

CHAPTER XIII

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. THE FRENCH WAR.
FOX AND BURKE. 1789-1797.

I

ON July 14, 1789, the Bastille fell to the fury of a Parisian mob; and on the 30th, Fox wrote to Fitzpatrick, "I was not surprised to hear you meant to go to Paris, but am very much so at you having put it off. If you go you had better come this way, as I should be glad to talk it over with you a little, and it is not quite impossible but I may go too. How much the greatest event it is that ever happened in the world! and how much the best!" This attitude towards the French Revolution is one that he was steadily to maintain to the end. In 1795 he disavowed, in simple and conclusive terms, having given "the least countenance to the scenes of blood and cruelty" that had attended that vast and demoniac upheaval. But he refused to let these horrors at any time blind him to the just verities of which they were the dreadful excesses, and he regarded the overthrow of the Bourbon family as "an event favourable to the liberty of Europe . . . because with it fell the reign of despotism." Almost alone in English public life, he held a view commonly shared by the poets of his time, and since established by the disputes of history. The cause is not one for present debate, but the part that Fox took in it, whether we approve or not, was undeniably a brave one, and it was at the outset subjected to a personal test of a very poignant nature. As we follow the progress of his relations with Burke, we are conscious of an undercurrent, if not of distrust, of something less than spontaneous cordiality. Whatever his faults may have been, Charles was the least envious of men, and two of his remarks in later years noted by Rogers had their origin, we need not doubt, in truth.

“Burke was a most impracticable person, a most unmanageable colleague—he would never support any measure, however convinced he might be in his heart of its utility, if it had first been proposed by another”*; and again: “After all, Burke was a damned wrong-headed fellow, through his whole life jealous and obstinate.” These were words after the event, and Rogers had a way of giving a malevolent turn to his reports, but our suspicion leaves us not wholly unprepared to find Fox saying something of the sort. At the beginning of 1790, however, there had been no outward trace of disagreement between the two men, and they were united by long-trying and powerful bonds. They had fought a great fight together, and in every phase of their political fortunes they had been closely allied. Difficult though he may have been, Burke had learnt to acknowledge Fox as the most powerful and the ablest man in their party, and to accept the leadership of one who, less than twenty years ago, had so sincerely flattered him with youthful homage. And Fox knew well how freely his own career in opposition had drawn upon the vital force of Burke’s political philosophy. It is true that Charles’s influence had not succeeded, even if it had been used, in securing cabinet rank for Burke in either of his administrative terms, but there is no evidence that the great Irishman resented this. Supporting Fox in the India debates of 1783, he had spoken these words: “And now, having done my duty to the Bill, let me say a word to the author. I should leave him to his own noble sentiments, if the unworthy and illiberal language with which he had been treated, beyond all excess of parliamentary liberty, did not make

* Dyce, Rogers’s editor, very aptly cites the words of Brutus on Cassius:

O name him not, let us not break with him;
For he will never follow any thing
That other men begin.

a few words necessary; not so much in justice to him as to my own feelings. I must say then, that it will be a distinction honourable to the age that [the liberation of India] has fallen to the lot of abilities and disposition equal to the task; that it has fallen to one who has the enlargement to compose, the spirit to undertake, and the eloquence to support so great a measure of hazardous benevolence. . . . He has put to hazard his ease, his security, his interest, his power, even his darling popularity, for the benefit of a people whom he has never seen. This is the road that all heroes have trod before him. . . . [In his faults there is] nothing to extinguish the fires of great virtues . . . no mixture of deceit, of hypocrisy, of pride, of ferocity, of complexional despotism, or want of feeling for the distress of mankind. . . . I have spoken what I think and what I feel to the mover of this Bill. An honourable friend of mine, speaking of his merits, was charged with having made a studied panegyric. I don't know what his was. Mine, I am sure, is a studied panegyric; the fruit of much meditation; the result of the observation of nearly twenty years." And now, there began a dispute, that was to end only with irreparable estrangement.

On February 9, in a debate on army estimates, Burke referred to France as being for the time politically expunged from the map of Europe; and as having lost everything, "even to her name." We had at this time no reason to fear the ambitions of a hostile monarchy; our danger was in an excess of anarchy, of successive fraud and violence, of "an irrational, unprincipled, proscribing, confiscating, plundering, ferocious, bloody, and tyrannical democracy." Most of all did he deplore "the late assumption of citizenship by the army" in that country, and he was shocked that his right honourable friend [Fox] had spoken words condoning that event. On the 5th, Fox had said that if ever he had been disposed for in-

