

CHAPTER XI

OPPOSITION AGAIN. FOX AND PITT. MRS. FITZHERBERT.
WARREN HASTINGS. 1783-1788

I

ON December 18, 1783, the Duke of Portland wrote to Lord Sandwich: "I immediately succeeded Mr. Pitt [in the King's presence], who had held an audience of near an hour and a half of His Majesty, and who, by the composure and serenity in which I found the King, had, as I conclude, agreed to accept. When I came to the House of Lords, I found it there strongly reported that the new arrangement and dissolution were immediately to take place."* The next day William Pitt had become Prime Minister at the age of twenty-four; but parliament was not dissolved until March 25, 1784. On the defeat of his India Bill, Fox wrote: "However, we are so strong, that nobody can undertake, without madness; and, if they do, I think we shall destroy them almost as soon as they are formed." He was reckoning without the parliamentary genius of the young rival whose name was to distinguish the coming political age with his own as that of Fox and Pitt. For three months the two leaders fenced on a question of constitutional order, and day by day Pitt turned Fox's position to his own advantage. The defeated ministers denied the King's right to dissolve parliament in the middle of a session, hoping by this manœuvre to reduce their successors to impotence by constant defeat in the Commons. Pitt accepted the situation, and steadily set himself to a sustained attack upon the old coalition majority. Fox and his misbegotten party had aimed at control of the immense resources of India for the purpose of establishing their

* Hinchingsbrooke MSS.

own power; they had sought to undermine the prerogative of the crown; and now they were afraid of going to the country with a plain issue, preferring to plead a doubtful point of procedure for the purpose of frustrating the King's duly accredited ministers. The arguments were vulnerable, but effective. Pitt knew perfectly well that the Indian reforms proposed by Fox and Burke were soundly conceived; in substance he followed them himself in his own later policy; and the trial of Warren Hastings, though it ended in the acquittal of the defendant, showed beyond dispute how necessary they were. But the charge that Fox had tried to manipulate Indian government for the purposes of party, false as it was, was a difficult one to disprove, and Pitt's cool perseverance began to affect opinion. In the same way, when Samuel Johnson said: "there was a doubt whether the nation should be ruled by the sceptre of George the Third or the tongue of Fox," he knew, as Pitt did, that there was no such doubt at all; though as early as July 13, 1782, the King himself had with no less absurdity written to Jenkinson: "the mask is now certainly cast off; it is no less than a struggle whether I am to be dictated to by Mr. Fox, who avows that he must have the sole direction of this Country."* But, again, while the real issue was whether the representatives of the people should control or be controlled by an arbitrary monarch, Pitt, giving Johnson's version of the case, played on popular fears for security. And, finally, while Fox was justified in presenting his views on dissolution, his public prestige, already a little tarnished by the junction with North, was further impaired by daily insinuations that he was clinging to power by slightly disreputable tactics. The situation was one of almost tragic futility. There was at this time no real difference in the political views and hopes of two men who might so splendidly have

* Fortescue, vol. vi., p. 85.

shared and brightened each other's lustre. But there was a rapidly hardening difference of temperament, and it betrayed them both into forcing an antagonism in respect of issues on which they were essentially in agreement. The spring session of 1784 resolved itself into a contest of wits between rivals for power, and Pitt won. He did not score all the points; in debate he was not yet, nor was he ever to be, Fox's master. At first the general feeling was reflected in Gibbon's exclamation: "Depend upon it, Billy's painted galley must soon sink under Charles's black collier." But the majority began to dwindle. On January 12, Fox could carry a resolution by a hundred and ninety-six votes to fifty-four; on the 23rd, Pitt lost his East India Bill only by eight, but on that occasion his own proposals too closely resembled those for which the House had voted under Fox, to make the trial representative, and on February 2 a majority of nineteen voted against "the continuance of the present Ministers." On the 18th, Fox, on a motion to postpone supplies, was successful by twelve in a House of over four hundred. On the 20th his majority rose to twenty on what amounted to a further vote of censure on the government; on March 1 it fell again to twelve, and to nine on the 5th. Three days later, Fox moved for "a representation to the King on the State of Public Affairs," and one vote only decided the division in his favour. Pitt had destroyed the opposition's claim to a compact majority, and advised the King to dissolve parliament and send his ministers to the country. In the election that followed, Fox's party was overwhelmed. When the new House met, Pitt carried his first measure by two hundred and seventy-one votes to sixty, and could rely on maintaining the margin. Charles was back in the familiar valleys of defeat, and the King no longer had reason to complain that he wished he were "eighty, or ninety, or dead."



