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The Personal and Public Relationship between Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox: Its Evolution and Significance

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THE PERSONAL AND PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
EDMUND BURKE AND CHARLES JAMES FOX:
ITS EVOLUTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

by

Susan Grace Schroeder

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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LIFE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Two of the most commanding public figures in eighteenth century England were Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox. Burke has an astonishing distinction: as other English statesmen, Fox and Pitt among them, exultantly cheered the outbreak of the French Revolution, he, "virtually alone,"¹ discerned that a dangerous trail of violence would follow its initiation. His 1790 Reflections on the Revolution in France--for its prophetic message, its literary splendor, and its ultimate historical impact--has earned Burke immortality.

But Burke's public contributions span a twenty-eight year period of undivided dedication. At the disposal of England he laid unparalleled natural gifts: "So full and cultured a mind as Burke's,--so vivid an imagination, and so intense and catholic an interest in all human affairs, past and present,--have never been placed at the service of

¹William Henry Davenport Adams, English Party Leaders and English Parties, Walpole to Peele, I (London, 1878), 314.

the state by anyone except Cicero."² Burke's speeches and writings mirrored an erudition unusually deep and wide. In speaking he "could either bring his masses of information to bear directly upon the subjects to which they severally belonged—or he could avail himself of them generally to strengthen his faculties and enlarge his views—or he could turn any portion of them to account for the purpose of illustrating his theme or enriching his diction."³

Burke's public efforts were always consistent with a comprehensive philosophical outlook and motivated by the highest altruism. Throughout the American Revolution—from the earliest tremors to the final peace—Burke displayed the same adherence to principle, the same wise foresight which distinguish his stand on the French Revolution: undaunted by adamant opposition of King, Tory ministers,

² Sir George Otto Trevelyan, George III and Charles Fox, (London, 1929), I, 203. Hunt points out that Cicero was a "model" to Burke "in character, eloquence, policy, ethics, and philosophy." Reverend William Hunt, "Burke, Edmund," Dictionary of National Biography, edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (London, 1908), III, 345.

³ Lord Henry Brougham, Historical Sketches of Statesmen Who Flourished in the Time of George III, I (London, 1853), 176-7. Bisset writes that when Burke spoke, "he never failed to show the whole and every part, the ends and means, the relation of means to means, and of means to ends, were all within his grasp." Robert Bisset, The Life of Edmund Burke, (London, 1800), I, 221.

and people, by discouraged mutterings within his own party, Burke led the Whigs in urging conciliation and recognition of colonial rights. Later in his career, Burke paved the way for a more humane colonial policy in India by his persistent efforts to punish Warren Hastings' exploitation of his colonial office. Burke brought to office enormous genius and high political altruism; these contributions had due impact on public policy.

Yet other aspects of Burke's life also establish his eminence. Throughout his adult career, he wielded an indefatigable pen, producing several significant literary and political works. Brougham points out that Burke was "a writer of the first class, and excelled in almost every kind of prose composition."⁴ Two works especially merit for him a "high place in literature"⁵: his 1756 Vindication of Natural Society, a masterly satire imitating the philosophy and style of Bolingbroke, and his 1757 Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful, an essay on esthetic theory which Doctor Johnson

⁴Brougham, p. 176.

⁵Hunt, p. 346.

"was one of the earliest to acknowledge...a model of true and refined criticism."⁶ The latter work Bisset calls "not only an important accession to philosophy, an exertion of extraordinary genius, but a ground-work of extraordinary fame."⁷ Of Burke's multiple writings in the political field, his 1770 pamphlet On the Cause of the Present Discontents, Adams asserts, is not only notable for its style but ranks as a "textbook of Whig principles."⁸ And Burke's pamphlets on the French Revolution, the aforementioned Reflections and the later Letters on a Regicide Peace, have gained Burke a firm reputation for stylistic brilliance and political wisdom.

Burke's talents were displayed not only in Parliament, not only in literary and political writings, but also, as might be expected, in conversation. Through the reputation earned by the essay On the Sublime and the Beautiful, Burke attracted the favor of Doctor Johnson,⁹ becoming in 1764 a charter member of his famous club and remaining an intimate friend of Johnson's until the latter's death. From Burke

⁶ Adams, p. 269.

⁷ Bisset, I, 59.

⁸ Adams, p. 279.

⁹ Bisset, I, 59.

alone, Johnson "would bear contradiction, which he would tolerate from no other person."¹⁰ And in the club Burke's "manners and colloquial talents rendered him the delight and admiration of the company, but most of all of Johnson, who was the most capable of appreciating his excellence. He remarked, that whenever he was in company with Burke he went away more knowing and wiser than he came, and that every time they conversed, his mind was kept on the full stretch."¹¹ Of Johnson's companions, Bisset claims, Burke "was, beyond all others, the most highly admired."¹² With Reynolds and Garrick Burke formed close friendships; Reynolds deemed him "the best judge of pictures he ever knew."¹³

Thus are found in Burke qualities demanding our instant admiration: intellectual range and wide erudition; distinguished, balanced, judicious statesmanship; enormous

¹⁰Ibid., p. 63.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 74-5. Johnson on another occasion exclaimed, "'Burke is never what we call hum-drum; never in a hurry to begin conversation, at a loss to carry it on, or eager to leave off.'" Adams adds, "Nor did he monopolize conversation...; he was able to listen.... Few of his sayings have been preserved; but some of these lead us to wish that he, too, had had his Boswell." Adams, p. 338.

¹²Bisset, I, 60.

¹³Ibid., p. 251. The author claims that Burke "had an exquisite taste for the fine arts."

literary talent; and ability to earn the respect and friendship of the most eminent literary and artistic men of his age.

Charles James Fox is another figure of unquestioned natural gifts. Buckle called Fox "'one of the greatest statesmen of the eighteenth century,'"¹⁴ and G. O. Trevelyan termed him "'our first great statesman of the modern school.'"¹⁵ Throughout a long Parliamentary career, Fox displayed an irresistible vigor and acuteness in debate. Lecky says of Fox that "'That great master of persuasive reasoning never failed to make every sentence tell upon his hearers, to employ precisely and invariably the kind of arguments that were most level with their understandings, to subordinate every other consideration to the single end of convincing and impressing those who were before him.'"¹⁶ And Robert T. Oliver asserts that "Mabel Platz was but stating the universal judgment when she wrote, 'for a union of oratorical and emotional power with debating ability, Fox has never been rivalled.'"¹⁷

¹⁴Quoted from Buckle, History of Civilization, I, 409, by Adams, p. 345 n..

¹⁵Quoted by John Carswell, The Old Cause; Three Biographical Studies in Whiggism (London, 1954), p. 269.

¹⁶Quoted by Robert T. Oliver, Four Who Spoke Out: Burke, Fox, Sheridan, Pitt (Syracuse, N.Y., 1946), p. 84.

¹⁷Ibid.

While Burke's erudition was more universal, Fox was thoroughly familiar with several modern languages, with history, and especially with the classics.¹⁸ His political knowledge was virtually unsurpassed: Brougham declares, "it may be questioned if any politician in any age ever knew so thoroughly the various interests and the exact positions of all the countries with which his own had dealings to conduct or relations to maintain."¹⁹

For twenty-two years Fox led the Whig party in Parliament; for fifteen of those years he was the formidable rival of William Pitt. Although clearly a skilled practical politician, Fox was, like Burke, a political altruist: he too opposed the injustices of the American War; he too labored for a fair colonial policy in India. To his independent leadership are credited the passage of the Libel Act, which enlarged freedom of speech, and the abolition of the African Slave Trade.

Burke and Fox, though equally outstanding in public life, were in temperament and personal habits glaringly

¹⁸ Adams, p. 345.

¹⁹ Brougham, p. 219. Buckle agrees that Fox "was better acquainted than any other [statesman of his century] with the character and resources of those foreign nations with which our own interests were intimately connected." Buckle, p. 409, quoted by Adams, p. 345 n..

dissimilar. Burke led a sober, highly moral life, centered around family affairs, agricultural pursuits at his country home, and friendships with the literary elite; "The dice and the bottle which misled so many of his contemporaries had for his lofty nature no attractions."²⁰ But Fox was one of those most willingly misled: a frequenter of Newmarket, an enthusiastic drinker, and a notorious gambler. Morley aptly characterizes Fox as "dissolute, indolent, irregular, and the most insensate gambler that ever squandered fortune after fortune over the faro-table."²¹ In family background too these men were antithetical: whereas Burke rose from an undistinguished, middle-class Irish family, Fox's parentage brushed English royalty.

