

CHAPTER VI

FOX IN OPPOSITION: THE FIRST STAGE. 1775

I

ON April 19, 1774, Burke delivered his great speech on American Taxation; from which passages have been quoted above. In the same debate Fox spoke briefly, but to the same point: "The Americans will become useful subjects, if you use them with that temper and lenity which you ought to do . . . a tax can only be laid for three purposes; the first for a commercial regulation, the second for a revenue, and the third for asserting your right. As to the two first, it has been clearly denied that it is for either; as to the latter, it is only done with a view to irritate and declare war against the Americans, which, if you persist in, I am clearly of opinion you will effect, or force them into open rebellion." Not, as it is reported to us, very exact or logical; but also not sophisticated or labouring for effect. There is an undertone of plain seriousness in the simple phrases, suggesting that the young statesman of twenty-five was at last pleading a cause in which his heart and his intelligence were deeply engaged. He now has no one to please but himself, his own conscience, and he is gravely happy in the emancipation. Three days later he spoke against the Massachusetts Bill, opening with the witty retort to a previous speaker: "Sir, I am glad to hear from the right honourable gentleman who spoke last, that now is not the time to tax America; that the only time for doing this is when all these disturbances are quelled, and the people are returned to their duty; so, I find, that taxes are to be the reward of obedience." He complained of the "constant line of conduct in this country practised towards America, consisting of violence and weakness," and submitted that the Bill would at once inflame passions and

fail of its purpose. And within a month George III. in jocular mood at a levee told his friends that "he had as lief fight the Bostonians as the French." Through the rest of this year (1774) American events, as we have seen, gathered towards the crisis. We hear no more from Charles on the topic until early in 1775.

On July 1, 1774, Walpole noted in his journal: "Died Henry Fox, Lord Holland. He expired easily, quite worn out in mind and body. Lord Holland left everything to his wife and £400,000 of public money. She paid all the debts of her two eldest sons: so Stephen remained possessed of £10,000 a year; Charles with a place of £600 a year, an estate of £200 and £10,000 in money; Henry, the youngest, had £20,000 and £900 a year. It was certain that Lord Holland died still much richer than he had pretended, but how much was not known. I have since doubted of Lord Holland's riches; at least when his son Stephen died, it was but a moderate estate that came to the grandson." It may be noted here that Lady Fox survived her husband three weeks only, and that Charles's eldest brother, Stephen, died in the following November. A few months before his father's death, Charles had written to Lady Holland, "That my extreme imprudence and dissipation has given both of you uneasiness is what I have long known," but added that he had lately begun "to flatter myself that, particularly with you, and in a great degree with my father, I had regained that sort of confidence which was once the greatest pride of my life." Lady Mary Coke, daughter of the Duke of Argyll, connected by marriage with "Coke of Norfolk," and a neighbour of Holland House, where she used to play cribbage with Charles and his mother, gives a less favourable impression. She was forty-eight when she wrote in her journal at the time of Lady Holland's fatal illness (July 3, 1774): "She intends . . . after some legacies, leaving all between [her youngest son] and Charles. The

latter is at present twelve thousand pounds worse than nothing, and has taken Chambers at the Temple in order to study the Law. He and his Brother the present Lord Holland's behaviour at the death of their Father was so void of all feeling that 'tis terrible to think of. They both went into Company directly, without observing any kind of decency, and will I suppose do just the same thing when their poor Mother breathes her last." Again, on July 20: "Her [Lady Holland's] two eldest sons seem very unworthy of further favours, especially Charles, who L^d Villiers had seen at noon at, Almack's, and he talk'd of going in the evening to Mr. Foot's, when his poor amiable Mother, to whom he had so many obligations, was suffering agonies, and at the last extremity." And four days later, after Lady Holland's death: "For her sons, at least for Mr. Charles Fox, nothing can be said."* These passages indicate the censorious view that was not uncommonly taken of Charles in his youth. But Lady Mary is a wholly unreliable witness. She is the "white cat" of a brilliant little biographical study by Lady Louisa Stuart† (1757-1851): "her understanding lay smothered under so much pride, self-conceit, prejudice, obstinacy, and violence of temper, that you did not know where to look for it." In a word, she was "invincibly wrong-headed," and no less so, we may believe, in her observations on Charles's conduct than in other matters. We have seen the indulgence with which Henry Fox worshipped his brilliant son, and there is no doubt that Charles taxed that indulgence severely. The old Paymaster in his closing days may have been perplexed by the boy's sacrifice of office on a matter of principle, but that his satisfaction in the talents that Charles was

* *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke*. Privately printed. Edinburgh. 1889.

