

## CHAPTER X

### THE PRINCE OF WALES. FOX AND SHELBURNE. COALITION WITH NORTH. 1782-1783

#### I

WE have seen what the King thought of Fox. What Fox thought of the King is indicated in a letter written to Fitzpatrick in September, 1781: "I agree with you in thinking that the people of this country in general deserve no pity, and certainly the King still less. . . . Indeed, indeed, it is intolerable to think that it should be in the power of one blockhead to do so much business." Each was genuinely convinced that the other was a menace to the country, and neither was given to the arts of evasion when he felt deeply. But, in the King's attitude at least, there was another and more personal source of mistrust. Whatever may be said for or against George Frederick, Prince of Wales, there is no doubt that he was an exceedingly unsatisfactory son, and there is none that his studied misconduct in filial respects was as much the consequence of his father's folly as of his own defects. George III. had a strict sense of responsibility towards his children, but he had not any conception of helping them to grow up in the development of natural domestic affections. He ruled them as he attempted to rule his ministers, parliament, and the people. Of intentional unkindness he was innocent, but a steady application of discipline without the smallest reference to the minds to be disciplined had particularly in his eldest son induced a habit of bridling resentment. We have seen how the Prince as a child would break out into little storms of revolt. As he grew to manhood, a naturally intemperate character nursed a growing hostility towards a father whom he had come to regard rather as a jailer than as a friend. This explains, if it does not excuse,



the unseemly spectacle of a King, whose private manners were irreproachable, being treated by his heir with open contempt and ridicule. The Prince's graver misdemeanours were accompanied by petty discourtesies designed in wanton offence. When he was to dine with the King, he invariably arrived an hour late. His uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, whose own quarrels with the King found a graceless satisfaction in turning the Prince's apartments in the Queen's House into a combined gambling-den, pawn-shop, and brothel, taught a ready pupil to disregard the common civilities as he passed his father in the corridors of the palace. "When we hunt together," the King pathetically complained, "neither my son nor my brother speak to me; and lately, when the chase ended at a village where there was but a single postchaise to be hired, my son and brother got into it, and drove to London, leaving me to go home in a cart if I could find one." On being asked why he endured it, "What can I do?" he replied. "If I resent it they will make my son leave me, and break out, which is what they wish."

The Duke of Cumberland, however, was a boor, and his company began to pall on a Prince who affected some elegance in his profligacy. He took to calling his nephew "Taffy," and was told to mend his manners. The young man found a far more agreeable associate in Charles Fox, to whose example the King began to attribute his son's conduct. Charles's considerate charm towards the feelings of others, outside the conventions of debate, was universally allowed, and there is not the least reason to believe that at any time he could have encouraged the Prince's ungainly displays of rudeness. But his influence in other ways was undeniable, and it was highly distasteful to the King. Fox liked the Prince, and also he knew that his political connection as heir, and potentially as regent, was a power that might prove of immense weight in opposing a sovereign from whom liberal opinions



could never hope for support. It is as foolish to assert that Fox corrupted the morals of his young friend and patron, as it would be to pretend that he moderated them by prudent counsel. The Prince, who became a member of Brooks's in 1784, was not likely to find in Fox any reluctance to share his fortunes at Newmarket or the tables, or to meet as many pledges as he liked to give in audit ale and claret.

Shortly before North's defeat, a more complicated anxiety had disturbed the King's relations with his heir. In August, 1781, George wrote to his minister, "I am sorry to be obliged to open a subject to L<sup>d</sup>. North that has long given me much pain. . . . My eldest son got last year into a very improper connection with an actress and woman of indifferent character . . . a multitude of letters past, which she had threatened to publish unless he, in short, bought them of her. He made her very foolish promises, which, undoubtedly, by her conduct to him, she entirely cancelled. I have thought it right to authorize the getting them from her . . . [and now learn that she will return them] on receiving £5000, undoubtedly an enormous sum; but I wish to get my son out of this shameful scrape. . . . I am happy at being able to say that I never was personally engaged in such a transaction, which perhaps makes me feel this the stronger." The lady in question was Mary Robinson, a young woman of great beauty, whose education had been directed by no less a person than Miss Hannah More. She first attracted the attention of the Prince in 1778, during her performance of Perdita in *A Winter's Tale*. Clandestine trysts in Kew Gardens were arranged, she became his mistress, and received from him a bond for twenty thousand pounds to be paid on his reaching the age of twenty-one. She has left her own account of their first meeting. "A few words, and those scarcely articulated, were uttered by the Prince, when a noise of people



approaching from the palace startled us. The moon was now rising, and the idea of his royal highness being seen out at so unusual an hour, terrified the whole groupe. After a few more words of the most affectionate nature, uttered by the prince, we parted. The rank of the prince no longer chilled into awe that being who now considered him as the lover and the friend. The graces of his person, the tenderness of his melodious, yet manly, voice, will be remembered by me, till every vision of this changing scene shall be forgotten." In three years Perdita's charm had lost its hold on her royal lover, who was at length, in 1784, induced by Fox to redeem his bond by a pension of five hundred pounds a year. Charles's solicitude was generous, but it cannot be said to have been wholly disinterested. In September, 1782, Lady Sarah Lennox, who had recently become Lady Sarah Napier, wrote to Lady Susan O'Brien,\* "I hear Charles saunters about the streets, and brags that he has not taken a pen in hand since he was out of place [he resigned in July as we shall see]. Pour se désennuyer he *lives* with Mrs. Robinson, goes to Sadler's Wells with her, and is all day figuring away with her. I long to tell him he does it to show that he is superior to Alcibiades, for *his* courtesan forsook him when he was unfortunate, and Mrs. Robinson takes *him* up." And Walpole, in November, has a fragmentary note: "Fox's idleness and love for Mrs. Robinson." Contemporary opinion thought highly of Perdita as an actress; she also was a poet, and

\* *Née* Lady Susan Fox Strangways, Lord Ilchester's daughter, the niece of Lord Holland, and so Charles's cousin, and kinswoman to her lifelong friend Lady Sarah, of whom we have already heard. See *Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox*, 1910. Her marriage to the actor William O'Brien caused something of a county sensation, which is obliquely recorded on a mural tablet in the church of Mr. Hardy's Melstock. Local society did not care for association with the handsome actor, and preferred to celebrate him as "Receiver General of Dorset."



if not a very distinguished one, she had sufficient intelligence to enliven her celebrated beauty. Her society must have been very agreeable, and Charles might have done a good deal worse than spend his evenings with her at Sadler's Wells. In 1799, she "undertook the poetical department of *The Morning Post*," but died in the following year at the age of forty-two. The gossip of the time had it that the King suspected Fox of having acted an accommodating part in her introduction to the Prince; that Charles did so there is not the slightest evidence, but it is not unlikely that the King was as ready to believe this as anything else to his detriment.