Yet there existed between Burke and Fox a friendship which Magnus calls "one of the wonders of the age."²² What drew them together? Burke disliked Sheridan for his shallowness and laxity²³; why not also Fox? Burke was drawn to Fox because he possessed virtues which so neutralized his errors "that scarcely one of his friends could see them...."²⁴

²⁰Adams, p. 339.

²¹John Morley, Burke (New York, 1879), pp. 116-7.

²²Sir Philip Magnus, Edmund Burke: a Life (London, 1939), p. 47.

²³Morley, p. 116.

²⁴James Prior, Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke (London, 1889), I, 224.

His great personal magnetism drew the praise of even his political rivals²⁵ and led Lord Holland to proclaim him "the best and greatest man of our time...beloved and almost adored by all who approached him."²⁶ But there is no warmer testimonial to Fox's virtues than Burke's own in Parliament, February 9, 1790. Fox, he declared, "was of the most artless, candid, open, and benevolent disposition; disinterested in the extreme; of a temper mild and placable, even to a fault; without one drop of gall in his whole constitution."²⁷

From their first meeting Burke and Fox felt "the natural attraction of one first class mind for another"²⁸; they found that they had a common love of literature as well. And gradually Burke discovered Fox to be "as passionate for freedom, justice, and beneficence" as he himself was; these aims were to both equally real, equally constant, equally overmastering.²⁹ On both the personal and the political

²⁵Cited from Buckle, p. 409, by Adams, p. 345 n..

²⁶Quoted from Lord Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party, I, 272-3, by Adams, p. 346 n..

²⁷Edmund Burke, The Speeches of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, in the House of Commons, and in Westminster Hall (London, 1816), III, 459.

²⁸Magnus, p. 85.

²⁹Morley, p. 117.

levels, then, strong ties united them.

The relationship between Burke and Fox, deep and intimate from its initiation, endured deep and intimate for twenty-seven years. It spanned all the years of Burke's parliamentary activity and nearly all of Fox's; it underlay many of the public standpoints taken by both men, many of their actions in private life. From its pivotal position in their lives alone it deserves study. But as a key to character, as a spotlight on political history, the culmination of their association is the most illuminating: after close personal and public interaction for twenty-seven years--after both had made strenuous personal sacrifices to maintain that intimacy--an irremediable breach burst open between Burke and Fox, a breach ultimately caused by an antithesis of character and political outlook.

The Burke-Fox relationship, therefore, clearly merits scholarly attention: not only because the men concerned are eminent, not only because their relationship was unique in its initiation, long in duration, wide in personal and public repercussions, not only because it is itself fraught with drama--but also because virtually no thorough scholarly attention has been given it. One study, Christopher

Hobhouse's "Burke and Fox,"³⁰ awards the relationship specific and undivided inspection, but leaves the personal facet unplumbed, summarizing only the political association, and that briefly. Most biographies of Burke and of Fox mention aspects of their association, sometimes examining in detail, but do not satisfy the need for a specific, unified, thorough study. Material on the relationship is scattered through these biographies, through political histories, through memoirs of the period. Two other immensely rich sources of insight--entirely unexploited--are the uncollected and unedited correspondence between Burke and Fox and the parliamentary speeches of both.

The purpose of this paper is, by utilizing these sources of information on Burke and Fox, to initiate more specific scholarly examination of their personal and public relationship--an area in each of their biographies too important to remain neglected.

Since the association is both personal and public, both aspects will be explained as they simultaneously evolve. And because this paper aims primarily to contribute

³⁰In From Anne to Victoria, edited by Bonamy Dobree (London, 1937), pp. 392-404.

to biographical information about Burke and Fox, aspects of character and of political opinion which relate to the association will be spotlighted throughout. The relationship itself--in personal and public aspects--falls very naturally into chronological phases: the period between 1764 and 1782, during which the personal and political alliance began and became solidified; the period between 1782 and 1791, during which gradual personal and political differences developed; and the period between 1791 and 1797, during which personal and political divergences climaxed in an irrevocable breach. These three major phases are studied in separate chapters. A final summarizing chapter closes the paper, followed by the bibliography.

CHAPTER II

GRAVITATION TO FUSION: 1764 TO 1782

Edmund Burke was born in Dublin on January 12, 1729,¹ the younger son of a Protestant attorney, Richard Burke, and a Catholic mother. His boyhood activity restricted by ill health, Edmund became an assiduous reader, a practice he was to continue throughout life. Sent for his health to his uncle's country home, young Burke received his basic education from a Castletown Roche schoolmaster.² From 1741 to 1743, he attended a classical academy at Ballitore, run by Abraham Shackleton for the Society of Friends.³ Here, writes Adams, Burke "was conspicuous for his steadfast application, his retentive memory, and quick apprehension,"⁴ studying with delight in his spare time history,

¹ Date given by Hunt, p. 345, and elsewhere. Disagreement about Burke's birthdate arises, however, from the discrepancy between the records of Trinity College and Burke's Beaconsfield memorial plaque: the former would place the birthdate at 1728, the latter at 1729. (Reverend J.G. MacLeod, "The Domestic Life and Personal Character of Edmund Burke," Month, XXXVIII [February, 1880], 241.) Adams, p. 262, however, blithely announces January 1, 1730, as the date.

² Adams, p. 262.

³ Ibid., and Hunt, p. 345.

⁴ Adams, pp. 262-3.

poetry, and old chivalric romances.⁵ Under Shackleton's guidance, Burke formed his life-long habit of Bible reading; through this Quaker, and perhaps also through his own religiously-divided parentage, Burke developed an early tolerance for religious dissenters⁶--a belief which he was later to defend publicly. He personally became an ardent believer in the Church of England.

In April of 1743, Burke entered Trinity College, Dublin,⁷ where he studied "diligently but in a desultory fashion."⁸ But during his time at Trinity, Burke showed power as a versifier and translator and devoted himself especially to the study of the classics, history, metaphysics, and general literature. Among the great men he studied, favorites were Smollett, Fielding, Le Sage, Addison, Shakespeare, Plutarch, Demosthenes, Sophocles, Lucretius, Virgil, and Horace.⁹

Having gained his B. A. in 1748, Burke left Trinity for London to study law in the Middle Temple. More drawn to literary studies, he dropped law in 1753. For a few

⁵Ibid., p. 263.

⁶Ibid., pp. 263-4.

⁷Ibid., p. 264. Goldsmith was at that time also a pupil at Trinity.

⁸Hunt, p. 345.

⁹Adams, pp. 264-5.

years after 1750, Burke traveled around England, and in London Garrick, Macklin, and Murphy became "constant associates." Throughout this period, Burke diligently labored to "perfect his faculties and to learn all he could about everything."¹⁰

Something of an epoch began in Burke's life when in 1755 his father, disappointed in Edmund's defection from the law,¹¹ withdrew his allowance; he was forced to rely on his literary pursuits for income. In the spring of 1756 he published his skillful satire of Bolingbroke, The Vindication of Natural Society; shortly thereafter the even more important Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful.

The latter work had enormous effect: "Its popularity was immediate. It was read in every 'polite circle,' and discussed by every literary club. Men of mark sought the acquaintance of its author,"¹² men such as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Doctor Johnson. Bisset writes that "intimate friendship" rapidly followed their acquaintance with Burke; Johnson was quick to discern in Burke "that extraordinary genius and know-

¹⁰Quotations just given are from Ibid., p. 266.

¹¹Hunt, p. 345.

¹²Adams, pp. 268-9.

ledge which the world afterwards saw."¹³

In 1757 Burke married a Miss Nugent, daughter of his physician,¹⁴ and in spite of his embryonic fame, the young writer underwent a considerable struggle to achieve a firm position. He did much writing after 1757, publishing that year An Account of European Settlements in America and part of the Abridgement of the History of England.¹⁵ In 1759 appeared the first volume of his work for Dodsley's Annual Register;¹⁶ Burke continued to write for Dodsley for some years.

A genuine turning point in Burke's career was his introduction in 1759 to Gerard Hamilton. That statesman, appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland, invited Burke to accompany him as a friend and private secretary, and in 1761 they departed for Ireland. Burke returned to England

¹³Bisset, I, 59, 62.

