attacked everybody who took part in the Revolution, from Condorcet and Lafayette down to Marat and Couthon. It was the feet of clay that they adored in their image, and not the head of fine gold and the breasts and the arms of silver.

On the continent of Europe the excitement was as great among the ruling classes as it was at home. Mirabeau, who had made Burke's acquaintance some years before in England, and even been his guest at Beaconsfield, now made the *Reflections* the text of more than one tremendous philippic. Louis XVI. is said to have translated the book into French with his own hand. Catherine of Russia, Voltaire's adored Semiramis of the North, the benefactress of Diderot, the ready helper of the philosophic party, pressed her congratulations on the great pontiff of the old order, who now thundered anathema against the philosophers and all their works.

It is important to remember the stage that the Revolution had reached, when Burke was composing his attack upon it. The year 1790 was precisely the time when the hopes of the best men in France shone most brightly, and seemed most reasonable. There had been disorders, and Paris

still had ferocity in her mien. But Robespierre was an obscure figure on the back benches of the Assembly. Nobody had ever heard of Danton. The name of Republic had never been so much as whispered. The king still believed that constitutional monarchy would leave him as much power as he desired. He had voluntarily gone to the National Assembly, and in simple language had exhorted them all to imitate his example by professing the single opinion, the single interest, the single wish—attachment to the new constitution, and ardent desire for the peace and happiness of France. The clergy, it is true, were violently irritated by the spoliation of their goods, and the nobles had crossed the Rhine, to brood impotently in the safety of Coblenz over projects of a bloody revenge upon their own country. But France, meanwhile, paid little heed either to the anger of the clergy or to the menaces of the emigrant nobles, and at the very moment when Burke was writing his most sombre pages, Paris and the provinces were celebrating with transports of joy and enthusiasm the civic oath, the federation, the restoration of concord to the land, the final establishment of freedom and justice in a regenerated France. This was the happy scene over which Burke suddenly stretched out the right arm of an inspired prophet, pointing to the cloud of thunder and darkness gathering on the hills, and proclaiming to them the doom that had been written upon the wall by the fingers of an inexorable hand. It is no wonder that, when the cloud burst and the doom was fulfilled, men turned to Burke, as they went of old to Ahithophel, whose counsel was as if a man had inquired of the oracle of God.

It is not to our purpose to discuss all the propositions advanced in the *Reflections*, much less to reply to them. The book is like some temple, by whose structure and design we allow ourselves to

be impressed, without being careful to measure the precise truth or fitness of the worship to which it was consecrated by its first founders. Just as the student of the *Politics* of Aristotle may well accept all the wisdom of it, without caring to protest at every turn against slavery as the basis of a society, so we may well cherish all the wisdom of the *Reflections*, at this distance of time, without marking as a rubric on every page that half of these impressive formulae and inspiring declamations were irrelevant to the occasion that called them forth, and exercised for the hour an influence that was purely mischievous. Time permits to us this profitable lenity. In reading this, the first of his invectives, it is important, for the sake of clear judgment, to put from our minds the practical policy that Burke afterwards so untiringly urged upon his countrymen. As yet there is no exhortation to England to interfere. We still listen to the voice of the statesman, and are not deafened by the passionate cries of the preacher of a crusade. When Burke wrote the *Reflections* he was justified in criticising the Revolution as an extraordinary movement, but still a movement professing to be conducted on the principles of rational and practicable politics. They were the principles to which competent onlookers like Jefferson and Morris had expected the Assembly to conform, but to which the Assembly never conformed for an instant. It was on the principles of rational politics that Fox and Sheridan admired it. On these principles Burke condemned it. He declared that the methods of the Constituent Assembly, up to the summer of 1790, were unjust, precipitate, destructive, and without stability. Men had chosen to build their house on the sands, and the winds and the seas would speedily beat against it and overthrow it.

His prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. What is still more important for the credit of his foresight

is, that not only did his prophecy come true, but it came true for the reasons he had fixed upon. It was the constitution of the Church, in which Burke saw the worst of the many bad mistakes of the Assembly. History, now slowly shaking herself free from the passions of a century, agrees that the civil constitution of the clergy was the measure which, more than any other, decisively put an end to whatever hopes there might have been of a peaceful transition from the old order to the new. A still more striking piece of foresight is the prediction of the despotism of the Napoleonic Empire. Burke had compared the levelling policy of the Assembly in their geometrical division of the departments, and their isolation from one another of the bodies of the state, to the treatment a conquered country receives at the hands of its conquerors. Like Romans in Greece or Macedon, the French innovators had destroyed the bonds of union, under colour of providing for the independence of each of their cities. "If the present project of a Republic should fail," Burke said, with a prescience really profound, "all securities to a moderate freedom fail with it. All the indirect restraints which mitigate despotism are removed; insomuch that, if monarchy should ever again obtain an entire ascendancy in France under this or any other dynasty, it will probably be, if not voluntarily tempered at setting out by the wise and virtuous counsels of the prince, the most completely arbitrary power that ever appeared on earth." Almost at the same moment Mirabeau was secretly writing to the king that their plan of reducing all citizens to a single class would have delighted Richelieu. This equal surface, he said, facilitates the exercise of power, and many reigns in an absolute government would not have done as much as this single year of revolution, for the royal authority. Time showed that Burke and Mirabeau were right.

History ratifies nearly all Burke's strictures on the levity and precipitancy of the first set of actors in the revolutionary drama. No part of the *Reflections* is more energetic than the denunciation of geometric and literary methods; and these are just what the modern explorer hits upon, as one of the fatal secrets of the catastrophe. De Tocqueville's chapter on the causes that made literary men the principal persons in France, and the effect this had upon the Revolution (Bk. iii. ch. i.), is only a little too cold to pass for Burke's own. Quinet's work on the Revolution is one long sermon, full of eloquence and cogency, upon the incapacity and blindness of the men who undertook the conduct of a tremendous crisis upon mere literary methods, without the moral courage to obey the logic of their beliefs, with the student's ignorance of the eager passion and rapid imagination of multitudes of men, with the pedant's misappreciation of a people, of whom it has been said by one of themselves, that there never was a nation more led by its sensations and less by its principles. Comte, again, points impressively to the Revolution as the period that illustrates more decisively than another the peril of confounding the two great functions of speculation and political action: and he speaks with just reprobation of the preposterous idea in the philosophic politicians of the epoch, that society was at their disposal, independent of its past development, devoid of inherent impulses, and easily capable of being morally regenerated by the mere modification of legislative rules.

What then was it that, in the midst of so much perspicacity as to detail, blinded Burke at the time when he wrote the *Reflections*, to the true nature of the movement? Is it not this, that he judges the Revolution as the solution of a merely political question? If the Revolution had been merely political, his judgment would have been adequate.

The question was much deeper. It was a social question that burned under the surface of what seemed no more than a modification of external arrangements. That Burke was alive to the existence of social problems, and that he was even tormented by them, we know from an incidental passage in the *Reflections*. There he tells us how often he had reflected, and never reflected without feeling, upon the innumerable servile and degrading occupations to which by the social economy so many wretches are inevitably doomed. He had pondered whether there could be any means of rescuing these unhappy people from their miserable industry without disturbing the natural course of things, and impeding the great wheel of circulation that is turned by their labour. This is the vein of the striking passage in his first composition that I have already quoted (p. 15). Burke did not yet see, and probably never saw, that one key to the events which astonished and exasperated him was simply that the persons most urgently concerned had taken the riddle which perplexed him, into their own hands, and had in fiery earnest set about their own deliverance. The pith of the Revolution up to 1790 was less the political constitution, of which Burke says so much, and so much that is true, than the social and economic transformation, of which he says so little. It was not a question of the power of the king, or the measure of an electoral circumscription, that made the Revolution; it was the iniquitous distribution of the taxes, the scourge of the militia service, the scourge of the road service, the destructive tyranny exercised in the vast preserves of wild game, the vexatious rights and imposts of the lords of manors, and all the other odious burdens and heavy impediments on the prosperity of the thrifty and industrious part of the nation. If he had seen ever so clearly that one of the most important sides of the Revolution in

progress was the rescue of the tiller of the soil, Burke would still doubtless have viewed events with bitter suspicion. For the process could not be executed without disturbing the normal course of things, and without violating his principle that all changes should find us with our minds tenacious of justice and tender of property. A closer examination than he chose to give of the current administration alike of justice and of property under the old system, would have explained to him that an hour had come in which the spirit of property and of justice compelled a supersession of the letter.

If Burke had insisted on rigidly keeping sensibility to the wrongs of the French people out of the discussion, on the ground that the whole subject was one for positive knowledge and logical inference, his position would have been intelligible and defensible. He followed no such course. His pleading turns constantly to arguments from feeling; but it is always to feeling on one side, and to a sensibility that is only alive to the consecrated force of historic associations. How much pure and uncontrolled emotion had to do with what ought to have been the reasoned judgments of his understanding, we know on his own evidence. He had sent the proof-sheets of a part of his book to Sir Philip Francis. They contained the famous passage describing the French queen as he had seen her seventeen years before at Versailles. Francis bluntly wrote to him that, in his opinion, all Burke's eloquence about Marie Antoinette was no better than pure foppery, and he referred to the queen herself as no better than Messalina. Burke was so excited by this that his son, in a rather officious letter, begged Francis not to repeat such stimulating remonstrance. What is interesting in the incident is Burke's own reply. He knew nothing, he said, of the story of Messalina, and declined the obligation of proving judicially the virtues of all those whom he saw suffering

wrong and contumely, before he endeavoured to interest others in their sufferings, and before endeavouring to kindle horror against midnight assassins at backstairs and their more wicked abettors in pulpits. And then he went on, "I tell you again that the recollection of the manner in which I saw the Queen of France in the year 1774 [1773], and the contrast between that brilliancy, splendour, and beauty, with the prostrate homage of a nation to her, and the abominable scene of 1789 which I was describing, *did* draw tears from me and wetted my paper. These tears came again into my eyes almost as often as I looked at the description —they may again."