MRS. ARMISTEAD (ELIZABETH BRIDGET FOX)

From an engraving after the portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds

II

The struggle was embittered by fierce party animosity. In February, as Pitt was returning from a city dinner, where he had been acclaimed as the saviour of the nation, his coach was attacked by a body of men armed with bludgeons, and the minister escaped serious damage only by taking refuge in White's Club in St. James's Street. For unhappily the assault had taken place just outside Brooks's, and it was more than hinted that the assailants were on the members' list of that Whig stronghold. Fox himself was mentioned. The accusation was never supported by a particle of evidence, and it is not necessary to defend Charles on a charge of having behaved as a common ruffian. But his own answer, when taxed with having had a share in the outrage, was characteristic; if not wholly delicate; he was, he said, in bed at the time with his mistress, Mrs. Armistead, who "was prepared to substantiate the fact on oath." As we shall see, Mrs. Armistead was to become Mrs. Fox, in a marriage of deep and charming affection. But the scandal occasioned by Pitt's misadventure, absurd as it was in its reflections on Fox, was symptomatic of dangerously high feeling between the great rivals. Pitt was shortly to show that generosity in combat was not one of his conspicuous merits.

Charles, after a prolonged contest, was again returned for Westminster. He has left his own record of the daily voting. On April 5 he writes: "The thing is far from over, and I have still hopes; but their beating me two days following, looks ugly." On the 7th, "Worse and worse, but I am afraid I must not give it up." On the 8th, "I have serious thoughts, if I am beaten here, of not coming into Parliament at all." On the 9th, "We certainly have a chance, but a small one," but on the 20th, "I have gained thirty-two to-day, so that we

are all in spirits again." On the 27th he gained forty-two on his opponent, and was then twenty ahead; on the 28th he gained a further twenty; on the 29th, fifteen; on the 30th, thirty, with subsequent additions. The campaign was enlivened by the appearance of the lovely Duchess of Devonshire as Charles's champion. In the early days of the polling, the casting of the metropolitan votes had left him well in arrears, and his friends, whose headquarters were now to be found at Carlton House, newly tenanted by the Prince of Wales, hastily sought a means of enlisting the electors from outlying hamlets in his interest. The Duchess undertook this enterprise, and very thoroughly she carried out her task. "Neither entreaties nor promises were spared. In some instances even personal caresses were said to have been permitted, in order to prevail on the surly or inflexible; and there can be no doubt of common mechanics having been conveyed to the hustings by the Duchess, in her own coach."* Georgiana worked all day long and every day, utterly careless of her rank, and lavish of her attractions. Dressed in a scarlet habit, with a cap made of a fox's skin, and the brush hanging down her back, "she was in the most blackguard houses in Long Acre by eight o'clock this morning." At first her efforts seemed to be making no decided impression. "Westminster goes on well," wrote Pitt with more wit than gallantry, "in spite of the Duchess of Devonshire and the other women of the people." But Fox's figures mounted, and the government took fright. Their agents flooded the borough with filthy lampoons and filthier libels. Fox later spoke in the House of the "injustice, indecency, and irreverence: the gross, the frontless prostitution of names too sacred to be named," that were used in the attempt to defeat him. Also, the government introduced a siren of their own into the field, but Lady Salisbury

* Wraxall, *Posthumous Memoirs of His Own Time*.

had neither the beauty nor the accommodating amiability of the Duchess. She very decidedly would not kiss a butcher for a vote. By the middle of May, Westminster was not going on at all well for Pitt, himself handsomely returned for the University of Cambridge. Indeed, Fox was in by a majority of two hundred and thirty-six.* Pitt took it badly. The victories that everywhere strengthened his cause were unsweetened by the defeat of the man whom he most feared; the man, it may be added, to whom he most owed, in the hour of victory, the honourable consideration due to greatness in misfortune. But Pitt already in his youth had a somewhat wintry mind, given to grudging humours. Charles, on his election, was chaired by an immense procession graced by the coaches of the Duchesses of Portland and Devonshire. The Prince of Wales's Feathers borne before him, he was carried in triumph to Devonshire House, where the Prince, surrounded by the Whig nobility, received him on a scaffolding built and embellished for the occasion. At night His Royal Highness appeared at dinner wearing Fox's colours, the buff and blue made so familiar by Gillray and his fellow-cartoonists, and the next day, at Carlton House, gave a complimentary breakfast that lasted from noon until six in the evening. During the day the King drove in state down St. James's Park on his way to open the new parliament, and as he passed the wall of Carlton Gardens the sound of rebel revelry from the lawn beyond fell on his ears. At night, a dinner given by Mrs. (afterwards Lady) Crewe, was attended by the Prince, who in Fox's honour gave the toast, "True Blue and Mrs. Crewe." But the hero was a tired and disappointed man. He

* The final figures were:

Lord Hood	..	..	..	6,694
Mr. Fox	..	..	..	6,234
Sir Cecil Wray	..	..	..	5,998

had won Westminster, but had decisively lost the country. The cup was bitter, but it was still not full enough for Pitt's liking. The minister's ample majority was not sufficient; he had believed that his victims would not be merely Fox's party, but Fox himself. Provoked by the failure of his hopes, he instigated, or at least lent himself to an expedient as paltry as it was senseless. On the declaration of the poll, it was the High Bailiff's plain duty to announce Hood and Fox as duly elected members. Instead, he ordered a scrutiny. The figures gave no indication that it could reverse the verdict. But the process was likely to be a tedious one, and in the meantime Fox would be kept from his rightful place. To meet the emergency, he was returned for Orkney, and thus enabled to sit at the opening of the new parliament. A member moved that the High Bailiff be ordered forthwith to make return of the elected members. In the following debate, Charles, after exploring the legal position with his usual comprehension, challenged Pitt in unequivocal terms. "Let him take care that when they see all the powers of his administration employed to overwhelm an individual, men's eyes may not open sooner than they would if he conducted himself within decent bounds of discretion. . . . But if the right honourable gentleman forgets his duty, I shall not neglect mine. Though he may exert all the influence of his situation to harass and persecute, he shall find that we are incapable of unbecoming submissions. There is a principle of resistance in mankind which will not brook such injuries. . . . But let the question terminate as it may, I feel myself bound to maintain an unbroken spirit through such complicated difficulties; and I have this reflection to solace me, that this unexampled injustice could never have succeeded, but by the most dangerous and desperate exertions of a government, which, rather than not wound the object of their enmity,

scrupled not to break down all the barriers of law, to run counter to the known customs of our ancestors . . . and to strike a deep blow [at] the English constitution, without any other inducement . . . except the malignant wish of gratifying an inordinate and implacable spirit of resentment." Pitt's reply was shameful. In a speech that spoke of Fox as "an apostate," and as "a candidate whose conduct and principles had rendered him detestable to the public," he urged the House to reject the motion, which it did by a large majority. This was on June 8, 1784. At prodigal cost the scrutiny proceeded, and six months later the High Bailiff was called to the bar of the House to report progress. It was then divulged that only a fourth part of the electors had been examined, that Fox had lost a hundred and five votes and gained eighty, and that to complete the scrutiny at least another two years would be necessary. At length the House wearied of this nonsense, and in March, 1785, the motion for an immediate return was carried, and Pitt, resisting to the last, suffered his first ministerial defeat on an issue in which his part had been wholly discreditable. Wraxall supplies a striking commentary: "It was determined, at whatever risk or price, to prevent Fox from taking his seat for the city that had elected him, and to render every other public object subservient to his exclusion. All the little passions of human nature were called into action, in order to oppress a formidable and illustrious individual. I am sensible that in passing this censure on Mr. Pitt's conduct, I condemn myself, since I supported and voted with him on every question relative to the Westminster election: but, in writing these memoirs, I acknowledge no guide but truth." On March 5, following the adverse vote, the government gave way, and Fox took his seat once again as member for Westminster.

III

Apart from his early association with the Tories, Charles had now twice been in office, and twice he had failed to establish himself. Another man in his position might have turned the opportunities to greater advantage by trimming. But on fundamental principle this was a course of which he was incapable. The crown influence was, in his view, an obstacle not to be evaded, but to be removed. Until that was done, it was impossible for him to give his mind to the settled routine of constructive measures. And the obstacle was too much for him. His work in opposition did, indeed, create a political mood that was already beginning to curb the pretensions of the King, but the process was to be a slow one, and Fox himself was never to enjoy the satisfaction of seeing George III. capitulate. His failure in office was an inevitable failure of circumstance and of his own impulsive temper. From 1782 to 1793, he was in opposition to a minister who managed the King with a discretion that he himself would have disdained to employ, a minister who nevertheless was as determined as himself to tolerate no improper interference from the crown. Pitt here achieved by diplomacy much that Fox could not by open attack. Court faction was obnoxious to both men, but while the King was deftly persuaded to regard Pitt as a friend, his blunt mind had no reason to regard Fox as anything but his most formidable enemy. Pitt's was the more astute method, but Fox hardly forfeits admiration in consequence. The pity remains that events should have thus thrown the two men into conflict. Pitt's domestic policy from 1784 to 1793 was in most respects perfectly fitted for Fox's collaboration, while his foreign policy would have derived nothing but benefit from the direction of one who had

a more enlightened understanding of European affairs than any other man in the country. Instead of being placed in authority with a mind equal and complementary to his own, Fox was forced into an opposition often fictitious and always unsatisfactory. Not that Charles could ever be dispirited. There was still much that he could do in keeping his unalterable principles before the House, and he faithfully did it. They were principles beyond the scope of Pitt's more calculating patriotism, principles, as we have seen, that were prophetic of a then unrealised liberalism. Moreover, Charles had too many intellectual and social resources ever to suffer the disillusionings of the cynic. He was still on occasion the particular distinction of Brooks's, but more and more he was drawn to the seclusion of his country-house and the serener moods of life and letters. If we lament the years that were lost to his leadership, we may still allow that they were years profoundly influenced by the ideals that he never failed to advocate, ideals far richer in promise for the future than was known by his age. And, while he was never out of power by choice, necessity left him with an ampler leisure that discloses a domestic life of high and simple beauty.