¹⁴Doctor Nugent was an esteemed scholar (Adams, p. 270), and became with Burke a charter member of Johnson's club (Bisset, I, 64); his daughter Jane was for Burke "a perfect wife" (Adams, p. 270).

¹⁵The remainder of this history was published posthumously (Hunt, p. 346). Adams comments that Burke was not eminent as a historian: "His genius and his inclination alike pointed to a political career...." (p. 271)

¹⁶Burke did notable sketches of contemporary history and "dispassionate judgments of public men." Adams, p. 271.

in 1763 because he needed more time for literary work;¹⁷ again he went to Ireland but in 1764 broke decisively with Hamilton, apparently because he had been "unjustly and even insolently treated."¹⁸ The alliance with Hamilton had been of value to Burke's career, however: through the office he met many important people in government circles.¹⁹

After his arrival in England in 1764, Burke renewed his literary friendships, becoming in May—with Reynolds, Goldsmith, and others—a charter member of Johnson's literary club. His conversational adeptness and pleasing manners "made him one of its chief ornaments."²⁰ And he soon became known and admired by the highest society in the fashionable and the political worlds.²¹

In 1765 Burke's real political career was launched: introduced to the Marquis of Rockingham, leader of the Whigs in Commons, Burke became his private secretary; and when Rockingham became Minister, Burke was elected to Parliament as a member for Wendover, taking his seat on January 14, 1766.

¹⁷Hunt, p. 346.

¹⁸Adams, p. 273.

¹⁹Hunt, p. 347.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Bisset, I, 124-5, 128.

Once in Parliament, Burke "revealed a vein of oratory so beautiful and so profound" that within the six months of his party's ministry, he "made himself felt as a political force."²² The "fire and freedom" of his first speech, on the Stamp Act, prompted the elder Pitt to commend him personally and to congratulate the Whigs "on the value of the acquisition they had made."²³ Thus encouraged, Burke continued to speak frequently, always with attentive audiences. Gradually, because of Rockingham's poor oratory and poor health, the young secretary began to take the lead in the party. His positive stand against taxation and coercion of the American colonists soon became party policy.²⁴

What of Fox during this time? Born twenty years after Burke, in London, January 24, 1749, Fox came from a much

²²Hobhouse, p. 393.

²³Adams, pp. 274, 275.

²⁴Doctor Johnson had foreseen Burke's phenomenal success: when at the club Sir John Hawkins "expressed surprise at Burke's growing reputation," Johnson exclaimed, "'Sir, there is no wonder at all. We, who know Mr. Burke, know that he will be one of the first men in the country.'" And in a letter to Langton, March 9, 1770, Johnson wrote, "'We have had the loss of Burke's company since he has been engaged in public business, in which he has gained more reputation than perhaps any man at his first appearance ever gained before. ... Burke is a great man by nature, and is expected soon to attain civil greatness.'" Quoted by Ibid., p. 275.

more distinguished family. His father was Henry Fox, the first Lord Holland; his mother Lady Georgina Caroline, daughter of Charles, the second Duke of Richmond. In Fox's childhood, "attention was drawn to the precocity of his intelligence and the amiability of his disposition."²⁵

Lack of religious training compounded with parental indulgence, unfortunately, left Fox with little self-discipline: throughout his life he was spontaneous, impulsive, socially uninhibited. Early he formed the habit of "thinking with freedom and speaking with readiness"²⁶—both of which qualities had influence on his later political orientation and debating effectiveness.

Fox's first schooling was gained at the preparatory institution at Wandsworth; he entered Eton in 1758 where he studied under the Reverend Mr. Francis, a Horace translator. In May 1763, Fox's father, "who strove his utmost to spoil him, carried him off from school to the gaieties of Paris and Spa and initiated him into the mysteries of play. It was then he acquired that fatal passion for gambling which, in after life, proved so disastrous."²⁷ After this

²⁵Ibid., p. 351.

²⁶Prior, I, 224.

²⁷Adams, pp. 351-2. Fox's brother Stephen, likewise stimulated, became an equally extravagant gambler. Ibid., p. 356.

delightful sojourn, young Fox returned to Eton to remain until the summer of 1764; he entered Hertford College, Oxford, in October. There he gained his enduring interest in the classics, languages, and history; earned a reputation in debate; and demonstrated an intense interest in public events. Many at this time, in fact, predicted his future political greatness.²⁸

From the latter part of 1766 to 1768--while Burke's reputation in Commons was rising--Fox traveled on the Continent, assiduously studying French and Italian literature and composing much French verse. Although he "took extraordinary pains to polish his attempts," Fox was never to develop into a powerful writer.²⁹ While he was still roaming the Continent, in May 1768, Fox was returned to Parliament with a Tory seat for Midhurst purchased by his benevolent father. Whereas Burke had entered Parliament at the age of thirty-five, with strong political convictions, firm religious beliefs, deep learning, and a well-deserved literary reputation, Fox,--"accomplished Oxonian student, Parisian dandy, and London gambler,"--slipped in at nineteen.³⁰ Yet he was an extraordinarily

²⁸"Charles James Fox," Month, VI (January, 1867), 33-4.

²⁹Adams, p. 354.

³⁰Oliver, p. 45.

precocious nineteen; his early promise was to flower in full in the years to come.

Friendship had already grown up between Fox and Burke by the time the young man entered Parliament; they had probably met while he was still an undergraduate at Eton. There is some controversy over the date of their first meeting: although Prior³¹ and other scholars claim that they had been personally acquainted since 1766, the testimonies of both Burke and Fox prove that they could have known each other as early as 1763. They certainly were acquainted by 1764. Burke said in a speech in Parliament May 11, 1791, that Fox "had been brought to him" at the age of fourteen;³² Fox was fourteen in 1763 (becoming fifteen in January 1764). And Lucy Sutherland writes, "Fox had referred to Burke in 1764 as 'one of the most agreeable men I have known.'"³³ And by 1766, indeed, the two were intimate. Writing to Sir George Maccartney on March 14th of that year, Fox praises a speech which the former had sent him, commenting, "'I have shown

³¹Prior, I, 222. Hunt, p. 352, writes that the two were intimate "at least as early as 1766."

³²Burke, Speeches, IV, 35.

³³Lucy Sutherland, ed., The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, under the general editorship of Thomas W. Copeland, II (Cambridge, Eng., 1960), 51 n.. This source is not again cited; the edition of Burke's correspondence hereafter cited is Fitzwilliam and Bourke's (see below, n. 77).

it to very few people. Mr. Burke admires it vastly."³⁴

Fox had come to know Burke, then, at the time when the latter was very highly regarded in literary and social circles and just about to launch into a remarkably successful political career. Before Fox himself entered Parliament, Burke had attained great public renown. The open, amiable undergraduate eagerly admired the eminent man twenty years his senior; and Burke, "the most thoughtful and imaginative orator of his day[,] often laid aside the routine of business to converse by the hour with a youth to [sic] whose precocious mind few paths of literature or science were wholly untrodden."³⁵

Despite the fact that Fox's character was very unlike his own, Burke found that Fox shared his own literary interests, his own generous altruistic sympathies; in Burke's own words, he discovered in the youth "the most promising talents" which he "used his best endeavors to cultivate."³⁶ Fox had reason to state many years later that he "had learnt more from [Burke]

³⁴Lord John Russell, ed., Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox (London, 1853), I, 26.

³⁵"Charles James Fox," p. 34.

³⁶Speech in Parliament, May 11, 1791, from Burke, Speeches, IV, 35.

than from all the men with whom he had ever conversed."³⁷

Their private relationship, then, began at least as early as 1764; their public interaction was initiated four years later. At the start of his public career, Fox, in general, exhibited more of promise than of political depth: although he much impressed the House with his speaking ability, he mimicked his father's Tory ideas, and it was obvious, says Walpole, that he "'had not yet thought out his political principles....'"³⁸ Between his public debut as a Tory in 1768 and 1774, then, Fox and his friend Burke were committed to political opposition. On the principal questions between 1768 and 1770--John Wilkes' election and American affairs--Fox and Burke took antithetical stands. Fox strenuously defended, with the other Tories, Wilkes' expulsion from Parliament; Burke stood adamantly opposed. And when the Tory ministers reacted to American discontent with additional repressive measures, Fox sided with them, while his friend Burke eloquently pleaded for recognition of colonial claims.

