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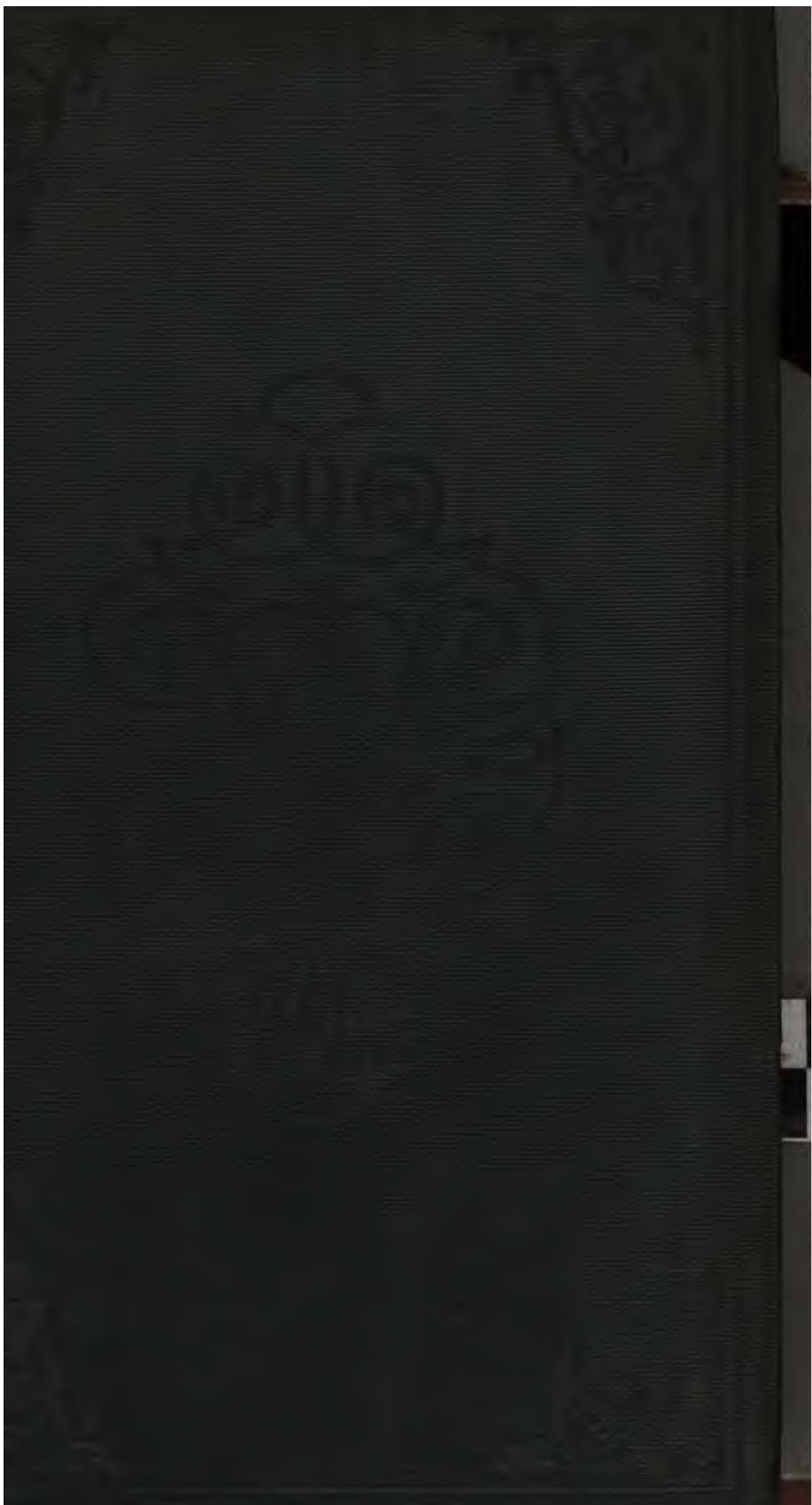
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