

## CHAPTER IX

### THE END OF THE WAR. FALL OF NORTH. FOX SECRETARY OF STATE. 1780-1782

#### I

THE Bets book at Brooks's has an entry dated August, 1778, "Mr. Fox betts Mr. Hanger 10 gs. L<sup>d</sup>. Sandwich is not 1st L<sup>d</sup>. of the Admiralty one calendar month after the decision of the Court Martial upon Keppel. Mr. Fox betts L<sup>d</sup>. Northington 10 gs. D<sup>o</sup>." Charles lost his twenty guineas, but his name from this date seldom appears in this curious record. On February 24, 1779, "Mr. Fox betts L<sup>d</sup>. Northington 50 to 10 that no man L<sup>d</sup>. N. names and now in Opposition accepts a cabinet place before the 1st of Nov next under L<sup>d</sup>. North. If L<sup>d</sup>. Guildford (North's father) dies before that time the bett to be off." During the following fifteen years he is concerned in not more than half a dozen entries, all but one or two of which refer to public business. The fondest censor of morals could hardly take these club amenities into his reckoning, but now at the age of thirty Charles was in fact chastening also the wilder excesses of his youth to the calls of business. Once in April, 1780, Walpole notes indeed that he was at Newmarket at a moment when the opposition without him "had not the art and industry to raise a flame," and that he now or at any time ceased to enjoy a good table, convivial society, a sporting chance, or a day off among the blades, there is happily no evidence. He was a keen sportsman, "too keen" says one chronicler\* "to be a successful one." His eagerness among the coveys was such that he not infrequently put the shot into his gun before the powder. On one occasion a keeper throwing his hat into a bush to

\* George Thomas, Earl of Albemarle. *Fifty Years of My Life*. 1876.



flush a woodcock, the bird took its flight serenely to fresh fields, while Charles triumphantly blew the hat to pieces. Starting for a partridge beat at daybreak, he was seen by his host's family as they were seated at breakfast, returning with extremely uncertain gait. Asked if he was ill, he replied, "No, only a little tipsy." Being thirsty, he had asked a cottager for a bowl of milk, which the yeoman wishing to do well by the quality had laced over-liberally with rum. Another day the guns were driven home by a violent storm, and on their arrival at the house Charles was missing; he had found a farm labourer who had views on the scientific cultivation of turnips, and had taken a drenching rather than neglect the opportunity. Being at the Duke of Grafton's Fakenham pheasant-shooting, he noticed a young kinsman of his own, of whom nobody appeared to be taking any notice. "Well, young 'un," said Charles, by way of putting the shy youth at his ease, "where do you spring from?" The boy replied "from Gottingen," where he had been at the University. "Not much shooting there, I suppose?" "Oh yes, we used to shoot foxes." "Hush!" whispered Charles, "never pronounce that word again, at least in this house, for if the Duke were to hear that you had ever shot one of my namesakes, he would swear it belonged to Fakenham wood." As the years went on he settled down into a regularity of habit, taking a liberal amount of exercise and enjoying any game that was forward. When he was fifty he rose at seven every morning, "mounted his horse instantly, rode to the river, and plunged into the Thames." He played cricket eagerly but with no conspicuous success, running himself out with great regularity. Writing from his father's house at Kingsgate in 1771 to George Selwyn, he says, "My love to Carlisle, and tell him we have a cricket party here, at which I am very near the best player, so he may judge of the rest." When gout



and dropsy cut him off from that enjoyment he took to trap-ball, which he played from a chair, and at which sundry small competitors accused him of cheating. Also he played tennis with enthusiasm. An onlooker venturing to ask how so corpulent a player was able to take such very heavily-cut returns so successfully, Charles replied, "Because, sir, I am a very painstaking man."

Life, opening with more than a due allowance of extravagant follies, remained always an ample and varied delight to this "man born to be loved," in Burke's phrase. In the unlikely files of the funeral sermons preached on his death, we find this from the Rev. Charles Simmons's pulpit at Richmond: "Truth compels us to acknowledge that he had faults; but they were faults unallied to malignity or meanness; they were the genuine offspring of his warm and sanguine nature; and they flowed from the same fertile region, from which many of his virtues drew their source; they were faults which have been discovered in some of the most elevated and the most amiable of our imperfect kind; they were faults, in short, which, if we must deplore, we find it impossible to resent." It is well said, and it is clear that they were not resented by Charles's own contemporaries. He could be unsparing in debate, but while his earlier errors could sometimes be turned into political capital by angry opponents, even the angriest was compelled to allow his private charm and amiability. "His nature," says Brougham, "was generous, open, manly; above everything like dissimulation or duplicity; governed by the impulses of a great and benevolent soul." The Anti-Jacobins, Frere and Canning, acknowledged him as the wittiest speaker of his time, and it was an age of wits. His great strength was in debate rather than in opening. "Never in my life," says Rogers, "did I hear anything to equal Fox's *speeches in reply*—they were wonderful." Porson observed that "Pitt (the younger) carefully con-