³⁷ Speech in Parliament on February 9, 1790, quoted from Ibid., III, 467.

³⁸ Horace Walpole, quoted by Adams, p. 355.

When Lord North's government was formed in 1770, young Fox was named Lord of the Admiralty; by this time, writes Walpole, he was "'already one of [Commons]' best speakers."³⁹ But Fox had earned wide notoriety by his tremendous gambling extravagances, and his appointment was "ill-received"⁴⁰ by the public. Raikes declared in his Journal in 1770 that Fox "'was the most undaunted and the most unsuccessful gambler at Brookes'. He was often heard to say that the greatest pleasure in life was winning at hazard, and the next approaching to it was losing at hazard."⁴¹ His political position, therefore, despite his very evident debating ability, appeared unpromising. And throughout 1770 and 1771 he continued, unthinking, to adhere to Tory policies.

But his friend Burke now had gained unquestioned pre-eminence: in 1770 he attracted further national recognition and regenerated his party⁴² by writing On the Cause of the Present Discontents, and by introducing into Parliament his eight resolutions for conciliation with America.⁴³ Now

³⁹Ibid., p. 356.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Raikes, Journal, III, 121, quoted by Ibid.

⁴²Hunt, p. 351.

⁴³Through his fervent espousal of the colonial cause, Burke was appointed the agent of New York State in 1771.

clearly acknowledged the leader of the Whigs, Burke was, whenever he spoke, eagerly heard, for "In every political question which engaged the attention of the House, Burke evinced the range of his intellectual powers, the warmth of his sympathy with truth and justice, the solidity of his judgment."⁴⁴

These marks of Burke's wisdom and genius were not without impact on his young friend. The fact that in 1771 doubts arose in Fox's mind about certain former political actions of his father's, writes Russell,

confirms, that Charles Fox, in his early years, even in the heat of party and personal contention in Parliament, was singularly attentive to the facts and maxims of his adversaries, and began early to sift and examine the soundness of those doctrines in support of which accident and his father's situation had engaged him. Burke's pamphlet on the Discontents, his own familiarity with that very able man, and his observation and candour, gradually prepared his mind for the adoption of more generous, elevated, and sound principles of public conduct than those which had been instilled into him....⁴⁵

It is clear, as Adams⁴⁶ and others also point out, that after this time Fox's discontent with his inherited

⁴⁴Adams, pp. 282-3.

⁴⁵Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 69.

⁴⁶Pp. 357, 359.

political opinions was mounting, that Burke's influence on his thinking was considerable. Speaking of Fox's political opinions in 1774, Hunt claims that he "had always looked up to Burke as his master in politics."⁴⁷

In 1772 Fox's tendency toward independent thinking broke into the open: he resigned the North ministry to oppose with Burke George III's Royal Marriage Bill. Russell testifies again that the weight of Burke's personal influence in Fox's act was heavy.⁴⁸ Despite his temporary alliance with them, however, Fox did not connect himself with the opposition but returned the next year to the North ministry as Junior Lord of the Treasury. During his retirement, however, Russell writes, Fox "braced his mind to the independent exercise of his faculties."⁴⁹

His gambling excesses were now mushrooming. A few nights prior to his motion for the repeal of the Marriage Act, Fox borrowed 10,000 pounds for a night of gambling in London with his brother Stephen. Walpole records these extraordinary details:

⁴⁷Hunt, p. 352.

⁴⁸Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 90.

⁴⁹Ibid...

"They began by pulling off their embroidered clothes and putting on frieze great coats, or turned their coats inside outwards for luck. They put on pieces of leather (such as are worn by footmen when they clean the knives) to save their laced ruffles, and, to guard their eyes from the light and to prevent tumbling their hair, wore high-crowned straw hats with broad brims and adorned with flowers and ribbons; masks to conceal their emotions when they played at quinzé. ... They borrowed of the Jews great sums at exorbitant premiums."⁵⁰

By 1774 Fox's "passion for gambling had plunged him into an ocean of debt."⁵¹ Although by this time, Fox had gained "considerable reputation" in the country and attentive audiences in the House, it is small wonder that, as Adams reports, his influence was diluted by these excesses.⁵²

Because of his licentious conduct, because of his association with Burke, and because of his new independence of thought, Fox's career struck a turning point in 1774: on February 28th he was dismissed from the North ministry. First on the list of causes was George III's personal disgust at Fox's immorality: he wrote to North on February 15th regarding Fox, "'Indeed, that young man has so thoroughly cast off every principle of common honor and honesty, that

⁵⁰Entry in Memoirs, January 6, 1772, quoted by Adams, p. 358.

⁵¹In 1774 Lord Holland vastly relieved Fox's anxieties by taking care of an accumulated debt of 140,000 pounds. Adams, p. 364.

⁵²Ibid..

he must become as contemptible as he is odious," insisting that North show his disapproval to Fox.⁵³ Secondly, it appears that North himself for "some time before" the dismissal had been admonishing Fox for his close associations with members of the opposition such as Burke; Fox blatantly ignored these warnings.⁵⁴ Finally, Fox infuriated both the King and North by suddenly opposing George's pet, the Royal Family Bill. The result was this incisive message from North: "'His Majesty has thought it proper to order a new Commission of the Treasury to be made out, in which I do not see your name. --North.'"⁵⁵

A new phase was about to begin in the public relationship between Burke and Fox. During the entire period of Fox's public activity, the American question had been growing more critical. Fox had made no firm personal commitment on the question prior to his dismissal; that event and his father's death just after it severed his Tory ties and freed him to decide independently.

⁵³Quoted by Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 96. Indeed, Fox's dissipation warranted objection: the night before he moved his opposition to the Family Bill, Fox was returning from Newmarket (where he'd lost some thousand pounds), stopped at Hockerell and spent the entire night drinking, and landed in Parliament sleepless and without having even drawn up his bill. (A contemporary, Mr. Crawford's, account, quoted by Adams, p. 361)

⁵⁴Bisset, I, 341-2.

⁵⁵Quoted by Edward Lascelles, The Life of Charles James Fox (New York, 1936), pp. 50-1.

And the rush of events soon brought him to a decision: news of the Boston Tea Party reached England in March,⁵⁶ and on the thirty-first of that month the North ministry rushed through the first of the "Intolerable Acts," the firm repressive measures which provoked the war.⁵⁷

The "Intolerable Acts" affected Burke and Fox in precisely the same way: "Burke opposed every step in this course of events,"⁵⁸ and the coercive measures "converted Fox from a wavering supporter into a determined foe of the Government."⁵⁹ Fox became one of the most adamant enemies of North's policies.⁶⁰

That Fox was uncommitted at the time of crisis in American relations had much to do with his decision on the question.⁶¹

⁵⁶Lord John Russell, The Life and Times of Charles James Fox (London, 1859-66), I, 61.

⁵⁷Helen Rex Keller, The Dictionary of Dates (New York, 1934), p. 38.

⁵⁸Ross J.S. Hoffman, and Paul Levack, eds., Burke's Politics; Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke on Reform, Revolution, and War (New York, 1949), p. 56.

⁵⁹A.W. Ward and others, eds., Cambridge Modern History, VI (New York, 1911), 446.

⁶⁰John Lawrence Le Breton Hammond, Charles James Fox, a Political Study (London, 1903), p. 217.

⁶¹Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 113, and Adams, p. 362.

His natural tendencies, springing from a generous, open, undisciplined nature, led him to strong sympathy with any whose rights were unjustly interfered with. And while Chatham was able to fill Fox "with faith in the essential justice of the American cause,"⁶² Burke's persistent, well-reasoned policy on the matter of coercion unquestionably served as the guiding light to Fox. Prior ascribes to Burke the "principal" credit for Fox's conversion, because of his "pointing out the way for him to pursue," and his "constant teaching and prompting on the subject."⁶³ For, as Hobhouse puts it, "In Burke's American speeches there is a note that rings true--a true wisdom, a true passion. Burke had found himself at last, and as his genius rang itself out in these noble phrases, it struck some echo in Fox's mind, some vein of altruism and sincerity...."⁶⁴ Ten years of personal friendship too, no doubt, added persuasive power to Burke's arguments. That Burke was the major influence is further demonstrated by the fact that, once his decision was made, Fox gravitated toward the Rockingham rather than the Chatham branch of the Whigs.