The answer was obvious. It was well to pity the unmerited agonies of Marie Antoinette, though as yet, we must remember, she had suffered nothing beyond the indignities of the days of October at Versailles. But did not the protracted agonies of a nation deserve the tribute of a tear? As Paine asked, were men to weep over the plumage, and forget the dying bird? The bulk of the people must labour, Burke told them, "to obtain what by labour can be obtained; and when they find, as they commonly do, the success disproportioned to the endeavour, they must be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal justice." When we learn that a Lyons silk weaver, working as hard as he could for over seventeen hours a day, could not earn money enough to procure the most bare and urgent necessaries of subsistence, we may know with what benignity of brow eternal justice must have presented herself in the garret of that hapless wretch. It was no idle abstraction, no metaphysical right of man for which the French cried, but only the practical right of being permitted, by their own toil, to save themselves and the little ones about their knees from hunger and cruel death. The *mainmortable* serfs of ecclesiastics are variously

said to have been a million and a million and a half at the time of the Revolution. Burke's horror, as he thought of the priests and prelates who left palaces and dignities to earn a scanty living by the drudgery of teaching their language in strange lands, should have been alleviated by the thought that a million or more of men were rescued from ghastly material misery. Are we to be so overwhelmed with sorrow for the pitiful destiny of the men of exalted rank and sacred function, as to have no tears for the forty thousand serfs in the gorges of the Jura, who were held in dead-hand by the Bishop of Saint-Claude ?

The simple truth is that Burke did not know enough of the subject about which he was writing. When he said, for instance, that the French before 1789 possessed all the elements of a constitution that might be made nearly as good as could be wished, he said what many of his contemporaries knew, and what all subsequent investigation and meditation have proved, to be recklessly ill-considered and untrue. As to the social state of France, his information was still worse. He saw the dangers and disorders of the new system, but he saw a very little way into the more cruel dangers and disorders of the old. Mackintosh replied to the *Reflections* with manliness and temperance in the *Vindiciae Gallicae*. Thomas Paine replied to them with an energy, courage, and eloquence worthy of his cause, in the *Rights of Man*. But the substantial and decisive reply to Burke came from his former correspondent, the farmer at Bradfield in Suffolk. Arthur Young published his *Travels in France* some eighteen months after the *Reflections* (1792), and the pages of the twenty-first chapter in which he closes his performance, as a luminous criticism of the most important side of the Revolution, are worth a hundred times more than Burke, Mackintosh, and Paine all put together. Young afterwards became

panic-stricken, but his book remained. There the writer plainly enumerates without trope or invective the intolerable burdens under which the great mass of the French people had for long years been groaning. It was the removal of these burdens that made the very heart's core of the Revolution, and gave to France the new life that so soon astonished and terrified Europe. Yet Burke seems profoundly unconscious of the whole of them. He even boldly asserts that, when the several orders met in their bailliages in 1789, to choose their representatives and draw up their grievances and instructions, in no one of these instructions did they charge, or even hint at, any of those things that had drawn upon the usurping Assembly the detestation of the rational part of mankind. He could not have made a more enormous blunder. There was not a single great change made by the Assembly that had not been demanded in the lists of grievances sent up by the nation to Versailles. The division of the kingdom into districts, and the proportioning of the representation to taxes and population; the suppression of the Intendants; the suppression of all monks and the sale of their goods and estates; the abolition of feudal rights, duties, and services; the alienation of the king's domains; the demolition of the Bastille; these and all else were in the prayers of half the petitions the country had laid at the feet of the king.

If this were merely an incidental blunder in a fact, it might be of no importance. But it was a blunder that went to the very root of the discussion. The fact that France was now at the back of the Assembly, inspiring its counsels and ratifying its decrees, was the cardinal element, and this is the fact which at this stage Burke systematically ignored. That he should have so ignored it, left him in a curious position, for it left him without any rational explanation of the sources of the policy that

kindled his indignation and contempt. A publicist can never be sure of his position until he can explain to himself even what he does not wish to justify to others. Burke thought it enough to dwell upon the immense number of lawyers in the Assembly, and to show that lawyers are naturally bad statesmen. He did not look the state of things steadily in the face. He set all down to the ignorance, folly, and wickedness of the French leaders. This was as shallow as the way in which his enemies, the philosophers, used to set down the superstition of eighteen centuries to the craft of priests, and all defects in the government of Europe to the cruelty of tyrants. How it came about that priests and tyrants acquired their irresistible power over men's minds, they never inquired. And Burke never inquired into the enthusiastic acquiescence of the nation, and, what was most remarkable of all, the acquiescence of the army, in the strong measures of the Assembly. Burke was in truth so appalled by the magnitude of the enterprise on which France had embarked, that he forgot for once the necessity in political affairs of seriously understanding the originating conditions of things. He was strangely content with the explanations that came from the malignants at Coblenz, and he actually told Francis that he charged the disorders not on the mob, but on the Duke of Orleans and Mirabeau, on Barnave and Bailly, on Lameth and Lafayette, who had spent immense sums of money, and used innumerable arts, to stir up the populace throughout France to the commission of the enormities that were shocking the conscience of Europe. His imagination broke loose. His practical reason was mastered by something deeper in him than reason.

This brings us to remark a really singular trait. In spite of the predominance of practical sagacity, of the habits and spirit of public business, of vigorous actuality in Burke's character, yet at the bottom

of all his thoughts about communities and governments there lay a certain mysticism. It was no irony, no literary trope, when he talked of our having taught the American husbandman "piously to believe in the mysterious virtue of wax and parchment." He was using no idle epithet when he described the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, "moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race." To him there actually was an element of mystery in the cohesion of men in societies, in political obedience, in the sanctity of contract; in all the fabric of law and charter and obligation, whether written or unwritten, that is the sheltering bulwark between civilisation and barbarism. When reason and history had contributed all they could to the explanation, it seemed to him as if the vital force, the secret of organisation, the binding framework, must still come from the impenetrable regions beyond reasoning and beyond history.

There was another powerful conservative writer of that age, whose genius was aroused into a protest against the revolutionary spirit as vehement as Burke's. This was Joseph de Maistre, one of the most learned, witty, and acute of all reactionary philosophers. De Maistre wrote a book on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions. He could only find this principle in the operation of occult and supernatural forces, producing the half-divine legislators who figure mysteriously in the early history of nations. Hence he held, and with astonishing ingenuity enforced, the doctrine that nothing else could deliver Europe from the Satanic forces of revolution—he used the word Satanic in all literal seriousness—save the divinely inspired supremacy of the Pope. No natural operations seemed at all adequate either to produce or to maintain the marvel of a coherent society. We are reminded of a professor who, in the fantastic days

of geology, explained the Pyramids of Egypt to be the remains of a volcanic eruption that had forced its way upwards by a slow and stately motion; the hieroglyphs were crystalline formations; and the shaft of the Great Pyramid was the air-hole of a volcano. De Maistre preferred a similar explanation of the monstrous structures of modern society. The hand of man could never have reared, and could never uphold them. If we cannot say that Burke laboured in constant travail with the same perplexity, it is at least true that he was keenly alive to it, and that one of the reasons why he dreaded to see a finger laid upon a single stone of a single political edifice, was his consciousness that he saw no answer to the perpetual enigma how any of these edifices had ever been built, and how the passion, violence, and waywardness of the natural man had ever been persuaded to bow their necks to the strong yoke of a common social discipline. Never was mysticism more unseasonable; never was an hour when men needed more carefully to remember Burke's own wise practical precept, when he was talking about the British rule in India, that we must throw a sacred veil over the beginnings of government. Many woes might perhaps have been saved to Europe, if Burke had applied this maxim to the government of the new France.

Much has always been said about the inconsistency between Burke's enmity to the Revolution and his enmity to Lord North in one set of circumstances, and to Warren Hastings in another. The pamphleteers of the day made selections from the speeches and tracts of his happier time, and the seeming contrast had its effect. More candid opponents admitted then, as all competent persons admit now, that the inconsistency was verbal and superficial. Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, was only one of many who observed very early that this was the unmistakable temper of Burke's mind.

"I admired, as everybody did," he said, "the talents, but not the principles of Mr. Burke; his opposition to the Clerical Petition [for relaxation of subscription, 1772], first excited my suspicion of his being a High Churchman in religion, and a Tory, perhaps an aristocratic Tory, in the state." Burke had indeed never been anything else than a conservative. He was like Falkland, who had bitterly assailed Strafford and Finch on the same principles on which, after the outbreak of the civil war, he consented to be Secretary of State to King Charles. Coleridge is borne out by a hundred passages, when he says that in Burke's writings at the beginning of the American Revolution and in those at the beginning of the French Revolution, the principles are the same and the deductions are the same; the practical inferences are almost opposite in the one case from those drawn in the other, yet in both equally legitimate. It would be better to say that they would have been equally legitimate, if Burke had been as right in his facts and as ample in his knowledge in the case of France, as he was in the case of America. We feel, indeed, that partly from want of this knowledge, he has gone too far from some of the wise maxims of an earlier time. What has become of the doctrine that all great public collections of men—he was then speaking of the House of Commons—"possess a marked love of virtue and an abhorrence of vice."[1] Why was the French Assembly not to have the benefit of this admirable generalisation? What has become of all those sayings about the presumption, in all disputes between nations and rulers, "being at least upon a par in favour of the people"; and a populace never rebelling from passion for attack, but from impatience of suffering? And where is now the strong dictum, in the letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol, that "general rebellions

[1] *American Taxation.*

and revolts of a whole people never were *encouraged*, now or at any time; they are always *provoked*"?

When all these things have been noted, to hold a man to his formulae without reference to their special application, is pure pedantry, and the most foolish pedantry. Burke was the last man to lay down any political proposition not subject to the ever varying interpretation of circumstances, and independently of the particular use that was to be made of it. Nothing universal, he had always said, can be rationally affirmed on any moral or political subject. The lines of morality, again, are never ideal lines of mathematics, but are broad and deep as well as long, admitting of exceptions, and demanding modifications. "These exceptions and modifications are made, not by the process of logic, but by the rules of prudence. Prudence is not only first in rank of the virtues, political and moral, but she is the director, the regulator, the standard of them all. As no moral questions are ever abstract questions, this, before I judge upon any abstract proposition, must be embodied in circumstances; for, since things are right and wrong, morally speaking, only by their relation and connection with other things, this very question of what it is politically right to grant, depends upon its relation to its effects." "Circumstances," he says, never weary of laying down his great notion of political method, "give, in reality, to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect. The circumstances are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or obnoxious to mankind."