creasing our standing army it would be now when they were learning from the example of France "that a man, by becoming a soldier, did not cease to be a citizen." Burke now declared that it was with a "pain inexpressible that he was obliged to have the shadow of a difference with his friend, whose authority would always be great with him and with all thinking people. . . . His confidence in [Mr. Fox] was such, and so ample, as to be almost implicit. He who profits of a superior understanding, raises his power to [that] level. . . . I have found the benefit of such a junction, and would not willingly depart from it. . . . I wish, on almost all occasions, that my sentiments may be . . . conveyed in [Mr. Fox's] words, and I wish, as among the greatest benefits to the country, an eminent share of power to that Right honourable gentleman, because I know that with his great and remarkable understanding he has joined the greatest possible degree of that natural moderation which is the best corrective of power; that he is of the most artless, candid, open and benevolent disposition, disinterested in the extreme; of a temper mild and placable, even to fault; and without one drop of gall in his whole constitution." Nothing could be handsomer; but it was the prelude to a searching and pitiless attack upon conditions in France. Fox replied. He repaid Burke's compliments in full: "such is my knowledge of his principles, such the value I set upon them, and such the estimation in which I hold his friendship, that if I were to put all the political information which I have learnt from books, all which I have gained from science, all which any knowledge of the world and its affairs has taught me, into one scale, and the improvement which I have derived from my right honourable friend's instruction and conversation were placed in the other, I should be at a loss to decide to which to give the preference. I have learnt more from my right honourable friend than from all the men with

whom I have conversed." And then he opposed his own views to Burke's, plainly, courteously and unequivocally. In a significant confession of political faith he disclaimed all servile submission to democracy—he was "equally the enemy of all absolute forms of government, whether an absolute monarchy, an absolute aristocracy, or an absolute democracy." He was "adverse to all extremes, and a friend only to a mixed government, like our own," Burke was unmoved, and the sitting ended with dissension brooding between the two friends.

II

Later in the year Burke published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and reconciliation with Fox in opinion was clearly impossible. In April, 1791, the quarrel declined into a personal breach, for which the responsibility was Burke's alone. Fox, in words that have been variously reported, eulogised the new constitution of France as "the most stupendous and glorious edifice of liberty which had been erected on the foundation of human integrity in any time or country." Unhappily, as Burke rose "in much visible emotion" to reply, cries of "Question!" silenced him, and passions were pent up that might have been released in the heat of debate. A few days later Fox reaffirmed his opinions, and Burke uttered his ominous warning, that if he and his friend should here differ he desired it to be recollected that "however dear he considered his friendship, there was something still dearer in his mind—the love of his country." On May 6, Burke was repeatedly called to order by the opposition for traducing the constitution of a friendly power, and Fox professed himself at a loss to know how one who had so eloquently defended "the rights of man" in America could now stigmatise them as "chimerical and visionary" in France. It was Burke

who had taught him that "no revolt of a nation was caused without provocation," and no denial of the master should now induce him to repudiate the lesson. Burke replied with complaints of misrepresentation, abuse of confidential exchanges of opinion, and unprovoked attacks upon his personal honour. Fox had proclaimed their difference on this matter to be absolute; he agreed that it was no less. At his time of life, it was, he knew, a grievous thing to risk the loss of friends, to risk, it might be, expulsion from his party. But his sense of public duty was clear, and with his last breath he would charge them, "Fly from the French constitution." Fox, in a whisper that was heard by many in the House, protested anxiously that there was no loss of friendship. "There is," exclaimed the speaker; "I know the price of my conduct—I have done my duty at the price of my friend—our friendship is at an end." Fox rose, and with tears on his cheeks, for some minutes was unable to speak. He "wept even to sobbing," says one witness of the scene. The House, deeply moved, remained hushed as he recovered himself. Quietly he answered Burke's charges, examined the differences between them, and regretted "ignominious terms" that his friend had that day applied to him. Here Burke interrupted, saying that he "did not remember using any." Fox seized the words without hesitation: "My right honourable friend does not recollect the epithets: they are out of his mind: then they are completely and for ever out of mine. I cannot cherish a recollection so painful, and, from this moment, they are obliterated and forgotten." But Burke was inexorable in his personal application of a public breach that was now beyond repair. On May 11 he interpreted a speech from Fox as "sentence of banishment" from the Whig party. Burke was now sixty-two years of age. It is difficult to see what reasonable reply he could have to Fox's charge of desertion from

liberal principles; but of his sincerity, mistaken or not, there need be no question, and it was a touching figure that hoped that the "House would not consider him a bad man, although he had been banished by one party, and was too old to seek another." All that Fox could say was unavailing. Burke, declaring himself to be "a man disgraced by his party" and adding that he did not "solicit the right honourable gentleman's friendship, nor that of any man," left the House, and never spoke to Fox in private again. Charles made overtures more than once, always to be refused, as he was finally when he asked for an interview as Burke lay dying in 1797. Lord John Russell, who in his *Life of Fox* is often a little uneasy in his hero's company, is clear upon the issues of this quarrel. "The separation of Mr. Burke from his party was a natural consequence of the position he had assumed in his book. The breach of friendship with Mr. Fox was an effect of his own wilful intemperance. But it was no momentary passion which confused and widened the breach. Mr. Burke did not rest till he had estranged from Mr. Fox many of his best friends, and broken into fragments the great and firm body of the English Whigs."