⁶²F.A. Mumby, George III and the American Revolution: The Beginnings. (Boston, 1923), p. 351.

⁶³Prior, I, 226.

⁶⁴Hobhouse, p. 397.

Thus opened a new phase in the Burke-Fox relationship—a phase of complete political fusion. Fox did not officially ally himself with the Rockingham party until 1778 or 1779 but after March 1774 acted with it.⁶⁵ When Burke made his speech on American Taxation on April 19th, Fox spoke with him; both warned that Ministry policy would lead to open rebellion.⁶⁶ From this time forward, throughout the war, they were to act wholly in unison.

Because their talents so beautifully complemented one another, "the union of the two strengthened immeasurably the quality of the opposition in the Commons."⁶⁷ Burke, with firm political policy and lofty oratorical power, had established himself as a public force. But Fox's accession, nonetheless, was an "immense gain" to the party;⁶⁸ for although at first he was strictly a disciple, "learning his politics all anew" from Burke, Fox,—with his spontaneity, his enthusiasm, "his matchless powers of persuasion,"⁶⁹—could argue with an electric, immediate effect that

⁶⁵Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 138, and Magnus, p. 85.

⁶⁶Lascelles, pp. 55-7.

⁶⁷Magnus, p. 85.

⁶⁸Adams, p. 365.

⁶⁹Hobhouse, p. 397.

Burke's detailed, philosophical oratory could not rival.⁷⁰

The tide of events rolled against the Whigs and their ally Fox, however; firmly backed by English public opinion,⁷¹ George III and his ministers sent General Gage to Massachusetts with strict orders to stamp out the colonial uprising. Well-founded⁷² Whig hopes that reconciliation could yet be achieved were dashed when the November 1774 Parliament enacted still more repressive measures. England and America hurtled on toward war.

In the motives of Fox and Burke for opposing these Ministry measures there appears a subtle but highly significant difference: it is pivotal to their later divergence over the French Revolution. Burke's hatred of Ministry policy was deeply grounded in his belief in liberty and justice: as he exclaimed in Bristol, October 13, 1774, "'I have never meant to put any colonist, or any human being, in a situation not becoming a free man.'"⁷³ But in addition, he opposed the

⁷⁰ Magnus, pp. 86-7.

⁷¹ Bertram Newman, Edmund Burke (London, 1927), p. 99, writes, "in adopting coercive measures the King had public opinion behind him"; Sir John Fortescue, The History of the British Army, III (London, 1902), 46, writes, "intense irritation" was aroused in England by "the violent behavior of Boston...."

⁷² Russell, Life and Times of Fox, I, 70.

⁷³ Quoted by Hoffman and Levaack, p. 61.

North government's measures because he knew they were "destroying the imperial unity he passionately desired to preserve."⁷⁴ Because of this fear, he rejected taxation as imprudent; on April 19, 1774, he declared, "'Reflect how you are to govern a people who think they ought to be free and think they are not. Your scheme yields no revenue; it yields nothing but discontent, disorder, disobedience....'"⁷⁵ Hating coercion for the same reason, he emphasized the basis for his stand in a March 22, 1775, speech for conciliation: "'my opinion is much more in favor of prudent management than of force; considering force not only as an odious but a feeble instrument for preserving a people so numerous, so active, so growing, so spirited as this, in a profitable and subordinate connection with us.'" He argued that force was inexpedient because as an instrument of rule it was but temporary, uncertain, destructive, and untried.⁷⁶

But Fox was never the deep thinker that Burke was: Fox's natural political orientation seemed to depend not upon a firm philosophical system but upon his generous, sympathetic

⁷⁴ Ibid...

⁷⁵ Speech on American Taxation, quoted by Ibid., p. 59.

⁷⁶ Quoted by Ibid., pp. 68-9.



natural impulses: he was characteristically passionate to see all men free. His rage and frustration over Gage's successful bullying in Massachusetts, mirrored in his first letter to Burke on October 13, 1774,⁷⁷ is definitely motivated by this passion for liberty. He writes,

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 don't know that I was ever so affected with any public event, either in history or in life. ... But to complain is useless, and I cannot bear to give the tories [*sic*] 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.

Lascelles points out that, throughout his life, Fox "intensely disliked the idea of coercion by force of arms."⁷⁸ His declaration in October, 1776, carries the implicit suggestion that in the American conflict his love of liberty overrode his desire to preserve the union: "'the noble lord who moved the amendment said that we were in the dilemma of conquering or abandoning America; if we are reduced to that, I am for abandoning America.'"⁷⁹ What at this time appears to be a strong liberal

⁷⁷In Edmund Burke, Correspondence of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke Between the Year 1744, and the Period of His Decease in 1797, ed. by Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam, and Sir Richard Bourke, K.C.B. (London, 1844), I, 493-5.

⁷⁸Lascelles, p. 55.

⁷⁹Quoted by Hammond, p. 212.

tendency later in Fox's career broadens into a credo.

Thus perhaps in the American conflict we see the germ of difference between the fundamentally conservative Burke and the fundamentally liberal Fox. During the American war, however, these tendencies were not absolutely clear-cut, as later they were to become. But regardless of whether their motives differed in emphasis, in the North policies Burke and Fox faced the challenge of an alien adversary; they united to overthrow it.

Throughout the war Burke and Fox persisted in strenuous but frustrating opposition to Ministry policies. Finding popular support squarely behind the King and augmented by Howe's easy victories, in 1776 the Rockingham party determined to secede from Parliament when American affairs were discussed. Burke labored to inspire his group with boldness and defiance in this act, but many of his colleagues—with the obvious exception of Fox—had almost lost the will to fight.⁸⁰ More English victories in 1777 intensified their depression, but when Burgoyne met defeat at the end of that

⁸⁰In 1777 Burke was exasperated when his associates only lethargically opposed a partial suspension of the Habeas Corpus act, a change which Burke feared dangerous to English liberties (Hoffman and Levack, pp. 94-6). His vexation at their tepidity is evident in his letter to Fox, October 8, 1777, found in Edmund Burke, The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, 4th edition, VI (Boston, 1871), 137-9, 142.

year, hope again rekindled.⁸¹ By 1780 the tide of war was turning toward the Rockinghams' position, and that year Burke made an influential speech advocating economy and retrenchment. Soon the Rockingham crusade was to culminate in victory.

During the American war the personal alliance between Burke and Fox was as firm as their political union. An abundance of evidence demonstrates this fact. For one thing, Burke nominated Fox to Johnson's club, and on March 25, 1774, --a month after his dismissal from North's ministry--Fox was admitted to membership.⁸² Secondly, through all their letters during the period shines great personal warmth. Salutations and closes of all five letters--especially those four written by Fox--are remarkably, unreservedly affectionate, and the tone and content of the letters indicate that high respect for one another and considerable warmth permeated their association. Marks of personal consideration such as

⁸¹ Charles R. Ritcheson, British Politics and the American Revolution (Norman, Okla., c. 1954), p. 231.

⁸² Carl B. Cone, Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the American Revolution (Lexington, Ky., 1957), p. 325. Regarding Fox's conduct at the club, Bisset writes, "Fox was generally silent in the company of Johnson. ... His taciturnity, probably, proceeded from a desire for information and instruction...." (I, 384)

Fox's almost obsequious query⁸³ as to whether Burke would wish him to see anyone while in Ireland; personal greetings relayed to and from the intimates of one another;⁸⁴ and teasing, playful remarks such as Burke's "I now sit down with malice prepense to kill you with a very long letter"⁸⁵ and Fox's "Indeed, my dear Burke, it requires all your candour and reverse of selfishness ...to be in patience with that rascally city [Bristol] after the way in which it has behaved to you"⁸⁶—all amply demonstrate that the friendship had gained a deep and sure footing.

That the personal and public facets of the union closely interact is evident from the heterogeneous content of the letters throughout their association. The five letters

⁸³Letter of September 8, 1777: "I thought you would like to know my intention in case there should be any body whom you would wish me to see, or to whom you would wish to be remembered. If that should be the case, you will be so good as to direct to me at the Duke of Leinster's, Dublin." Burke, Correspondence, II, 182.