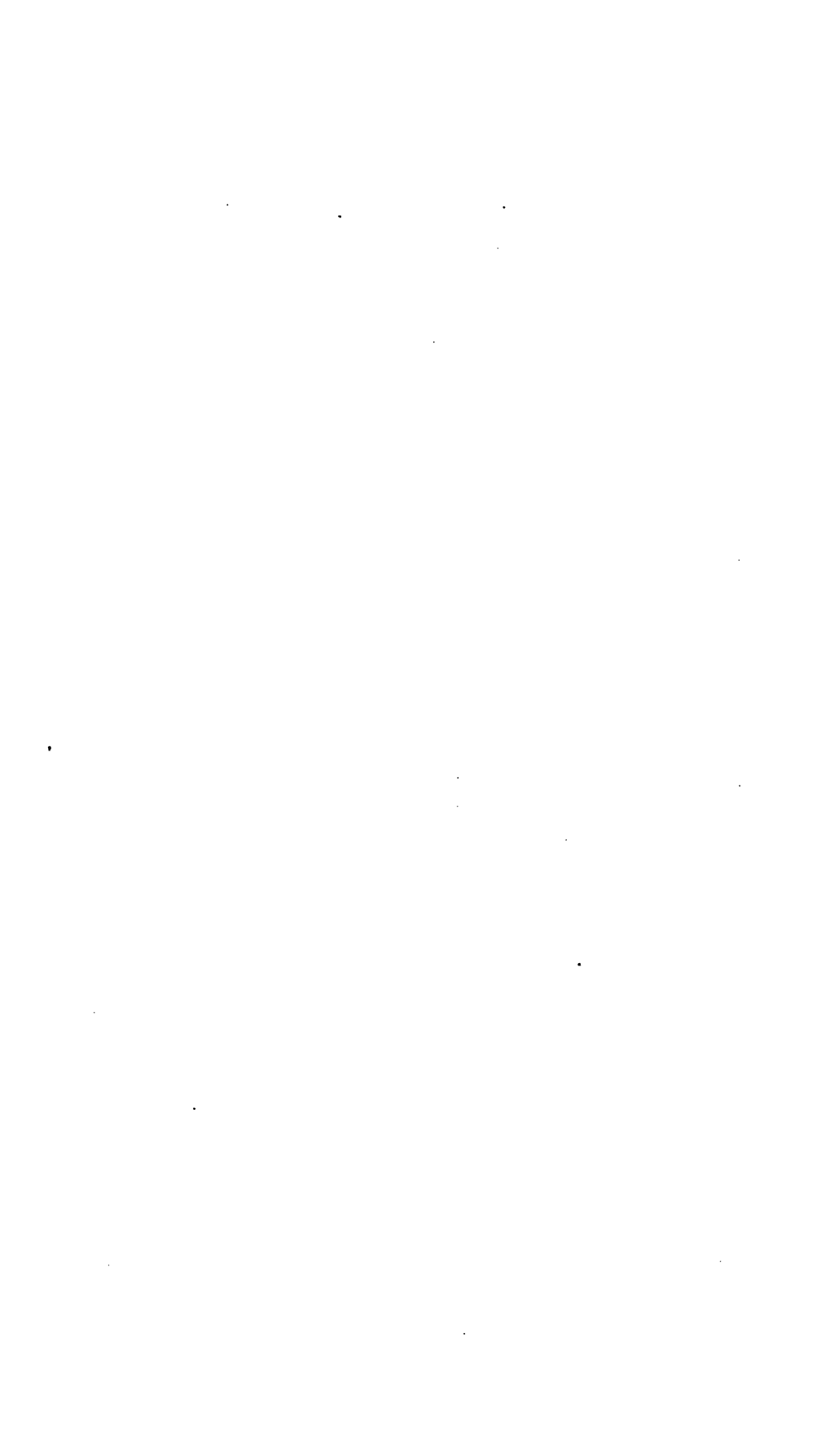
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THE  
AGE OF PITT AND FOX.