Charles's political life from this time, 1791, until he seceded from the House in 1797, was somewhat dreary, sterile. Burke, indefatigably hostile, grew a little unscrupulous as, by mingled intrigue and invective, he sowed the seeds of dissolution among a party that for some time had no particular aim in the presence of Pitt's secure and in many respects enlightened supremacy. The young minister's financial acumen and industry during the years following the peace of 1763 had effected a remarkable recovery in the national fortunes. Fox, if he hinted that the credit was not wholly Pitt's, acknowledged the fair promise of the situation. On the question of parliamentary reform, Pitt found himself, as he thought, under the necessity of taking a firm line

against measures that an opposition group, known as the Association of Friends of the People, brought forward without consulting Fox. The minister was compelled by this policy to discredit proposals of a kind that he had himself not long since submitted to the House. He justified himself by saying that while he had advocated them as a means of repairing a disorganised treasury, it would be folly to interfere with the electoral system on the present state of prosperity. Fox, rather than disown his conviction, supported measures that he considered to be ill-timed and dangerous, as aiming at a direct popular appeal rather than at conciliating opinion in parliament. But while the political conditions separated Fox and Pitt for the first time on this topic, their views remained essentially in agreement. If Fox had a far greater sympathy than Pitt with the motives of the French Revolution, he had no less loathing of its horrors. In June, 1793, he was to write, "things at Paris have been going regularly from bad to worse," and in August, "there were reports of the Queen's being executed, but they were unfounded, and I still hope that they will abstain from this one act of butchery." On other matters, there was a general understanding between the two leaders. Fox was for unconditional liberty of religious thought, and Pitt, while more conservative in his views, was no bigot. Both were in favour of the rising movement for the abolition of slavery. When, therefore, in June, 1792, an effort was made to effect a coalition between the two men, there was a reasonable prospect of its success. After some hesitation, Fox exclaimed that "it was so damned right a thing, that it must be done." There were mutual suspicions, and some difficulty as to the respective offices to be held by the two men in the proposed new arrangement, but these were at no point insuperable. The design, that might have been so fertile of national good, that might conceivably even have

averted the Napoleonic wars, was wrecked by Burke. The animosity of the "man disgraced" had but one aim; to alienate Fox from his followers. He himself was already closely in touch with a considerable and powerful body of the Whigs, and now in their counsels he steadily plied the argument that Fox himself was the obstacle to any accommodation. On June 9, at a meeting with the Duke of Portland, Lord Loughborough and others, he "declaimed on the conduct of Fox, that his conduct had disqualified him for office."* On the 22nd, he told Malmesbury that "Mr. Fox's coach stops the way," and "concluded by observing how very hard it was that on his account an arrangement calculated to preserve the country should be broken off; yet he foresaw that it would be . . . as there was no doing without Fox, or with him." On July 5 there was a feeling that there would be "no difficulty in arranging Pitt and Fox," and on the 11th, Portland announced that "Pitt certainly still wishes for an arrangement." But settlement came no nearer, and Burke lost no opportunity of delaying it. At length he had the satisfaction of seeing it abandoned. On August 26 he wrote to a friend, "the difficulty, in fact, is the arrangement of Fox." Negotiations were still active in December, at a further meeting on the 22nd of which month Burke "with his usual eloquence talked for an hour"; said that Fox's principles had been seduced; that his ambition had led him to embrace those of the French Revolution, and that if he renounced them it would be either as a convert or a hypocrite; that there was no prospect of his being the one, and that they had grave cause to beware of the other—together with much more to the same effect, marked a good deal more by rhetorical anger than by logic. The rhetoric prevailed.

* For a full account of the negotiations see *Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury, 1844.*, vol. ii., pp. 453-495.

Fox's friends were stampeded. Some, Burke and Portland among them, went over to the government, others, provoked by the apostasy, indulged irresponsible theories of liberty to which Fox would not subscribe. He was left almost alone in the purpose from which he never retreated—the establishment of liberal doctrines by strictly constitutional procedure.

III

His isolation rapidly became yet more complete. Pitt, intent on economic recovery, did not want war, but there came a point when he was no longer prepared to oppose it on principle. He wished France no good, but had no inclination to ruin his own finance by incurring vast new obligations. His vision of international affairs was a narrow one, and he had a vague idea that the misfortunes of a formidable trade rival would somehow help his own exchequer; though if France was to be conquered, he was content to leave the task to Austria and her allies. But Austria, in traditional vein, was making a very uncertain job of it, and English opinion was becoming alarmed. In August, 1792, the French throne fell; in November the Convention, in which the revolutionary government was newly vested, issued a decree that was in effect a challenge to all peoples to throw off the yoke of their oppressors, which in the highly excited republican mind meant repudiating all existing authority. The response from England was negligible. The members of a few crack-brained societies began to address each other as Citizen Smith or Citizeness Peppercorn, and issued absurd proclamations of which nobody took the slightest notice. When damage was done it was done not by an insurrectionary people rising against their sovereign, but by mobs incited to outrage peaceable meetings of respectable folk who genuinely believed

that a revolution was necessary in France, without the least intention of aiming at one in England; as in the disgraceful Birmingham riots of 1791, in which Priestley's house, containing his irreplaceable manuscripts and instruments, was destroyed together with those of many other reputable citizens, and in which there was at least a strong suspicion of instigation from quarters not unfriendly to the government. The Convention's decree, highly improper at it was, had not the smallest prospect of disturbing the domestic equilibrium of the English people. But it was an admirable instrument for the purpose of inflaming the public temper, and Burke, who by this time was in a state of almost lunatic Francophobia, used it to the utmost. Pitt tried to stem the tide, but his knowledge of foreign policy was small, and his gift for enlightened diplomacy smaller, and he failed.