A few episodes of memorable interest in Fox's life may be taken in rapid survey from the political activities that now for some years settled down to a routine such as has been indicated above. In April, 1785, he again supported Pitt in a measure for parliamentary reform that was again defeated by an emphatic majority. In the same year he vehemently and successfully opposed the minister's Irish trade policy, and was feted in consequence by the Manchester merchants who, like Fox himself, could in those days see no good in Pitt's Free Trade proposals. "Our reception in Manchester," wrote Charles, "was the finest thing imaginable, and handsome in all respects. All the principal people came out to meet us, and attended

us into town, with blue and buff cockades." The whiff of returning popularity was very grateful to a man who had lately encountered little but odium outside the circles of Carlton House.*

It was in 1785, too, that Fox's intimacy with the Prince involved him in the affair of Mrs. Fitzherbert. This lady, whose maiden name was Mary (or Maria) Anne Smythe, was twenty-nine years old at the time, the Prince twenty-three. She had been twice married and widowed. Her first husband, a Dorset squire by name Edward Weld, died in the year of their marriage before she was twenty; the second, Thomas Fitzherbert, of Swinnerton in the county of Stafford, whom she married when she was twenty-two, died in 1781. She was left with a fortune of two thousand a year, was generally allowed to be accomplished and attractive, and was a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Her virtue has been much remarked, and there is no evidence that it was anything but exemplary; but in getting herself into a position of most ingenious difficulty with a young man six years her

* The objections to Pitt's Irish proposals, elaborated at great length in the debate, may be summarised under two heads. The Irish patriot party opposed measures that they conceived would subject their own parliament to English legislation. Manchester and other great commercial centres in England saw the ruin of their prosperity in the proposed free traffic. On the whole, the probability is that Pitt's financial genius was wiser than they, but that was the situation that forced him to withdraw his Bill. Among the Hinchingbrooke papers is a letter from Portland to Sandwich, dated August 19, 1785, less than a week after Grattan had killed the government plan in the Irish House of Commons, that throws a curious light on political temper at the time. "I have the satisfaction of acquainting your Lordship that the ministerial system of commercial intercourse between this country and Ireland is completely annihilated. Mr. Orde [Secretary to the Duke of Rutland, Lord-Lieutenant] abandoned it on Monday last in the House of Commons of that Kingdom, and assured them that he would not revive it in this session, nor till it was called for by the general voice of the people of Ireland."

junior, she could scarcely plead inexperience. On her second widowhood she went to live at Richmond, and there in 1784 formed the acquaintance of the Prince. His infatuation was immediate, but his solicitations unavailing. The lady refused to live with him as a mistress, and she could contract no legal marriage with the heir to the throne. Inflamed by the resistance, the Prince's passion took an extravagant turn. Mrs. Fitzherbert has left her own account of an incident that has all the graces of invention. "Keit, the surgeon, Lord Onslow, Lord Southampton, and Mr. Edward Bouverie, arrived at her house in the utmost consternation, informing her that the life of the Prince was in imminent danger—that he had stabbed himself—and that only her immediate presence could save him. She resisted, in the most peremptory manner, all their importunities, saying that nothing should induce her to enter Carlton House. She was afterwards brought to share in the alarm, but still, fearful of some stratagem derogatory to her reputation, insisted upon some lady of high character accompanying her, as an indispensable condition; the Duchess of Devonshire was selected. They four drove from Park Street to Devonshire House, and took her along with them. She found the Prince pale, and covered with blood. The sight so overpowered her faculties, that she was deprived of almost all consciousness. The Prince told her, that nothing would induce him to live unless she promised to become his wife, and permitted him to put a ring round her finger. I believe a ring from the hand of the Duchess of Devonshire was used upon the occasion, and not one of his own. Mrs. Fitzherbert being asked by me, whether she did not believe that some trick has been practised, and that it was not really the blood of His Royal Highness, answered in the negative, and said she has frequently seen the scar. . . . They returned to Devonshire House. A deposition was drawn up of what

had occurred.”* The next day she left the country with a protest that she had not been a free agent in what had taken place.