† Lord Bute's daughter. The sketch was written in 1827. Lady Mary died in 1811.

displaying was seriously diminished by even such extravagance as was the gossip of the town, is not to be believed. Lord Holland had himself to thank, and he was not the man to grieve unduly over courses that he had so liberally encouraged. With all his faults, he had a sense of humour. On his deathbed he gave instructions that if George Selwyn called he was on no account to be refused. Selwyn, according to Walpole, had a passion for "coffins, and corpses, and executions." Lord Holland in giving his order observed that if he was alive he should be glad to see George; if he was dead, George would be glad to see him.

II

The New Year (1775) found the parliamentary debates on America in full swing. The London merchants diligently pressed the demand of the colonies for an unprejudiced examination of their claims, and in leading their case Burke was seconded by Fox with a vigour that matured with every speech he made. The young liberal, now firmly seated in opposition, attacked North's policy as "framed on false information, conceived in weakness and ignorance, and executed with negligence." They had been promised that the appearance of troops in Boston would restore the people to tranquillity, whereas every courier brought news that the troops themselves were in an extremely precarious condition, and that the agitation was everywhere gathering force. On February 2, in a speech of which no full report has been preserved, he discovered, according to Gibbon who was present, "powers for regular debate, which neither his friends hoped, nor his enemies dreaded." This was on a motion by North to present an address to the King undertaking the loyal disposal of the nation's arms and purse "to enforce due obedience to the laws and authority of the supreme legislature." Fox proposed an amendment

“deploring that . . . the measures taken by His Majesty’s servants tend rather to widen than to heal the unhappy differences . . . and praying a speedy alteration of the same.” North was too securely entrenched to be shaken by these impertinences, but Fox was able nevertheless to carry a hundred and four votes against the ministerial three hundred and five. It was, in Walpole’s words, a vote for civil war. The King in acknowledging the address, did not doubt but that he would have the concurrence of the House in “such augmentation of his Forces as the present occasion shall be thought to require.” Fox told the government that they had for months been talking of the American rebellion, and asked why, if it were to be opposed by force, they had done nothing in all that time to prepare for the contingency. Their policy was morally indefensible, and now they were showing a total want of ability in conducting it. There is no doubt that North himself at this time was without any convictions as to what was the proper thing to do. Nothing would have pleased him better than to find some means short of resignation of escaping responsibility altogether. Of meeting the responsibility by an enlightened survey of the situation and the administration of even-handed justice, he was incapable. Under his leadership, loud in assertions of national honour, the King’s party now firmly held the view that American disaffection was a wanton betrayal of trust that must be sharply brought to account. That there could be any serious difficulty in effecting this salutary design they did not for a moment suppose. A major-general or two and a stiff little expeditionary force would speedily vindicate the Rights of the British Crown. North himself was less confident, but had not the courage to say so. First he put diplomatic obstacles in the way of sending out reinforcements to Gage, then under pressure he hurried the preparations forward. Then, without warning, to everybody’s sur-

prise and to the indignation and alarm of his own party, he introduced, on February 20, a conciliatory resolution, whereby the colonies, on undertaking to contribute to the "common defence" in emergency, were to be exempt from crown taxation, although the right to levy such taxation was maintained. The bellicose majority in the House, that is to say North's own followers, were supported by public feeling in regarding this proposal as a confession of fear in the face of danger.