It is at this point that Fox might have saved the situation had he been in power. But when parliament opened in December, 1792, and the King announced that the Convention was plainly determined on war, Fox faced a country panic-stricken by the threat of a monster that was about to destroy universal law and order, a ministry that had lost control of events, and, moreover, a Convention in France that did indeed believe that a European war would be to its advantage. The alleged, and wholly unproved, insurrectionary movement in England was used as a pretext for calling out the Militia, and the country responded with demonstrations of loyalty. Fox in debate carefully distinguished the generous motives of the French crisis from its base passions, and contended that it was not for us to dictate to a foreign power upon its choice of government. On January 21, 1793, Louis XVI. was guillotined in Paris. Fox in the House pronounced it to be "an act as disgraceful as any that the page of history recorded. . . . Not only were the rules of criminal justice . . . violated; . . . not only was

[Louis] tried and condemned without any existing law to which he was personally amenable, and even contrary to laws that did actually exist, but the degrading circumstances of his imprisonment, the unnecessary and insulting asperity with which he had been treated, the total want of republican magnanimity in the whole transaction added every aggravation to the inhumanity and injustice of those acts." But he still refused to admit justification for war. The Convention's decree was, he allowed, an offence, but it was frivolous in the government to pretend that our security had been endangered by it, and our duty in the first place was at most to announce the terms on which we desired it to be repealed. The atrocity of the King's execution had shocked humanity, but it was, he believed, an accepted point of usage that a government as such could not be cognisant of crimes committed in another country unless its own safety or treaties were involved. Punishment of French criminals was not our business. But the powers of argument by this time were wasted. Whether Fox could have brought the Convention to its senses at an earlier stage by his understanding of European interests may be doubtful; it is certain that by February, 1793, neither his voice nor any could have checked the war spirit in England. The Whig landslide continued. Fox's amendment to the King's Address was lost by two hundred and ninety votes to fifty. On February 12 a message from the crown informed parliament that a state of war existed between this country and France. Fox was unable to bring the debate to a division, and on the 18th in proposing his "Resolution Against the War" he secured but forty-four votes in a House of over three hundred.

IV

On January 26, 1793, Charles addressed a letter to his Westminster constituents. "To vote in small minorities," he begins, "is a misfortune to which I have been so much accustomed, that I cannot be expected to feel it very acutely." Since this letter presents Fox's own defence of his conduct in opposing the French war, it is necessary to consider it in some detail. While he has learnt to accept misrepresentation and calumny with fortitude, even with some pride, since these are so often the rewards of zeal and service to the state, he is informed on the present occasion that many of his warmest friends among those whom he represents in parliament disapprove of his conduct, and profess themselves "neither able nor willing to defend" him. He therefore proposes to place before them a precise record of his part in the recent debates. His first motion, taking the form of an Amendment to the Address, had been to demand that the government should give a true account of their motives in calling up the Militia and adopting other emergency measures, as the summoning of parliament before the prescribed date. The alleged insurrections at Yarmouth, Shields, and other places were, he believed, a wholly inadequate explanation of steps so serious; and doubtless for the truth they must look to that other clause under which the present exercise of prerogative had been made—"the general state of the country." But before coming to a decision as to what should properly be done, surely the House had a right, indeed a duty, to ascertain what precisely the state of the country really was. If it was held to be against the public interest to reveal this to the House in open session, there could be no possible objection to giving the information to a secret committee, upon whose assurances the House would be able to proceed. Unable to answer

these submissions, supporters of the administration had taken another line, and had defined the present measures as taken against the notorious progress of "French opinions." But "the sudden embodying of the Militia and the drawing of regular troops to the capital were measures to meet an immediate, not a distant mischief." If the government meant that the insurrectionary state of the country was their justification, they should produce evidence of that state, and this in Fox's view it was impossible for them to do. If, on the other hand, the latent danger of French example was their real anxiety, they should say so plainly, and not demoralise the country with reports of imaginary tumults. Then follows a passage so strangely untarnished by time that it should be read in its remarkable entirety.

"I am aware that there were some persons who thought that to be upon our guard was so much our first interest, in the present posture of affairs, that even to conceal the truth was less mischievous than to diminish the public terror. They dreaded enquiry, lest it should produce light; they felt so strongly the advantage of obscurity in inspiring terror, that they overlooked its other property of causing real peril. They were so alive to the dangers belonging to false security, that they were insensible to those arising from groundless alarms. — In this frame of mind they might for a moment forget that integrity and sincerity ought ever to be the characteristic virtues of a British House of Commons; and while they were compelled to admit that the House could not, without inquiry, profess its belief of dangers, which (if true) might be substantiated by evidence, they might nevertheless be unwilling that the salutary alarm (for such they deemed it) arising from these supposed dangers in the minds of the people, should be wholly quieted. What they did not themselves credit, they might wish to be believed by others. Dangers, which

they considered as distant, they were not displeased that the public should suppose near, in order to excite more vigorous exertions.