## II

Fox took up his new task with enthusiasm. "I am very well in health and spirits," he had written a few months before, when the prospects of office were still uncertain. Now success invigorated him, and he still further braced his habits to the obligations of his work. "He never touched a card," says Lord Holland, "and was during all his three short administrations assiduous in his duties." Members of Brooks's who had paid up arrears of subscription in order that they might boast of familiarity with a minister, were mortified by his prolonged absence. At once he showed that he meant to use power firmly but modestly. Industry, and a knowledge of home and foreign affairs such as surprised men far older and more experienced than himself, were supplemented by candour and good humour. His secretaries saw from the first that he knew what he wanted, and respected an energy and decision that were not wasted in vexatious meddling. He gave himself no airs, and he stood no nonsense. He was a man of the world, and declined to sacrifice reality to doctrinaire policy or the prejudices of class. Anyone who wanted to see him could



do so, but he had little patience with ignorance, and none with sophistry. All the natural graces of his character expanded in authority, and he spared neither labour nor good-will to make himself worthy of a place that he earnestly wished to enjoy to his own and the public good. He knew that his association with the King would demand tact, and he was prepared to exercise it. Had this been his most serious difficulty, he might well have made a great thing of his first term of major office. But the Rockingham ministry of 1782 was divided in itself, and moreover its chief was a dying man.

William Petty, second Earl of Shelburne, was at this time forty-five years of age; Rockingham, seven years older. The leader was a Whig without compromise, determined to oppose the obnoxious system of crown influence to the extent of his not very remarkable capacities. Shelburne, on the other hand, was a Whig whose principles had become embittered by political conflict, and whose character, while it did not lack courage, had a slippery habit. Fixed as he had been in his condemnation of the American war, he had always sympathised with the royal views on independence, and it was to him that the King looked for support in the new ministry. It was with him that the King held personal conversations at the very moment when Rockingham was preparing his cabinet list, actually declining to see the Prime Minister himself, and sending all messages through the favoured Secretary. Fox knew this, and was filled with misgivings. No sooner had they been appointed, than he told Shelburne to his face that he saw plainly "that the administration was to consist of two parts, one belonging to the King, and the other to the public." The observation was just, but it was a bad beginning. Worse followed when Shelburne took it upon himself to fill a vacant seat in the cabinet, informing Rockingham



that he had invited Dunning to become Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, with a barony.

Parliament met on April 8 under the new government. On the 12th, Fox reported to Fitzpatrick that at the cabinet meeting of that day there had already been high words, and on the 15th that another meeting had been "very teasing and wrangling." On the 28th, "Shelburne shows himself more jealous of my encroaching on his department, and wishing very much to encroach on mine. He affects the minister more and more every day, and is, I believe, perfectly confident that the King intends to make him so." So difficult is the situation, that already Charles is contemplating loss of office, saying that if they can remain in long enough to deal "a good stout blow to the influence of the crown" it does not matter how soon they are out, leaving Shelburne to form what government he can. Fox's letters to Fitzpatrick were addressed to Dublin Castle, where his friend was acting as secretary to the Duke of Portland, who was Lord-Lieutenant. The pacification of Ireland was the first business of the new ministers, as a preliminary to clearing up the foreign chaos. In this undertaking, Fox had suspicions, confirmed by Fitzpatrick, that Shelburne was saying one thing in the House of Lords, and another to Portland.

While Shelburne was unable to make headway in the cabinet, his interest grew with the King. Proposals brought forward by him were rejected, among them one for bringing North to public trial, but when Rockingham brought forward his own for reforming the court influence and establishment, it was to Shelburne that the King turned for relief, conducting with him a highly improper correspondence, in which he asked how Rockingham could best be circumvented. It soon became perfectly clear to his colleagues that Shelburne must either leave the cabinet or wreck it. North's friends were still able



as often as not to carry a division; it was bad enough for a government to be living on a wisp of a majority, and uncertain at that, but to be continually harassed by the intrigues of one of its own members was intolerable.

These were all rather disgusting quarrels, and had Charles's record during the Rockingham administration amounted to no more than even an honourable part in them, there is little that could be said for it. But there was much beside. Writing to Sir Horace Mann in May of the already critical condition of the ministry, Walpole fears for what will happen "unless some master-genius gains the ascendant. Mr. Fox alone seems to be such a man. He already shines as greatly in Place as he did in Opposition, though infinitely more difficult a task." As Foreign Secretary he carried out a very solid term of work in negotiating peace with France. When the government was a week old, a cabinet minute was entered recommending that the King direct Mr. Fox to open treaty with Holland.\* The transaction hung fire, and Fox, anxious to do something that might restore British connections on the continent, made approaches to the King of Prussia, who, however, was old, and all for keeping himself to himself. Of greater importance was the French question, and in this again Fox found himself in conflict with Shelburne: By a fatuous arrangement then prevailing in the machinery of government, the conduct of foreign affairs was jointly in the hands of the two Secretaries of State,† and while Shelburne's commissioner was treating with Benjamin Franklin in Paris, Fox's was treating with the French minister in the same city, and a pretty game of cross *espionage* ensued, in

\* An amusing phrase with a modern connotation occurs in a letter from Fox to Fitzpatrick: "People here are very sanguine of peace with Holland; I *doubt*—I don't think." The italics are Charles's.

† Shelburne had the Northern Department—*i.e.*, America (with Ireland); Fox, the Southern—*i.e.*, Europe.



which Shelburne was the more cunning adept. On May 18, however, Fox was empowered to instruct his representative to treat specifically for peace both with France and America, with full acknowledgment of the latter's independence. The negotiations were of great length, and to-day make very dull reading. But Fox at every step discovered what he believed to be traces of Shelburne's duplicity. To follow in detail the voluminous correspondence by which Charles attempted to keep himself informed of every move in the business, is to be convinced that the traces were no hallucination. And Walpole's testimony, prejudiced as it may be, has his usual air of convincing shrewdness. "His falsehood," he says of Shelburne, "was so constant and notorious, that it was rather his profession than his instrument. . . . He feared neither danger nor detection. He was so fond of insincerity as if he had been the inventor, and practised it with as little caution as if he thought nobody else had discovered the secret." Even the King had spoken of him as "the Jesuit of Berkeley Square." For Fox to run in double harness with such a man was impossible. How he would have concluded negotiations so delicate, and so hampered by intrigue, we cannot tell. In their midst, on July 1, Rockingham died; and John Wesley was able to note in his journal: "He lately had forty thousand a year in England, and fifteen or twenty in Ireland. And what has he now? Six foot of earth." The King, during the illness of his first minister, sent no enquiry as to his condition. Shelburne was asked to form a ministry. Charles represented to the King that the Earl was not a person who would carry the confidence of his colleagues or the country, was snubbed for his pains, and refused to take office in the reconstruction. It is probable that even had Rockingham lived, Charles would have declined to continue the pretence of co-operation with Shelburne. The most acute



difference between them at the end was on the question of American independence. After the first proposals to Paris, Fox was convinced that acknowledgment of this was essential as a first measure, and should not be reserved as part of a general treaty. Shelburne, partly by conviction, and partly in deference to the King, whom he now used every occasion to conciliate, opposed the motion with great vigour, while assuring Franklin that not Fox, but he himself, was the true friend to whom America should look. That America needed no such assurances from either quarter, does not add to Shelburne's honours.