sidered his sentences before he uttered them; but Fox threw himself into the middle of his, and left it to God Almighty to get him out again." His voice in moments of vehemence became shrill, but in control "some of the undertones were peculiarly sweet; and there was even in the shrill and piercing tones which he uttered when at the more exalted pitch, a power that thrilled the heart of the hearer. His pronunciation of our language was singularly beautiful, and his use of it pure and chaste to severity."\* He had a manner of extreme simplicity, was accessible to every approach, and responded with the unaffectedness of a child to any effort to interest or amuse him. In Brougham's words again, "A life of gambling, and intrigue, and faction, left the nature of Charles Fox as little tainted with selfishness or falsehood, and his heart as little hardened, as if he had lived and died in a farmhouse; or rather as if he had not outlived his childish years."

Fox now, at the time of the Dunning victory, had at least disciplined his habits to his responsibilities. His great and original powers were in full exercise, and he was not wasting them. Young as he was, he had already had twelve years of active parliamentary experience, and he was able to support his advanced views by an exact knowledge of procedure. At the age of thirty he was a thoroughly skilled parliamentarian. Rebel though he might be in his mind, he never made the mistake of supposing that constitutional reform in England could be achieved by unconstitutional means, unless, indeed, extreme necessity called for a Cromwell. He had no faith in the efficacy of guerilla tactics or stump agitation. Very patiently, though without compromise, he submitted his splendid passion to the slow expedients of the House of Commons, speaking always for the truth as he saw it, but

\* Brougham. It should be noted that the reports of Fox's speeches were in almost every case uncorrected by the speaker.



hoping always, too, that he would be able to make that truth prevail by the practical argument of a majority. His life was spent in that pilgrimage, and only once or twice was he allowed a glimpse of the promised land. Such a one now, in 1780, seemed about to break upon his anxious but intrepid vision. North's majority, if not lost, was critically insecure; the opposition was daily winning opinion in the country; and Charles himself was not only feared and respected in the House, but had also become a figure of high popular esteem. The average citizen was beginning very heartily to like this man who would be intimidated by nobody, and who was continually treating freedom as a living issue.

## II

The summer of 1780 saw a fierce wave of anti-popery excitement sweep the country. Some two years previously certain penal measures against the Roman Catholics had been repealed, and now Protestant bigotry succeeded in stirring up a demand for the suspension of this relief. England may always have had very good cause to be suspicious of popery, but reasonable Englishmen have always been able to distinguish between proper national safeguards and the senseless cruelties of heresy-hunting. In 1780, fanaticism indulged in one of its most disgraceful orgies, recalling the delirium of Titus Oates. A Protestant Association was formed, under the presidency of Lord George Gordon, then just under thirty years of age. This young man was possessed of a very special devil of intolerance. Dressing himself in methodist garb, and wearing his lank hair festooned over his shoulders, Walpole's "lunatic apostle" ran to and fro in a perpetual frenzy of spiritual apprehension. Having succeeded in gaining admission to the King's closet, he harangued the astonished monarch for an hour, and left