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THE  
*Age of Pitt and Fox*  
AGE OF PITT AND FOX.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“IRELAND AND ITS RULERS.”

“We may now, without any breach of public duty—without any wound to personal feelings—explore the hidden thoughts, the inward workings of those great minds which stood arrayed against each other during twenty-three stormy and eventful years.”—*QUARTERLY REVIEW C.X.L.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# THE AGE OF PITT AND FOX.

## CHAPTER I.

UPON the 19th of March, 1782, the celebrated Administration of Lord North ceased to rule. During its twelve years continuance England had been unfortunate in her affairs. Her power had been rebelled against by America ; her armies had been worsted ; her authority over Ireland began to be seriously questioned ; and her general fame was tarnished in the eyes of Europe. The results of the American war had soured the public mind. At first that fatal war had been popular ; national rights were supposed to have been invaded, and many were so senseless as to think that gain might accrue from a contest with the Colonies. But the expenses of the struggle were not felt, until the whole nation heartily repented of having ever commenced it ; and then as the people had been reckless of the



Robert Walpole. Thus the services which the Whigs had rendered to the Monarchy, gave them a claim to the respect and confidence of the King ; but like all political parties they stretched their claims too far, and they evidently thought that the Revolution of 1688 had destroyed the prerogative of the Sovereign to rule without responsible advisers, but had also created a privilege for the Whigs to advise the Crown in perpetuity.

King George the Third on coming to the Throne had resolved to assert the personal independence of the Sovereign. He ventured to think that it was not one of the principles of the Constitution, that the personage legally designated us, "The Sovereign," and "Monarch," should in reality be the vassal of any political party—of any hereditary faction—however great its wealth, or splendid the talents of its chiefs. This supposition was stigmatized as political heresy by the Whigs. They were indignant at their youthful Sovereign's presuming to think that a King should be—a King! And they were surprised at his boldness in selecting his own Ministers. Yet there were many amongst the Whig party, who rejoiced at the King's resolute determination to free himself from the thralldom in which "the great revolution families" prepared to bind him. They felt the reign of a haughty oligarchy was not merely degrading to the Sovereign, but ruinous to the claims of "new men" endowed with genius and capacity for affairs.

The King resolved to select his own Ministers, not from a desire to centralize all power in his own hands, for he proposed no change whatsoever in the tenure by which the House of Brunswick holds the Throne. He knew that an English Monarch must share his power with Parliament, but he supposed that "Parliament" and "the Whig Party" were not convertible terms. He had carried out his designs soon after his arrival on the Throne. The circumstances under which he had done so, were not altogether favourable ; his Minister Lord Bute was not well calculated for aiding in the project of liberating the Sovereign from subjection to a Whig party. Anti Jacobite prejudices were easily stimulated against a nobleman, who, in addition to his own faults, had the crime of being a Scotchman. Lord Bute succumbed to the clamour, and King George resented the resignation of the Minister, whom he considered as a deserter. A storm of indignation was raised against the King. Impudent demagogues, and a licentious press covered the royal character with calumny and slander. But the King's resolution did not give way, any more than the spirit or ambition of the Whigs. Meantime the disputes with the Colonies commenced, and the King was unable to procure Ministers with the Parliamentary talents, necessary for supporting his designs. The American war proved fatal, and he had the mortification of losing

scathed by his vices, it was not so with his public character, which was fearfully damaged by his notorious profligacy.

His parliamentary talents, and his personal character were the sources of his power. Though decidedly inferior as an orator to Bolingbroke—Chatham—and Burke, it was impossible to excel him as a debater. He seemed born for the English House of Commons. A resolute will ; a strong understanding, happily adapted for dealing with those politics which are equally remote from the details of business and the generality of speculation ; great facility of pouring forth a torrent of arguments were his chief qualities. Vehement—impassioned, staggering under his emotions, he swayed his audience, not by a vivid imagination, but by the example of his own genuine excitement. His saying “ If a speech read well, it was a bad speech,” was characteristic of his views of eloquence, which he considered solely in an English fashion. He had no set style, no monotony of round or studied periods. His illustrations were drawn from history or common life. Reasoning from facts and obvious principles, he made his hearers think with him, because he appeared to speak what he thought, and to feel like one of themselves.