### III

Shelburne held power for eight months. Most of Rockingham's ministers remained with him, Lord John Cavendish alone following Fox in resigning from cabinet rank. Strong pressure was brought upon Charles to persuade him that to go out was desertion, the Duke of Richmond being importunate almost to the point of a personal quarrel. "The Duke of Richmond," wrote Shelburne to the King on July 4, "condemns in very strong terms Mr. Fox's precipitate and unadvis'd conduct."\* On June 30, in expectation of Rockingham's death, he had written: "The second [point] respects the weight which Your Majesty would think it proper to give Mr. Fox in case of any new arrangement. I have since Fryday seen the most material persons. . . . I find it the opinion of *all* that no Price is too great to pay to obtain the continuance of that description of Men, if it be but for the present, who I very plainly see are too open to be operated upon by Mr. Fox's Habits, Assiduity and Address."† But Charles knew that there could be no accommodation between Shelburne and himself, and was firm in his refusal. By far the most notable addition

\* Fortescue, vol. vi., p. 75.

† *Idem.*, p. 69.



made by Shelburne to the cabinet was that occasioned by Cavendish's resignation. At the age of twenty-three William Pitt became Chancellor of the Exchequer. This was a blow to one of Fox's cherished hopes, but it was not wholly unexpected. During the Rockingham session, Pitt had been equivocal in a support that Fox was learning to value beyond that of any other man in the House. "I wish I could say I was quite as well satisfied in regard to the other person," Fox had written of Pitt in May: "he is very civil and obliging, profuse of compliment in public, but he has more than once taken a line that has alarmed me." It was the beginning of a breach that steadily widened. Pitt's cool deliberation, his fixed desire for power, and his confident self-esteem, must always have been at odds with Fox's impulsive and lonely genius. But at the opening of his career there seemed to be promise of an understanding between the two greatest political minds of their age, that might have ripened into a union of incalculable benefit to their country. We have seen examples of Fox's earlier kindness to the younger man. And now in office he had been no less generous. Writing as Secretary of State to the King on April 30, 1782, he referred handsomely to a suggestion put forward by "Mr. William Pitt in one of the most eloquent speeches that ever was made."\* Not only was the older man foremost in recognising the almost unexampled talents of the younger, he also admired his fresh and eager courage with something that might easily have been fired into affection. Moreover, Pitt at first showed signs of an enlightened enthusiasm, that encouraged Fox to hope that here was a youth who might become incomparably a partner and friend in his own liberal ambitions. Pitt's first motion of consequence in the House had been for parliamentary reform, and Fox had supported it in defeat. But Pitt's character was

\* Fortescue, vol. v., p. 507.



developing away from Fox's ideals, and his alliance with Shelburne left Charles disillusioned. After Shelburne's accession there was but one sitting of parliament before recess; it was taken up by ministerial explanations, during which Pitt observed that it must appear that Mr. Fox had resigned not on grounds of public interest but in the disappointment of his own hopes of preferment to chief office.

#### IV

Charles was still but thirty-three, and was not likely to be inconsolable in any reverse of fortune. He took to his clubs again, he went a-roving with Mrs. Robinson as we have seen, and he further cultivated the society of the Prince, who dined with him on the day of his resignation, and assured him that he should always look on Rockingham's friends as the men most to be relied upon in the country. Charles at this time used to hold levees at his St. James's Street lodgings, and there the Prince frequently attended. Our modern standards of hygiene may be startled by Walpole's picture of the scene, but it is to be remembered that hot and cold water on the latest plan was not then a feature of domestic architecture, and that the famous elegance of the eighteenth century veneered a mortal deal of dirt. Not much change in these matters had taken place in the century since Pepys, having washed his feet, and finding that it gave him a cold, decided not to wash them again. Charles, then, rising late, would receive his disciples, "his bristling black person, and shaggy breast quite open, and rarely purified by any ablutions, was wrapped in a foul linen night-gown, and his bushy hair dishevelled. In these cynic weeds, and with epicurean good-humour, did he dictate his politics, and in this school did the heir of the crown attend his lessons and imbibe them." A little untidy, no doubt, but they must have been tonic parties



for a young man who had been brought up in the prim austerities of Kew and the Queen's House. And if a bottle was sometimes opened, it does not appear that the Prince was obliged to go to St. James's Street for a drink when he wanted it.\*

During the recess Shelburne was employed in the negotiations for peace with America and France, and the assembling of parliament was postponed until December 5, in the hope that he might be able to announce his success in both endeavours. As the date approached, it was realised that, while preliminary articles had been signed with America, the French difficulties could not be solved in time, and the ministers hurriedly investigated possible means of strengthening their position in what promised to be a very dissatisfied House. Shelburne, deciding that among the men out of office North still had the greatest number of votes at his command, conveniently forgot his anxiety for a public trial, and proposed to approach the former minister. Pitt flatly declined to take part in any such arrangement, but advised a further appeal to Fox. It was Shelburne's turn to decline. He had opened his mind too freely to the King to allow such a move, even had his own inclinations permitted. On July 16 he had written, enclosing a paper, "the contents [of which] must decide on Fox's character with the Publick, if they are ever call'd for by Parliament. I am afraid Mr. Fox has none to lose with Your Majesty."† And on August 7 His Majesty expressed strong approval of a scheme to keep Shelburne informed of the "connections of each individual" in the House of Commons;

\* The third Lord Holland notes on the above passage from Walpole: "This description, though of course a strong caricature, yet certainly has much humour, and I must needs acknowledge, from my boyish recollection of a morning in St. James's Street, some truth to recommend it."

† Fortescue, vol. vi. p. 88.



such a provision being "very material to counteract the Activity of Mr. Fox, who every honest Man . . . must wish to the utmost to keep out of Power."\* Thus the session opened with relations tautly strained between the first minister and the brilliant young Chancellor, who was to be by far the most important government voice in the Commons. The King, in his speech from the Throne, acknowledged the independence of America in words that left no doubt as to his feelings. "In thus admitting their separation from the crown of these Kingdoms, I have sacrificed every consideration of my own to the wishes and opinions of my people." In the debate on the Address, Fox said, "If any peer should dare to impeach the Earl of Shelburne for having done this, although it has been said that 'it would be the ruin of the country, and he would be a traitor who should do it,' I will stand up as his advocate—I will defend him against such artful and insidious charges—I will hold him harmless, and protect him from the accusation of 'having dared to give away the right of Great Britain,' and pledge myself that the recognition of the independence of America shall not be 'stained with the blood of the Minister who should sign it.'" The stroke was a deft one. The words that Fox quoted had been Shelburne's own.