only on a solemn assurance that the King would instantly read a pamphlet crackling with hell-fire and Anti-Christ. A zeal that at first excited no more than ridicule suddenly assumed a serious aspect. Gordon gave notice that he was going to march on Westminster at the head of a host pledged to the vindication of the true faith. On May 29, a mob, upon whose passions he had worked for months, assembled in Coachmakers Hall, Cheapside. Gordon told them that he would present their grievances to parliament on condition that he was accompanied by not less than twenty thousand people. June 2 was appointed for the demonstration, and on that day a vast crowd of "pious ragamuffins" met in St. George's Fields, Southwark. At Gordon's bidding they donned blue cockades to distinguish them in the event of trouble, and bearing blue banners decorated with the words "No Popery," they set off in three separate bodies for Westminster. As members who were known to favour toleration appeared in the yard, Gordon's invective produced an uproar that rapidly blazed into a scene of indiscriminate violence. Half a dozen peers narrowly escaped with their lives, the Archbishop of York "had his lawn sleeves torn off and flung in his face," the Bishop of Lincoln was pursued on to the leads of the House, Lord Boston was rescued as the rioters were about to cut the sign of the cross on his forehead, and when North urged Gordon to call off his ruffians, the demented saint cried out that with a word he could have the Prime Minister torn to pieces by the mob. At length the Guards were called out and the precincts of the Houses cleared, but the disorder had no more than begun. For eight days London was terrorised. That night two chapels belonging to Catholic legations were burnt; and on the following days private houses, churches, and public buildings were destroyed, no one was safe from assault in the streets, and a lawless and mostly drunken rabble paraded the town by day and night.



On the 7th, Newgate and the King's Bench were gutted, and the Bank attempted in force. The justices were powerless or afraid to act, and troops were summoned from various quarters, but although an imposing display of canvas appeared in St. James's and Hyde Parks, it was not until the 9th that the disturbances were quelled and Gordon arrested. Nearly three hundred civilians were known to have been killed, and there were also large numbers of unrecorded fatalities; the hospitals were full of serious casualties; the property destroyed during the riots was valued at a hundred and eighty thousand pounds. A hundred and thirty-five prisoners were brought up for trial, forty-nine sentenced to death, and twenty-nine executed. The legal proceedings were as precipitate and savage as the outrages themselves. Seventeen of the persons executed were under eighteen years of age and three under fifteen, girls among them. Indeed, if the riots were disgraceful, the behaviour of the authorities in dealing with them was hardly less so. During their progress, the government acted with as much indecision and panic as the intimidated justices. "There are no men in the country," wrote Burke in a letter dated "June 7, 1780, in what was London." The King shone in the crisis by setting an example of coolness and courage that was poorly followed by his ministers. And when the trouble was over, the conduct of trials under Wedderburn, who had recently been made Lord Chief Justice and Baron Loughborough, rivalled the ferocities of Jeffreys. In defiance of equity, Gordon himself, tried for high treason, was acquitted. He survived, however, to receive a life sentence for criminal libel, and spent six years in Newgate, where he died at the age of forty-two; having added a finishing extravagance to his career by becoming a Jew.\*

\* John Wesley, at the age of seventy-seven, wrote in his journal for Saturday, December 16, 1780: "Having a second message from Lord



## III

While the accounts of the riots do not mention Fox, their occasion was one in which he was closely concerned. The horror with which Burke and other friends of toleration viewed Gordon's insane exploit cannot but have been shared by him, but it could not prejudice his convictions. On June 20 he spoke for three hours against the proposed repeal of Catholic relief. Recognising the dangers that might come from Rome, he was convinced that the present agitation did not arise from a calm opposition to these, but merely from the unnatural desire of bigots to fetter their fellow-creatures. "I am a friend to universal toleration . . . and I am against every thing that has the least tendency to bridle and restrain liberty of conscience." It is a notable fact that on this non-party occasion North voted with Fox and Burke, the former of whom paid a handsome tribute to his "true talents and natural disposition" when they were "relieved from the official trammels that controlled his mind," and effectively drew an instance from *Paradise Lost*:

As one who long in populous city pent,  
Where houses thick, and sewers annoy the air,  
Forth issuing on a summer's morn to breathe  
Among the pleasant villages and farms  
Adjoin'd, from each thing met conceives delight;  
The smell of corn, of tedded grass, of kine,  
Or dairy; each rural sight, each rural sound.

---

George Gordon, earnestly desiring to see me, I wrote a line to Lord Stormont, who, on Monday the 18th, sent me a warrant to see him. On Tuesday, the 19th, I spent an hour with him, at his apartment in the Tower. Our conversation turned upon Popery and religion. He seemed to be well acquainted with the Bible, and had abundance of other books, enough to furnish a study. I was agreeably surprised to find he did not complain of any person or thing; and cannot but hope, his confinement will take a right turn, and prove a lasting blessing to him."



The Bill for repeal passed the Commons, but was thrown out in the Lords.