The Prince thereupon fell into further depths of quite genuine distress. Constant relays of couriers pursued the lady to the continent, and when official representations were made to her suitor that it was time that he should marry for state reasons, he flatly declined to discuss the matter. Among his confidants were Fox and Mrs. Armistead, who were now very happily established at St. Anne's Hill, near Chertsey in Surrey. Mrs. Armistead told Lord Holland that here the Prince would come to “weep by the hour, testifying the sincerity and violence of his passions by the most extravagant expressions and action; rolling on the floor, striking his forehead, tearing his hair, falling into hysterics, and swearing that he would abandon the country, forgo the crown, sell his jewels and plate, and scrape together a competence to fly with the object of his affections to America.” The sympathetic friends at St. Anne's Hill did not take the threat seriously; even though the popular fancy is said to have lent it the colour of—

I would crowns resign to call her mine,
Sweet Lass of Richmond Hill.

But when it was announced in December, 1785, that Mrs. Fitzherbert had returned to England, the news was accompanied by a report that made these scenes an extremely alarming recollection. On the 10th of that month, Charles wrote a remarkable letter to the Prince. After respectful professions of attachment and duty, he proceeds: “I was told just before I left town yesterday, that Mrs. Fitzherbert was arrived, and if I had heard only this, I should have felt most unfeigned joy at an event which I knew would contribute so much to your

* Mrs. Fitzherbert's account, as dictated to Lord Stourton. *Memoirs of Mrs. Fitzherbert.* By the Hon. Charles Langdale. 1856.

Royal Highness's satisfaction; but I was told at the same time, that from a variety of circumstances . . . there was reason to suppose that you were going to take the very desperate step (pardon the expression) of marrying her at this moment. If such an idea be really in your mind, and it is not too late, for God's sake let me call your attention to some considerations"—which considerations he sets forth at great length and with uncompromising force. Of Mrs. Fitzherbert herself, she is, says Charles, "a person with whom I have scarcely the honour of being acquainted, but I hear from everybody that her character is irreproachable, and her manners most amiable." The dilemma is very subtly complicated. Marriage of the heir to the throne before the age of twenty-five or without sanction of parliament, so the letter continues, is illegal. On the other hand, by marriage with a Catholic the heir is thrown out of succession to the crown. Having examined the case in all its aspects, all its dangers to the Prince, to Mrs. Fitzherbert herself, and to their possible children, Charles refers to what might be—but what in fact was not—a possibility of Mrs. Fitzherbert's conversion at a later date, when the Prince could marry legally and must judge for himself; and concludes with the following words: "in the meanwhile a mock marriage (for it can be no other) is neither honourable for either of the parties, nor, with respect to your Royal Highness, even safe." This appears so clear to me that, if I were Mrs. Fitzherbert's father or brother, I would advise her not by any means to agree to it, and to prefer any other species of connection with you to one leading to so much misery and mischief." This has been very shocking to many people, whose moral transports we need not pause to share. The Prince replied by return: "My dear Charles,—Your letter of last night afforded me more true satisfaction than I can find words to express, and it is an additional proof to me . . . of your regard and

affection . . . which it is not only the wish but the ambition of my life to merit. Make yourself easy, my dear friend; believe me, the world will now soon be convinced that there not only is, but never was, any ground for these reports which of late have been so explicitly circulated." That is definite; and ten days later the Prince and Mrs. Fitzherbert were privately married in the lady's drawing-room by a minister of the Church of England.

IV

The secret was well kept. More than fifteen months later, the question of the Prince's debts came before the House of Commons, and a member made veiled references to matters gravely affecting the constitution both in Church and State. His meaning was not to be mistaken, and a reply was clearly expected. Fox made it in plain terms. That a scandal so palpable could have obtained a moment's currency astonished him, but "when it appears that an invention so monstrous, a report of a fact which has not the smallest degree of foundation, a report of fact actually impossible to happen, has been circulated with so much industry as to have made an impression on this House, it proves at once the uncommon pains taken by the enemies of His Royal Highness to propagate the grossest and most malignant falsehoods, with a view to deprecate his character and injure him in the opinion of his country." On being further questioned, he repeated that the fact not only never could have happened legally, but never has happened in any way whatsoever; and being then asked whether he had direct authority for this assertion, he replied that he had. Few words of observation need be added. Fox, beyond any possibility of suspicion, was speaking the truth; that is, he had been given the Prince's assurance as he declared. But from that day to the end of Charles's