Unfortunately, it was just this, and so lacked the ameliorative influence that it should have possessed if it had been more opportunely made. That North should thus oscillate between defiance and concession was in accordance with his character, but the King's position in the matter is less intelligible. His obstinate attitude towards colonial insubordination has already been indicated, and his severest critics could never accuse George III. of cowardice. His follies were pursued with a quite steadfast resolution. His behaviour on this occasion was as erratic as North's; since we cannot attribute it to the same motives, it is difficult to find for it any explanation other than mere stupidity. On February 8 he wrote to North, hoping, on what grounds he alone knew, that the language of his answer to the address would "open the eyes of the deluded Americans," but sure at least that if it did not, it would "set every delicate man at liberty to avow the propriety of the most coercive measures." A week later, while the new fighting force was being organised, he wrote again to North that while he was "a thorough friend to holding out the olive-branch," he had no doubt that once the colonies realised that the government was in military earnest, they would submit. A flash of the finer George appears at the end of the letter: "I entirely place my security in the protection of the Divine Disposer of all things, and shall never look to the right or left, but steadily pursue the tract

which my conscience dictates to be the right one." The dictates were often singularly unfortunate, but the King was justified of his boast. And at this moment his conscience was persistently telling him that the Americans, who were threatening revolt because they refused to be taxed, must be coerced into obedience. It must have been clear even to his inelastic mind that by removing the cause of complaint he could also remove the threat; and yet for months he refused to make a compromise that he repeatedly declared would be a surrender of his honour and an end of his authority. We remember that when in an interval of comparative enlightenment North listened to American demands, George was careful to stipulate for the retention of the tea-tax as at least a peppercorn rent. Since then even so much enlightenment had passed, and taxation was again in full play. On February 15, 1775, at 6 min. pt. 10 a.m., the King was determined in the name of conscience to uphold the practice. And yet on February 19 he wrote to North, "I very highly approve of the resolution to be moved to-morrow," the resolution that North did introduce on the 20th, as we have seen. And the King adds oddly, "it plainly defines the line to be held in America," as though nothing had ever been nearer to his thoughts than the concessions that it was now proposed to make.

When North brought the resolution forward, he was hotly attacked by the implacables of his own majority, who looked upon his conduct as a betrayal. So formidable was their resentment, that it looked for some time as though the debate would result in a government split and defeat of the minister. In this extremity, Wedderburn was deputed to explain that there was no real intention of modifying the severity of their attitude towards the colonists, and this assurance, backed by close whip work, saved the situation. That is to say, it saved the vote, but it left North's Resolution stripped of credit.

Fox, joining in the debate, congratulated the opposition on having persuaded North to listen to reason, if indeed the noble lord really meant what he said. But did he? The speaker took leave gravely to doubt it. In fact, he was sure that the noble lord meant nothing of the sort; that he was stampeded by fear of the situation into making promises that he had no intention of keeping when it should suit his convenience to break them. "No one in this country, who is sincerely for peace, will trust the speciousness of his expressions, and the Americans will reject them with disdain." On the next day, February 21, the King wrote to his minister rejoicing in the zeal shown by the House in supporting "the just superiority of the mother-country over its colonies," and again approving of the Resolution "which certainly in a most manly manner shows what is expected, and gives up no right." In which confused complacency His Majesty watched the peril that was now so rapidly brewing to disaster.

III

The session was at this point enlivened by further electoral activities on the part of Wilkes, of whom, however, it would be unprofitable for us to take further notice. In March, North brought forward infamous proposals that finally discarded all pretence of conciliation. The colonists in resistance to the Acts confining their trade to English ports and shipping, had cut off their contacts with English markets. The new Bills, affecting New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and South Carolina, forbade any traffic between those states and any country other than Great Britain and the British West Indies. This meant submission or starvation. Fox told the government that step by step they were reducing their legislative authority to utter contempt. Measures so devoid of justice and even of

common humanity could, he supposed, be framed only for the express purpose of provoking the people against whom they were directed, to open rebellion. The first Bill, dealing with New England, was passed by two hundred and fifteen votes to sixty-one. Two days later an amendment was proposed, providing "that nothing in this act shall extend to prohibit the importation into any, or either of the said provinces, of any fuel, meal, corn, flour or victual, which shall be brought coastwise from any part of the continent of America." This precaution against actual famine, which incidentally would involve British loyalists no less than the rebels, was opposed by the government, who declared that they had battalions enough to look after their own adherents, and that as for the rebels, the sooner they starved the better. Burke scornfully exclaimed that having by their Bill taken from the American subjects the right to live by their own labours, they now in rejecting the amendment were depriving them of the right to live by the charity of their friends. "You had reduced the people to beggary, and now you take the beggar's scrip from them." Fox again told North that while his policy was monstrous, it was, even from the ministerial point of view, inconceivably stupid. To attempt the starvation of the colonists was wicked; to propose methods that would bring friend and foe alike to common ruin was imbecile. The amendment was negatived by a hundred and eighty-eight votes to fifty-eight, and Fox could say with justice, "Sir, you have now, by refusing this proposition, completed the system of your folly."