The administration, weak as it had been in dealing with the Gordon riots, nevertheless found itself unexpectedly strengthened by the outbreak. In a moment of public danger, men turned to the only authority there was, however incompetent it might be. North saw in the respite a suitable opportunity for fresh advances towards a coalition on favourable terms to the court, and conversations were again held. This time Rockingham, whose probity was a great deal more notable than his force of character, was less exacting than before in his demands, less exacting indeed than his support of the recent petitions demanded. The proposals for general reform were dropped, the acceptance of certain individual Bills being deemed sufficient to satisfy opposition honour. Rockingham stipulated for a seat in the cabinet without office for himself, and proposed that the Duke of Richmond and Fox should be Secretaries of State, Thomas Townshend Chancellor of the Exchequer, Keppel head of the Admiralty, and that important places should be found for the Duke of Portland and Burke. Many Whigs were deeply offended by the omission of the names of Grafton and Shelburne from the list of recommendations. The King showed at once that while he was willing for North to get what satisfaction he could from his negotiations, the royal pleasure was going to suffer no dictation when it came to a settlement. The Duke of Richmond, it seemed, had for long been extremely disrespectful to His Majesty, and his name could not be considered until he made ample apologies. The Duke of Portland he would accept with pleasure, and "Messrs. Townshend and Burke would be real acquisitions." Keppel might be given a command at sea, but could not be placed at the Admiralty. Charles was too young for a Secretaryship of State, but in words of striking self-revelation the King



withheld his absolute veto: "As to Mr. Fox, if any lucrative, not ministerial office, can be pointed out for him, provided he will support the Ministry, I shall have no objection to the proposition. He never had any principle, and can therefore act as his interest may guide him." Rockingham had asked but little; he was now offered less, and North was once more frustrated by his master's perversity. The ministry began rapidly to lose the ground that it had regained, and it decided to go to the country.

The election was held in September. Keppel stood for Windsor; the King hotly exerting his personal influence against him, and the Prince of Wales, now eighteen years old, openly working for the Admiral. Keppel was defeated, but was thereupon invited to contest the Surrey county seat, which he won. The Windsor citizens paraded the royal terrace wearing crêpe favours with Keppel's name, and the Prince of Wales declared that the Surrey election was the happiest event he had ever known. After a sharp contest, Charles carried Westminster with Admiral Rodney against the government candidate, and was chaired round the town in triumph. The poll was declared on September 22; on the 15th, Charles wrote to Burke that the figures to date were:

Rodney	..	..	..	..	4,476
Fox	..	..	..	..	4,059
Lord Lincoln	..	..	..	..	3,315

Rodney, at the age of sixty, had distinguished himself in the previous January against the Spanish fleet off Cape St. Vincent. It is charmingly told of him that being detained in Paris by heavy financial difficulties, he was released by the generosity of the Marshal de Biron, who lent him a thousand louis, saying that his country's chivalry could not take so poor an advantage of a distinguished enemy.



The new parliament met on October 31, 1780. The election had made no important effect on the state of the parties, but there were notable changes in the House. Burke had been turned out by the Bristol constituency that he had represented for the past six years. He took the defeat philosophically, saying that it would teach the Whigs the necessity for greater vigour in their ways. He returned to parliament the following year as member for Malton in Yorkshire. Burgoyne, that strange figure whose Saratoga debacle ranks among Creasy's fifteen decisive battles of the world, whose quarrel with Lord George Germaine had resulted in the previous year in his dismissal from the service for refusing to return to America, whose cause was one of Charles's enthusiasms, and who was to taste some popular success as a dramatist, lost the pocket-borough of Preston, which he had held since 1768, and was to recover in 1784. "There is an ugly report," says Fox in his letter to Burke, "that Burgoyne is beat at Preston. It is merely report, but I do not like it." Among the new members were Richard Brinsley Sheridan, aged twenty-nine, for Stafford; William Wilberforce, aged twenty-one, for Hull; and William Pitt, of the same age, for Appleby.

## IV

The session opened to the old tune. Peace with France had been mentioned. "I shall only add one reflection," wrote the King to North on the day that parliament met, "that, whilst the House of Bourbon make American independency an article of their propositions, no event can ever make me be a sharer in such negociation." The Speech from the Throne emerged from a general haze only to announce the necessity of preparing for at least another year of war. Speaking on the address, Fox again urged the abandonment of the American war,



and concentration on that with France. That in spite of all reason, morality, and expediency, the one should still be continued was to him inconceivable, but as for the other, he would with regard to the Bourbons remind his hearers of the old saying, "Let us not rail at Alexander, let us beat him." So pleased were his Westminster constituents with his performance on this occasion, that they presented him with an address of congratulation and thanks, and with a somewhat unnecessary solicitude pledged themselves to take especial precautions for the safety of his person. The first division in the new House showed that the court still had a compact majority for the common run of business. But the difficulties that were crowding upon the government were such that a packed lobby could not indefinitely save them. By the end of 1780 the state of India was highly threatening, and Holland had been added to the list of countries at war with England..