This is at once the weapon with which he would have defended his own consistency, and attacked the absolute proceedings in France. He changed his front, but he never changed his ground. He was not more passionate against the proscription in France, than he had been against the suspension

of Habeas Corpus in the American war. "I flatter myself," he said in the *Reflections*, "that I love a manly, moral, regulated liberty." Ten years before he had said, "The liberty, the only liberty I mean, is a liberty connected with order." The court tried to regulate liberty too severely. It found in him an inflexible opponent. Demagogues tried to remove the regulations of liberty. They encountered in him the bitterest and most unceasing of all remonstrants. The arbitrary majority in the House of Commons forgot for whose benefit they held power, from whom they derived their authority, and in what description of government it was that they had a place. Burke was the most valiant and strenuous champion in the ranks of the independent minority. He withstood to the face the king and the king's friends. He withstood to the face Charles Fox and the Friends of the People. He may have been wrong in both, or in either, but it is unreasonable to tell us that he turned back in his course; that he was a revolutionist in 1770, and a reactionist in 1790; that he was in his sane mind when he opposed the supremacy of the court, but that his reason was tottering when he opposed the supremacy of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

There is no part of Burke's career at which we may not find evidence of his instinctive and undying repugnance to the critical or revolutionary spirit and all its works. From the early days when he had parodied Bolingbroke, down to the later time when he denounced Condorcet as a fanatical atheist, with "every disposition to the lowest as well as the highest and most determined villainies," he invariably suspected or denounced everybody, virtuous or vicious, high-minded or ignoble, who inquired with too keen a scrutiny into the foundations of morals, of religion, of social order. To examine with a curious or unfavourable eye the bases of established opinions, was to show

a leaning to anarchy, to atheism, or to unbridled libertinism. Already we have seen how, three years after the publication of his *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, and seventeen years before the composition of the *Reflections*, he denounced the philosophers with a fervour and a vehemence which he never afterwards surpassed. When a few of the clergy petitioned to be relieved from some of the severities of subscription, he had resisted them on the bold ground that the truth of a proposition deserves less attention than the effect of adherence to it upon the established order of things. "I will not enter into the question," he told the House of Commons, "how much truth is preferable to peace. Perhaps truth may be far better. But as we have scarcely ever the same certainty in the one that we have in the other, I would, unless the truth were evident indeed, hold fast to peace." In that intellectual restlessness, to which the world is so deeply indebted, Burke could recognise but scanty merit. Himself the most industrious and active-minded of men, he was ever sober in cutting the channels of his activity, and he would have had others equally moderate. Perceiving that plain and righteous conduct is the end of life in this world, he prayed men not to be over-curious in searching for, and handling, and again handling, the theoretic base on which the prerogatives of virtue repose. Provided that there was peace, that is to say, so much of fair happiness and content as is compatible with the conditions of the human lot, Burke felt that a too great inquisitiveness as to its foundations was not only idle but cruel.

If the world continues to read the *Reflections*, and reads it with a new admiration not diminished by the fact that on the special issue its tendency is every day more clearly discerned to have been misleading, we may be sure that it is not for the sake of such things as the precise character of the

Revolution of 1688, where, for that matter, constitutional writers have shown abundantly that Burke was nearly as much in the wrong as Dr. Sacheverell. Nor has the book lived merely by its gorgeous rhetoric and high emotions, though these have been contributing elements. It lives because it contains a sentiment, a method, a set of informal principles, which, awakened into new life after the Revolution, rapidly transformed the current ways of thinking and feeling about all the most serious objects of our attention, and have powerfully helped to give a richer substance to all modern literature. In the *Reflections* we have the first great sign that the ideas on government and philosophy that Locke had been the chief agent in setting into European circulation, and that had carried all triumphantly before them throughout the century, did not comprehend the whole truth nor the deepest truth about human character—the relations of men and the union of men in society. It has often been said that the armoury from which the French philosophers of the eighteenth century borrowed their weapons was furnished from England, and it may be added as truly that the reaction against that whole scheme of thought came from England. In one sense we may call the *Reflections* a political pamphlet, but it is much more than this, just as the movement against which it was levelled was much more than a political movement. The Revolution rested on a philosophy, and Burke confronted it with an antagonistic philosophy. Those are but superficial readers who fail to see at how many points Burke, while seeming only to deal with the French monarchy and the British constitution, with Dr. Price and Marie Antoinette, was in fact, and exactly because he dealt with them in the comprehensive spirit of true philosophy, turning men's minds to an attitude from which not only the political incidents of the hour, but the

current ideas about religion, psychology, the very nature of human knowledge, would all be seen in a changed light and clothed in new colour. All really profound speculation about society comes in time to touch the heart of every other object of speculation, not by directly contributing new truths or directly corroborating old ones, but by setting men to consider the consequences to life of different opinions on these abstract subjects, and their relations to the great paramount interests of society, however those interests may happen at the time to be conceived. Burke's book marks a turning-point in literary history, because it was the signal for the reaction over the whole field of thought into which the Revolution drove many of the finest minds of the next generation, by showing the supposed consequences of pure individualistic rationalism.

We need not attempt to work out the details of this extension of a political reaction into a universal reaction in philosophy and poetry. Any one may easily think out for himself what consequences in act and thought, as well as in government, would be likely to flow, for example, from one of the most permanently admirable sides of Burke's teaching—his respect for the collective reason of men, and his sense of the impossibility in politics and morals of considering the individual apart from the experience of the race. "We are afraid," he says, "to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages. *Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them.* If they find what they seek, and they seldom fail, they think it more wise to continue the prejudice

with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason: because prejudice with its reason has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence. Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature." Is not this to say, in other words, that in every man the substantial foundations of action consist of the accumulated layers various generations of ancestors have placed for him; that the greater part of our sentiments act most effectively when they act most mechanically, and by the methods of an unquestioned system; that although no rule of conduct or spring of action ought to endure that does not repose in sound reason, yet this naked reason is in itself a less effective means of influencing action than when it exists as one part of a fabric of ancient and endeared association? Interpreted by a mobile genius, and expanded by a poetic imagination, all this became the foundation from which the philosophy of Coleridge started, and, as Mill has shown in a famous essay, Coleridge was the great apostle of the conservative spirit in England in its best form.

Though Burke here, no doubt, found a true base for the philosophy of order, yet perhaps Condorcet or Barnave might have justly asked him whether, when we thus realise the strong and immovable foundations that are laid in our character before we are born, there could be any occasion, as a matter of fact, for the vehement alarm that moved Burke lest a few lawyers, by a score of parchment

decrees, should overthrow the venerated sentiments of Europe about justice and about property ? Should he not have known better than most men the force of the self-protecting elements of society ?

This is not a convenient place for discussing the issues between the school of order and the school of progress. It is enough to have marked Burke's position in one of them. The *Reflections* places him among the great Conservatives of history. Perhaps the only Englishman with whom in this respect he may be compared, is Sir Thomas More,—that virtuous and eloquent reactionist of the sixteenth century. More abounded in light, in intellectual interests, in single-minded care for the common weal. He was as anxious as any man of his time for the improved ordering of the Church, but he could not endure that reformation should be bought at the price of breaking up the ancient spiritual unity of Europe. He was willing to slay and be slain rather than he would tolerate the destruction of the old faith, or assent to the violence of the new statecraft. He viewed Thomas Cromwell's policy of reformation, just as Burke viewed Mirabeau's policy of revolution. Burke too, we may be very sure, would as willingly have sent Mirabeau and Bailly to prison or the block, as More sent Phillips to the Tower and Bainham to the stake. For neither More nor Burke was of the gentle contemplative spirit, which the first disorder of a new society just bursting into life merely overshadows with saddening regrets and poetic gloom. The old harmony was to them so bound up with the purpose and meaning of life, that to wage active battle for the gods of their reverence was the irresistible instinct of self-preservation. More had an excuse which Burke had not, for the principle of persecution was accepted by the best minds of the sixteenth century, but by the best minds of the eighteenth it was emphatically repudiated.

Another illustrious name of Burke's own era rises to our lips, as we ponder mentally the too scanty list of those who have essayed the great and hardy task of reconciling order with progress. Turgot is even a more imposing figure than Burke himself. The impression made upon us by the pair is indeed very different, for Turgot was austere, reserved, distant, a man of many silences and much suspense; while Burke, as we know, was imaginative, exuberant, unrestrained, and, like some of the greatest actors on the stage of human affairs, he had associated his own personality with the prevalence of right ideas and good influences. In Turgot, on the other hand, we discern something of the isolation, the sternness, the disdainful melancholy of Tacitus. He even rises out of the eager crowd of the Voltairean age with some of that austere moral indignation and haughty astonishment with which Dante had watched the stubborn ways of men centuries before. On one side Turgot shared the conservatism of Burke, though, perhaps, he would hardly have given it that name. He habitually corrected the headlong insistence of the revolutionary philosophers, his friends, by reminding them that neither pity, nor benevolence, nor hope can ever dispense with justice; and he could never endure to hear of great changes being wrought at the cost of this sovereign quality. Like Burke, he held fast to the doctrine that everything must be done for the multitude, but nothing by them. Like Burke, he realised how close are the links that bind the successive generations of men, and make up the long chain of human history. Like Burke, he never believed that the human mind has any spontaneous inclination to welcome pure truth. Here, however, is visible between them a hard line of division. It is not error, said Turgot, that opposes the progress of truth; it is indolence, obstinacy, and the spirit of routine. But then

Turgot enjoined upon us to make it the aim of life to do battle in ourselves and others with all this indolence, obstinacy, and spirit of routine in the world; Burke, on the contrary, gave to these bad things gentler names, surrounded them with the picturesque associations of the past, and in the vast convulsion of his time threw all his passion and all his genius on their side. Will any reader doubt which of these two types of the school of order and justice, both of them noble, is the more valuable for the race, and the worthier and more stimulating ideal for the individual?

It is not certain that Burke was not sometimes for a moment startled by the suspicion that he might unawares be fighting against the truth. In the midst of flaming and bitter pages, we now and again feel a cool breath from the distant region of a half-pensive tolerance. "I do not think," he says at the close of the *Reflections*, to the person to whom they were addressed, "that my sentiments are likely to alter yours. I do not know that they ought. You are young; you cannot guide, but must follow, the fortune of your country. But hereafter they may be of some use to you, in some future form which your commonwealth may take. In the present it can hardly remain; but before its final settlement, it may be obliged to pass, as one of our poets says, 'through great varieties of untried being,' and in all its transmigrations to be purified by fire and blood."