In the course of these debates Charles more than once overstepped the bounds of parliamentary decorum in his opposition to North. But there are times when we cannot hear of these excesses without warming to them. When a minister claims parliamentary privilege for gross and palpable misconduct, it is very well that someone should

have the courage to tell him to his face that he is a knave. And in his treatment of the American colonies North, intimately inspired by his royal master, was politically a knave. No private amiabilities or even virtues can excuse a minister of state who abuses power through sheer misconception of moral values. The origins of the American trouble cannot be laid to North's charge, but from his accession to office to the outbreak of war, his policy did nothing but aggravate the quarrel. Of deliberate outrage we may acquit him, but his total incapacity to grasp the nature of the problem upon which his decisions were authoritative, was outrage none the less. Had English control of the American colonies been wise and tolerant, it is still probable that sooner or later separation would have taken place, by pacific understanding. The vast potentialities of the American continent made it imperative that if at any time the settlers should feel that independence was their proper destiny, their claim should be recognised without dispute. It is possible that under beneficent administration the claim would never have been made: that in time a system of emancipated unity would have been devised prophetic of the later ties of her great Dominions to Britain. But what might have happened does not concern us. What did happen was that English policy under North drove the colonists into revolt, and left the government no alternative but to meet the revolt with a disgraceful war. There are few passages of our history from which the national credit emerges in such dishonour, and in raising a voice of continuous and passionate protest, Charles Fox at the age of twenty-five gave splendid proof of patriotic courage. It was no easy thing to do. The country had been inflamed by government rhetoric, and misinformed by government propaganda. North's majority, liberally dosed with the golden pills, was a very large one, and the small minority for whom Burke and Fox spoke was ill-organised, while

several of its members had no very stout heart in the business. On the occasion of the New England Bill debate the King could write confidently to North of "the languor of Opposition," and attribute it to a "sense of the nation warm in favour of the proposition." But Burke and Fox suffered no isolation to discourage them in the support of a hopeless cause. And decorum or none, a gleam of satisfaction irradiates this gloom of sinister incompetence, as Charles stands up and accuses North of "the most unexampled treachery and falsehood," and on being called to order explains that those are the words of his precise choice and that he abides by them. North had frequently protested his insufficiency for the seals. Charles endorses the protest, and asks the minister why he does not relinquish them. "It is true that the noble lord has often confessed his incapacity, and from a consciousness of it has pretended a willingness to resign; but the event has proved that whatever his consciousness may have been, his love of the emoluments of office has completely conquered it." The thrust was a savage one, but Fox was not engaged in the amenities of a debating society. He was attacking a man whom he believed to be leading the country straight to shame and disaster.

On March 22, in a speech that lasted three hours, Burke presented his plan for conciliation with America. This celebrated oration has justly taken its place among the greatest performances in parliamentary debate. With wide and lucid erudition, the speaker sketched the history of American settlement, showed the conditions in which the relations between the crown and the colonists had been amicable and those under which they had become strained, illustrating his argument with a clear summary of trading figures. He then proceeded to make a series of proposals that would, he considered, place colonial administration on a basis of healthy and per-