Further dissension rose in the cabinet. Fox insisted on knowing whether the clause in the preliminary American peace articles, relating to independence, was to be taken as irrevocable, or as only contingent on the conclusion of peace with France, which was a condition of the articles in general. Pitt replied that in effect it was irrevocable. Shelburne was quick to note the indiscretion, and wrote off reassuringly to the King, "Mr. Fox affected to consider this as a concession to the Opposition. . . . It created some uneasiness, but . . .

\* Fortescue, vol. vi., p. 97.



Mr. Pitt undertakes that Mr. Fox will not carry through the deception."\* The King was furious, declared that Pitt did not know what he was talking about, and that if the French treaty proved abortive, he should by no means look upon the recognition of America's claim as binding. In view of the actual state of America, the argument was fantastic, but the King insisted that Pitt ought to withdraw his words, and once more raked over the ministerial smother.

## V

On January 20, preliminary treaties of peace were signed with France and Spain, and a truce declared with Holland. The terms were neither very good nor very bad, but they were bad enough to give the opposition an opening that was eagerly taken. Fox said that he could see in them nothing but concessions, which was not too palpable an exaggeration of the truth to excite the prejudices of national pride. It must be remembered that Fox had steadfastly supported the crown in the French war, and his opposition to Shelburne's peace cannot be dismissed as merely mischievous. Amendments to the Address on the peace were carried by the opposition, on February 17, 1783, by a majority of sixteen. On the 21st a motion that the cessions to France were unjustified, was brought in by Lord John Cavendish, and, after a debate that lasted until seven in the morning, was carried by nineteen. It amounted to a direct vote of censure, and Shelburne was left with no alternative to resignation.

In the meantime there had been a rapid development of events behind the parliamentary scene. Suspecting that his peace was likely to prove unpopular, Shelburne had at last yielded to Pitt's entreaties, and consented to approach Fox. Pitt visited Charles at his lodgings

\* Fortescue, vol. vi., p. 175.



on this mission, and was told that before Fox would come in, Shelburne must go out. Shelburne sent his report to the King, who replied, on February 11: "I am not in the least surprised that Mr. Pitt's interview with Mr. Fox ended as abruptly as the hastiness and impoliteness of the latter naturally led me to expect."\* The confidence of Charles's decision was explained when he spoke on February 17, in a passage that dealt openly with rumours that had for some days been agitating Shelburne's counsels. "I am accused," said Fox, "of forming a junction with a noble person, whose principles I have been in the habit of opposing for the last seven years of my life. . . . That such an alliance has taken place I can by no means aver. That I shall have the honour of concurring with the noble lord in the blue ribbon on the present question is very certain; and if men of honour can meet on points of general national concern, I can see no reason for calling such a meeting an unnatural junction. It is neither wise nor noble to keep up animosities for ever. It is neither just nor candid to keep up animosity when the cause of it is no more. It is not in my nature to bear malice, or to live in ill-will. My friendships are perpetual, my enmities are not so. . . . When a man ceases to be what he was, when the opinions that made him obnoxious are changed, he is then no more my enemy, but my friend. The American war was the cause of the enmity between the noble lord and myself. The American war, and the American question is at an end. The noble lord has profited from fatal experience. While that system was maintained, nothing could be more asunder than the noble lord and myself. But it is now no more; and it is therefore wise and candid to put an end also to the ill-will, the animosity, the rancour, and the feuds which it occasioned. I am free

\* Fortescue, vol. vi., p. 237.



to acknowledge, that when I was the friend of the noble lord in the blue ribbon, I found him open and sincere; when the enemy, honourable and manly. I never had reason to say of the noble lord in the blue ribbon that he practised any of those subterfuges, tricks, and stratagems, which I found in others; any of those behindhand and paltry manœuvres which destroy confidence between human beings, and degrade the character of the statesman and the man." In fact, North and Fox had in private meetings come to an agreement to act together in the House against Shelburne. When on February 19 the minister was defeated on a fundamental issue for the second time in three days, their purpose had been achieved, and the field was theirs. The famous coalition, branded so often as infamous, was about to be born.

The gravamen of the charge against Fox is that he was uniting with a man whose political conduct he had constantly denounced. The extremes of language which we have frequently seen Charles applying to North may be summarised in a single example. As late as March 5, 1782, he had said: "from the moment when I should make any terms with one of them [North and his ministers], from that moment I will rest satisfied to be called the most infamous of mankind. I could not for an instant think of a coalition with men who . . . have shown themselves void of every principle of honour and honesty." Allowing for the heat of a debate that Charles knew at the time to be of a decisive nature, these are words difficult to repudiate. And yet, in the passage just quoted from Charles's speech of February 17, is not the repudiation a fair one? If he had said many hard and bitter things of North, we recall that he had also on many occasions spoken handsomely of the qualities that he now eulogises. And is it not true in all human affairs, and particularly in the history of political affairs,



that circumstances do often quite honourably alter the most unlikely cases? Without the least desire to make the worse appear the better reason, it is difficult for candour to take those words of the 17th at anything but their simple face value. The accomplished biographers of Shelburne (Lord Fitzmaurice) and Pitt (Earl Stanhope) speak in unison, and to a familiar measure. "Yet when the prizes of office rose in view," says one, "the high crimes, the misdemeanours, the want of common honour and honesty of North, were alike forgotten by Fox"; and the other, "yet now, as the overthrow of Lord Shelburne rose before them as a tempting prize, these two eminent men, in an evil hour for their own fame, were gradually drawn together." It is a matter of opinion. We can but assess motives from such knowledge as we are able to form of character. To believe that there was nothing contemptible to which Fox would not stoop in order to secure the prizes of office may be a view possible to an impartial study of such records as we have of the man. But it is doubtless clear to any reader of the present work that it could not be so to the writer. That it was worth Charles's or any man's while to unite with North is very doubtful, since North was always to remain as weak and unprincipled in politics as he had always been. But, in default of accepting Charles as a common placeman, we have to find some explanation of the union other than his taste for prizes. And the discovery seems simple enough. That Fox overstated the legitimate objection to Shelburne's peace terms we may allow, but that it is possible to exaggerate his genuine mistrust of Shelburne himself, we do not. It was plain that Shelburne was daily falling more and more under the influence of the King, and the consequent danger to the state was one that to Fox's mind, in the light of seven years' experience, must be averted at any cost. The chief aim of his long and impassioned



opposition had been directed against this very evil.\* Shelburne must be overthrown. The peace proposals were a likely occasion to this end. But Fox needed support—the support of additional votes, and for this he must go to North or nobody. And it was true that, in the march of events, the North of to-day was not the North of yesterday. It may be added that Fox was aware that for the past four years North himself had had no real heart in the policy that he had been forced by the King to administer. Fox was no fool. He knew very well that the step he was taking would loosen a thousand censorious tongues, and he took it. His motive was not the inordinate desire for a place that he had voluntarily relinquished less than a year before, but what he conceived to be public necessity. His judgment may have been at fault, but it was honest. The coalition failed, and brought little credit to its leaders. But it has not commonly been remembered in its favour that it did in fact turn out Shelburne, who, given time, had in him the making of an even more disastrous minister than North at his worst.