⁸⁴In the letter cited above Fox writes "Pray make my compliments to Mrs. Burke, etc." (Ibid.) but by the next year he has considerably more confidence: "My love to every body" (Letter of June or July, 1778, from Ibid., p. 225). Burke sends warm greetings to Fox's friend Townshend and relays the salutations of his family in his October 8, 1777, letter (Burke, Works, p. 147), and Fox's 1778 letter shows that Burke had included Fox's close friend Fitzpatrick in a dinner invitation (Burke, Correspondence, II, 225).

⁸⁵Burke, Works, p. 137.

⁸⁶Letter of June or July 1778 from Burke, Correspondence, II, 225.

during the American war show very clearly the character of their political relationship. Although Fox does occasionally assert very positive, independent political opinions, although Burke shows definite respect for his young friend's talents and opinions, indubitably Burke acts as the political master; Fox as the pupil.

Fox shows himself to be both grateful and humble in his relations with his teacher. For one thing, Fox's letters are much more frequent than Burke's—four of the five during this period were written by Fox; in the later period, however, this proportion was to reverse completely. Secondly, Fox's letters indicate, in general, heavy dependence upon Burke's political guidance. An outstanding example of his attitude is furnished in the September 15, 1780, letter, the majority of which is consumed with Fox's mental turmoil over the stand he took on "popery" during the Westminster election then in progress. A voter, he writes, had asked him on the hustings whether he would work to repeal the "popish bill"; when Fox answered that he would not, the man refused to vote. Fox was later persuaded to make a statement that he would not support measures "prejudicial to the protestant religion or tending to establish popery" in England. Over this appearance of compromise he has now become uneasy. He pours out

his sense of guilt to Burke:

by referring for my future conduct to my past, nobody can accuse me of having done any thing mean, or gone at all from our ground, which I would not give up for all the elections in the world. ... I have dwelt upon this rather long, because if any one were to think that I have given up, in the smallest degree, the great cause of toleration for the sake of a point of my own, I should be the most miserable man in the world, amidst all the acclamations which are at this moment dinning in my ears, and for which you know I have as much taste as any man. Pray judge me severely, and say whether I have done wrong.⁸⁷

Finally, Burke's one letter, October 8, 1777, provides superlative proof of his fatherly attitude toward Fox in political matters. The whole tone of the letter is unmistakably instructive and Burke spells out his analysis of political questions at great length. His paternalism, however, is tempered by affection and intense admiration for Fox's talents; these attitudes inhere in his warning that Fox show restraint in his public fervor and in his urging that Fox contribute his talents officially to the Rockingham party:

you have much more before you for your work. Do not be in haste. Lay your foundations deep in public opinion. Though (as you are sensible) I have never given you the least hint of advice about joining yourself in a declared connection with our party, nor do I now, yet, as I love that party very well, and am clear that you are better able to serve them than any man I know, I wish that things should

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 376-7.

be so kept as to leave you mutually very open to one another in all changes and contingencies; and I wish this the rather, because, in order to be very great, as I am anxious that you should be, (always presuming that you are disposed to make a good use of power,) you will certainly want some better support than merely that of the crown.... I therefore wish you a firm ground in the country; and I do not know so firm and so sound a bottom to build on as our party.⁸⁸

The letters not only indicate the warmth of the friendship between Burke and Fox, not only the character of their political association, but also a very significant difference between their natures, a difference of key import in the breakdown of their relationship many years later. The divergence occurs in Burke's and Fox's conceptions of the relation between public dedication and private habits.

There is an obvious difference between Burke's leisure occupations and Fox's. Burke, "untainted by the contagion of fashionable vice and frivolity, ...directed to reading and conversation those hours which were not employed in parliamentary duties, in necessary business, and in salubrious exercise";⁸⁹ thus his private occupations, wholly consistent with his sober public dedication, tended to

⁸⁸Burke, Works, pp. 143-4.

⁸⁹Bisset, I, 250.

enrich his political contribution. His nature demanded that his private occupations be thus fruitful. To Fox, on the other hand, personal and public activities were in no sense integrated. Even with a new political altruism after 1774, Fox's personal habits remained incongruous with public dedication—at least by comparison with Burke's. During the American war, Fox's arduous love of the races intensified;⁹⁰ his fantastic gambling excesses continued to mount.

His social life, too, he easily severed from his public life. Having now come into intimate contact with the Whigs, Fox gravitated in leisure time toward the many idle but amiable members of the party—who "were not only indifferent to the rewards of office, but regarded it as a grievous burden that they should miss their hunting and shooting, forego Newmarket, and leave their beautiful houses in the country for the unwelcome duties of governing the country."⁹¹ Both Fox and Burke recognized that these lukewarm associates inhibited their party's efforts: Fox termed them "very pleasant and

⁹⁰"He was devoted to racing...and was reputed to be one of the best handicappers in the country" (Lascelles, p. 32). Walpole wrote to Horace Mann in May 1781, "'Mr. Fox is the first figure...in Parliament, at the gaming table, at Newmarket'" (quoted by Adams, p. 373).

⁹¹Lascelles, p. 65.

very amiable people; but altogether as unfit to storm a citadel, as they would be proper for the defence of it";⁹² Burke ascribed partial blame for the party's impotence to their tepidity and want of enterprise.⁹³

While Burke could excuse these deficiencies,⁹⁴ he took them seriously enough so as not to mingle freely with the men in private. Fox, however, found annual visits to their country homes "one of the greatest delights of his life," and was such a pleasant companion that these Whigs were soon competing "for the privilege of entertaining him."⁹⁵ To Fox amiable friends were amiable friends, regardless of their political dispositions.

The circumstances of Fox's 1777 visit to Ireland with Townshend again spotlight the variance between his pleasure-seeking private life and the private preoccupation with public matters which characterized Burke. Burke's very full letter

⁹²Letter to Burke on September 8, 1777, from Burke, Correspondence, II, 182. Fox wrote the letter from Chatsworth, a Whig country house where he was the guest of William Cavendish, fifth Duke of Devonshire, and his wife Georgiana. John Drinkwater, Charles James Fox (New York, 1928), p. 158.

⁹³Letter to Fox on October 8, 1777, in Burke, Works, pp. 137-8.

⁹⁴"To say the truth I cannot greatly blame them. We live at a time when men are not repaid in fame for what they sacrifice in interest or repose." Ibid., p. 138.

⁹⁵Lascelles, pp. 69-70.

to Fox in Ireland closes with an exhaustive examination of the political situation in that country; Burke is convinced that the Tories plan to affirm in the next Parliament that their policies have Irish support. Knowing that Fox is staying with Irish political leaders, Burke exhorts him to use the visit to counteract the Tory plan: "Pray do not be asleep in this scene of action,--at this time, if I am right, the principal." He assumes that Fox will do so: "You will easily refute, in your conversation, the little topics which they will set afloat; such as, that Ireland is a boat and must go with the ship...."⁹⁶

Fox, ironically, had not Burke's political preoccupation. In the first place, the trip with Townshend had originated as "a mere party of pleasure, settled between them while riding out at Chatsworth."⁹⁷ Moreover, "Irish local politics were little discussed" during the visit; in fact, "the strangers were much caressed and attended to, and were constantly invited to dinners, where there was much conversation and a prodigious amount of wine. A wild and hazardous freak of Lord John Townshend and Mr. Fox made a great noise, and, ...raised their reputations in Ireland.... They bathed in

⁹⁶Letter to Fox, October 8, 1777, from Burke, Works, p. 147.

⁹⁷Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 138.

the Devil's Punch Bowl, and fortunately escaped from all the consequences to be apprehended from its extreme coldness."⁹⁸

And Burke, ironically, had opened his letter with high optimism:

"My dear Charles, I am, on many accounts, exceedingly pleased with your journey to Ireland. I do not think it possible to dispose better of the interval between this and the meeting of Parliament."⁹⁹

Again it appears that Burke had misconceived his friend's character, from Fox's letter to him in June or July of 1778;¹⁰⁰ Burke apparently had thought Fox was occupying his time usefully, but Fox quickly set him straight:

Nothing can be so unlike the life I have been leading here¹⁰¹ as the idea you seem to have formed of it. It is the very abstract and perfection of all faineantise;¹⁰² and nothing has kept me here but the most complete indolence. I have determined to go every day, but have found myself in such a state of happy laziness, lying almost naked upon my couch all day, that I thought it was quite a sin to disturb myself. The fact is, that when the weather is really warm, I want neither amusement, society, occupation, nor object.

The question may be raised whether Burke was blind to this dichotomy between Fox's character and his own. Probably

⁹⁸ Ibid...