manent co-operation. The tone of his speech was carefully pacific, subdued in its passion, and apart from occasional references to the "noble lord in the blue riband"—North—indulging no personalities. At this stage of events, separation was still a doctrine that found little favour in America and had hardly occurred even to the most ardent advocates of colonial rights in England, and Burke gave it no serious consideration in his survey of the problem. His one desire was for the vindication of our colonial authority, and his purpose to examine the means by which alone that authority could be maintained. "The proposition is peace. Not peace through the medium of war; not peace hunted through the labyrinth of intricate and endless negotiations; not peace to arise out of universal discord fomented from principle in all parts of the empire; not peace to depend on the juridical determination of perplexing questions or the precise marking the shadowy boundaries of a complex government. It is simple peace, sought in its natural course, and in its ordinary haunts; it is peace sought in the spirit of peace, and laid in principles purely pacific." The root of all the trouble was taxation. The colonies, it must by now be abundantly clear, would not submit to our levies, from which moreover there was no evidence that our exchequer had ever been a penny-piece the richer. He proposed, therefore, that we should formally abandon all claims to the right of taxation, and that at the same time we should ask the colonies to further the interests that they shared in common with the empire, by accepting full fiscal responsibility for their own internal administration, and that they should further undertake in the event of imperial necessity to consider in their own assemblies the propriety of contributing to the requirements of the crown. "My resolutions therefore mean to establish the equity and justice of a taxation of America by *grant*, and not by *imposition*." Burke's whole scheme was con-

ceived in a spirit of the most enlightened statesmanship, and at the same time it is difficult to see how its wise and moderate simplicity can have failed to persuade even the hostile temper of that majority. Appeals to reason, that were to achieve a classic fame, could not, however, disturb North's slumber nor check the pugnacity of his colleagues. In vain did Burke beseech them to follow him into an air of loftier patriotism than their coercive dignities. "An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery." In what respect had the policy of aggression been justified? "In this situation, let us seriously and coolly ponder. What is it we have got by all our menaces, which have been many and ferocious? What advantages have we derived from the penal laws we have passed, and which for the time have been severe and numerous? What advances have we made towards our object by the sending of a force which, by land and sea, is no contemptible strength? Has the disorder abated? Nothing less." It might be said that if concessions were offered, the colonies would interpret them as misgivings, and be emboldened to further trespasses. "Alas! alas! when will this speculating against fact and reason end? What will quiet these panic fears which we entertain of the hostile effect of a conciliatory conduct? Is it true that no case can exist in which it is proper for the sovereign to accede to the desires of his discontented subjects? . . . Is all authority of course lost when it is not pushed to the extreme? Is it a certain maxim that the fewer causes of dissatisfaction are left by Government the more the subject will be inclined to resist and rebel?" No control could endure that was not benevolent in principle; the history of their own relations with Ireland and Wales—he cited also the cases of Chester and Durham—should convince them of that. His phrase was a memorable one: "Your standard could never be ad-

vanced an inch before your privileges." He concluded by explaining the difference between his own proposals and those that had recently been made by North. The government measure, he said, amounted to no more than "ransom by auction," since the colonial quotas were to be finally regulated, not by local assemblies but by parliament, a scheme in fact for "taxing the colonies in the antechamber of the noble lord and his successors." In other words, North proposed to leave the colonists to decide upon the method of collecting taxes, but reserved to the home government the right of decision as to what the taxes should be, while Burke proposed to leave the colonists with complete control both as to the nature and extent of their taxation, with an explicit understanding that they would consider themselves pledged to take what in consultation appeared to be a reasonable share of such imperial responsibilities as might arise. Burke at length came to his peroration: "We ought to elevate our minds to the greatness of that trust to which the order of Providence has called us. By adverting to the dignity of this high calling, our ancestors have turned a savage wilderness into a glorious empire, and have made the most extensive, and the only honourable conquests, not by destroying, but by promoting the wealth, the number, the happiness of the human race. Let us get an American revenue as we have got an American empire. English privileges have made it all that it is; English privileges alone will make it all it can be." He thereupon put the first clause of his motion to the House. It was an historic moment. Acceptance of his proposals would undoubtedly have meant the pacification of America, with what ultimate result no one can tell. The future in any case may well have been destined not to lie with the extension of "English privileges alone." But of the immediate effect and of its lasting benefits, there could have been no question; and a splendid chapter would have been added

to the credit of British statesmanship. The House divided, and Bruke was defeated by two hundred and seventy votes against seventy-eight.