## VI

On March 11, Walpole wrote to Lady Ossory: “I hope, Madam, you have been rejoiced at the appointment of every new Prime Minister that we have had for this last fortnight—Mr. W. Pitt, the Duke of Portland, Lord Temple, Lord Gower, and Lord Thurlow. There may have been more for aught I know. . . . At present there is no premier at all, at least there was not a quarter of an hour ago.” Walpole’s pleasantry was near the truth. The King in the new crisis was obsessed by one idea—that if by any device it were possible, the govern-

\* How closely, and how privately, Shelburne was at this time in the King’s counsels, is newly demonstrated in the fifth and sixth volumes of *The Correspondence of King George the Third*.



ment should not include Fox. On August 7, 1782, when he had written that every honest man must wish to keep Mr. Fox out of power, he had also written to North, asking him to bring his followers to the support of Shelburne in the forthcoming session, so that "I may be enabled to keep the Constitution from being entirely annihilated, which must be the case if Mr. Fox and his Associates are not withstood . . . the present contest . . . is no less than whether the sole direction of my Kingdoms shall be trusted in the hands of Mr. Fox; Lord North has long known my opinion of that gentleman, which has been if possible more rivited by three months experience of Him in Office, which has finally determined Me never to employ Him again. Consequently the contest is become personal and He indeed sees it also in that point of view."\* On his own resignation Shelburne encouraged this determination, and made the astonishing proposal, accepted by the King, that Pitt, still under twenty-four years of age, should be invited to form a ministry. Flattered as he was, Pitt had the good sense to know that he had no better chance than Shelburne of controlling a majority in the House, and declined an offer that would mean no more than obtaining "the chariot for a day." The King was put considerably out of temper by the refusal. "I am clear that Mr. Pitt means to play false, and wants I should again negotiate with the Coalition," he wrote on March 25, at 15 m. pt. 7 a.m. Pitt's letter definitely declining office was dated the same day at one-thirty noon, and at 35 m. pt. 4 p.m. the King was "much hurt" at conduct so insensible to the gravity of the crisis.† Other possible candidates were approached, as indicated in Walpole's letter, with no success. The King then begged North to take office independently of Fox, and was refused. The coalitionists in the meantime, confident that the King would

\* Fortescue, vol. vi., p. 97.

† *Idem.*, pp. 309-311.



be forced to accept them as such, had laid their plans. It was Fox's idea that there should be a nominal head of the government, with the real power residing in North and himself as joint Secretaries of State. The Duke of Portland had already consented to become this figure-head. After protracted court resistance, during which the overtures to Pitt were renewed, the Duke of Portland kissed hands as First Lord of the Treasury on April 2, and the King could complain to the end of his life that the coalition ministry of 1783 had been thrust upon him by the machinations of wicked men. Such had been the King's extremity that at one moment he seriously contemplated abdication, and among his manuscript papers is a remarkable document to which Sir John Fortescue assigns the date March, 1783, in which he announces to parliament his decision to resign the throne.\* But he faced what to him was an all but intolerable situation. Much as he resented Fox, his chief anger fell on North. Fox, after all, owed him nothing, while North at least had reaped very ample benefits from his personal kindness. He felt that he had been betrayed by his old minister, and in the most injurious manner. Meeting the aged Earl of Guilford at a drawing-room, he exclaimed: "Did I ever think that Lord North would deliver me up to Mr. Fox." At the levees attended by the new ministers, while he received Charles graciously, he received North "with the utmost coolness, and continued to treat him with visible aversion." One observer, however, noted that when Fox kissed hands, the King "turned back his ears and eyes just like the horse at Astley's, when the tailor he had determined to throw was getting on him." And in conversation with others, he "loaded [Fox] with every expression of abhorrence."

The Coalition Ministry included—besides Portland,

\* Fortescue, vol. vi., pp. 316-317.



North, and Fox—Cavendish at the Exchequer, Keppel at the Admiralty, Fox's old friend Carlisle as Lord Privy Seal, with Loughborough (Wedderburn) as one of the Commissioners for the Custody of the Great Seal, and Burke, Fitzpatrick and Sheridan outside the cabinet. The other names need not be enumerated. The most notable absentee was the Duke of Richmond. It may be mentioned that one of the principal agents in negotiating between North and Fox had been Adam, the duellist. Charles, on taking office, was re-elected without opposition for Westminster, as was Cavendish for York, a suggestion that public indignation at the "unnatural alliance" has sometimes been exaggerated, though Walpole's "some hissing at Westminster" becomes in Pitt's biographer, "the multitude received [Fox] with hootings and hissings, and his eloquent voice could not be heard."

## VII

Fox's part in the ill-starred ministry may be briefly told. At his first royal audience the topic being the Prince of Wales, Charles assured the King "that he had never said a word to the Prince that he would not have been glad to have His Majesty hear," adding that he had ventured no more in the way of encouraging the Prince's personal ambitions than to promise that as occasion arose he would support any motion to provide him with a sufficient personal establishment. He subsequently supported a proposed allowance of a hundred thousand a year, which the King, however, succeeded in getting reduced, and having scored the point of modifying his heir's obligation to the obnoxious minister, made up some part of the deficiency out of his own Civil List. But the Prince realised who his friend was, and the King watched his son's attachment for Charles with growing jealousy. In May, Pitt again made proposals for parliamentary



reform, and again Fox supported him in an adverse vote. The liberality of temper that Charles displayed in this, and the sincerity of his professions that he could bear no malice, are further illustrated in a correspondence to be found in the Hinchingbrooke papers, of which the following passages are now first printed. No member of the North administration had been more out of sympathy with Fox than Sandwich, and none had been more severely attacked by the opposition. On the various occasions when Fox had been consulted on the possibility of coalescing with the government, Sandwich had invariably been one of the ministers named by him as unacceptable in any arrangement that might be made. Sandwich's heir, Lord Hinchingbrooke, was now in the House of Commons, and from a letter of February, 1783, it appears that he was taking a line contrary to his father's wishes. Sandwich nevertheless approached North in his son's interest, and received a letter, dated February 23, saying "I do not know whether I shall have anything to do in a new arrangement. . . . Lord Hinchingbrooke may however be sure that if [I do], he will certainly be among the first for whom I shall exert myself." Three days later North writes again, "Whether I shall have any share in the formation of a new administration, is now more uncertain and more improbable than it was when I wrote to you before. You may, however, depend upon it that I will have part of none where a due attention is not paid to my former colleagues in office." On April 4, Sandwich wrote to North: "Your lordship cannot be surprised that I am much hurt at the account given me by Lord Hinchingbrooke, of a conversation he had with your Lordship this day. After the assurance that I had received from you that you would bear a part in no administration where a due attention was not paid to your former colleagues in office, I did not think that I should have been one of those colleagues whose interests had not met with