“ Fox,” as an orator,” says Godwin, “ seemed to come immediately from the forming hand of Nature.

Bolingbroke, but Lord Chatham was the man who founded a party, of which the idea was to rule in accordance with the national spirit of England ; and to have no superstitious reverence for the great Revolution families. When Lord Chatham died, he was succeeded by Lord Shelburne in the advocacy of these views. During the American war both parties had been thrown together into a common Opposition to Lord North and the Courtiers, and although their views as to Colonial Policy were extremely different, they managed to carry on together with tolerable harmony. The Shelburne party cherished high notions of British supremacy, and were more attached to English Imperial authority than the Rockingham connexion were supposed to be. They were more ready to accommodate themselves to the King, and they were by no means disinclined to a bona fide Parliamentary Reform.

Both these parties might be considered as rivals in the same cause ; they were much more like each other, than either was to the Courtiers, or that fantastic popular party, which existed out of doors, of which there will be occasion to speak presently. This rivalry was the source of much jealousy between the parties of Lords Rockingham and Shelburne. And there was no little management required to keep them together. The Cabinet were composed of five of the Rockingham—and the same

number of the Shelburne party, and the latter having conceded the point of the Premiership, were desirous to secure a Chancellor of their own nomination. They desired to have Mr. Dunning nominated to that office. But the King was desirous to retain a Chancellor of his own—he insisted in keeping Lord Thurlow one of Lord North's colleagues. To this arrangement Mr. Fox and the Rockinghams readily consented, and accordingly Thurlow was made Chancellor. For long before the North Cabinet had fallen, Mr. Fox had made an ingenious attempt to detach Lord Thurlow from Lord North, in order to secure a Chancellor for his own party and prevent the Seals being given to a lawyer of the Shelburne connexion. In fact the rivalry was carried so far between the parties of the Cabinet, that when the Shelburne faction succeeded in getting a Peerage for Mr. Dunning (created Lord Ashburton)—the Rockingham section insisted that a lawyer of their party also should be ennobled, and the King consented to Sir Fletcher Norton being gazetted as Lord Grantley.\*

The King sided as far as possible with Lord

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\* "I was invited to attend at Tommy Townshend's during the formation of the Ministry, and can remember when the jealousy between the Rockingham and Shelburne parties was first betrayed by Fox's awkward manner, when he let out that the King had been seen by no one but Lord Shelburne."—(WILBERFORCE, vol. ii, p. 23.)

King's Palace, was a paradise to the Prince. He revelled in its enjoyments and courted the smiles of its fair hostess.

And in truth, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, the daughter of a noble race,† was no ordinary woman, no merely conventional leader of fashionable life. She had matchless charms—a certain grace quite peculiar to herself—and a native freshness of spirit which enhanced the effect of her lovely form. To see was to admire—to know was to love her; she could raise enthusiasm in the most frigid, and where once she cast her spell, she was sure to retain her sway. Her mind was ardent and imaginative, with a rich vein of sentiment: her affections were remarkably strong: and her soaring spirit chafed under the restrictions imposed upon her by the rules of society, and by the sedate Duke, whose mediocrity was doubly conspicuous as head of the Cavendishes, and husband of the most fascinating of women.

She had a strong understanding, and was in all respects the most accomplished lady of her time. She was mistress of several languages, was conversant with history, and understood much of the principles of politics. Amidst the many indiscretions imputed to her by a censorious world, she composed poetry, of her talents for which she had no cause to blush. For though her literary taste was not severe, yet some of her poems were

natural and simple, all of them graceful, and some affecting. Unlike other intellectual women, she had not a particle of pedantry : she despised the heavy dictionaries wrapped up in petticoats, the blotches of one sex, and the bores of the other, called "blues."