IV

Something like despair may well have fallen on the friends of reason as Burke's masterly appeal was thus dismissed. The opposition Lords, led by the Marquis of Rockingham, did actually at this point pass a resolution that while they would continue to vote against the government's American policy, they would take no further part in the debates on the matter. On May 15, Burke returned to the theme in the House of Commons, this time introducing a "Representation and Remonstrance from the General Assembly of New York." The document was temperately worded, freely acknowledging the sovereign authority of the crown, and dutiful in its submission. New York hitherto had been reluctant to associate itself with the more emphatic protests being registered by the colonies in general, but it now asked for the repeal of those Acts that were, it was claimed, imposing an intolerable burden on free men and "subversive of the rights of English subjects." Again Burke begged the House to display its generosity before it was too late, and again North dismissed the plea with contempt. Burke moved "that the Representation and Remonstrance of the General Assembly of the Colony of New York be brought up." North moved an amendment inserting after the word Remonstrance the clause, "in which the said Assembly claim to themselves rights derogatory to, and inconsistent with, the legislative authority of parliament." Fox spoke, no longer with any hope of influencing North's conduct, but with unabated spirit. He pointed out that New York was the only province to which England could any longer look for substantial friendship, and that it had been foremost in counsels of forbearance to the other

colonies. The petition of this province was now about not merely to be rejected, but to be refused a hearing—"it is not suffered to be presented, no, not even to be read by the clerk. When they hear of this, they will be inflamed, and hereafter be as distinguished by their violence, as they have hitherto been by their moderation. It is the only method they can take to regain the esteem and confidence of their brethren in the other colonies, who have been offended at their moderation." He repeated that it was not the right to tax in any circumstances that was being challenged, but the methods of imposition. It may be noted that this distinction, which may seem to us a very nebulous one, was, in fact, steadily maintained in the early stages of the dispute by the colonies themselves. Fox asserted that it was the abuse of a right and not the right itself that had driven most of the colonies to desperation, and now New York was to be similarly embittered. "The noble lord chooses to be consistent; he is determined to make them all mad alike." North's amendment passed by a majority of a hundred and nineteen in a House of two hundred and fifty-three. Late at night (30 min. pt. 10 p.m.) the King had received the good news, and with fond iteration was writing to North that it showed "how firm the House of Commons are in the support of the just rights of their country."

But news travelled slowly in those days, and unknown to the disputants in the House, the miserable business had already passed beyond the bounds of argument. On the very day of this debate, Benjamin Franklin was writing to Burke from Philadelphia, "You will see by the papers, that General Gage called his assembly to propose Lord North's pacific plan: but before they could meet, drew the sword and began the war. His troops made a most vigorous retreat—twenty miles in three hours—scarce to be paralleled in history; the feeble Americans, who pelted them all the way, could scarce keep up with

them." A fortnight later, May 28, Walpole recorded in his journal the arrival of "a light sloop sent by the Americans from Salem, with an account of their having defeated the King's troops." On April 18, Gage had sent out eight hundred men to seize arms and ammunition that the insurrectionary militia were reported to have collected at Concord, eighteen miles from Boston. At Lexington, the crown troops were met by a detachment of minute-men, and in the middle of the night the first shot of the war was fired—the celebrated shot, in fact, heard round the world. The next morning Concord was reached, and further skirmishing took place. A certain amount of the illicit ammunition was destroyed, but Franklin's version of the engagement was not much exaggerated. The heavier casualties were in the British ranks, and the prestige lost by the red-coats was never to be recovered on the continent of America. The minute-men were for the most part farmers, roughly armed and wholly undisciplined, and they had more than held their own against trained and fully equipped regulars. Stimulated by this example, the spirit of resistance stiffened throughout the colonies. The issue was now going to be fought out in the field. The British crown was at last faced with the inevitable consequences of its own intolerant folly; it had now either to crush its American colonies or lose them. Charles Fox and his friends, who continued to proclaim what they believed to be their own country's dishonour, were duly stigmatised as traitors. But in the light of history, if anything could more deeply humiliate English patriotism than the knowledge that we engaged in the American war of 1775, it would be that we had won it.

V

Charles had now been out of office a little over a year, and was already established as one of the ablest and most determined members of the opposition. His political

support of Burke was attended by the ripening of a warm personal friendship.* At a moment when government action seemed likely to effect its purpose by intimidating the spirit of the colonies, he had written:

“NEWMARKET,

“October 13, 1774.