due attention; for your Lordship will observe that I cannot think the offer of an employment to my son . . . is all the attention that is due to me." Sandwich adds an affectionate tribute to his son's share in the transaction. In an undated letter, North replied: "You use me very ill in supposing that my having been hitherto able to procure only an office for Lord Hinchingbrooke, was owing to my not wishing to pay attention to both," and explained that there were insufficient places at the ministry's disposal to satisfy claims at the rate of more than one apiece to a family. On April 81, Lord Chesterfield, in a letter from the same papers, wrote to Sandwich, "I am very glad Lord Hinchingbrooke has got the stag-hounds, as I think he will like that situation." On the 25th, Portland was in the correspondence, and wrote to Sandwich, that while at the moment there was nothing to offer, "I should certainly be very glad that the present administration should have the advantage of your Lordship's support . . . and whenever an arrangement can be made that will enable us to give you an effectual proof of the sincerity of this profession, I shall offer it with pleasure. . . . I remain only hopeful of some more favourable opportunity of acquiring the benefit of your assistance and influence." On the 27th, Portland assures him of "my readiness to subscribe to the terms upon which you propose to enter into conversation." The following day Hinchingbrooke wrote to his father: "I must insist that you do not think of lowering your credit on my account. If I could have accepted the office offered me, with any degree of propriety, I should have been glad to have done it. I think Lord North's behaviour has been scandalous with regard to you, and I shall certainly have no connection with him. I make no doubt of the Duke of Portland's wishes to engage you, because he cannot do without assistance; but if that should be the case, and the administration dissolve soon, I beg that



you may not say that I was the occasion of your entering into it." Three following letters from Portland deal with a minor resignation that makes an opening for Sandwich until something more suitable can be provided. The office was that of Ranger of the Parks, which Sandwich resigned on the fall of the Coalition, and four months later Sandwich is in communication with Fox. On September 3, Charles writes from Wimbledon:

"My Lord—I am much obliged to you for your letter relative to Mr. Pardoe, but it is impossible for me at this moment to give you any answer to it. It is so clearly my opinion that a plan ought to be adopted, putting the whole of the Direction [of the East India Company] upon a different footing, or possibly even substituting a new commission in the place of the Directors, and that the plan ought to be put into execution immediately after the meeting of parliament, that I cannot enter into any engagements upon the idea of filling up the direction in the old way. In the meantime I feel very sensibly what your Lordship says in favour of Mr. Pardoe, and I do assure you that in this and every other instance, I should be very happy to show the truth and regard with which I am, my Lord . . ." At the end of November, when the Coalition crisis on the East India Bill was approaching, Sandwich was in touch with Shelburne, who was thought to have fresh prospects of office, but the following letters show that in the critical stages of the Bills that were within a month to lead to the government's defeat, Fox looked upon Sandwich's support as assured and valuable. On November 27, Sandwich wrote a long letter to Charles, expressing strongly the astonishment with which he had heard Lord Hinchinbrooke announce that he proposed to vote against the ministers. "It may perhaps appear extraordinary, that I should enter into a matter of this nature with a person with whom I have had so short a political acquaintance;



but my sentiments with regard to political engagements are such, and differ so much from my son's, that I am hurt beyond measure at the idea that persons who do not know me may possibly imagine that this young man's absurdities may originate from, or be countenanced by me; but, as I have already said, I am sure Lord North will acquit me from any such imputation, and will describe to you, better than I can, the distress I am under upon this occasion." On November 30, Fox replied, from St James's Place:

"MY LORD,

"I am exceedingly obliged to your Lordship for your letter, informing me of what had passed with Lord Hinchingbrooke, and I have no doubt but you were as well pleased as I was to find that he voted in the majority. Now that he is embarked in the question, I can make no doubt of his going on with us. There is to be an opposition and division again to-morrow, when it will be very material to maintain our superiority, or, if possible, to increase it.

"Mr. Stephenson\* voted with us, although Robinson\* (of whom, between ourselves, I have suspicions) told me that he would not. Sir William James, Mr. Pardoe, Mr. Durand, and Sir Walter Rawlinson were all, as I understand, absent. With regard to the first, † it is as much as could be expected from him, all things considered, and I expect your Lordship to say that you did not think any interference on your part with the last ‡ was likely to be serviceable on this occasion. But with respect to Durand and Pardoe, I should hope better, and of this I am sure, that if they do not attend, it will not be your fault, because I am

\* Members of Sandwich's political connection.

† Sir William James, Chairman of the East India Company Directors.

‡ Of Sir Walter Rawlinson and Mr. Durand I find no mention elsewhere. Pardoe is referred to in Sandwich's letter above.



sure you must see the importance of great majorities, in this question, in the same light that I do.

“The enemy has nearly given up the House of Commons (though this, by the way, should not make us remiss) as untenable, and professes to have great hopes in the House of Lords. I have no doubt but your victory there will be equal to ours, if similar exertions are made; but there are many peers very friendly, who will never come up without being pressed.

“I am with great truth and regard,  
“C. J. Fox.”

The Commons majorities, as Charles says, were substantial; but in the Lords there was less security, and it was there that the trouble came, as we shall see. On December 6, Fox wrote again from St. James's Place to Sandwich:

“MY LORD,

“I am sure you will allow the excuse of a hurry of business, for not having sooner answered your last letter. I am very sorry to hear Lord Mulgrave\* is dissatisfied, but cannot even guess the reason. I know that both the D. of Portland's relation, Mr. Jocelyn, and Lord North's son, were set aside in order to make Mr. Phipps Aide de Camp to the Lord Lieutenant; and with regard to the majority he asked, he must know as well as I do that it was out of our power. I shall be very glad to talk this or any other matter over with your Lordship, whenever you will do me the honour to call upon me.

“I believe we shall be very strong in the House of Lords; but it should be remembered that proxies, which form a considerable part of our strength, can not be used in a committee, and all exertions

\* Lord Mulgrave—Constantine John Phipps, second Baron Mulgrave, in the Irish peerage, M.P. for Huntingdon, and a Commissioner of the East India Board.



ought therefore to be used to bring up even those whose proxies we already have. Do you know anything of Lord Exeter\* and Lord Dudley? I am told the former would have much weight with Lord Harborough.