He felt in the midst of his angry hate that what he took for seething chaos, might after all be the struggle upwards of the germs of order. Among the later words that he wrote on the Revolution were these: "If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty

current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men." We can only regret that these rays of the *mens divinior* did not shine with a more steadfast light; and that a spirit which, amid the sharp press of manifold cares and distractions, had ever vibrated with lofty sympathies, was not now more constant to its faith in the beneficent powers and processes of the Unseen Time.

CHAPTER IX

BURKE AND HIS PARTY—PROGRESS OF THE REVOLUTION—IRELAND—LAST YEARS

For some months after the publication of the *Reflections*, Burke kept up the relations of an armed peace with his old political friends. The Indian impeachment went on, and in December (1790) there was a private meeting on the business connected with it, between Pitt, Burke, Fox, and Dundas, at the house of the Speaker. It was described by one who knew, as most amiable, and there seems to have been a general impression in the world at this moment that Fox might by some means be induced to join Pitt. What troubled the slumbers of good Whigs like Gilbert Elliot, was the prospect of Fox committing himself too strongly on French affairs. Burke himself was in the deepest dejection at the prospect; for Fox did not cease to express the most unqualified disapproval of the *Reflections*; he thought that, even in point of composition, it was the worst thing that Burke had ever published. It was already feared that his friendship for Sheridan was drawing him farther away from Burke, with whom Sheridan had quarrelled, into a course of politics that would both damage his own reputation and break up the strong union of which the Duke of Portland was the nominal head.

New floods in France had not yet carried back the ship of state into raging waters. Pitt was

thinking so little of danger from that country that he had plunged into a policy of intervention in the affairs of eastern Europe. When writers charge Burke with breaking violently in upon Pitt's system of peace abroad and reform at home, they overlook the fact that before Burke had begun to preach his crusade against the Jacobins, Pitt had already prepared a war with Russia. The nation refused to follow. They agreed with Fox that it was no concern of theirs whether or not Russia took from Turkey the country between the Boug and the Dniester; they felt that British interests would be more damaged by the expenses of a war than by the acquisition by Russia of Ockzakow. Pitt was obliged to throw up the scheme, and to extricate himself as well as he could from rash engagements with Prussia. It was on account of his services to the cause of peace on this occasion that Catherine ordered the Russian ambassador to send her a bust of Fox in white marble, to be placed in her colonnade between Demosthenes and Cicero. We may take it for granted that after the Revolution rose to its full height the bust of Fox accompanied that of Voltaire down to the cellar of the Hermitage.

While the affair of the Russian armament was still occupying the minister, an event of signal importance happened in the ranks of his political adversaries. The alliance which had lasted between Burke and Fox for five-and-twenty years came to a sudden end, and this rift gradually widened into a destructive breach throughout the party. There is no parallel in our parliamentary history to the fatal scene. In Ireland, indeed, only eight years before, Flood and Grattan, after fighting side by side for many years, had all at once sprung upon one another in the Parliament House with the fury of vultures: Flood had screamed to Grattan that he was a mendicant patriot, and Grattan had called Flood an ill-omened bird of night, with a sepulchral

note, a cadaverous aspect, and a broken beak. The Irish, like the French, have the art of making things dramatic, and Burke was the greatest of Irishmen. On the opening of the session of 1791, the Government had introduced a bill for the better government of Canada. It introduced questions about Church establishments and hereditary legislators. In discussing these Fox made some references to France. It was impossible to refer to France without touching the *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Burke was not present, but he heard what Fox had said, and before long Fox again introduced French affairs in a debate on the Russian armament. Burke arose in violent heat of mind to reply, but the House would not hear him. He resolved to speak when the time came for the Canada Bill to be recommitted. Meanwhile some of his friends did all they could to dissuade him from pressing the matter further. Even the Prince of Wales is said to have written him a letter. There were many signs of the rupture that was so soon to come in the Whig ranks. Men so equally devoted to the common cause as Windham and Elliot nearly came to a quarrel at a dinner-party at Lord Malmesbury's, on the subject of Burke's design to speak; and Windham, who for the present sided with Fox, enters in his diary that he was glad to escape from the room without speaking to the man whom, since the death of Dr. Johnson, he revered before all other men besides.

On the day appointed for the Canada Bill, Fox called at Burke's house, and after some talk on Burke's intention to speak, and on other matters, they walked down to Westminster and entered the House together, as they had so many a time done before, but were never to do again. They found that the debate had been adjourned, and it was not until May 6th that Burke had an opportunity of explaining himself on the Revolution in France.

He had no sooner risen than interruptions broke out from his own side, and a scene of great disorder followed. Burke was incensed beyond endurance by this treatment, for even Fox and Windham had taken part in the tumult against him. With much bitterness he commented on Fox's previous eulogies of the Revolution, and finally there came the fatal words of severance. "It is indiscreet," he said, "at any period, but especially at my time of life, to provoke enemies, or give my friends occasion to desert me. Yet if my firm and steady adherence to the British Constitution place me in such a dilemma, I am ready to risk it, and with my last words to exclaim, 'Fly from the French Constitution.'" Fox at this point eagerly called to him that there was no loss of friends. "Yes, yes," cried Burke, "there is a loss of friends. I know the price of my conduct. I have done my duty at the price of my friend. Our friendship is at an end."

The members who sat on the same side were aghast at proceedings that went beyond their worst apprehensions. Even the ministerialists were shocked. Pitt agreed much more with Fox than with Burke, but he would have been more than human if he had not watched with complacency his two most formidable adversaries turning their swords against one another. Wilberforce, who was more disinterested, lamented the spectacle as shameful. In the galleries there was hardly a dry eye. Fox, as might have been expected from his warm and generous nature, was deeply moved, and is described as weeping even to sobbing. He repeated his former acknowledgment of his debt to Burke, and he repeated his former expression of faith in the blessings which the abolition of royal despotism would bring to France. With unabated vehemence Burke again rose to denounce the French Constitution—"a building composed of untempered mortar —the work of Goths and Vandals, where everything

was disjointed and inverted." After a short rejoinder from Fox the scene came to a close, and the once friendly intercourse between the two heroes was at an end. When they met in the managers' box in Westminster Hall on the business of Hastings's trial, they met with the formalities of strangers. There is a story that when Burke left the House on the night of the quarrel, it was raining, and Mr. Curwen, a member of the Opposition, took him home in his carriage. Burke at once began to declaim against the French. Curwen dropped some remark on the other side. "What!" Burke cried out, grasping the check-string, "are you one of these people? Set me down!" It needed all Curwen's force to keep him where he was; and when they reached his house Burke stepped out without saying a single word.

We may agree that all this did not indicate the perfect sobriety and self-control proper to a statesman in what was a serious crisis not only to his party but to Europe. It was about this time that Burke said to Addington, who was then Speaker of the House of Commons, that he was not well. "I eat too much, Speaker," he said, "I drink too much, and I sleep too little." It is even said that he felt the final breach with Fox as a relief from unendurable suspense; and he quoted the lines about Aeneas, after he had finally resolved to quit Dido and the Carthaginian shore, at last being able to snatch slumber in his ship's tall stern. There can be no doubt how severe had been the tension. Yet the performance to which Burke now applied himself is one of the gravest and most reasonable of all his compositions. He felt it necessary to vindicate the fundamental consistency between his present and his past. We have no difficulty in imagining the abuse to which he was exposed from those whose abuse gave him pain. In a country governed by party, a politician

who quits the allies of a lifetime must expect to pay the penalty. The Whig papers told him that he was expected to surrender his seat in Parliament. They imputed to him all sorts of sinister motives. His name was introduced into ironical toasts. For a whole year there was scarcely a member of his former party who did not stand aloof from him. Windham, when the feeling was at its height, sent word to a host that he would rather not meet Burke at dinner. Dr. Parr, though he thought Mr. Burke the greatest man upon earth, declared himself most indignantly and most fixedly on the side of Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Fox. The Duke of Portland, though always described as strongly and fondly attached to him, and Gilbert Elliot, who thought that Burke was right in his views on the Revolution, and right in expressing them, still could not forgive the open catastrophe, and for many months all the old habits of intimacy among them were entirely broken off.

Burke did not bend to the storm. He went down to Margate, and there finished the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*. Meanwhile he despatched his son to Coblenz to give advice to the royalist exiles, who were then mainly in the hands of Calonne, one of the very worst of the ministers whom Louis XVI. had tried between his dismissal of Turgot in 1774, and the meeting of the States-General in 1789. This measure was taken at the request of Calonne, who had visited Burke at Margate. The English government did not disapprove of it, though they naturally declined to invest either young Burke or any one else with authority from themselves. As little came of the mission as might have been expected from the frivolous, unmanly, and enraged spirit of those to whom it was addressed.

In August (1791), while Richard Burke was at Coblenz, the *Appeal* was published. This was the

last piece that Burke wrote on the Revolution, in which there is any pretence of measure, sobriety, and calm judgment in face of a formidable and perplexing crisis. Henceforth it is not political philosophy, but the minatory exhortation of a prophet. He is now only Demosthenes thundering against Philip, or Cicero launching tirades against Mark Antony.

The *Reflections* had not been published many months before Burke wrote the *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (January 1791), in which strong disapproval had grown into furious animosity. It contains the elaborate diatribe against Rousseau, the grave panegyric on Cromwell for choosing Hale to be Chief Justice, and a sound criticism on the laxity and want of foresight in the manner in which the States-General had been convened. Here first Burke advanced to the position that it might be the duty of other nations to interfere to restore the king to his rightful authority, just as England and Prussia had interfered to save Holland from confusion, as they had interfered to preserve the hereditary constitution in the Austrian Netherlands, and as Prussia had interfered to snatch even the malignant and the turban'd Turk from the pounce of the Russian eagle. Was not the King of France as much an object of policy and compassion as the Grand Seignior? As this was the first piece in which Burke hinted at a crusade, so it was the first in which he began to heap upon the heads, not of Hébert, Fouquier-Tinville, Billaud, nor even of Robespierre or Danton—for none of these had yet been heard of—but of able and conscientious men in the Constituent Assembly, language of a virulence which Fox once said seriously that Burke had picked, even to the phrases of it, out of the writings of Salmasius against Milton, but which is really only to be paralleled by the much worse language of Milton against Salmasius. It was in truth exactly the kind of incensed speech which, at a later date,

the factions in Paris levelled against one another, when Girondins screamed for the heads of Jacobins, and Robespierre denounced Danton, and Tallien cried for the blood of Robespierre.