⁹⁹ Burke, Works, p. 137.

¹⁰⁰ Burke, Correspondence, II, 225.

¹⁰¹ The place is uncertain.

¹⁰² Faineantise: "idleness, laziness, sloth." J. E. Mansion, ed., Heath's Standard French and English Dictionary (London, 1934), I, 353.

not. Unquestionably he knew, with the rest of the public, the details about Fox's gambling activities. Besides, while he might have had a tendency to judge Fox's character in terms of his own, at least three of Burke's statements prove that he was totally aware of Fox's flaws. In his 1777 letter, Burke bluntly points out to Fox that he is too licentious to ever gain royal favor: "I much doubt, whether, with all your parts, you are the man formed for acquiring real interior favor in this court, or in any...."¹⁰³ And in a November 1788 letter, as he expresses the hope that Fox will soon become minister, Burke remarks, "Your business formerly was only to take care of your own honour. I hope you have now another trust."¹⁰⁴ Finally, the clearest statement both of Burke's recognition of Fox's shortcomings and of his own reasons for loving his friend in spite of them appears in a speech in 1783: "'He has faults, but they are faults that, though they may in a small degree tarnish the lustre, and sometimes impede the march of his abilities, have nothing in them to extinguish the fire of great virtues. In those faults there is no mixture of deceit, of hypocrisy,

¹⁰³Burke, Works, p. 144.

¹⁰⁴Burke, Correspondence, III, 85.

of pride, of ferocity, of complexional despotism, or want of feeling for the distresses of mankind.'" ¹⁰⁵ Burke could understand that Fox's flaws arose from the same flexible, generous nature that made him a fervent political idealist.

In 1764 had sprung up a warm personal friendship, based upon mutual admiration, mutual political idealism, and mutual literary interests; out of it had grown a firm personal and political alliance. Burke had helped Fox to find himself politically and during the American war stood in admiration as his protege's political influence and skill increased. By 1778, undoubtedly, Fox had gained incredible impact as a debater; referring to the session of that year, Adams writes, "In each stormy debate, indeed, Fox appeared in full feather; always prompt and resolute in the attack, and overpowering his adversaries by the weight of his arguments and the strenuousness of his invectives." ¹⁰⁶ By 1780 Fox's "popularity in the country was immense...." ¹⁰⁷ And with

¹⁰⁵ Speech in Parliament supporting Fox's East India Bill, quoted by Adams, pp. 388-9.

¹⁰⁶ Adams, p. 386. Bisset, I, 340-1, points out that Fox's debating style was, as was his political outlook, enlarged through his personal association with Burke.

¹⁰⁷ Adams, p. 386.

speaking power, with his ascendancy acknowledged by all, Fox gained confidence in asserting independent political opinions. Burke, delighted with his pupil's prowess, readily encouraged this: he "became, as the American war advanced, as he grew more and more connected with Fox, a more and more implicit supporter of the measures which that statesman proposed...."¹⁰⁸

That Burke's increasing submission was indeed necessary to the maintenance of their association is demonstrated by the remarkable events during the years to follow.

¹⁰⁸Bisset, II, 119.

CHAPTER III

VIBRATIONS TO CONVULSION: 1782 TO 1791

Within the years between 1782 and 1791, the Burke-Fox relationship falls into two major phases: the first, from the forming of the Rockingham ministry in March 1782 to the fall of the Bastille in July 1789; the second, from the latter date to early 1791. During the entire period we discover distinct alterations in the public situations and the political opinions of Burke and Fox. And very gradual, subtle repercussions develop in their personal relationship.

At the close of the American war, the Rockingham party triumphantly drove out North's discredited government and formed a new ministry in March 1782. Fox became Leader in Commons with the cabinet post of Foreign Secretary of State.¹ But Burke--Rockingham's closest adviser, director of party policy, and vigorous leader throughout the Revolution,--remarkably enough, was merely allotted the position of Paymaster of the Forces, and excluded from the Cabinet.

¹Adams, p. 293.

Yet his claims to a cabinet post were "indisputable."²

Why was he excluded? Scholars ascribe several reasons. Oliver, perhaps a more impartial observer than others, traces his exclusion partly to his "humble birth and lack of family connections, partly his personal austerity which failed to make political friends, partly his irritability...."³ Burke's "irritability" was to become more pronounced, but a temper outbreak during a 1777 Parliamentary session exemplifies the tendency's beginning. An observer, Mr. Crawford, wrote Lord Ossory about an argument on December 4th between Wedderburne and Burke "'which so offended the latter, that he went out of the House, and I believe intended to challenge Wedderburne....'" Crawford believed that Burke had been "'originally in the wrong'" and had construed Wedderburne's remarks to him "'into a menace.'"⁴

Additional causes for Burke's relegation to a minor post could be his essential didacticism, which made him difficult to work with in a group,⁵ and the jealousy of

²Ibid., pp. 293-4.

³Oliver, p. 67.

⁴Quoted by Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 162.

⁵Hunt, p. 354.

other party members.⁶ But by far the most universally acknowledged cause for Burke's decline was his inability to hold an audience. Despite his tremendous genius, despite his vast erudition, despite his incomparable eloquence, Burke simply was blind to his audience's reactions.⁷ To most his speeches appeared overamplified, didactic, too profusely ornamented, laden with irrelevancies, occasionally so impassioned as to be indelicate. In short, Burke's speeches often fell flat.

Even in a 1772 speech Walpole noted this tendency: "His fault was copiousness above measure; and he dealt abundantly, too much, in establishing general positions. Two-thirds of this oration resembled the beginning of a book on speculative doctrines, and yet argument was not the forte of it."⁸ But there was much to praise in Burke's early speeches, and not until the end of the American war did Burke's hold upon his audiences loosen.

Bisset, generally more positive in his attitudes toward Burke than is Walpole, explains that Burke's difficulty

⁶ Ibid., p. 355.

⁷ Brougham, for example, remarks that Burke "'regarded not the degree of interest felt by his audience in the topics which deeply occupied himself; and seldom knew when he had said enough on those which affected them as well as him.'" Quoted by Adams, p. 295.

⁸ Quoted by Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 84.

arose from "the elasticity of his fancy," the rapidity of his power of association, "the fulness and flow of his capacious mind." Bisset admits that these tendencies rendered Burke's speeches "very long, and to some very tiresome." But perhaps, as Bisset concludes, few members of the House had the intellectual range, prowess, or interest to follow Burke.⁹ Regardless of the causes, however, Goldsmith's lines in his 1774 "Retaliation" neatly summarize Burke's overall effect:

"Who, too deep for his hearers, still went on refining,
And thought of convincing, while they thought of dining."¹⁰

Walpole had written on April 7, 1772, "'If Fox once reflects and abandons his vices, ...he will excell Burke; for of all the politicians of talents that I ever knew, Burke has the least political art.'"¹¹ And Fox did surpass Burke—but not because he in any sense abandoned his vices. Fox, in contrast to Burke, qualified for the Cabinet by his high birth, his amiable, magnetic personality which had made for him, as we have seen, many political friends. But most important, by 1782 Fox had become an electrifyingly effective

⁹Bisset, I, 221-2.

¹⁰Quoted by Adams, p. 296 n..

¹¹Quoted by Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, I, 86.

speaker.

Ironically, the very qualities which had made Fox such a beautiful complement to Burke during the American war now made him Burke's successor. In every sense his speaking was the opposite of Burke's: his "marked characteristic was his directness"; his undeviating object was always the "conviction of the hearer." Fox would allow nothing to obstruct the "cogent sequence" of his argument; never would he digress, never would he repeat himself, never would he reiterate "a line of reasoning he had already traced."¹²

The immediate impact of Fox's speaking, therefore, was enormous: "He could lash his hearers into a storm of indignation, or move them to melting pity, or excite them to sympathetic laughter, at his will."¹³ His depth of feeling and absolute sincerity strengthened his effect.¹⁴

Now Burke found that he had been eclipsed. But though shunted into the Paymaster position, though disappointed,¹⁵ he displayed a "splendid disinterestedness" in the office,¹⁶

¹²Adams, pp. 346-7.

¹³Ibid., pp. 348-9.

¹⁴These affirmations of Sir Robert Grant in the Quarterly Review (August, 1810) are quoted by Ibid., p. 349.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 297.