In February, 1781, Fox objecting to a government appointment that was in fact indefensible, the King again opened his mind to North: "The question proposed by Mr. Fox . . . was unjust and indecent, as everything that comes from that quarter must naturally be expected." In the same month a dramatic scene took place in the House during the debate on the later clauses of Burke's economy Bill. As one of the members opposing the measure resumed his seat, there were cries of "Mr. Pitt! Mr. Pitt!" and in a chamber that for the time seemed to be haunted by the presence of the Great Commoner, his son rose to speak for the first time. He spoke for the Bill, and the impression he made upon a crowded House was instantaneous. Chatham's instruction had not been wasted. "His voice," we read, "was alike silvery and sonorous," though Rogers once observed that it sounded as though he had worsted in his mouth. "No superfluous imagery, no attempt at brilliancy of effect



. . . marked this first and famous display of the oratorical power of the Younger Pitt. His manner was calm, modest, dignified, and perfectly self-possessed." North said dispassionately that it was the best first speech that he had ever heard. "He is not merely a chip of the old block," said Burke, "but the old block itself." As the young member finished speaking, Fox was at his side with generous congratulations. But if he was already an assured speaker, Pitt was as yet no prophet. An old member, overhearing Charles's compliments, remarked, "You may well praise the speech, sir, for except yourself there is no man in the House who could make such another; and, old as I am, I hope to hear you both battling it within these walls as I have heard your fathers before you." Fox had no answer, but Pitt, glowing with the kindness shown him by the Whig leader, replied, with more grace than foresight, "I have no doubt, General, you would like to attain the age of Methuselah." In this debate, Sheridan, who had spoken once previously but without success, also first made his mark, telling a court wag that his wit had the distinction of being most evident when he was attempting to be serious.

During the following months of the session, Fox spoke constantly and with a mastery that grew from power to power. His examination of North's finance displayed at once a control of detail and a grasp of general principles that showed how deep were the foundations of his brilliant advocacy. In a debate upon the county petitions he "shone transcendently," and covered the whole range of the court's mismanagement in a speech that kept the House at close attention for over two hours. In another speech of equal length he resumed the attack on American policy, confident in the face of adverse votes that, if he did not fail in determination, the arbitrary fanaticism of his opponents must sooner or later collapse. Twice his attention was again engaged by William Pitt. On one



occasion, the two men rose together to follow North, and Fox immediately gave way. On the other, when Fox moved for "A Committee to take into Consideration the State of the American War," the younger man supported him in a speech that induced Fox to say the new member was already one of the first men in parliament.

## V

If Charles was at this time attending very closely to business, and curbing such excesses as might impair his capacities, he had involved his fortune in a disorder from which he was only to recover years later by the action of friends, and for some time yet he was spasmodically tempted by the tables in the hope of relieving the pressure of creditors. A couple of younger sparks having the temerity to set up a bank at Brooks's, Charles and Fitzpatrick broke it for them to the tune of four thousand pounds. "There," said Fox, according to Walpole who tells the tale, "so should all usurpers be served." And Walpole adds, "He did still better; for he sent for his tradesmen, and paid as far as the money would go. In the mornings he continues his war on Lord North, but cannot break *that* bank." But the success did not avail him, for three weeks later Walpole writes, "as I came up St. James's Street, I saw a cart and porters at Charles's door; coffers and old chests of drawers loading. In short, his success at faro has awakened his host of creditors; but unless his bank had swelled to the size of the Bank of England, it could not have yielded a sop apiece for each. Epsom, too, had been unpropitious; and one creditor has actually seized and carried off his goods, which did not seem worth removing. As I returned full of this scene, whom should I find sauntering by my own door but Charles? He came up and talked to me at the coach-window, on the Marriage Bill, with as