Burke declined most wisely to suggest any plan for the National Assembly. "Permit me to say," —this is in the letter of January 1791, to a member of the Assembly,—"that if I were as confident as I ought to be diffident in my own loose general ideas, I never should venture to broach them, if but at twenty leagues' distance from the centre of your affairs. I must see with my own eyes; I must in a manner touch with my own hands, not only the fixed, but momentary circumstances, before I could venture to suggest any political project whatsoever. I must know the power and disposition to accept, to execute, to persevere. I must see all the aids and all the obstacles. I must see the means of correcting the plan, where correctives would be wanted. I must see the things: I must see the men. Without a concurrence and adaptation of these to the design, the very best speculative projects might become not only useless but mischievous. Plans must be made for men. People at a distance must judge ill of men. They do not always answer to their reputation when you approach them. Nay, the perspective varies, and shows them quite other than you thought them. At a distance, if we judge uncertainly of men, we must judge worse of *opportunities*, which continually vary their shapes and colours, and pass away like clouds." Our admiration at such words is quickly stifled when we recall the confident, unsparing, immoderate criticism that both preceded and followed this truly rational exposition of the danger of advising, in cases where we know neither the men nor the opportunities. Why was savage and unfaltering denunciation any less unbecoming than, as he admits, crude prescriptions would have been unbecoming?

By the end of 1791, when he wrote the *Thoughts on French Affairs*, he had penetrated still farther into the essential character of the Revolution. Any notion of a reform to be effected after the decorous pattern of 1688, so conspicuous in the first great manifesto, had wholly disappeared. The changes in France he allowed to bear little resemblance or analogy to any of those previously brought about in Europe. It is a revolution, he said, of doctrine and theoretic dogma. The Reformation was the last revolution of this sort that had happened in Europe; and he immediately goes on to remark a point of striking resemblance between them. The effect of the Reformation was "to introduce other interests into all countries than those which arose from their locality and natural circumstances." In like manner other sources of faction were now opened, combining parties among the inhabitants of different countries into a single connection. From these sources, effects were likely to arise fully as important as those which had formerly arisen from the jarring interests of the religious sects. It is a species of faction which "breaks the locality of public affections." [1]

He was thus launched on the full tide of his policy. The French Revolution must be hemmed in by a cordon of fire. Those who sympathised with it in England must be gagged, and if gagging did not suffice, they must be taught respect for the constitution in dungeons and on the gallows. His cry for war abroad and harsh coercion at home waxed louder every day. As Fox said, it was lucky that Burke took the royal side in the Revolution, for his

[1] De Tocqueville has unconsciously imitated Burke's very phrases. "Toutes les révolutions civiles et politiques ont eu une patrie, et s'y sont enfermées. La Révolution française . . . on l'a vue rapprocher ou diviser les hommes en dépit des lois, des traditions, des caractères, de langue, rendant parfois ennemis des compatriotes, et frères des étrangers; *ou plutôt elle a formé au-dessus de toutes les nationalités particulières, une patrie intellectuelle commune dont les hommes de toutes les nations ont pu devenir citoyens*" (*Ancien Régime*, p. 15).

violence would certainly have got him hanged if he had happened to take the other side.

It was in the early summer of 1792 that Miss Burney again met Burke at Mrs. Crewe's villa at Hampstead. He entered into an animated conversation on Lord Macartney and the Chinese expedition, reviving all the old enthusiasm of his companion by his allusions and anecdotes, his brilliant fancies and wide information. When politics were introduced, he spoke with an eagerness and a vehemence that instantly banished the graces, though it redoubled the energies of his discourse. "How I wish," Miss Burney writes, "that you could meet this wonderful man when he is easy, happy, and with people he cordially likes! But politics, even on his own side, must always be excluded; his irritability is so terrible on that theme, that it gives immediately to his face *the expression of a man who is going to defend himself from murderers.*"

Burke still remained without a following, but the ranks of his old allies gradually began to show signs of wavering. His panic about the Jacobins within the gates slowly spread. His old faith, about which he had once talked so much, in the ancient rustic, manly, home-bred sense of the English people, he dismissed as if it had been some idle dream that had come to him through the ivory gate. His fine comparison of the nation to a majestic herd, browsing in peace amid the importunate chirrupings of a thousand crickets, became so little appropriate, that he was now beside himself with apprehension that the crickets were about to rend the oxen in pieces. Even then, the herd stood tranquilly in their pastures, only occasionally turning a dull eye, now to France, and now to Burke. In the autumn of 1791 Burke dined with Pitt and Lord Grenville, and he found them resolute for an honest neutrality in the affairs of France, and

"quite out of all apprehensions of any effect from the French Revolution in this kingdom, either at present or any time to come." Francis and Sheridan, it is true, spoke as if they almost wished for a domestic convulsion; and cool observers who saw him daily, even accused Sheridan of wishing to stir up the lower ranks of the people by the hope of plundering their betters. But men who afterwards became alarmists, are found, so late as the spring of 1792, declaring in their most confidential correspondence that the party of confusion made no way with the country, and produced no effect. Horne Tooke was its most conspicuous chief, and nobody pretended to fear the subversion of the realm by Horne Tooke. Yet Burke, in letters where he admits that the democratic party is entirely discountenanced, and that the Jacobin faction in England is under a heavy cloud, was so possessed by the spectre of panic, as to declare that the Duke of Brunswick was as much fighting the battle of the Crown of England, as the Duke of Cumberland fought that battle at Culloden.

Time and events, meanwhile, had been powerfully telling for Burke. While he was writing his *Appeal*, the French king and queen had destroyed whatever confidence sanguine dreamers might have had in their loyalty to the new order of things, by attempting to escape over the frontier. They were brought back, and a manful attempt was made to get the new constitution to work, in the winter of 1791–92. It was soon found out that Mirabeau had been right when he said that for a monarchy it was too democratic, and for a republic there was a king too much. This was Burke's *Reflections* in a nutshell. But it was foreign intervention that finally ruined the king, and destroyed the hope of an orderly issue. Frederick the Great had set the first example of what some call iniquity and violence in Europe, and others in milder terms call a

readjustment of the equilibrium of nations. He had taken Silesia from the House of Austria, and he had shared in the first partition of Poland. Catherine II. had followed him at the expense of Poland, Sweden, and Turkey. However we may view these transactions, and whether we describe them by the stern words of the moralist, or the more deprecatory words of the diplomatist, they are the first sources of that storm of lawless rapine which swept over every part of Europe for five-and-twenty years to come. The intervention of Austria and Prussia in the affairs of France was originally less a deliberate design for the benefit of the old order, than an interlude in the intrigues of eastern Europe. But the first effect of intervention on behalf of the French monarchy was to bring it in a few weeks to the ground.

In the spring of 1792 France replied to the preparations of Austria and Prussia for invasion by a declaration of war. It was inevitable that the French people should associate the court with the foreign enemy that was coming to its deliverance. Everybody knew as well then as we know it now that the queen was as bitterly incensed against the new order of things, and as resolutely unfaithful to it, as the most furious emigrant on the Rhine. Even Burke himself, writing to his son at Coblenz, was constrained to talk about Marie Antoinette as that "most unfortunate woman, who was not to be cured of the spirit of court intrigue even by a prison." The king may have been loyally resigned to his position, but resignation will not defend a country from the invader; and the nation distrusted a chief who only a few months before had been arrested in full flight to join the national enemy. Power naturally fell into the hands of the men of conviction, energy, passion, and resource. Patriotism and republicanism became synonyms, and the constitution against which

Burke had prophesied was henceforth a dead letter. The spirit of insurrection that had slumbered since the fall of the Bastille and the march to Versailles in 1789, now awoke in formidable violence, and after the preliminary rehearsal of what is known in the revolutionary calendar as the 20th of June (1792), the people of Paris responded to the Duke of Brunswick's insensate manifesto by the more memorable day of the 10th of August. Brunswick, accepting the hateful language which the French emigrants put into his mouth, had declared that every member of the national guard taken with arms in his hands would be immediately put to death ; that every inhabitant who should dare to defend himself would be put to death and his house burnt to the ground ; and that if the least insult was offered to the royal family, then their Austrian and Prussian Majesties would deliver Paris to military execution and total destruction. This is the vindictive ferocity that only civil war can kindle. To convince men that the manifesto was not an empty threat, on the day of its publication a force of nearly 140,000 Austrians, Prussians, and Hessians entered France. The sections of Paris replied by marching to the Tuileries, and after a furious conflict with the Swiss guards, they stormed the château. The king and his family had fled to the National Assembly. The same evening they were thrown into prison, whence the king and queen only came out on their way to the scaffold.

It was the king's execution in January 1793 that finally raised feeling in England to the intense heat that Burke had for so long been invoking. The evening on which the courier brought the news was never forgotten by those who were in London at the time. The playhouses were instantly closed, and the audiences insisted on retiring with half the amusement for which they had paid. People of the lowest and the highest rank alike put on mourn-

ing. The French were universally denounced as fiends upon earth. It was hardly safe for a Frenchman to appear in the streets of London. Placards were posted on every wall, calling for war, and the crowds who gathered round them read them with loud hurrahs.

It would be a complete mistake to say that Pitt ever lost his head, but he lost his feet. The momentary passion of the nation forced him out of the pacific path in which he would have chosen to stay. Burke had become the greatest power in the country, and was in closer communication with the ministers than any one out of office. He went once about this time with Windham and Elliot to inform Pitt as to the uneasiness of the public about the slackness of our naval and military preparation. "Burke," says one of the party, "gave Pitt a little political instruction in a very respectful and cordial way, but with the authority of an old and most informed statesman; and although nobody ever takes the whole of Burke's advice, yet he often, or always rather, furnishes very important and useful matter, some part of which sticks and does good. Pitt took it all very patiently and cordially."

It was in the December of 1792 that Burke had enacted that famous bit of melodrama out of place known as the Dagger Scene. The government had brought in an Alien Bill, imposing certain pains and restrictions on foreigners coming to this country. Fox denounced it as a concession to foolish alarms, and was followed by Burke, who began to storm as usual against murderous atheists. Then without due preparation he began to fumble in his bosom, suddenly drew out a dagger, and with an extravagant gesture threw it on the floor of the House, crying that this was what they had to expect from their alliance with France. The

stroke missed its mark, and there was a general inclination to titter, until Burke, collecting himself for an effort, called upon them with a vehemence to which his listeners could not choose but respond, to keep French principles from their heads, and French daggers from their hearts; to preserve all their blandishments in life, and all their consolations in death; all the blessings of time, and all the hopes of eternity. All this was not prepared long beforehand, for it seems that the dagger had only been shown to Burke on his way to the House as one that had been sent to Birmingham to be a pattern for a large order. Whether prepared or unprepared, the scene was one from which we gladly avert our eyes.