life, Mrs. Fitzherbert refused to acknowledge him. In other words, the Prince led her to believe that Fox had spoken in the House without authority. To Charles himself the Prince made no word of protest, but he persuaded Sheridan to offer a gratuitous tribute in the House to Mrs. Fitzherbert's virtues, with what object it is not clear. Fox on discovering the truth, which he did within twenty-four hours of his speech, was naturally enraged, to the point, it is said, of refusing for a year to see a Prince who nevertheless continued to address him as My Dear Charles and sign himself in haste with "Adieu, my dear friend." The complications of the case were prolonged and strange. Mrs. Fitzherbert's connection with the Prince underwent numerous vicissitudes until 1803, when the final separation took place. On his marriage to Caroline of Brunswick in 1795, she was, by her conviction that her own union was binding in the sight of her Church, whatever it might be by English law, in the embarrassing position of being married to a man who had two duly accredited wives. When the Princess was deserted by her husband after a year's infelicity, he made fresh overtures to Maria. In these he was warmly supported by his family, from the King downwards, who had always treated Mrs. Fitzherbert with cordial respect, and considered her to be a desirable influence upon the royal heir. That lady, at a loss to know precisely where or who she was, turned in her perplexity to the papal throne for instruction. Rome advised her that she might return to her presumably bigamous husband with decorum and piety. She did so, to his complete satisfaction until 1803, when the charms and intrigues of Lady Hertford ended a misalliance that had by no means been without its idyllic note. Mrs. Fitzherbert, in a somewhat bleak old age, told her lay confessor that in her happier years she and the Prince had been "extremely poor, but as merry as crickets." As

though to spoil the story of no embellishment, the Prince, when George IV., stoutly repudiated to Mr. Croker "the absurd story of his supposed marriage." There is but one explanation of the whole fantastic business. If George III. was an obstinate precisian, his eldest son was a no less obstinate liar, and it is clear that he lied to Fox, to Mrs. Fitzherbert, and to Mr. Croker with a nice impartiality.

V

While we are in the society of this amiable if inaccurate prince, we may consider another episode of his career in which Fox was closely concerned. In 1788 the King suffered his second mental breakdown. Pitt was in the full tide of his ascendancy, when suddenly he was faced, by an act of God, with the menace of effacement. If the King were declared to be incapable of government, and a Regency established, there could be no doubt that the buff and blue would come in with the Prince. Towards the end of the year, the King was apprehensive of the returning malady. He complained of disorder in his thoughts, and found himself unable to listen to the music that was so precious to him. There was a lamentable cry one day in the royal apartments at Windsor: "I am going to be mad, and I wish to God that I may die." A little time after, the unfortunate monarch is said to have risen suddenly from the dining-table and, seizing his obnoxious heir by the throat, to have pinned him against the wall in a frenzy of reproach. The Prince must have been provoking enough as a son, even to sanity, but it was insanity that the court recognised in the symptoms. At the end of October the King's behaviour at a levee gave alarming indications of the truth, and although every effort was made to keep the public in ignorance, the world began to whisper that the King was mad again. On November 10, Captain

John Payne, the Prince's secretary, apologised to Sandwich for a delay in writing, as "the very precarious situation of affairs in this place [Windsor] made me unwilling to create any useless alarms till His Majesty's disorder seemed to take some decisive appearance. I am sorry to add that the one it has taken is of the most unhappy kind. No lucid interval has appeared ever since he was first seized, and to-day our last hope is removed with the fever. His pulse is quiet, and at times his ravings subside into great calmness, but always increase in incoherency, and his general health is declining."* Early in December the King was declared by the physicians to be incapable of government. But an immediate complication arose. The doctors disagreed as to the probable duration of the collapse, and while one gave no hope of early recovery, others with equal authority held far less gloomy views. They even hinted that so short a period as six weeks might see the trouble through. A political crisis was at once precipitated. Fox was in Italy at the moment, and Burke wrote to him there, urging his immediate return: "God bless you. There is a good deal to be done for your security and credit, supposing the prince's dispositions to you to be all they are represented, and that I believe them to be. Your business formerly was only to take care of your own honour. I hope you have now another trust. It is a great deal that the proscription is taken off; but, at the same time, the effects of twenty-eight years [Burke is miscalculating] of systematic endeavours to destroy you, cannot be done away with ease. You are to act a great, and though not a discouraging, a difficult

* Hinchinbrooke MSS.: "Jack Payne," who flattered his master's example concerning the King, was, we may suspect, overstating his solicitude. Venturing on one occasion to speak disrespectfully of the Queen in the presence of the Duchess of Gordon, he was pulled up by Her Grace with "You little, insignificant, good-for-nothing, upstart, pert, chattering puppy, how dare you name your royal master's royal mother in that style?"