Her great fault was her rage for admiration. She aspired to all that was dazzling and brilliant, and with her ardour and artistical talents for effect seemed a great actress of aristocracy, born to captivate and delight—a woman fit to be the gaze of a nobility. Amongst the prevalent vices, gambling was pursued by ladies of fashion, and the Duchess was excessively fond of high play, by her pursuit of which she frequently brought herself into trouble. But her errors were amply atoned for by her virtues ; she had the kindest of hearts ; she was the tenderest of mothers, and gave an example to women of rank, by nursing her children.\* She was a faithful friend ; an affectionate daughter and sister ; a generous protectress of the needy and miserable ; tolerant of the infirmities, and compassionate to the sufferings of others. These

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\* A fact alluded to by Coleridge, in his lines upon her portrait.

" You were a mother ! At your bosom fed,  
 " The babes that loved you ! You with laughing eye,  
 " Each twilight thought—each nascent feeling read,  
 " Which you yourself created."

done them. Building superb castles in the air, they have lived upon earth, in the most wretched abodes. Impassioned—generous—and brave, they have never been able to keep their liberties. Profusely gifted with the elements of original genius, they have not influenced other nations, nor erected for themselves an enduring system of moral—or political laws.

Century after century has seen them rise to be defeated; to be beaten into servitude, but never into despair; never powerful against England, because never united amongst themselves. A paralytic gladiator, daring to enter the arena is the proper emblem of a people so pugnacious, though so stricken.

The causes of Irish troubles have varied in every age. For three centuries it was purely a question of races; of a superior country conquering and colonising the smaller one. Then when the inferior country had acquired privileges, a new source of disaffection was introduced. Sometimes it was the mere Irish against the Anglo-Irish: sometimes it was a question of Irish Catholics against Irish Protestants, and anon of the Protestant and Catholic Irish against England. And thus was the contest carried on through centuries of anarchy and rapine through a series of rebellions in which Ireland never attained to happiness, and in which England never procured glory.

The question with which Mr. Fox had to deal in



1782, was totally different in its moral elements, from any which Ireland had ever previously presented to England. It was a claim of the English-sprung Protestants of Ireland to the Legislative Independence of their Parliament.

The Revolution of 1688 had finally terminated in the subjection of the Irish Catholics. The island after the fall of King James was then left under the masterdom of the Protestants, who composed about a third of the population. They were of the mixed British race as it existed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—only a few Norman families were amongst them. In 1692 their correct description was a colony of English planted in Ireland : and the instability of Irish society was manifest in the fact that the landed property of the country had been four times confiscated in the seventeenth century.\*

The Government of Ireland had been carried on by a Viceroy, representing the British Monarch, and by Houses of Lords and Commons, with powers of local legislation subject to the authority of England. Her laws were in many respects similar to those of England ; her political Constitution was an imperfect species of Federal Government. But the true Constitution of a country, is its people with their genius—habits—traditions—their moral and physical resources.

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\* *Vide* the speech of Lord Chancellor Clare on the Union.

Parliamentary supremacy of England. The politics of Molyneux and Swift were revived again with energy.

It was in this state of things that the Irish public mind was inflamed to its highest pitch by the eloquence and enthusiasm of Henry Grattan, a man who would have been conspicuous in Athens or Rome, even in their proudest days. To remarkable natural gifts, he united great industry, high courage, and a mind tenacious of its purpose. Of singular ardour, his character was so enthusiastic, and his intellect so versatile, that he seemed born to excel. Fame as a poet, supremacy in the senate, the highest success in the learned professions—all were in the reach of one, who added patient industry to the highest genius. At first his bent of mind urged him to poetry, for which he had all the qualifications, as the novelty, variety, and beauty of his ideas, and his masterdom over language incontestably evince. Nominally studying for the Bar, he led, during his early manhood in England, the life of a poet and philosopher. He delighted in wandering through Windsor forest by moonlight, and by his peculiar habits—his abstraction—his impassioned temper—his solitary life, gave to some the opinion that he was out of his senses. But Oliver Goldsmith, who casually met Grattan at the Temple, could distinguish between the symptoms of

long as the meanest cottager in Ireland has a link of the British chain clanking to his rags ; he may be naked, he shall not be in iron ; and I do see the time is at hand, the spirit is gone forth, the declaration is planted ; and though great men should apostatize, yet the cause will live ; and though the public speaker should die, yet the immortal fire shall outlast the organ which conveyed it ; and the breath of liberty like the word of the holy man, shall not die with the prophet, but survive him. I shall move you that the King's most excellent Majesty, and the Lords and Commons of Ireland are the only power competent to make laws for Ireland.\*