“To these systems of crooked policy and pious fraud I have always entertained a kind of instinctive and invincible repugnance; and, if I had nothing else to advance in defence of my conduct but this feeling, of which I cannot divest myself, I should be far from fearing your displeasure. But are there in truth, no evils in a false alarm, besides the disgrace attending those who are concerned in propagating it? Is it nothing to destroy peace, harmony and confidence, among all ranks of citizens? Is it nothing to give a general credit and countenance to suspicions, which every man may point as his worst passions incline him? In such a state, all political animosities are inflamed. We confound the mistaken speculatist with the desperate incendiary. We extend the prejudices which we have conceived against individuals to the political party or even to the religious sect of which they are members. In this spirit a Judge declared from the bench, in the last century, that poisoning was a Popish trick, and I should not be surprised if Bishops were now to preach from the pulpit that sedition is a Presbyterian or a Unitarian vice. Those who differ from us in their ideas of the constitution, in this paroxysm of alarm we consider as confederated to destroy it. Forbearance and toleration have no place in our minds; for who can tolerate opinions, which, according to what the Deluders teach, and rage and fear incline the Deluded to believe, attack our Lives, our Properties, and our Religion?

“This situation I thought it my duty, if possible, to avert, by promoting an inquiry. By this measure the guilty, if such there are, would have been detected, and the innocent liberated from suspicion.

“My proposal was rejected by a great majority. I defer with all due respect to their opinion, but retain my own.”

His second motion, says Fox, had been to beg His Majesty to “employ every means of negotiation, consistent with the honour and safety of this country, to avert the calamities of war.” It is inconceivable that his friends will question the propriety of this. In general terms, the advantages of peace can need no emphasis. If there are seeds of discontent at home, “war is the hot bed in which these seeds will soonest vegetate.” Little as he had expected support, he had learnt from experience that even the voice of a minority might sometimes deter ministers from “irrational projects of war,” and he had spoken; that he had spoken in vain was, he hopes, in no sense to his dishonour. His third motion had been to send a special minister to Paris for the purpose of exploring their differences with France, and either to resolve them, or to remove every doubt that the grounds of war were intelligible and just. Some people favoured secret rather than open negotiation. He rejected the proposals as suiting “the conduct rather of such as sue for a favour, than of a great nation, which demands satisfaction.” Others professed an opinion that by sending a minister to Paris at that time we should give countenance to proceedings “most unanimously, and most justly reprobated in every country in Europe.” In a postscript, written after the execution of the King, he justly observes that the presence of such a minister might “have afforded one chance more of preventing an act concerning which (out of France) I will venture to affirm that there is not throughout Europe one dissentient voice.” And against the view in general he opposes a wealth of example: “We had a Minister at Versailles when Corsica was bought and enslaved. We had Ministers at

the German courts, at the time of the infamous partition of Poland. We have generally a resident Consul, who acts as a Minister to the piratical republic of Algiers; and we have more than once sent embassies to the Emperors of Morocco, reeking from the blood through which by the murder of their nearest relations they had waded to their thrones? In none of these instances was any sanction given by Great Britain to the transaction by which power had been acquired, or the manner in which it had been exercised." Others, again, held that our duty was not to persuade but to conquer France. To what end? Had we grievances? Then how were they to be redressed, either before a war or after it, but by negotiations? If such negotiations were rejected by the Convention at the outset, then our justification for war would be plain, but not until then. It could but seem that the refusal to make approaches was inspired by a determination to engage in war with France on account of her internal concerns, and in order to force her to re-establish her own former government. And yet the King's speech had expressly disavowed any such principle.* Did anybody believe that they could by arms force France to a counter-revolution? No—nobody seemed to maintain that.

Then were we to expend the "blood and treasure of this country in a hope that—not our efforts—but time and chance may produce a new government in France with which it would be more agreeable to our ministers to negotiate than with the present?" And what, again, would be the termination of such a war, but negotiation? Finally, there were people who objected to any recognition of France but as "the price of peace." But they must not confuse the present issue with that involved in the

* "I have uniformly abstained from any interference with respect to the internal affairs of France." King's Speech from the Throne. December 13, 1792.

question of American independence. In that case he had been of opinion that a gratuitous and preliminary acknowledgment of their independence was most consonant to the principles of magnanimity and policy; but in this instance we have no sacrifice to make, for we have no claim; and the reasons for which the French wish an avowed and open intercourse can only be such as apply equally to the mutual interest of both nations, by affording more effective means of preventing misunderstanding, and securing peace.”* Having made the point that the ministry had in fact recognised the new French government by continuing to act upon their commercial treaties after the overthrow of Louis, Fox concludes by saying that having placed all the facts before his constituents he awaits their verdict without misgiving. If his reasonings do not convince them, he will be disappointed, but at least he is confident they must believe that these reasonings, “and not any sinister or oblique motive, did in fact actuate me.”