“I am very truly my Lord,

“C. J. Fox.”

This was eleven days before the vote in the Lords brought the Coalition to an end.

### VIII

During the summer of 1783, Fox was, officially, chiefly employed in the conduct of foreign affairs. His efforts to restore British prestige in the association of Europe

\* This Earl of Exeter does not even find a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. But it so happens that Sandwich had been soliciting his vote, and his answer, written three days before Fox's letter, is also preserved at Pinchingbrooke. Although it has no immediate place in our story, it is so attractive a little masterpiece of sly aloofness, that I take pleasure in printing it:

“MY LORD,

“December 3, 1783.”

“Accept my thanks for the honour of your letter and opinion, received last night, on the bill now depending in the House of Commons, which I design to attend when brought before the Lords next week. Not as a speaker, for you well know I am but little given to join in any conversation; wishing rather always to hear than be heard, only for the pleasure of listening to those speeches which will be delivered on both sides of the question on so singular an event, by some of the most sensible and learned personages in this Kingdom, and to give my vote as it shall appear to me most conducive to the public good, for with Mr. [Warren] Hastings and his connection I am entirely unacquainted, neither do I at present recollect any proprietor of India stock that I care one farthing for, except yourself. Hoping therefore we may agree in opinion at the end of the debate, I remain, etc., etc.

“EXETER.”

Lords Dudley and Harborough belong with Sir Walter Rawlinson and Mr. Durand to the illustrious unknown, and I find no letters of theirs to place beside Exeter's.



were well-intentioned, if they did not go very far. After all, six months gives a man less than a sporting chance to make an impression on European history. But his previous short term of office had made him personally popular with the ministers of foreign powers, and had he been given an opportunity of settling down to the job, he might very well have done more to effect a really constructive foreign policy than any statesman of his time, since he had imagination, good-will, and, on occasion, salutary firmness; the French minister called him a faggot of thorns. It was a combination of qualities not to be found elsewhere, but it was never given an effective chance. Three times the promise was frustrated, twice by political fortune, once by death. Fox's Coalition period was, in the sum, a barren one. He persuaded one or two foreign powers into a friendly mood—Russia and Prussia among them—he concluded a peace that was an unpalatable legacy from his predecessors, and then he was dismissed. When parliament met for the autumn session in November, 1793, Pitt thought to score an easy mark in ridiculing a minister who had come into power by denouncing terms that he now advanced as an achievement. Fox was too quick for him in debating technique, but to himself he had to confess that his redemption of the national fortunes was but a poor showing. It was not his fault, but there it was. When he said that to have repudiated the preliminary articles would have been to sink the national honour, he was speaking the truth, but it was an anæmic truth for the comfort of a man so adventurous and full-blooded. In the circumstances, he could have done no better, but he knew passionately how better might be done. Ill-starred is the precise definition of the Coalition ministry, which was substantially Fox's ministry.

The King's speech proceeded from its eulogy of the peace to another fateful clause. "The situation of the



East India Company will require the utmost exertions of your wisdom to maintain and improve the valuable advantages derived from our Indian possessions, and to promote and secure the happiness of the native inhabitants of those provinces." The challenge was a dual one, made by the King and Fox; and they did not mean the same thing. Fox announced that Indian affairs were indeed overdue for discussion, and that within a few days he proposed to bring them forward. On November 18 began a series of debates, the summary of which covers over a hundred closely printed pages.

The position, according to Fox, was this. The state of the East India Company was on all hands admitted to be deplorable, and careful enquirers, irrespective of party, were agreed that the chief reason was "the disobedience to the orders of the Court of Directors, and the rapacity of the Company's servants in India." Reform was necessary, but it involved the very invidious necessity of also punishing the authors of the mischief. In this, so many personal considerations arose, that any man might well shrink from the task of investigation. As Fox opened in this fashion, his hearers knew that Warren Hastings was his mark: "that great man Mr. Hastings, a man who, by disobeying the orders of his employers, had made himself so great as to be now able to mix in every question of state, and make every measure of government a personal point in which he had a share." The terms inhumanity, false policy, speculation, and brutality had an obvious bearing. Whatever the rights and the wrongs of the case might be, said Fox, the present state of the company was chaotic, and he proposed to substitute for the existing directorate a board of seven persons, nominated by parliament, and to function under its supervision. It would deal with territorial rights, judicature, and finance with its subsidiary aspects, bribery and corruption. Glancing at a personal



consideration, he used a memorable phrase: "I shall always consider my own character, my situation, my rank in the country, as at stake on every measure of state which I shall presume to undertake." He proceeded to an examination of Indian accounts that was an amazing testimony to his mastery of vast volumes of detail. I have been curious to submit this array of figures to a distinguished accountant,\* and he assures me that on this evidence alone he would rank Fox highly among financial intelligences in our political history.

Let us take another stray phrase or two from these speeches that, covering a period of four weeks, showed Charles at his height as a practical orator, lucid, fearless, often inspired. "Necessity is said to be the plea of tyranny—it is also the plea of freedom." "Freedom, according to my conception of it, commences in the safe and sacred possession of a man's property, governed by laws defined and certain, with many personal privileges, natural, civil, and religious, which he cannot surrender without ruin to himself, and of which to be deprived by any other power is despotism." "What is the end of all government? Certainly the happiness of the governed." Fox may have borrowed that, but if so I do not know the source. "It is no violation of right to abolish the authority that is abused." Pitt had made many objections to Fox's measures, Pitt, "the honourable friend who calls a Bill which backs this sinking company with the credit of the state, a confiscation of their property." And in the vein of irony that Charles so easily commanded, "The bill diminishes the influence of the crown, says one; you are wrong, says a second, it increases it; you are both right, says a third, for it both increases and diminishes the influence of the crown." And then again, this time with a familiar allusion, "Our principles are well known, and I would rather perish

\* Sir Nicholas Waterhouse.



with them, than prosper with any other." In addition: "Delicacy and reserve are criminal when interests of Englishmen are at hazard." "Pride is the passion of little, dark, intriguing minds." "I ever contended, and, I trust I ever shall, that the crown, kept within its proper boundaries, is essential to the practice of government." "I have [too much self-respect] ever to owe anything to secret influence." "The open and broad path of the constitution has uniformly been mine." The constitution generously interpreted in terms of freedom—has any statesman ever approached an ideal polity more nearly than that?

These fragments do no justice to the vehemence, the wealth of illustration, the vision, that informed the great speeches that Fox made on the topic of East India. But even they may indicate the wit, the national ardour, and the wider concepts of humanity, that distinguished his part in a controversy, in which he justly said that he was met by every species of court faction. And if any antagonist still observes that these phrases, and a hundred others like them, sprang from the virtuosity of party politics, he may be left in the enjoyment of his own perceptions.