His splendid speech on this occasion was not merely remarkable by its fire and energy ; it was replete with great political wisdom, and exhibited as great powers of reflection as of imagination. "Moderation," he finely observed, "is but a relative term ; for nations, like men, are only safe in proportion to the spirit they put forth, and the proud contemplation with which they survey themselves. Conceive yourselves a plantation, ridden by an oppressive Government, and every thing you have done, is but a fortunate phrenzy ; conceive yourselves to be what you are, a great, a growing, and a proud nation, and a declaration of right, is no more than the safe exercise of your indubitable authority."

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\* Speeches, (Madden's Edition page 63)

ment, but as an Englishman, he not unreasonably thought that the idea of two Independent Parliaments in one Empire, was as absurd as two commanders-in-chief to an army, or two Sovereigns to one Kingdom. He found, however, that the Irish were bent on having a free Parliament; he saw that it was not the claim of a mere populace, or a band of frothy demagogues; he beheld the first persons in the island—Lord Charlemont—Lords Kingsborough and Clanricarde, and the heads of the Irish gentry leading the people on. Having no troops to oppose the Volunteers, he determined, if possible, to manage the Irish Popular leaders; and his first stroke of policy was if possible to gain time—to procrastinate his decision, and to win over, some of the Irish patriots. For his Lord Lieutenant, he chose the Duke of Portland—the head of a great Whig House—a staunch partizan of Lord Rockingham—a man of no talents—and much infirmity of purpose—his merits were his Dukedom, and his Whiggery, but he was not below the average qualities of a Vice-Roy for Ireland, whose principal business is to leave matters as he finds them.\* But the Chief Secretary, Richard Fitzpatrick, was a man of parts, and deserves notice, not only for his own sake, but because he was a choice example of a school of men and manners, now departed.

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\* He makes a pitiful figure in the Malmesbury Correspondence. Vol. ii. Pages 482 to 495.

request of Mr. Fox. But Grattan vehemently exclaimed, "No time, no time", and, being himself too ill to write, dictated a letter to the cabinet, "that they could not delay, that they were pledged to the people, that they could not postpone the question."\* Accordingly, on the sixteenth of April, Grattan entered the Irish House of Commons, contrary to the expectation of those who knew his bad health. He made a long statement of Irish rights, and in a triumphant tone expatiated upon the prospects of Irish Liberty. He stated his terms for supporting the Government were, the abolition of the legislative power of the privy council; the abrogation of the claim of England to make laws for Ireland; the dependency of the Irish Army on the Irish Parliament; the exclusion of the English Courts of Law from any judicial authority in Ireland. He then moved an address to the King, stating, "that the Crown of Ireland is an Imperial Crown, inseparably annexed to Great Britain; on which connection the interests and happiness of both nations essentially depend; but that the kingdom of Ireland is a distinct kingdom, with a Parliament of her own, the sole Legislature thereof." The address was supported by all the principal Irish Commoners, the Brownlows, Ponsonbys, Ogles, and Conollys, and by John Fitzgibbon, a man destined to play a most influential part in the times that were approach-

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\* "Grattan's Life by his Son, vol. ii.