part; and in a scene which is wholly new. If you cannot succeed in it, the thing is desperate." Charles reached England on November 24. The Prince's party, led by Fox, were for an immediate and unlimited Regency in favour of the heir-apparent. Pitt, playing for time, instituted an elaborate search for precedents. He appointed a committee, he evolved tedious ingenuities of debate in the House, he protested with horror against the indecency of haste on so mournful an occasion. In vain Fox retorted that the plain facts of the case required no precedent, and that the indecency of a haste to provide the country with an executive was a ministerial fiction. Pitt was gaining his point, which was time. On December 15, Fox wrote: "I think it certain that in about a fortnight we shall come in. If we carry our questions [on the form of the proposed Regency Act] we shall come in in a more creditable and triumphant way, but at any rate the Prince must be Regent, and of consequence the Ministry must be changed. The manner in which the Prince has behaved through the whole, has been the most steady, the most friendly, and the handsomest that can be conceived. . . . The King himself (notwithstanding the reports which you may hear) is certainly worse, and perfectly mad." The middle of February, 1789, however, found Pitt still successfully engaged in obstruction, and on the 17th Fox was writing to Fitzpatrick: "I hope by this time all ideas of the Prince or any of us taking any measure in consequence of the good reports of the King are at an end; if they are not, pray do all you can to crush them." Hope deferred was still high, and he adds: "I leave this place [Bath, where he was taking a cure] on Thursday, but stay for letters, and therefore if you could let me know by the return of post, on what day the Regency is like to commence, I should be obliged to you." But the King was once again to destroy Charles's prospects. On the 19th, Pitt

wrote to his mother: "You will have seen for some days how constantly the news from Kew has been improving. . . . [The King] is to all appearance perfectly well, and if it were the case of a private man, would be immediately declared so . . . the plan of the Regency must probably be altered . . . or perhaps wholly laid aside." On the same day the Chancellor in the House of Lords announced the King's convalescence, and, five days later, his complete recovery. On March 5 parliament was told that it would be informed of His Majesty's pleasure on the 10th, and the visions of a Regency government under Fox were at an end.

VI

The charges against Warren Hastings, initiated as we have seen by Fox in his India speeches of 1783, were again brought before the House in 1786, and in 1788 culminated in impeachment. The principal agent in the proceedings was Burke, who for five years had been preparing his case against a man whom he regarded as a criminal reproach to the English name. The trial lasted a hundred and forty-five days, but extended over a period of seven years, and it was not until 1795 that Hastings was acquitted, a ruined man with little but a verdict by way of fortune or reputation. On the motion for impeachment, passed by the House in 1786, Fox took a decisive tone, in which he was supported, less decisively, by Pitt. On the general principles of the case, it was impossible that Fox could have any but one view, and he stated it clearly: "A noble lord has most sagaciously asked, what, in such a situation, is a governor of India to do; is he to consult Puffendorf and Grotius? No. But I will tell him what he is to consult—the laws of nature—not of the statutes to be found in . . . books, but those laws which are to be found in Europe, Africa, and Asia—that are found amongst all mankind—those principles of

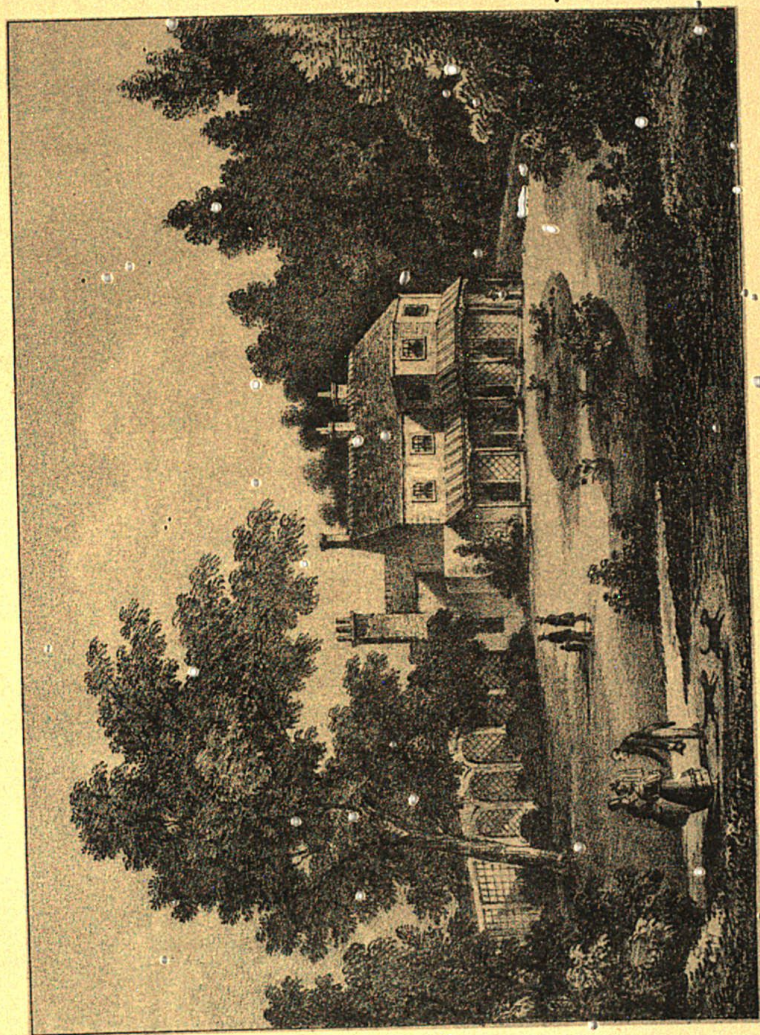
equity and humanity implanted in our hearts." It has always been, and will remain, a matter for scepticism to many that there are public men who really do believe that kind of thing; but Fox believed it, every word of it and always. He began to believe it when as a youth he left the King and North, and he went on believing it without a moment's misgiving until in 1806 he died, not an old but a greatly experienced and still far from disillusioned man.