much *sang-froid* as if he knew nothing of what had happened." And on June 20, "Sold by auction the library of Charles Fox, which had been taken in execution." Among the books was a presentation copy of the first volume of *The Decline and Fall*, containing a note on the flyleaf in Charles's hand: "The author at Brooks's said there was no salvation for the country until six heads of the principal persons in administration were laid upon the table. Eleven days after, the same gentleman accepted a place of lord of trade, under those very ministers, and has acted with them ever since." Such, we are told, was the eagerness of the bidders for the smallest souvenir of the People's Tribune, that the volume containing this note fetched no less a sum than three guineas. It may be hoped that Gibbon, who was as susceptible as most authors, saw no account of the transaction; though the bibliophile may be excused for envying the lucky purchaser at the price. The pulse even of a Thomas J. Wise might quicken as such things are told. A further note of the time may be taken from Walpole: "Lateness of hours is the principal feature of the times. . . . Gaming is yet general, though money, the principal ingredient, does not abound. My old favourite game, 'faro,' is recently revived. I have played but twice, and not all night, as I used to do. It is not decent to end where one began, nor to sit up all night with a generation by two descents my juniors. Mr. Fox is the first figure in all the places I have mentioned, the hero in Parliament, at the gaming table, at Newmarket. Last week he spent twenty-four hours at all three, or on the road from one to the other, and ill the whole time, for he has a bad constitution, and treats it as if he had been dipped in the immortal river; but I doubt at last his heel will be vulnerable." Walpole in his later years—he was now well over sixty—was a fellow of caprice, and not always logical in his processes. He allowed himself some indignation about Charles that



did not square with his own confessions—"and not all night as I used to," and again, "I doted on faro above thirty years ago, but it is not decent to sit up all night now with boys and girls," observations hardly conformable with, "The more marvellous Fox's parts are, the more one is provoked by his follies, which comfort so many rascals and blockheads, and make all that is admirable and amiable in him only matter of regret to those who like him as I do." As to the reflection on Charles's powers of resistance, Walpole might plead that after all he died at the age of fifty-seven; but the third Lord Holland, who knew more about it than Walpole, in annotating the above passage, remarks: "Why he says his constitution was a bad one I cannot divine; I should say nearly the strongest I ever knew."

## VI

Before the close of the 1780-81 session, Fox returned to his condemnation of the existing marriage laws. This country, which in modern history has been, if so loud a claim may be forgiven, the example of the world in its legislative practice, has been, nevertheless, so curiously insensitive in this fundamental concern of human happiness, that it is but just to quote the essential argument of one of the first men to approach the theme with liberal judgment. "In that generous season," said this man whose convictions are sometimes impugned, "which this marriage act labours and intends to blast, a young man, a farmer, or an artisan, becomes enamoured of a female, possessing, like himself, all the honest and warm affections of the heart. They have youth, they have virtue, they have tenderness, they have love, but they have not fortune. Prudence, with her cold train of associates, points out a variety of obstacles in their union, but passion surmounts them all, and the couple are



wedded. What are the consequences? happy to themselves, and favourable to their country. Their love is the sweetener of domestic life. Their prospect of a rising family becomes the incentive to industry. Their natural cares and their toils are softened by the natural ecstasy of affording protection and nourishment to their children. The husband feels the incitement in so powerful a degree, that he sees and knows the benefit of his application. Every hour that he works brings new accommodation to his young family. By labouring this day, he supplies one want, by labouring another, he imparts one conveniency or one comfort; and thus, from day to day, he is roused into activity by the most endearing of all human motives. The wife again, instigated by the same desires, makes his house comfortable, and his hours of repose happy. . . . Thus while they secure to themselves the most sober and tranquil felicity, they become, by their marriage, amiable, active, and virtuous members of society.—View the same couple in another light. Bound together in heart by the most ardent desires, and incited by their passion to marry without having any great prospect before them, their parents intervene; they are not arrived at the age of twenty-one; under the authority of the marriage act, their parents prevent their marriage. . . . But they have it not in their power to prevent their intercourse. . . . What are the consequences? Enjoyment satiates the man, and ruins the woman; she becomes pregnant; he, prosecuted by the parish for the maintenance of the child, is initiated in a course of unsettled pursuits and of licentious gratifications. Having no incitement to industry, he loses the disposition, and he either flies the place of his residence, to avoid the expense of the child, or he remains the corrupter and disgrace of his neighbourhood. The unhappy female, after suffering all the contemptuous reproach of relations and all the exulting censure of female acquaintances, is turned



out of doors, and doomed to struggle with all the ills and difficulties of a strange and severe world. The miserable wanderer comes to London, and here, after waiting, perhaps, in vain to secure some hospitable service, in which she might be able to retrieve or conceal her misfortune, she is forced, much oftener by necessity than inclination, to join that unfortunate description of women, who seek a precarious subsistence in the gratification of loose desire. Good God! what are the miseries that she is not to undergo—what are the evils that do not result to society! but above all, what must be the consolation of that legislature who, from pride and avarice, are mean enough to inflict such misfortunes on their country.” It is like a scene from Crabbe. Fox went on to attack with particular severity the clause of the Marriage Act that enabled parents to nullify marriages contracted by their children under the specified age without consent, and to bastardise the offspring of such unions. He carried his Bill for repeal in the Commons, but it was rejected by the Lords.