## IX

But eloquent pleading of a good cause, and a conformable House of Commons, were not enough. The King had a doubly-rooted objection to the Bills, and he was determined to kill them. He affected to regard them as subversive of crown rights. The argument was a frivolous one, since even under Fox's scheme the control of Indian affairs would rest finally with the Secretary of State under the sanction of the throne. But it was plausible enough to excite the King's jealousy of parliamentary authority. Secondly, and chiefly, the author of the Bills was Charles



Fox. Charles, with some reason, was blamed by his friends for introducing measures of such fundamental scope before the King had time to recover from his first anger with the coalition. All through the summer, George III. behaved like a petulant but dangerous child. He hampered his ministers by such petty devices as refusing to create peerages on their recommendation, and so depriving them of a principal source of patronage. In meeting them he was civil, but no more. He desired no cordial relations with them; he desired only to be rid of men who were, he believed, fixed on keeping him "a prisoner in his own palace." Fox, with unruffled temper, was careful to fail in no possible mark of deference. This is the kind of letter he wrote to the King: "Mr. Fox hopes your Majesty will not think him presumptuous, or improperly intruding upon your Majesty with professions, if he begs leave most humbly to implore your Majesty to believe, that both the Duke of Portland and he have nothing so much at heart as to conduct your Majesty's affairs, both with respect to measures and to persons, in the manner that may give your Majesty the most satisfaction, and that whenever your Majesty will be graciously pleased to condescend even to hint your inclinations on any subject, that it will be the study of your Majesty's Ministers to show how truly sensible they are of your Majesty's goodness." And this is the kind of letter that the King wrote to Fox, who, in forwarding the final treaties for royal perusal, had asked, very properly, whether the King would desire him to wait on him with any verbal explanations: "The projects of definitive treaties with France and Spain, and the dispatch which is to accompany them, must so fully state the reasons of the alterations of the preliminary articles that I do not mean to call on Mr. Fox for further explanation on this subject. Unnecessary discussions are not my taste, and the Cabinet, having by a minute approved of these



projects, I do not propose to give myself any additional trouble with regard to them." On the death of one of the royal children, Fox in forwarding some despatches to the King, most humbly begged leave "to take this opportunity of most sincerely condoling with Your Majesty on the late melancholy event, and of assuring Your Majesty of his sensibility upon every occasion that can give concern to your Royal Mind." The King acknowledged the despatches, but not the condolences.\* He nearly achieved his object in June, when the Prince's establishment was under discussion. The cordial relations that he knew to exist between his son and Fox threw him into paroxysms of suspicion and resentment. How cordial these relations were may be shown by brief extracts from the letters that the Prince wrote at the time to "Dear Charles." In the dating of these notes we see a pale reflex of the King's habit—"¾ past 2 o'clock," "¼ past nine o'clock," but the minutes are not recorded, nor the prevailing side of the meridian, usually not even the date. "I am waiting for you at your own house; pray come directly if you can, as I wish very much to speak to you. I will not detain you three minutes. Yours most truly, George P." And then, as a postscript: "If you have not got your own carriage you had better take anybody else's." Again: "allow me to thank you, my dear Charles, for your kind attention to me on this and every other occasion." "I cannot, however, conclude without . . . thanking you for the part you have taken in bringing this essential business to me so near a conclusion, which, I assure you, I shall never forget as long as I live." And yet again: "I am most exceedingly sensible of the kind and friendly attention you have shown me throughout the whole of this business, which is of so much importance to my happiness." On June 17, Fox wrote to Northington, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland,

\* Fortescue, vol. vi., pp. 376-377.



“there is great reason to think that our Administration will not outlive to-morrow. . . . The immediate cause of the quarrel is the Prince of Wales’s establishment.” On the same day, Lord Mulgrave wrote to Sandwich:\* “Having heard to-day, from I believe very good authority, communicated to me in confidence, that the present Administration is at an end, or will be so in a day or two . . . and as I think you will wish to have the earliest intelligence, and perhaps be on the spot at the time, I send my servant with this. . . . It is unnecessary to enter in further particulars of a confidential conversation, of which I will only say that it convinces me all is over with these people.” Two causes contributed to the escape of the ministry on this occasion. First, the King decided at the last moment that to dismiss a government on so personal a question might create a bad impression; and secondly, the Prince offered to accept any compromise that his friends thought advisable: “After what has already passed, I did not require this additional proof of your friendship and attachment,” he wrote to Fox on June 18, “and you will see by a letter I have this instant written to the Duke of Portland, how ready I am to take your advice, and that I leave it entirely to the Cabinet.” On the 19th, Fox wrote to Northampton: “There is reason to think that the storm is for the present dissipated. . . . The Prince has behaved in the handsomest manner, and his reasonableness under the hardest usage, is likely to keep everything quiet.” And a month later, to the same correspondent, he adds further evidence of the feelings that were cementing a friendship that the Prince to the end of his life remembered with genuine emotion: “I shall always therefore consider the Prince’s having yielded, a most fortunate event, and shall always feel myself proportionately obliged to him and to those who advised him.” Chief among whom was Charles himself:

\* Hinchbrooke MSS.



“Charles Fox went to the Prince and prevailed on him to submit himself entirely to his father, which, at last, he did.”\*

## X

But the King's opportunity was not to be long deferred. As the East India debates proceeded he saw that he could do nothing with the Commons, but he worked his influence in the Lords with tireless vigilance. He let it be known that any peer who voted with the government when the final decision came, would forfeit all claim to royal favour. On December 17, with the Commons still firm for the ministry, the East India measures were thrown out in the Lords by ninety-five votes to seventy-six. In the heat of disappointment, Charles wrote: “I am too much hurried to write to you an account of our misfortune. We are beat in the House of Lords by such treachery on the part of the King, and such meanness on the part of his *friends* . . . as one could not expect either from him or them. . . . We are not yet out, but I suppose we shall be to-morrow.” Whether defeat in the Lords, against a great Commons majority, justified the dismissal of ministers, may be questioned. But the King had no concern for such niceties. He had a constitutional right, and took it without a moment's hesitation. At midnight North and Fox received orders to deliver up their Seals. It is said to have been nearly one in the morning before the King's messenger knocked at North's bedroom door, desiring to see him on urgent business. “Then, sir,” said North, “you must see Lady North too.” The royal displeasure was marked by no touch of chivalry; it even violated the common decencies of practice. The fallen ministers were told to send the Seals by their Under-Secretaries, as a personal interview would be disagreeable to His Majesty. Fox was not

\* Walpole.



honoured even with so direct a communication, North being ordered to acquaint his colleague with the King's pleasure. Charles was within a few days of his thirty-fifth birthday. He was not to come into office again until 1806, when he was a dying man.