V

This letter† is masterly in its arrangement, its logic, and its temper. The style, if it inevitably takes an occasional turn upon the forum, is concise and easy, and distinguished always by clarity. As an example of eighteenth-century English prose, it is no mean achieve-

* When Fox made his proposal on December 15 for sending a minister to France, the British Ambassador had already been recalled from Paris, and Burke excitedly declared that a state of war already existed. Fox, during the debates, regretted the recall, and took no notice of Burke's hysteria.

† It may be read in Fox's *Collected Speeches* (1815) and also in the edition of his French war speeches edited in the *Everyman Library* by Miss Irene Cooper Willis, who contributes an admirable Introduction. The letter was one of the few things Fox himself published. It quickly ran through several editions; as I write I have before me the sixth, dated, like the first, 1793.

ment. But it displays, also, for one reader at least, an intellectual poise and a political vision entirely beyond the scope of any of Fox's political contemporaries. When a country is betrayed or exalted into the passions that accompany the inception of a war, argument has little weight; it may be held that it should have none. And yet there will always be men inflexibly resolved not to abandon their reason in a crisis, no matter what the penalties of candour may be. Fox's argument was swept aside in the rush of popular feeling; but it was never answered. It was, indeed, unanswerable. The superstition that Fox did not love his own country will not, as we have said before, bear a moment's investigation. He loved her institutions, her parliamentary procedure and life, her social manners, her historical traditions, her literature, her sports, and her landscape, as devotedly as any Englishman who ever lived. And, with a patriotism that no adversity could daunt, he loved her honour. There will always be differences of opinion as to how that honour best is served. Many impartial judges of history may believe that at the beginning of 1793 it was contingent on a war with France: others may conclude that had Fox been in power, he might have preserved peace and a yet finer honour at once. War having become an established fact, he pledged himself in his resolution of February 12, to loyal support of the King in "repelling every hostile attack against this country," but added that every effort, "consistent with the honour of his Majesty's crown, the security of his allies, and the interests of his people," to effect a settlement should continue to be made. But the country was in no mood now to discuss peace on any terms, good or bad. Fox was left with an impotent and almost unheeded minority in the House, and stripped of popular credit. But such loyalty as he retained was uncompromising. It was said that there were but forty of the liberal Whigs left, but that to a

man they would willingly be hanged for Fox. Among them were Sheridan and Fitzpatrick; Adam the duellist and Thomas Erskine, the future Lord Chancellor; Philip Francis, the reputed author of *Junius*; the fifth Duke of Bedford and his brother, Lord John Russell, who succeeded him in 1802; and Charles Grey, now a young man of under thirty, who fifty years later was to be Prime Minister as Earl Grey, and who, in a new age of English politics, was to keep the name and fame of Fox in pious recollection. It was the last-named who, in the debate on our representation in Paris, sounded the ringing note of a devotion that was to inspire the faithful few. "If the enthusiasm of any man for my right honourable friend who made the motion be abated, mine, on the contrary, is if possible increased. The state of the country calls upon my right honourable friend to stand in the gap and defend the constitution: he has said he will do so. And while I have power of body or mind he shall not stand alone. A firm band of admiring friends, not the less respectable nor the less likely to prevail from the present disproportion of their number, will faithfully stand by him against all the calumnies of those who betray while they affect to defend the constitution." These were brave words, and Fox knew how to value confidence so generous. On the same occasion, another devotee, a man several years older than Fox himself, declared in the face of a full and hostile House, with the renegade Whigs ranged uneasily behind the Treasury benches, "While I live and breathe, I will maintain these opinions. I know the public and private virtues of my right honourable friend; and whenever I separate from him I shall consider that day the most degraded of my life."

VI

The progress of the French war in general does not concern us; we have only to indicate Fox's view of it. That "he rejoiced in the misfortunes of his own country and the successes of her enemies" is the kind of calumny that beset his days while living, and has afforded much satisfaction in some quarters ever since. It can best be answered in his own words. His attitude on declaration of war we have seen. On March 15, 1793, he said: "My support of the war now that we are engaged in it, is as sincere as that of his Majesty's ministers, although on very different grounds. I wish it to be supported with vigour, because by a vigorous war, we shall the more speedily obtain adequate and honourable terms of peace." On the 22nd, he "should support ministers in carrying on the war." On April 30: "I repeat, that although I was not in the least degree accessory to the commencement of this calamitous war, yet I should be glad to be instrumental in bringing it to a conclusion as speedily as can be effected with due regard to the honour of the country." On June 17, in moving a resolution for peace on the grounds that the menace from France to ourselves and our allies no longer existed, he allowed that in so far as the war had been undertaken to meet that menace it was "just, prudent, and necessary." In January, 1794: "A desire has been universally expressed, that an honourable and secure peace should be established; such also is my desire; and if peace cannot be concluded on such terms, I will then grant that the war ought to be carried on." In April, while wishing that we had at the outset employed negotiation, if such a course "had failed to procure for us all we had a just right to demand, no doubt could have been entertained of the propriety of our entering into a war, and endeavouring to secure from France by the success of our army, that justice which she refused to the