Irish impulse is added ; to his hereditary stubbornness the growing youth acquires vehemence, and in the progress of a few years the marks of his forefathers are erased from the man's personal character. It was so with the descendants of the Cromwellian and Williamite invaders. They also became, in the process of time, a nation, equally distinct from their English ancestors, as from the Catholic Irish. Thus the island had two distinct nations ; two moral essences of a different nature. The upper nation of Protestants held the lower one of Catholics in absolute slavery, and, like all masters of slaves, they became intolerably proud, and cherished their own liberties with increased attachment.\* While they stinted the civil privileges of the Catholic helots, they revelled in the enjoyment of their own exalted tyranny. But when they came in contact with England, they were doomed to mortification. They were treated, as Irish and inferior ; they grew angry and patriotic, and repaid English superciliousness by exhibiting national hostility. Their trade was fettered by the greater country ; and their personal ambition thwarted in various ways. With the estates of the ancient Irish chieftains, the upstarts who raised themselves on the ruins of the

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\* " In a people, who are masters of slaves, but not slaves themselves, the haughtiness of domination combines with the spirit of freedom, fortifies it, and renders it invincible." (BURKE, on Conciliation with the Colonies.)

admit, must be my wish as an Englishman ; that this connexion may be such as may consist with the peace and happiness of Ireland, I must wish as a Whig, and as one who professes to hold the national rights of mankind far more sacred than any local prejudices whatever.”\* These words he addressed to Grattan about a fortnight after the declaration of rights. In the interim he received letters from the Duke of Portland, informing him of the state of Ireland. It seemed that the Lord Lieutenant did not despair of a compromise with the Irish demands. But his expectations were vain. The Irish leaders were resolved that the 6th, George the First—the statute of Imperial authority, should be repealed, and Grattan was determined to use the force of the Volunteers. The English Ministers had no army to cope with them. Their overtures for a compromise were rejected. The time approached for fighting or concession. They had no other course left them but to yield.

Accordingly, on the 17th of May, the affairs of Ireland were brought under the notice of the English Parliament, by Lord Shelburne, and Mr. Fox.† The Cabinet announced its intention of concession. It proposed that both Houses should declare that “the act of 6th, George 1st., entitled “an act for the

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\* See the correspondence in Grattan's Life, vol. ii.

† Parl. Deb. vol. xxiii. Pages, 16—35.

age, was seen to spend his mental strength in the inglorious contests of factious agitation ; a malignant defamer of the finest spirits of his time, he became an incarnation of envy ; and realizing Ovid's description of that passion, he was the instrument of his own punishment. But let none too harshly chide the failings of such a man. His case was a remarkable instance of intellectual misery. Panting to engage in debate with the parliamentary orators ; feeling a proud consciousness that he could tower over the Barrés, and the Courtneys, and all the lesser gladiators, and that he could dare a struggle with the chiefs of parliament ; he saw himself perpetually excluded from all hope of disputing the palm of political eloquence. Those who by the failure of some physical organ, have been arrested in the career of personal distinction, may form a faint notion of the discomfiture of spirit endured by Horne Tooke.

To the exertions of Wilkes and Tooke, aided by the licence of the London rabble, is to be traced the birth of that spirit of false democracy which under various names duped thousands ; and disturbed English society for the succeeding sixty years. One picture of the tribunes of that licentious party answers for their character and purposes at all periods of their history. What knaves ! what slanderers of England and its institutions ! and side by side with the charlatans and adventurers, what vain,



and futile theorists, imbecile in devising good, influential in aggravating evils! The aristocratic gambler, driven to politics from his craving for excitement; the notorious profligate, declaiming in favour of political purity; the vain dreamer, the fantastic schemer, the puerile theorist, seeking food for their vanity in public notoriety, or hoping by popular connections to impart strength to their weak abilities: such are the leaders who periodically return for the disturbance and delusion of the untaught and neglected masses, who smoulder in the purlieus of our great towns. With them are mixed, perchance, some antiquarian dotard, who sees perfection in the parchment constitutions of former ages. His honest folly contrasts with the coarse ambition of the bloated Aldermen seeking to buy popular applause at so much *per* shout. And hearken to yon briefless barrister, advertising his fluency of vituperation, while "hear him" are cried by the quack, who has risen into bad eminence by calumniating the faculty, or by the clergyman, whose vices have deprived him of his parish! Such are the prominent figures of that grovelling school of Reform, founded by Wilkes and Horne Tooke, and continued to later generations, by their equally vicious, but far more contemptible successors. For in truth the polluted characters of the tribunes of the British populace did more for half a century to retard the growth of a true public spirit, and to confirm the