Negotiations had been going on for some months, and they continued in various stages for some months longer, for a coalition between the two great parties of the State. Burke was persistently anxious that Fox should join Pitt's government. Pitt always admitted the importance of Fox's abilities in the difficult affairs that lay before the ministry, and declared that he had no sort of personal animosity to Fox, but rather a personal good-will and good-liking. Fox himself said of a coalition, "It is so damned right, to be sure, that I cannot help thinking it must be." But the difficulties were insuperable. The more rapidly the government drifted in Burke's direction, the more impossible was it for a man of Fox's political sympathies and convictions to have any dealings with a Cabinet committed to a policy of irrational panic, to be carried out by a costly war abroad and cruel repression at home. "*What a very wretched man!*" was Burke's angry exclamation one day, when it became certain that Fox meant to stand by the old flag of freedom and generous common sense.

When the coalition at length took place (1794),

the only man who carried Burke's principles to their fullest extent into Pitt's Cabinet was Windham. It is impossible not to feel the attraction of Windham's character, his amiability, his reverence for great and virtuous men, his passion for knowledge, the versatility of his interests. He is a striking example of the fact that literature was a common pursuit and occupation to the chief statesmen of that time (always excepting Pitt), to an extent that has been gradually tending to become rarer. Windham, in the midst of his devotion to public affairs, to the business of his country, and, let us add, a zealous attendance on every prize-fight within reach, was never happy unless he was working up points in literature and mathematics. There was a literary and classical spirit abroad, and in spite of the furious preoccupations of faction, a certain ready disengagement of mind prevailed. If Windham and Fox began to talk of horses, they seemed to fall naturally into what had been said about horses by the old writers. Fox held that long ears were a merit, and Windham met him by the authority of Xenophon and Oppian in favour of short ones, and finally they went off into what it was that Virgil meant when he called a horse's head *argutum caput*. Burke and Windham travelled in Scotland together in 1785, and their conversation fell as often on old books as on Hastings or on Pitt. They discussed Virgil's similes; Johnson and L'Estrange, as the extremes of English style; what Stephens and A. Gellius had to say about Cicero's use of the word *gratiosus*. If they came to libraries, Windham ran into them with eagerness, and very strongly enjoyed all "the *feel* that a library usually excites." He is constantly reproaching himself with a remissness, which was purely imaginary, in keeping up his mathematics, his Greek tragedies, his Latin historians. There is no more curious example of the

remorse of a bookman impeded by affairs. "What progress might men make in the several parts of knowledge," he says very truly, in one of these moods, "if they could only pursue them with the same eagerness and assiduity as are exerted by lawyers in the conduct of a suit." But this distraction between the tastes of the bookman and the pursuits of public business, united with a certain quality of his constitution to produce one great defect in his character, and it was the worst defect that a statesman can have. He became the most irresolute and vacillating of men. He wastes the first half of a day in deciding which of two courses to take, and the second half in blaming himself for not having taken the other. He is constantly late at entertainments, because he cannot make up his mind in proper time whether to go or to stay at home; hesitation whether he shall read in the red room or in the library, loses him three of the best hours of a morning; the difficulty of early rising he finds to consist less in rising early than in satisfying himself that the practice is wholesome; his mind is torn for a whole forenoon in an absurd contest with himself, whether he ought to indulge a strong wish to exercise his horse before dinner. Every page of his diary is a register of the symptoms of this unhappy disease. When the Revolution came, he was absolutely forced, by the iron necessity of the case, after certain perturbations, to go either with Fox or with Burke. Under this compulsion he took one headlong plunge into the policy of alarm. Everybody knows how desperately an habitually irresolute man is capable of clinging to a policy or a conviction, to which he has once been driven by dire stress of circumstance. Windham, having at last made up his mind to be frightened by the Revolution, was more violently and inconsolably frightened than anybody else.

Pitt, after he had been forced into war, at least intended it to be a war on the good old-fashioned principles of seizing the enemy's colonies and keeping them. He was taunted by the alarmists with caring only for sugar islands, and making himself master of all the islands in the world except Great Britain and Ireland. To Burke all this was an abomination, and Windham followed Burke to the letter. He even declared the holy rage of the *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, published after Burke's death, to contain the purest wisdom and the most unanswerable policy. It was through Windham's eloquence and perseverance that the monstrous idea of a crusade, and all Burke's other violent and excited precepts, gained an effective place and hearing in the Cabinet, in the royal closet, and in the House of Commons, long after Burke himself had left the world.

We have already seen how important an element Irish affairs became in the war with America. The same spirit that had been stirred by the American war was inevitably kindled in Ireland by the French Revolution. The association of United Irishmen now came into existence, with aims avowedly revolutionary. They joined the party that was striving for the relief of the Catholics from certain disabilities, and for their admission to the franchise. Burke had watched all movements in his native country, from the Whiteboy insurrection of 1761 downwards, with steady vigilance, and he watched the new movement of 1792 with the keenest eyes. It made him profoundly uneasy. He could not endure the thought of ever so momentary and indirect an association with a revolutionary party, either in Ireland or any other quarter of the globe, yet he was eager for a policy that should reconcile the Irish. He was so for two reasons. One of them was his political sense of the inexpediency of proscribing men by whole nations, and excluding

from the franchise on the ground of religion a people as numerous as the subjects of the King of Denmark or the King of Sardinia, equal to the population of the United Netherlands, and larger than were to be found in all the states of Switzerland. His second reason was his sense of the urgency of facing trouble abroad with a nation united and contented at home; of abolishing in the heart of the country that "bank of discontent, every hour accumulating, upon which every description of seditious men may draw at pleasure."

In the beginning of 1792 Burke's son went to Dublin as the agent and adviser of the Catholic Committee, who at first listened to him with the respect due to one in whom they expected to meet the qualities of his father. They soon found out that he was utterly without either tact or judgment; that he was arrogant, impertinent, vain, and empty. Wolfe Tone declared him to be by far the most impudent and opinionative fellow that he had ever known in his life. Nothing could exceed the absurdity of his conduct, and on one occasion he had a very narrow escape of being taken into custody by the Serjeant-at-arms, for rushing down from the gallery into the Irish House of Commons, and attempting to make a speech in defence of a petition he had drawn up, that was being attacked by a member in his place. Richard Burke went home, it is said, with two thousand guineas in his pocket, which the Catholics had cheerfully paid as the price of getting rid of him. He returned shortly after, but only helped to plunge the business into further confusion, and finally left the scene covered with odium and discredit. His father's *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792) remains an admirable monument of wise statesmanship, a singular interlude of calm and solid reasoning in the midst of a fiery whirl-

wind of intense passion. Burke perhaps felt that the state of Ireland was passing away from the sphere of calm and solid reason, when he knew that Dumouriez's victory over the allies at Valmy, which filled Beaconsfield with such gloom and dismay, was celebrated at Dublin by an illumination.

Burke, now in his sixty-fourth year, had for some time announced his intention of leaving the House of Commons as soon as he had brought to an end the prosecution of Hastings. In 1794 the trial came to a close; the thanks of the House were formally voted to the managers of the impeachment; and when the scene was over Burke applied for the Chiltern Hundreds. Lord Fitzwilliam nominated Richard Burke for the seat which his father had thus vacated at Malton. Pitt was then making arrangements for the accession of the Portland Whigs to his government, and it was natural, in connection with these arrangements, to confer some favour on the man who had done more than anybody else to promote the new alliance. It was proposed to make Burke a peer under the style of Lord Beaconsfield,—a title in a later age borrowed for himself by a man of genius with inborn gifts of irony. To the title it was proposed to attach a yearly income for two or more lives. But the bolt of destiny was at this instant launched. Richard Burke, the adored centre of all his father's hopes and affections, was seized with illness and died (August 1794). We cannot look without tragic emotion on the pathos of the scene, which left the remnant of the old man's days desolate and void. A Roman poet has described in touching words the woe of the aged Nestor, as he beheld the funeral pile of his son, too untimely slain—

> Oro parumper
> Attendas quantum de legibus ipse queratur
> Fatorum et nimio de stamine, quum videt acris

> Antilochi barbam ardentem : quum quaerit ab omni
> Quisquis adest socius, cur haec in tempora duret,
> Quod facinus dignum tam longo admiserit aevo.

Burke's grief finds yet nobler expression. "The storm has gone over me, and I lie like one of those old oaks which the late hurricane has scattered about me. I am stripped of all my honours ; I am torn up by the roots and lie prostrate on the earth. . . . I am alone. I have none to meet my enemies in the gate. . . . I live in an inverted order. They who ought to have succeeded me have gone before me. They who should have been to me as posterity are in the place of ancestors."

Burke only lived three years after this desolating blow. The arrangements for a peerage, as a matter of course, came to an end. But Pitt was well aware of the serious embarrassments by which Burke was so pressed that he saw actual beggary very close at hand. The king, too—who had once, by the way, granted a pension to Burke's detested Rousseau, though Rousseau was too proud to draw it—seems to have been honourably interested in making a provision for Burke. What Pitt offered was an immediate grant of £1200 a year from the civil list for Mrs. Burke's life, to be followed by a proposition to Parliament in a message from the king, to confer an annuity of greater value upon a statesman who had served the country to his own loss for thirty years. As a matter of fact, the grant, £2500 a year in amount, much to Burke's chagrin, was never brought before Parliament, but was conferred directly by the Crown, as a charge on the four and a half per cent fund for two or more lives. It seems as if Pitt were afraid of challenging the opinion of Parliament; and the storm which the pension raised out of doors was a measure of the trouble which the defence of it would have inflicted on the government inside the House of Commons. According to the rumour of the time, Burke sold two

of his pensions upon lives for £27,000, and there was left the third pension of £1200. By and by, when the resentment of the Opposition was roused to the highest pitch by the infamous Treason and Sedition Bills of 1795, the Duke of Bedford and Lord Lauderdale, seeking to accumulate every possible complaint against the government, assailed the grant to Burke, as made without the consent of Parliament, and as a violent contradiction to the whole policy of the plan for economic reform. The attack, if not unjustifiable in itself, came from an unlucky quarter. A chief of the house of Bedford was the most unfit person in the world to protest against grants by favour of the Crown. Burke was too practised a rhetorician not to see the opening, and his *Letter to a Noble Lord* is the most splendid repartee in the English tongue.