wisdom of our counsels." In May: "If we were to propose peace and fail, what should we lose? . . . This we should gain, that the Convention would no longer be able to delude the people of France into the persuasion that we were making war upon them, not for the usual objects of war, but for the destruction of their liberties." In December, on the King's Speech: "In it, not a word was said of the Navy. He should only observe, that in our present circumstances, the neglect of building a single ship that could possibly be built, was a subject highly criminal." In March, 1795: "There is not a mere majority, there is almost a unanimity in favour of loyalty." In May: "He would quote the sentiment of Mr. Burke in the case of America—'Try peace and conciliation, and if these fail, then pursue war.'" In October: "A war of self-defence . . . he could explain, he could justify." In February, 1796: "Let it not be understood that I wish for a dishonest peace, or peace on any other terms than those which are suitable to the interests, and consistent with the dignity of this country." In October of the same year: "The right honourable gentleman says that a great danger threatens us. I agree with him in calling upon the people to resist an invasion on the part of France. Resist it, I say, with all your might. Be unanimous in your exertions: be vigorous in your efforts: draw your purses freely: contribute your personal labours cheerfully." And in May, 1797, at the moment when he was about to secede from parliament after long and unremitting opposition that, greatly as it has ennobled the records of those days, had made not the smallest impression on ministerial conduct, he said again: "We must combine all our strength, fortify one another by the communion of our courage; and by a seasonable exertion of national wisdom, patriotism, and vigour, take measures for the chance of salvation, and encounter with unappalled hearts, all the enemies, foreign and internal, all the dangers

and calamities of every kind which press so heavily upon us."

These links, taken at chance from an unbroken chain of evidence extending over a period of five years, are sufficient finally to discredit the charges made against Charles's loyalty in general. But he was, none the less, from the first, a merciless critic of the conduct of the French Revolutionary War, and, later, of its character. He adopted a triple line of attack. In the first place, allowing the necessity for war at the outset, he insisted that no moment should be considered as improper for exploring possible approaches to peace. Over and over again he besought the government to negotiate on terms that could not imperil the national honour, and as often his admonitions were disregarded. Secondly, he resisted, with all the energy and eloquence that he could command, the shameless and demoralising interference with the constitutional rights of the people, that is so commonly the self-constituted prerogative of war ministers. Against panic-stricken Treason and Seditious Bills, against the savage prosecution and punishment of honest people who differed from ministerial opinion, against the insidious encroachment upon every kind of freedom in the name of public interest, he raised his voice in fearless indignation. Speaking of Lord Howe's victory of June the First with the Channel Fleet in 1794, "he had hoped that Lord Howe had not only conquered the French fleet, but reconquered the Habeas Corpus Act. . . . But they talked of a convention. What was the magical influence of this word, that if any set of people call themselves a convention the whole nation must be undone, [whereas] the nearest justice of the peace, he was fully convinced, might easily disperse them." In 1796 he said: "There are some inconveniences that necessarily arise out of a free constitution. [But] you cannot argue that subject in this House, for the people of this

country have made their election: they have chosen a free government, and it is your duty to preserve it with all its inconveniences, if there be any that are worth mentioning. If, therefore, when ministers pretend an alarm, you are to give them whatever power they ask for . . . you desert the point on which the people of this country have already made their election; and, instead of the blessings which your ancestors intended for you, you take what may appear to you, but what never appeared to me, the advantages of despotism." And the last words he spoke in 1797, before this term of absence, were: "A new administration ought to be formed: I have no desire to make a part of any such administration, and I am sure that such an arrangement is feasible, and that it is capable of being done without me. . . . I have no wish to be the person, or one of the persons, to do it; but though my inclination is for retirement, I shall always be ready to give my free and firm support to an administration that shall restore to the country its outraged rights." The reports of Fox's speeches from 1792 to 1797 cover nearly a thousand pages: and they bristle with these challenging onsets.

Thirdly, and even more significantly, Fox steadily grew in the conviction that the war was an improper one, and that the ministers' conduct of it was incapable. He submitted constantly that there was no information before the House as to what its objects were. In a speech made in March, 1795, he summarised an argument in which he persisted until 1797. Were we fighting against or for France? That is, was our cause that of our Dutch allies on the Scheldt, and the insult offered by the Convention to our national integrity; or was it the re-establishment of the fallen government of France? If the former, and they had every right to assume that this "defensive" war was undertaken for no other reason, then the events of the war had shown that the Dutch cared nothing for our

assistance, and were prepared to welcome their French invaders, while no one could pretend that at this time the French menace to this island was a serious or practicable one. If the latter, we were fighting for a cause expressly disowned by the King and his ministers, the settlement of a foreign power's internal affairs. Would the government let the country know to which of these alternative motives for continuing the war they confessed? And, in either choice, would they explain what could be the impropriety at this time of seeing whether negotiation might not lead to a favourable conclusion? In short, it seemed to him that the government, to justify the war, were advancing either a case that no longer existed, or a case that on their own admission was a bad one. Whatever the facts, clearly we could not merely lay down our arms and silently withdraw from the contest. But that we had no proper reason for continuing the war, he was convinced; and how to end it but by negotiation, he was at a loss to know. As to our own condition, Fox had no difficulty in showing that it was deplorable. "When Great Britain entered upon this war, she was promised the assistance of all Europe; and in less than six months, the whole burden of the war has devolved upon Great Britain."