“DEAR BURKE,

“Though your opinions have turned out to be but too true, I am sure you will be far enough from triumphing in your foresight. What a dismal piece of news! and what a melancholy consideration for all thinking men, that no people, animated by what principle soever, can make a successful resistance to military discipline. I do not know that I was ever so affected by any public event, either in history or in life. The introduction of great standing armies into Europe, has then made all mankind irrecoverably slaves. But to complain is useless, and I cannot bear to give the tories the triumph of seeing how dejected I am at heart. Indeed, I am not altogether so much so about the particular business in question, which I think very far from being decided, as I am from the sad figure that *men* make against *soldiers*. I have written to Lord Rockingham, to desire him to lose no time in adopting some plan of operations in consequence of this event. . . . If the ministry were free agents, and had common sense, I think it not impossible but some good might be wrought out of this evil; I mean if they were to take this opportunity of making proper concessions. The Duke of Grafton does not despair of this, and, in that view, does not feel as I do about this news;

* Sandwich was not elected to Brooks's until 1785, but a note in the Hinchbrooke manuscripts reads, in the manner of the Bets Book of that Club: “July 19, 1774. Lord Sandwich has received five guineas from Mr. Fox, and the same sum from Mr. Richard Fitzpatrick, on condition that he pays fifty guineas to each of them whenever Mr. Edmund Burke is Privy Councilor.”

but I believe he is very widely mistaken indeed; and everything I hear from London supports my opinion; for I am told the exultation is excessive. . . .

“Yours ever very affectionately,

“C. J. Fox.”

The letter presents several points of interest. Its tone shows that the “Yours ever very affectionately” was no mere formality. Burke’s intellectual power and courage were daily inspiration to the maturing genius of the younger man, and the intimacy was in itself a more than sufficient recompense to Charles for any sacrifice that he had made in breaking with North. Lord John Russell records the fact that Fox once said that he had learnt more from Burke’s conversation than from all the books he had ever read. The affection that he now conceived for the man who more than any other influenced the early years of his emancipation, was never to be impaired, and, as we shall see, Burke’s later renunciation of the friendship was to be one of the deepest sorrows of Fox’s life. We note, too, in Charles’s announcement of his letter to Rockingham, the consideration that he was already receiving in the counsels of his party. The American debates left North with no doubt that his old cadet was an extremely vexatious young person, a view that was cordially shared by the King. In his own opinion of His Majesty, Charles retained no illusions. “If the ministry were free agents” means clearly that he knows them not to be, and why. The quarrel was afterwards to mince no words, but for the present it smouldered in an atmosphere of tacit hostility. George, indeed, was hardly yet at the necessity of acknowledging Mr. Fox as being worthy of his notice, and his disapproval appears only in a stray note or so. When his brother Stephen died, Charles inherited the sinecure of the Clerkship of the Polls

in Ireland. North wishing to buy this for one of his supporters, a bid was made and duly submitted to the King, who wrote, "As you are of opinion, from the enclosed state of the produce of the Clerk of the Pells in Ireland, that the bargain is not unreasonably advantageous to Mr. Fox, I give my consent to the finishing that affair." And when Richard Fitzpatrick, whose sister married Stephen Fox and who was known as one of Charles's familiar friends, was recommended for an appointment in the Royal Household, the King replied, "I do not chuse to fill my family with professed gamesters."

The letter to Burke above all shows in its opening paragraphs the unfolding generousities of Fox's mind. Some readers may find the phrases a little heavy with the self-consciousness of youth, but no one can mistake them for the language of cant. The ill regulation of Charles's personal habits made him an easy mark for censure, and the cartoonists were already busy with his fame. A swarthy complexion nicknamed him Niger, and a figure corpulent beyond his years was rich in lines grateful to the professional pencils. At the end of 1773 *The Oxford Magazine* presented the public with a domestic scene of the Foxes in conclave. Lord Holland is gravely addressing his heir Stephen, whose filial respect appears to be dwindling into slumber, while at the other side of the table Charles, only a degree less rotund than his brother, is engaged in picking his father's pocket. Modern zeal has ably seconded such agreeable conceits. Mr. Henry Belcher in his *First American Civil War* (1911), speaking of Fox at this time, observes that "the man's wickedness as to women and gambling and drinking made of him . . . little but an instrument of mischief," and quotes a fellow enthusiast as saying, "Fox's character, both public and private, was enough to make any man detest him. He was factious, dissolute, untrustworthy, a gambler, a voluptuary, a cynical sentimentalist, and a politician