## VII

Parliament rose on July 18, and met again at the end of November. In the interval an event of capital importance had taken place in America, and the news of it had reached England. On October 19, 1781, Lord Cornwallis surrendered, with all that was left of his army, to Washington at Yorktown. North, in unwonted agitation, exclaimed on hearing the tidings, “O God! it is all over.” But the Speech from the Throne showed that the King thought otherwise. He had laboured earnestly to restore to his “deluded subjects in America that happy and prosperous condition” and so forth, but “the late misfortune in that quarter” called for “the firm concurrence and assistance” of parliament, “to frustrate the designs of our enemies, equally prejudicial to the real



interests of America and to those of Great Britain." Fox threw off all disguise but the thinnest veil of irony. It was time for somebody to speak his mind about the King, and he spoke it. "If men were unacquainted with the nature of our constitution, and did not know that the speech was contrived by a cabinet council, what would they pronounce the present speech from the throne to be . . . but the speech of some arbitrary, despotic, hard-hearted . . . monarch, who, having involved the slaves, his subjects, in a ruinous and unnatural war, to glut his enmity or satiate his revenge, was determined to persevere, in spite of calamity . . . ; that it was the speech of a monarch incapable of feeling his own misfortunes, or of sympathising with the sorrows of his people, when the high prerogative of his despotic will was disputed; for despotic monarchs were the most tenacious of their rights, as they called them, and allowed nothing for the feelings or the comforts of their fellow-creatures." It was, he continued, the general belief that they would have heard a confession from the throne, that His Majesty had been misled, that the deception was now at an end, and that it was now for parliament to take immediate steps to restore peace. "Instead of this, we have heard a speech breathing vengeance, blood, misery, and rancour. It speaks thus—'Much has been lost; much blood, much treasure has been squandered; the burthens of my people are almost intolerable; but my passions are yet ungratified, my object of subjugation and revenge is yet unfulfilled, and therefore I am determined to persevere.'" We may allow, and even admire, the courage of the King's misguided pertinacity, but there can be no doubt that Fox sincerely believed his language on this occasion to be as just as it was bold. Turning from the King to the ministers, he declared openly that they were a curse to the country. The following day, Pitt again spoke with the opposition, and denounced the American war in terms



that Fox himself could not have exceeded. A little later, Charles asserted of the boy who was so soon to be his most formidable rival, that he could no longer lament the loss of Chatham, since all his virtues and talents were living in his son. It is amusing to note that earlier in the year, Pitt had been elected to Brooks's on Fox's nomination, and that although the famous club was within a year or two to become an extremely unsympathetic place to the younger statesman, he continued to pay his subscription till the end of his life. Sheridan, who also was elected (on Fitzpatrick's nomination) during his first parliamentary session, was, on the other hand, to find in St. James's Street a spiritual home entirely to his taste.

For a time North's majority held, but after the Christmas recess it fell into a sudden, and this time irreparable decline. No news comfortable to the ministry arrived, and a now thoroughly discredited cause was left with no effective support but the King's endless resolution. Fox's unabated onsets had told their tale, and North's apparently secure position was at length on the verge of collapse. On January 24, 1782, Charles, returning to his attack on Sandwich, moved that "it be referred to a committee to enquire into the causes of the want of success of his majesty's naval forces during the war, and more particularly in the year 1781." North accepted the motion, and on February 7 the opposition, led by Fox, and supported among others by Pitt and Sheridan, moved that "there has been gross mismanagement of his majesty's naval affairs in the year 1781." The motion was lost, but by no more than twenty-two votes. Although the whole House was in committee, Fox gave notice that he should present the same motion to the House in open session, in order that it should be recorded in the Journals. On the 20th he did this, and the government majority was reduced to nineteen. On the 22nd a motion was introduced for putting an end to the