VII.

That was in 1795. Eighteen months later, with views unchanged upon the justification of the war, he was showing that its management was drifting from bad to worse. "Ministers tell us there is danger of an invasion. I may be willing for a time to suspend any enquiry into the causes that have involved us in this difficulty, and disgrace:—and into the conduct of those who have brought us into this danger; but must I not know what it is? Must the mere bringing us into danger be of itself a sufficient claim to confidence?" He now no longer had any

faith in the original purity of motive, in the acceptance of which he had at first announced his support of the war. Referring to Burke's *Letters on a Regicidè Peace*, he said: "If those be incorrigible jacobins who detest the measures of his Majesty's Ministers, who are of opinion that their conduct has tarnished the glory of the country, and that they have conducted pusillanimously a contest which they rashly and unjustly commenced . . . if these are the incorrigible jacobins, I am glad to hear that they amount to eighty thousand. I wish they amounted to eighty million." At regular intervals he demanded an enquiry into the state of the nation, always to face overwhelming defeat on division. More than once messages from the throne announced an intention to discuss terms of peace. Each time Fox welcomed a decision that he had unceasingly urged year by year, and each time the promise faded nebulously away.

That Pitt was a great war minister is questionable; and it may be an idle speculation to surmise that Fox would have been a greater. But that Pitt was often tied to a party against his own better impulses is, I think, clear to any candid reading of those times; and also that Fox, misguided or not, was governed from first to last by conviction that was as disinterested as it was independent. His position, for a man of his temperament, was a melancholy one. It meant loss of friends, popularity, and respect, all of which he cared for with a touching ingenuity. To know Fox at all, is to know that such a passage as the following is utterly devoid of sentimental rhetoric: "For myself, let gentlemen catechise me as much as they please; let them spread papers, stating me to be an enemy of my country; let them blacken me . . .; let them even be successful, if they can, in their endeavours to make me odious to my countrymen; still will I persist in doing my duty to the public, and never relinquish it but with my life." Here was no

cheap boast. He knew the price that he was paying, and knew it to be a heavy one. It is doubtful whether any man in English public life who has so greatly valued popular esteem, has so bravely borne the loss of it. As he passed the print-shops of Bond Street and Piccadilly and every other morning saw some foul travesty of himself leering from the windows, he often had to bite hard on the bullet. Not that he was despondent. He enjoyed the fight, and he was assured of the affection of a few unalienable friends. But he loved England, and he believed that she was being violated. His protests were held up to gross mockery, and he was far too sensitive a being not to mind that. The contest was a wearing one, but Charles, for all his sensitiveness, was uncommonly tough in the grain. It was only after five years that he decided that in the present temper of the country and under the present ministry, it was useless to repeat arguments for the hundredth time, and for the hundredth to see them ignominiously rejected. The critics who have most severely reprimanded his secession from parliament are those who have most shrilly declared the futility of his presence in it. Our view coincides with theirs in neither respect. For five years he defended a certain principle in face of every discouragement. Some people may think it a bad principle; he thought it a good one, and he more than any man of his time impressed it upon English life, with a genius that has never been forgotten. At the end of five years he retired, not in despair, nor in a sulk, but because he believed that secession was now the boldest and the most effective step to take. His own words are explicit, and they are his own perfect vindication. On May 26, 1797, at the end of a long speech of unimpaired vigour, he said: "And now, Sir, before I sit down, allow me to make a single observation with respect to the character and conduct of those who have, in conjunction with myself, felt

it their duty to oppose the progress of this disastrous war. I hear it said, 'You do nothing but mischief when you are here; and yet we should be sorry to see you away.' I do not know how we shall be able to satisfy gentlemen who feel towards us in this way. If we can neither do our duty without mischief, nor please them with doing nothing, I know of but one way by which we can give them content, and that is by putting an end to our existence. With respect to myself, and I believe I can also speak for others, I do not feel it consistent with my duty totally to secede from this House. I have no such intention; but, Sir, I have no hesitation in saying, that after seeing the conduct of this House, after seeing them give to Ministers their confidence and support, upon convicted failure, imposition and incapacity; after seeing them deaf and blind to the consequences of a career that penetrates the hearts of all other men with alarm, and that neither reason, experience, nor duty is sufficiently powerful to influence them to oppose the conduct of government, I certainly do think that I may devote more of my time to my private pursuits, and to the retirement which I love, than I have hitherto done; I certainly think I need not devote much of it to fruitless exertions, and to idle talk, in this House. Whenever it shall appear that my efforts may contribute in any degree to restore us to the situation from which the confidence of this House in a desperate system and incapable administration has so suddenly reduced us, I shall be found ready to discharge my duty." Thereafter, with a brief reappearance seven months later, he and his followers absented themselves from parliament until the beginning of 1800.