presentative system to be branded as a close monopoly—that system under which a stranger to England—an Irishman, without wealth, or aristocratic connexions—could place himself at the head of the Whig Opposition—and take a large part in swaying the public councils? Nor in making this question, did he listen to the voice of vanity. If Burke had been a selfish man, if he had been of a mean or malignant nature, he might have made it matter of charge against the English system, that with all his unrivalled accomplishments—and capacity for affairs—he should have been excluded from the Cabinet of Lord Rockingham; *he*, who had given a creed to the aristocratic Whigs of his time; *he*, who by his genius had cast lustre on his party—*he* not to have been admitted to that Cabinet of which the Chancellorship of the Exchequer was conferred upon the ungifted scion of one of “the great Revolution families,”—the mediocre Lord John Cavendish. But Burke was morally incapable of avenging his personal wrongs upon the institutions of the country. So that he was enabled to fulfil a lofty mission—he cared little for the transient dignity of an official station. Though his talents did not receive an external reward, yet his mind partook of a lofty consciousness. He saw himself honoured by the discerning, and revered by the wise of all parties, He heard the glowing language in which the leading

men of every Profession in the country spoke of his powers and character. He beheld the Tory prejudice and honest bigotry of Johnson melt into generous admiration. He witnessed the anxiety of the gifted Fox to learn from his superior wisdom and experience. He heard Dunning—the friend and adherent of Lord Shelburne (the nominal ally but personal enemy of Burke) burst into a passionate eulogy of his powers. Of his speech on Economical Reform he heard Dunning say, what is applicable to nearly all the great efforts of his master intellect, “It must remain as a monument to be handed down to posterity of his uncommon zeal, unrivalled industry, astonishing abilities, and invincible perseverance. He had undertaken a task big with labour and difficulty, yet such were the eminent and unequalled abilities—so extraordinary the talents and ingenuity, and so fortunate the frame of the honourable gentleman’s mind, his vast capacity and happy conception, that in his hands what must have proved a vast heap of ponderous matter, composed of heterogeneous ingredients, discordant in their nature and opposite in principle, was so skilfully arranged, as to become quite simple as to each respective part, dependent on each other ; and the whole at the same time so judiciously combined, as to present nothing, to almost every mind tolerably intelligent,

discrimination between a man and his order, between a class and an institution. This feeling of individuality interposes self generated obstacles to the tyranny of democratic purposes. It gives a reasonable moderation to the workings of the passion, and makes its votaries discriminative and reflecting. Leading them to deliberate, it causes their actions to be guided by a moral purpose. And thus the citizen rebel of England, with his passions kindled to fury, can never become such an object for reprobation as the corsairs of French, the money-grubs of American, or the scowling assassins of Spanish Democracy.

Thus in his objections to reform, Burke did not sufficiently consider the national character of the English. He committed an error also in thinking that a discredited system could stand without reform. The dangers to be apprehended from the bad Reformer, he should have guarded against, by taking up the question himself. Lord Chatham was as little inclined to the government of the rabble as Burke; yet he did not anticipate evil from a Parliamentary Reform. The sincerity of Lord Chatham's views in favour of Reform was visible in the readiness with which his son, William Pitt, acceded to the request of the Reformers, that he would bring the question forward. Besides, the spirit of the times was eminently favourable for making a political change.

There was existing that amount of public displeasure which gave energy to innovation ; yet it was not at that period of so deep and malignant nature as to have suggested fears of revolution.

Such was the spirit prevalent in the nation, when Mr. Pitt entered upon the public scene, the political community being divided between the Church and King, or Tory party ; the Whigs, or aristocratic party ; and the popular, including the commercial classes.