The charge lay in abeyance till 1787, when Sheridan joined Burke in leading the prosecution, and on February 7 delivered his classic oration on the Begums of Oude. He spoke for five hours and forty minutes, and on concluding collapsed into Burke's arms amidst a tumult of cheering and applause. A parliamentary career that had hitherto been somewhat disappointing suddenly achieved a brilliant, if not sustained, triumph. The intellectual agility, the control of argument and antithesis, and the illuminating wit that inform the speech, are qualities that have so splendidly enriched English comedy. But as we read to-day the crowding periods so artfully deployed, we sometimes seem to detect a flaw in that ringing rhetoric. The use of one great man as whipping-post for another is a poor business, but a comparison here obtrudes itself. Fox and Sheridan were for many years political friends; in the cartoons of the indefatigable Gillray—whose spirited obscenities became a little tiresome in reiteration—they are inseparable. In Fox's last ministry Sheridan was Treasurer of the Navy. Also they were often boon companions in exploits that have furnished the history of the time with many familiar and scandalous footnotes, the significance of which we have discussed. And yet Fox never seems to have had any deep bond of natural sympathy with the man whose talents he so greatly admired. The explanation is, I think, that while Fox, self-indulgent as he may have been, had a character suffi-

ciently tough to survive excesses unimpaired, Sheridan drank himself steadily into a real deterioration. "Fox," says Wraxall, speaking from personal knowledge, "out-lived his vices; those of Sheridan accompanied him to the tomb." No one could be less capable than Fox of moral indignations in such matters, as it may be said no man had less right to affect them. But the distinction implies a deeper difference of character than is apparent in fugitive humours. Both men were no doubt fallible enough in their private affairs, and it means nothing that one drank more or less than the other. But Sheridan became the victim of habits that Charles survived. The deeper, simpler, more responsible nature could bear a strain that was too heavy for the weaker, more unstable genius. Antipathy in such cases is hardly conscious; but it exists. The last man in the world to sit in judgment on the private life of Sheridan or of anyone else, Fox had somewhere hidden in his mind a spark of disdain for a man, friend as he was, who could not stay the course. The emotion had nothing to do with his amiability, which was imperturbable; it was merely a condition of nature such as none of us can determine, however firmly we may keep it in control. In Sheridan's memorable speech there is, we may fancy, just an undertone of something meretricious, something that belonged to a world in which Fox could not breathe.

But, however this may be, the effect of the speech on its hearers was phenomenal. Fox himself declared with enthusiasm that "all he had ever heard, all he had ever read, when compared with it, dwindled into nothing." Fifteen years later, when asked by his nephew which was the best speech he had ever heard in the House, he replied on the instant, "Sheridan's on the Begum charge." Burke proclaimed it as "the most astonishing effort of eloquence, argument, and wit united, of which there was any record of tradition," and Pitt confirmed the eulogy by saying that "it surpassed all the eloquence of ancient

and modern times." As the trial dragged out its infamous length, Fox took part at intervals in the debates that were an occasional chorus to the scene in Westminster Hall, but the management remained chiefly with Burke and Sheridan, and we hear little of him in the concluding stages. Now, in 1788, he was approaching a contest more imperative in its demands than the fortunes of Warren Hastings, grave as these were in their implications. Dark and formidable clouds were settling over France, and in the cataclysmic storm that was about to break, Fox's creed of liberty was to be put to its final and severest trial. In the approaching struggle he had the public support of no more than a little and bitterly misrepresented company. But he was to be fortified by attachments and resources that were widening into the serene and happy middle age that he was not destined to outlive.



ST. ANNE'S HILL,
After C. Stirling