It is not surprising that Burke's defence should have provoked rejoinder. A cloud of pamphlets followed the *Letter to a Noble Lord*—some in doggerel verse, others in a magniloquent prose imitated from his own, others mere poisonous scurrility. The nearest approach to a just stroke that I can find, after turning over a pile of this trash, is an expression of wonder that he, who was inconsolable for the loss of a beloved son, should not have reflected how many tender parents had been made childless in the profusion of blood of which he himself had been the most relentless champion. Our disgust at the pages of insult that were here levelled at a great man, is perhaps moderated by the thought that Burke himself, who of all people ought to have known better, had held up to public scorn and obloquy men of such virtue, attainments, and real service to mankind as Richard Price and Joseph Priestley.

It was during these months that he composed the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, though the third and fourth of them were not published until after his death. There have been those to whom these

compositions appeared to be Burke's masterpieces. In fact they are deplorable. They contain passages of fine philosophy and of skilful and plausible reasoning, but such passages only make us wonder how they come to be where they are. The reader is in no humour for them. In splendours of rhetoric, in fine images, in sustention, in irony, they surpass anything that Burke ever wrote, but of the qualities and principles that, far more than his rhetoric, have made Burke so admirable and so great—of justice, of firm grasp of fact, of a reasonable sense of the probabilities of things—there are only traces enough to light up the gulfs of empty words, reckless phrases, and senseless vituperations, that surge and boil around them.

It is with the same emotion of " grief and shame " with which Fox heard Burke argue against relief to dissenters, that we hear him abusing the courts of law because they did not convict Hardy and Horne Tooke. The pages against divorce and civil marriage, even granting that they point to the right judgment in these matters, express it with a vehemence that is irrational, and in the dialect, not of a statesman, but of an enraged capucin. The highly wrought passage in which Burke describes external aggrandisement as the original thought and the ultimate aim of the earlier statesmen of the Revolution, is no better than ingenious nonsense. The whole performance rests on a gross and inexcusable anachronism. There is a contemptuous refusal to discriminate between groups of men who were as different from one another as Oliver Cromwell was different from James Nayler, and between periods as unlike in all their conditions as the Athens of the Thirty Tyrants was unlike Athens after Thrasybulus had driven the Tyrants out. He assumes that the men, the policy, the maxims of the French government are the men, the policy, and the maxims of the handful of obscure miscreants

who had hacked priests and nobles to pieces at the doors of the prisons four years before. Carnot is to him merely "that sanguinary tyrant," and the heroic Hoche becomes "that old practised assassin," while the Prince of Wales, by the way, and the Duke of York are the hope and pride of nations. To heap up that incessant iteration about thieves, murderers, house-breakers, assassins, bandits, bravoes with their hands dripping with blood and their maw gorged with property, desperate paramours, bombastical players, the refuse and rejected offal of strolling theatres, bloody buffoons, bloody felons—all this was as unjust to hundreds of disinterested, honest, and patriotic men who were then earnestly striving to restore a true order and solid citizenship in France, as the scurrility of an Orangeman is unjust to millions of devout Catholics.

Burke was the man who might have been expected before all others to know that in every system of government, whatever may have been the crimes of its origin, there is sure, by the bare necessity of things, to rise up a party or an individual, whom their political instinct will force into resistance to the fatalities of anarchy. Man is too strongly a political animal for it to be otherwise. It was so at each period and division in the Revolution. There was always a party of order, and by 1795, when Burke penned these reckless philippics, order was only too easy in France. The Revolution had worn out the passion and moral enthusiasm of its first years, and all the best men of the revolutionary time had been consumed in a flame of fire. When Burke talked about this war being wholly unlike any war that ever was waged in Europe before, about its being a war for justice on the one side, and a fanatical bloody propagandism on the other, he shut his eyes to the plain fact that the Directory had after all really sunk to the moral level of Frederick and Catherine, or for that matter, of

Louis the Fourteenth himself. This war was only too like the other great wars of European history. The French government had become political, exactly in the same sense in which Thugut and Metternich and Herzberg were political. The French Republic in 1797 was neither more nor less aggressive, immoral, piratical, than the monarchies that had partitioned Poland, and had intended to redistribute the continent of Europe to suit their own ambitions. The Coalition began the game, but France proved too strong for them, and they had the worst of their game. Jacobinism may have inspired the original fire that made her armies irresistible, but Jacobinism of that stamp had now gone out of fashion, and to denounce a peace with the Directory because the origin of their government was regicidal, was as childish as it would have been in Mazarin to decline a treaty of regicide peace with the Lord Protector.

What makes the *Regicide Peace* so repulsive is not that it recommends energetic prosecution of the war, and not that it abounds in glaring fallacies in detail, but that it is in direct contradiction with the strong, positive, rational, and sane method that had before uniformly marked Burke's political philosophy. Here lay his inconsistency, not in abandoning democratic principles, for he had never held them, but in forgetting his own rules that nations act from adequate motives relative to their interests, and not from metaphysical speculation; that we cannot draw an indictment against a whole people; that there is a species of hostile justice which no asperity of war wholly extinguishes in the minds of a civilised people. "Steady independent minds," he had once said, "when they have an object of so serious a concern to mankind as *government* under their contemplation, will disdain to assume the part of satirists and declaimers." Show the thing that you ask for, he cried during the

American war, to be reason, show it to be common sense. We have a measure of the reason and common sense of Burke's attitude in the *Regicide Peace*, in the language it inspired in Windham and others, who denounced Wilberforce for canting when he spoke of peace; who stigmatised Pitt as weak and a pander to national avarice for thinking of the cost of the war; and who actually charged the liverymen of London who petitioned for peace, with open sedition.

It is a striking illustration of the versatility of Burke's moods that immediately before sitting down to write the *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace* he had composed one of the most lucid and accurately meditated of all his tracts, which, short as it is, contains ideas on free trade that were only too far in advance of the opinion of his time. In 1772 a Corn Bill had been introduced—it was passed in the following year—of which Adam Smith said that it was like the laws of Solon, not the best in itself, but the best that the situation and tendency of the times would admit. In speaking upon this measure, Burke had laid down those sensible principles on the trade in corn, which he now in 1795 worked out in the *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*. Those who do not concern themselves with economics will perhaps be interested in the singular passage, vigorously objected to by Dugald Stewart, in which Burke sets up a genial defence of the consumption of ardent spirits. It is interesting as an argument, and it is most characteristic of the author.

The curtain was now falling. All who saw him felt that Burke's life was quickly drawing to a close. His son's death had struck the final blow. We could only wish that the years had brought to him what it ought to be the fervent prayer of us all to find at the close of the long struggle with ourselves and with circumstance—a disposition to happiness, a composed spirit to which time has

made things clear, an unrebellious temper, and hopes undimmed for mankind. If this was not so, Burke at least busied himself to the end in great interests. His charity to the unfortunate emigrants from France was diligent and unwearied. Among other solid services he established a school near Beaconsfield for sixty French boys, principally the orphans of Quiberon, and the children of other emigrants who had suffered in the cause. Almost the last glimpse that we have of Burke is in a record of a visit to Beaconsfield by the author of the *Vindiciae Gallicae*. Mackintosh had written to Burke to express his admiration for his character and genius, and recanting his old defence of the Revolution. "Since that time," he said, "a melancholy experience has undeceived me on many subjects, in which I was then the dupe of my enthusiasm." When Mackintosh went to Beaconsfield (Christmas, 1796) he was as much amazed as every one else with the exuberance of his host's mind in conversation. Even then Burke entered with cordial glee into the sports of children, rolling about with them on the carpet, and pouring out in his gambols the sublimest images, mixed with the most wretched puns. He said of Fox, with a deep sigh, "He is made to be loved." There was the irresistible outbreak against "that putrid carcase, that mother of all evil—the French Revolution." It reminded him of the accursed things that crawled in and out of the mouth of the vile hag in Spenser's Cave of Error; and he repeated the nauseous stanza. Mackintosh was to be the faithful knight of the romance, the brightness of whose sword was to flash destruction on the filthy progeny.

It was on the 9th of July 1797 that, in the sixty-eighth year of his age, preserving his faculties to the last moment, he expired. With magnanimous tenderness Fox proposed that he should be buried among the great dead in Westminster Abbey; but

Burke had left strict injunctions that his funeral should be private, and he was laid in the little church at Beaconsfield. It was a terrible moment in the history of England and of Europe. An open mutiny had just been quelled in the fleet. There had been signs of disaffection in the army. In Ireland the spirit of revolt was smouldering, and in a few months broke out in the fierce flames of a great rebellion. And it was the year of the political crime of Campo Formio, that sinister pacification in which violence and fraud once more asserted their unveiled ascendancy in Europe. These sombre shadows were falling over the western world when a life went out that, notwithstanding some grave aberrations, had shed strong lights on secrets of human nature and social order.

CHAPTER X

BURKE'S LITERARY CHARACTER

A STORY is told that in the time when Burke was still at peace with the dissenters, he visited Priestley, and after seeing his library and his laboratory, and hearing how his host's hours were given to experiment and meditation, he exclaimed that such a life must make him the happiest and most to be envied of men. It must sometimes have occurred to Burke to wonder whether he had made the right choice when he locked away the fragments of his *History*, and plunged into the distraction of party and Parliament. But his interests and aptitudes were too strong and overmastering for him to have been right in doing otherwise. Contact with affairs was an indispensable condition for the full use of his great faculties, in spite of their being less faculties of affairs than of speculation. Public life was the actual field in which to test, and work out, and use with good effect the moral ideas which were Burke's most sincere and genuine interests. And he was able to bring these moral ideas into such effective use because he was so entirely unfettered by the narrowing spirit of formula. No man, for instance, who thought in formulae would have written the curious passage that I have already referred to, in which he eulogises gin, because " under the pressure of the cares and sorrows of our mortal condition, men have at all times and in all countries called in some physical aid to their moral consolation." He

valued words at their proper rate, that is to say, he knew that some of the greatest facts in the life and character of man, and in the institutions of society, can find no description and no measurement in words. Public life, as we can easily perceive, with its shibboleths, its exclusive parties, its measurement by conventional standards, its attention to small expediencies before the larger, is not a field where such characteristics are likely to make an instant effect.