American war, and in the division that followed a debate lasting till two in the morning, the voting was one hundred and ninety-four for the government, and one hundred and ninety-three against. Less than a week later, the ministers, derelict with a majority of one, proposed to adjourn the House for a fortnight's consideration of the case, and were defeated by a majority of nineteen, Pitt urging the House, "by every consideration of duty and prudence, to withdraw confidence from the present administration." News arrived that Minorca had been surrendered to the French. On March 5 the government itself was, as Fox said, "beaten" into bringing forward a Bill "to enable his Majesty to conclude a peace, or truce, with the revolted colonies of North America." On the 8th the Opposition moved a vote of censure on the ministers, who saved themselves by ten votes. On the 15th the motion was repeated, and the majority fell to nine. Jenkinson, the King's chief Friend, employed a ferrety fellow named John Robinson to keep an exact scrutiny of the voting day by day, and this gentleman was grieved to report that on the 15th "The Rats were very bad."\* Fox pressed the falling ministry without pause, and gave notice to challenge again on the 20th. On March 9 the King had written to North, "I am much hurt at the appearance of yesterday in the House of Commons, and at [your] opinion that it is impossible for the present Ministry to continue to conduct public business any longer." On the 17th we find, "I am resolved not to throw myself into the hands of Opposition at all events, and shall certainly, if things go as they seem to lead, know what my conscience as well as my honour dictates as the only way left for me," and on the 19th, North having pleaded for relief from an intolerable situation, "After having yesterday in the most solemn manner assured you that my sentiments of honour will

\* Fortescue, vol. v., p. 389.



not permit me to send for any of the leaders of the Opposition and personally treat with them, I could not but be hurt at your letter of last night. Every man must be sole judge of his feelings: therefore whatever you or any man can say on that subject has no avail with me. . . . If you resign before I have decided what I will do, you will certainly for ever forfeit my regard." There is a stirring note in this desperate resistance, which the King in his present mood was prepared to take to the point of abdication. The royal yacht was in constant readiness for a fortnight. But the mood passed, and Rockingham was approached through the agency of Thurlow, the Lord Chancellor. The Whig leader was asked to accept office and leave the discussion of terms until he had been called. The stratagem did not succeed, and Rockingham accepted only on condition of entire freedom. When the House met on the 20th, North, having after some disturbance obtained leave to speak before the debate opened on the renewed vote of censure, was able to announce that with the royal sanction the administration was at an end. North went out with a jest. It was snowing; a long debate had been expected, and North's was almost the only carriage in attendance. "You see, gentlemen," he remarked as the House was leaving, "the advantage of being in the secret." At an end also was the American war, though peace was not formally concluded until November. On March 27 the King wrote to the minister with whom he had shared so stoutly so many ignoble vicissitudes, "At last the fatal day has come which the misfortunes of the times and the sudden change of sentiments of the House of Commons have drove me to of changing the Ministry, and a more general removal of persons than I believe was ever known before. I have to the last fought for individuals, but the number I have saved, except my Bedchamber, is incredibly few. . . . The effusion of my sorrows has made me



say more than I had intended, but I ever did and ever shall look on you as a friend, as well as a faithful servant."

### VIII

In the new cabinet, Rockingham was First Lord of the Treasury, Shelburne and Fox the principal Secretaries of State, and the Duke of Grafton Lord Privy Seal. Among the other members, Thurlow, who had for long been inclined to opposition policy, was retained from the old ministry. Fitzpatrick, and more especially Sheridan, received ample recognition of their claims in junior posts, but as much cannot be said of Burke, who was appointed Paymaster General of the forces, with no place in the cabinet. But many of the Whigs suspected him of sentiments that might not be too offended by judicious court flattery. Pitt was approached in handsome terms in connection with one of the smaller offices, but that remarkable young gentleman of twenty-three had a few weeks before, in the Sandwich debates, informed the House, "For myself, I could not expect to form part of a new administration, but were my doing so more within my reach, I feel myself bound to declare that I never would accept a subordinate situation."

At the age of thirty-three, Charles had reached one of the great offices of state, by merit and no favour. He was indeed the most effective force and the most engaging personality in the new government. He wanted power, because he believed that he could employ it wisely for the country, and he had achieved it. His tenure was to be short and stormy, and complicated from the first by deep-rooted differences with Shelburne. Before examining these, we must for a little time turn our attention elsewhere. The fall of North's ministry was not at this moment the only distress that was assailing the mind of George III.