without principle or even scruple." Mr. Belcher elsewhere underlines his testimony with—"Men like Sandwich, Grafton, Fox, and Dashwood would in these days be hounded out of public life for immorality," and, in a high strain of true-blue fervour, with—"Fox was the founder of that school of politics whose voice and hand are ever uplifted on behalf of every country but their own." This last charge has been sufficiently answered in words already quoted from Sir James Mackintosh. If anyone chooses to see England betrayed in the parts taken by Fox and Burke in the debates against the disgraceful American policy of George III. and his minister, let him. To many English readers of history, the one consolation to be derived from the gloomy spectacle of those days is the superb courage of these men leading their little band of patriots against a denial of every decent instinct in the British character. Of the more general indictment of Fox's political probity, we need only to remember what his place and emoluments might have been had he chosen to remain in the King's party, and what in fact they were. Thomas Wright in his *England under the House of Hanover*, speaking of his departure from the Treasury, says with no more than the bare truth, "It is due to Fox's character to say, that from this moment he continued during his life steady and consistent in the political principles he now embraced." That for many years Charles's private life was dissolute even by the standards of his own time, it is impossible to deny, and unprofitable to regret. He drank heavily, though not, it would seem, seriously beyond the capacity of a remarkable constitution; he gamed abominably. Of his intrigues with women it is easier to find airy censure by his detractors than other evidence. It could afford us no particular satisfaction to suppose that he was ascetically disinclined for gallantry, but that such affairs as he indulged were ever cruel or cynical there is no reason what-

ever to believe. Sir George Trevelyan reminds us that he loved Homer, because Homer "always spoke well of women," and the same writer, whose epic of the English Whigs does honour to its great theme, adds, with an authority that is not likely to be successfully challenged, words that I make no apology for quoting at length: "Fox, from twenty to twenty-five, had doubtless not the air of a rigid moralist. . . . But he did not add a paragraph to the chronicle of sin and misery in which companions, and relatives, of his own conspicuously figured. A Lovelace never would have won, or valued, the enthusiastic friendship with which Fox was honoured by so many high-minded women, whose loyalty to his interests, at a great crisis, has furnished some of the most agreeable . . . anecdotes of English history. . . . His notion of true gallantry was to treat women as beings who stood on the same intellectual tableland as himself; to give them the very best of his thoughts and his knowledge, as well as of his humour and his eloquence; to invite, and weigh, their advice in seasons of difficulty; and if ever they urged him to steps which his judgment or his conscience disapproved, not to elude them with half-contemptuous banter, but to convince them by plain-spoken and serious remonstrance." And then, yet more memorably, "There have been few better husbands than Fox, and probably none so delightful; for no known man ever devoted such power of pleasing to the single end of making a wife happy." How tenderly exact this encomium is we shall see later, but for the moment we have but to note that the scandal of Fox's private life gains very little momentum by examination in this respect. A further word of remarkable testimony may be added from one of Charles's own contemporaries. In 1834, John Cam Hobhouse was in the company of James Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale, then an old man of seventy-five, who had shrewdly observed the public life of two generations, and had him-

self fought stoutly in the cause of liberal opinion. He had served under Fox, and told Hobhouse that only once had he ever had to explain a subject twice to his chief, and added, "Charles Fox was not only the most extraordinary man I have ever seen, but also the best man."

When, however, each moralist has balanced this account as he will, it remains for us to keep one consideration firmly in view. Whatever the measure of Charles's delinquencies, they at no time, from the date of his early rupture with North, weakened the resolution or affected the integrity of his public life. For years he stood by an unpopular cause, with his talents fettered and his ambitions unrewarded. And in the long run, while he hardly ever knew what it was to command an effective majority, his own minority honoured him with a devotion such as few statesmen have been able to inspire.