Though it is not wrong to say of Burke that as an orator he was transcendent, yet in that immediate influence upon his hearers which is commonly supposed to be the mark of oratorical success, all the evidence is that Burke generally failed. We have seen how his speech against Hastings affected Miss Burney, and how the speech on the Nabob of Arcot's debts was judged by Pitt not to be worth answering. Perhaps the greatest that he ever made was that on conciliation with America; the wisest in its temper, the most closely logical in its reasoning, the amplest in appropriate topics, the most generous and conciliatory in the substance of its appeals. Yet Erskine, who was in the House when this was delivered, said that it drove everybody away, including people who, when they came to read it, read it over and over again, and could hardly think of anything else. As Moore says rather too floridly, but with truth—"In vain did Burke's genius put forth its superb plumage, glittering all over with the hundred eyes of fancy—the gait of the bird was heavy and awkward, and its voice seemed rather to scare than attract." Burke's gestures were clumsy; he had sonorous but harsh tones; he never lost a strong Irish accent; and his utterance was often hurried and eager. Apart from these disadvantages of accident which have been overcome by men infinitely inferior to Burke, it is easy to perceive, from the matter and texture of the speeches

that have become English classics, that the very qualities which are excellences in literature were drawbacks to the spoken discourses. A listener in Westminster Hall or the House of Commons, unlike the reader by his fireside in another century, is always thinking of arguments and facts that bear directly on the special issue before him. What he wishes to hear is some particularity of event or inference which will either help him to make up his mind, or justify him if his mind is already made up. Burke never neglected these particularities, and he never went so wide as to fall for an instant into vagueness, but he went wide enough into the generalities that lent force and light to his view, to weary men who cared for nothing, and could not be expected to care for anything, but the business actually in hand and the most expeditious way through it. The contentiousness is not close enough and rapid enough to hold the interest of a practical assembly, which, though it was a hundred times less busy than the House of Commons to-day, seems to have been eager in the inverse proportion of what it had to do, to get that little quickly done.

Then we may doubt whether there is any instance of an orator throwing his spell over a large audience, without frequent resort to the higher forms of commonplace. Two of the greatest speeches of Burke's time are supposed to have been Grattan's on Tithes and Fox's on the Westminster Scrutiny, and these were evidently full of the splendid commonplaces of the first-rate rhetorician. Burke's mind was not readily set to these tunes. The emotion to which he commonly appealed was that too rare one, the love of wisdom; and he combined his thoughts and knowledge in propositions of wisdom so weighty and strong, that the minds of ordinary hearers were not on the instant prepared for them.

It is true that Burke's speeches were not without

effect of an indirect kind, for there is good evidence that at the time when Lord North's ministry was tottering, Burke had risen to a position of the first eminence in Parliament. When Boswell said to him that people would wonder how he could bring himself to take so much pains with his speeches, knowing with certainty that not one vote would be gained by them, Burke answered that it is very well worth while to take pains to speak well in Parliament; for if a man speaks well, he gradually establishes a certain reputation and consequence in the general opinion; and though an Act that has been ably opposed becomes law, yet in its progress it is softened and modified to meet objections whose force has never been acknowledged directly. "Aye, sir," Johnson broke in, "and there is a gratification of pride. Though we cannot out-vote them, we will out-argue them."

Out-arguing is not perhaps the right word for most of Burke's performances. He is at heart thinking more of the subject itself than of those on whom it was his apparent business to impress a particular view of it. He surrenders himself wholly to the matter, and follows up, though with a strong and close tread, all the excursions to which it may give rise in an elastic intelligence —"motion," as De Quincey says, "propagating motion, and life throwing off life." But then this exuberant way of thinking, this willingness to let the subject lead, is less apt in public discourse than it is in literature, and from this comes the literary quality of Burke's speeches.

With all his hatred for the bookman in politics, Burke owed much of his own distinction to that generous richness and breadth of judgment which had been ripened in him by literature and his practice in it. Like some other men in our history, he showed that books are a better preparation for statesmanship than early training in the

subordinate posts and among the permanent officials of a public department. There is no copiousness of literary reference in his works, such as overabounded in civil and ecclesiastical publicists of the seventeenth century. Nor can we truly say that there is much, though there is certainly some, of that tact which literature is alleged to confer on those who approach it in a just spirit and with the true gift. The influence of literature on Burke lay partly in the direction of emancipation from the mechanical formulae of practical politics; partly in the association which it engendered, in a powerful understanding like his, between politics and the moral forces of the world, and between political maxims and the old and great sentences of morals; partly in drawing him, even when resting his case on prudence and expediency, to appeal to the widest and highest sympathies; partly, and more than all, in opening his thoughts to the many conditions, possibilities, and "varieties of untried being" in human character and situation, and so giving an incomparable flexibility to his methods of political approach.

This flexibility is not to be found in his manner and composition. That derives its immense power from other sources; from passion, intensity, imagination, size, truth, cogency of logical reason. If any one has imbued himself with that exacting love of delicacy, measure, and taste in expression, which was until our own day a sacred tradition of the French, then he will not like Burke. Those who insist on charm, on winningness in style, on subtle harmonies and exquisite suggestion, are disappointed in Burke; they even find him stiff and over-coloured. And there are blemishes of this kind. His banter is nearly always ungainly, his wit blunt, as Johnson said of it, and very often unseasonable. We feel that Johnson must have been right in declaring that though Burke was

always in search of pleasantries, he never made a good joke in his life. As is usual with a man who has not true humour, Burke is also without true pathos. The thought of wrong or misery moved him less to pity for the victim than to anger against the cause. Then, there are some gratuitous and unredeemed vulgarities; some images whose barbarity makes us shudder, of creeping ascarides and inexpugnable tapeworms. But it is the mere foppery of literature to suffer ourselves to be long detained by specks like these.

The varieties of Burke's literary or rhetorical method are very striking. It is almost incredible that the superb imaginative amplification of the description of Hyder Ali's descent upon the Carnatic should be from the same pen as the grave, simple, unadorned *Address to the King* (1777), where each sentence falls on the ear with the accent of some golden-tongued oracle of the wise gods. His stride is the stride of a giant, from the sentimental beauty of the picture of Marie Antoinette at Versailles, or the red horror of the tale of Debi Sing in Rungpore, to the learning, positiveness, and cool judicial mastery of the *Report on the Lords' Journals* (1794),[1] which Philip Francis, no mean judge, declared on the whole to be the "most eminent and extraordinary" of all his productions. Even in the coolest and driest of his pieces, there is the mark of greatness, of grasp, of comprehension. In all its varieties Burke's style is noble, earnest, deep-flowing, because his sentiment was lofty and fervid, and went with sincerity and ardent disciplined travail of judgment. Fox told Francis Horner that Dryden's prose was Burke's great favourite, and that Burke imitated him more than any one else. We may well believe that he was attracted by Dryden's ease, his copiousness, his gaiety, his manliness of

[1] *Works*, xi. 1-152.

style, but there can hardly have been any conscious attempt at imitation. Their topics were too different. Burke had the style of his subjects, the amplitude, the weightiness, the laboriousness, the sense, the high flight, the grandeur, proper to a man dealing with imperial themes, the freedom of nations, the justice of rulers, the fortunes of great societies, the sacredness of law. Burke will always be read with delight and edification, because in the midst of discussions on the local and the accidental, he scatters apophthegms that take us into the regions of lasting wisdom. In the midst of the torrent of his most strenuous and passionate deliverances, he suddenly rises aloof from his immediate subject, and in all tranquillity reminds us of some permanent relation of things, some enduring truth of human life or society. We do not hear the organ tones of Milton, for faith and freedom had other notes in the seventeenth century. There is none of the complacent and wise-browed sagacity of Bacon, for Burke's were days of eager personal strife and party fire and civil division. We are not exhilarated by the cheerfulness, the polish, the fine manners of Bolingbroke, for Burke had an anxious conscience, and was earnest and intent that the good should triumph. And yet Burke is among the greatest of those who have wrought marvels in the prose of our English tongue.

The influence of Burke on the publicists of the generation after the Revolution was much less considerable than might have been expected. In Germany, where there has been so much excellent writing about *Staatswissenschaft*, with such poverty and darkness in the wisdom of practical politics, there is a long list of writers who have drawn their inspiration from Burke. In France, publicists of the sentimental school, like Chateaubriand, and the politico-ecclesiastical school, like De Maistre, fashioned a track of their own. In England, Burke

made a deep mark on contemporary opinion during the last years of his life, and then his influence underwent a certain eclipse. The official Whigs considered him a renegade and a heresiarch, who had committed the deadly sin of breaking up the party; and they never mentioned his name without bitterness. To men like Godwin, the author of *Political Justice*, Burke was as Antichrist. Bentham and James Mill thought of him as a declaimer who lived upon applause, and who, as one of them says, was for protecting everything old, not because it was good but because it existed. In one quarter only did he exert a profound influence. His maxim that men might employ their sagacity in discovering the latent wisdom that underlies general prejudices and old institutions, instead of exploding them, inspired Coleridge, as I have already said; and the Coleridgian school are Burke's direct descendants, whenever they deal with the significance and the relations of Church and State. But they connected these views so closely with their views in metaphysics and theology, that the association with Burke was effectually disguised.

The only English writer of that age whom we can name along with Burke in the literature of enduring power, is Wordsworth, that deep-glowing representative in another field, and with many rare elements added that were all his own, of those harmonising and conciliatory forces that make man's destiny easier to him, through reverence for the past, for duty, for institutions. He was born in the year of the *Present Discontents* (1770), and when Burke wrote the *Reflections*, Wordsworth was standing, with France "on the top of golden hours," listening with delight among the ruins of the Bastille, or on the banks of the Loire, to "the homeless sound of joy that was in the sky." When France lost faith and freedom, and Napoleon had built his throne on their grave,

he began to see those strong elements which for Burke had all his life been the true and fast foundation of the social world. Wide as is the difference between an oratorical and declamatory mind like Burke's, and the least oratorical of all poets, yet under this difference of form and temper there is striking likeness in spirit. There was the same energetic feeling about moral thought and feeling, the same frame of counsel and prudence, the same love for the slowness of time, the same slight account held of mere intellectual knowledge, and even the same ruling sympathy with that side of the character of Englishmen which Burke exulted in, as "*their sullen resistance of innovation.*"

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