¹⁶Oliver, p. 67.

making during his tenure "some substantial reforms."¹⁷

After a mere three months in office, on July 1, 1782, Rockingham died; at his death Shelburne, leader of another segment of the Whigs became minister through the King's support. Fox and Burke both disliked Shelburne¹⁸ and immediately resigned. After Rockingham's death Fox's preeminence over his friend Burke became indisputable: thenceforth Fox was recognized as leader of the party. With Rockingham's death, Copeland writes, came "one of the crucial turning points" of Burke's career: "Henceforth he was not supported, either in the House or in the councils of the party, by any one powerful influence." Though Fox was "devoted to Burke," Fox now showed that he, unlike Rockingham, "did not need Burke" but was strong enough to direct his own course.¹⁹ Recognizing this fact, Burke willingly submitted to his former pupil's leadership.

¹⁷Hunt, p. 355.

¹⁸Hobhouse, p. 398. A letter written to advise Fox to resign Shelburne's cabinet is found in Memorials of Fox, I, 353-4; Russell writes that it "seems to be in the handwriting of Mr. Burke," although very little like his other writing in its "low" tone, "obscure" language, and "vague" purpose.

¹⁹Thomas W. Copeland, Our Eminent Friend Edmund Burke: Six Essays (New Haven, 1949), pp. 74-5.

Fox, determined to oust Shelburne, formed a coalition with the former Tory minister Lord North and in April 1783 took office, this time personally relegating Burke into another Paymaster post. Fox asked Burke to help prepare a measure to improve Indian colonial government; the resulting East India Bill aimed at transferring Indian governmental control from the East India Company to a board appointed by the Parliament.²⁰ But both King and public were enraged at the coalition government because Fox had bound himself to a man "whom for the past eight years he had been execrating as the arch-villain of the war, the corrupter of Parliament, and the instrument of the King's arbitrary will."²¹ When heavy criticism was leveled at Fox's East India Bill, George III gained a good excuse to dismiss the government in December 1783.

²⁰Adams, pp. 299-303.

²¹Hobhouse, p. 398. Bisset (II, 137) claims that the coalition is "now known to have first been projected by Mr. Burke," explaining that this fact was ascertained at a discussion at the Duke of Portland's following Burke and Fox's split in 1791. He adds that this fact removes some of the blame from Fox's reputation since Burke and North had always thought well of one another.

Pitt, now to become the great rival of Fox, began a new ministry with a small minority, but by the election of 1784 he had gained overwhelming popular support. Fox barely won his election at Westminster;²² the coalition with North had "brought upon Mr. Fox a burden of unpopularity which weakened for the rest of his life the influence of his genius, eloquence, and political foresight...."²³ But in spite of temporary Whig impotence Fox's claim to leadership in the party was to remain undisputed.

Burke too suffered from the coalition's disrepute: with 160 Whigs displaced by the 1784 election,²⁴ the new Parliament became filled with "arrogant young Tories, bent upon humbling him."²⁵ Within the next few years, he was to be badly mistreated in Parliament, faced by attacks on his character and interruptions whenever he spoke.²⁶

Since the Tories now controlled the House, both Burke

²²Adams, p. 396. The election was disputed in Parliament but finally was verified in 1785.

²³Ibid., pp. 379-80.

²⁴Ibid., p. 303.

²⁵Oliver, p. 68.

²⁶Hunt, p. 356.

and Fox curtailed their Parliamentary activity during 1784, the former returning to Beaconsfield, the latter to Chertsey.²⁷ Burke's active interest in Indian affairs, begun early in his career and strengthened by the later Fox-North activity, during his retirement intensified.²⁸ In 1785 Warren Hastings returned to England with an ostensibly brilliant record as Governor-General of India, but evidence showed that he had used highly exploitive and immoral tactics to build his empire. These facts aroused Burke's fury, and, after asking in the 1786 session to examine Hastings' papers, he proposed his impeachment, firmly backed by Sir Philip Francis.²⁹

The Hastings Trial, begun February 13, 1788, was to be an outstanding episode in Burke's career. Burke's anger at reports of Hastings' arbitrary wielding of power soon intensified into an obsessive fury.³⁰ His wholehearted determination was indeed necessary, for the trial dragged him over a nine-year obstacle course of numberless interruptions and of political and public opposition. At length, in June 1794, Hastings was acquitted. But Burke's strenuous and virtually

²⁷Hobhouse, p. 399.

²⁸Ibid...

²⁹Adams, pp. 303-4.

³⁰Hobhouse, p. 400.

single-handed efforts had not been wasted. Although public and parliamentary concern were quite exhausted by its conclusion, the trial had "made an unparalleled impression on the public mind"³¹ and ultimately served its purpose as a warning to future Indian rulers to respect and revere native rights.³²

Although Burke's oratorical faults and especially his feverish persistence weakened his already feeble political position, he had made some unquestionably fine orations during the trial. Many at its close--even Hastings!--complimented him on his splendid, forceful eloquence.³³

One of the many postponements of the Hastings trial had been the Regency Question, raised in 1788 when George III's mental illness became acute. When the illness persisted, likelihood of the Prince of Wales' becoming regent grew firm; and since he had become "the bosom companion of Fox,"³⁴ the probability was that Fox would supplant Pitt's ministry.

³¹Adams, p. 306.

³²Ibid., p. 312.

³³Ibid...

³⁴Hobhouse, p. 400.

Fox, in Italy when the King became ill, rushed back to England in November;³⁵ Pitt quickly drew up a regency bill to limit the powers of the prince--and a heated Parliamentary battle broke out. Burke firmly assisted Fox in defending the Prince. But just as it seemed that the Whigs had gained office, in February 1789 the King suddenly recovered and their hopes were dashed: Pitt became firmly entrenched once more.³⁶

During this period from 1782 to 1789, in the formerly solid relationship between Burke and Fox distinct inner vibrations could be felt. Between the two men relations had radically altered. Burke, the former leader, became the follower; Fox, the former pupil, became the master. Burke--in spite of his characteristic belief in his own opinions, in spite of his injured pride--readily submitted to Fox's leadership, and tempering his inclinations to advise, generously commending his friend's abilities, tried to make himself content to follow. But subtle alterations took place in the characters of both men--all of which seem to stem from their altered political positions.

³⁵Fitzwilliam and Bourke, eds., Correspondence of Burke, III, 81.

³⁶Historical details in this paragraph, if not otherwise footnoted, are drawn from Robert B. Eckles and Richard W. Hale, Jr., Britain, Her Peoples and the Commonwealth (New York, 1954), pp. 295-6.

Fox, with a sudden, heady rush of power, steadily gained confidence in his own political thinking and--most important in this connection--a consciousness of his power and popularity. A tendency toward eagerness for power could perhaps be seen in his forming a coalition with North and in his later defense of the Regent's right to power, this latter position, as Pitt pointed out, quite inconsistent with Fox's constant previous campaigning to limit royal control.³⁷ Burke's letters during the period, as we shall see, contain several allusions to Fox's infection by glory. Moreover, now that Fox could stand independently, he began to disagree with Burke on political matters; now entrenched in party power, he began to neglect his old friend.

Throughout the period Burke had had to stand alone against personal attack, against contempt, against political opposition; the Hastings trial and the Regency debates showed that under these pressures his temper had been wearing thin, was even becoming "completely unrestrained."³⁸ Walpole, Sheridan and others³⁹ record this observation; Adams speaks

³⁷Ibid...

³⁸Oliver, p. 68.

³⁹According to Ibid., pp. 68-9.

of the "virulence and violence" of his speeches during the Regency debates.⁴⁰ Because of these same pressures, Burke's tendencies toward bulldog dogmatism and steely political independence hardened. Fox's increasing firmness of opinion, his increasing personal neglect had their effect on his friend.

But despite the mounting influence of these changes, Burke and Fox held to their strong affection for one another and struggled to ward off differences. The struggle is evident in their speeches and letters between 1782 and 1789.

A strong, deep affection permeates Burke's speech in 1783 in support of Fox's East India Bill. He commends his friend, it should be noticed, because the bill indicates that Fox's altruism overrides all selfish considerations:

"it will be a distinction honourable to the age [that this matter] has fallen to the lot of abilities and dispositions equal to the task; that it has fallen to one who has the enlargement to comprehend, the spirit to undertake, and the eloquence to support so great a measure of hazardous benevolence. His spirit is now owing to his ignorance of the state of men and things; he will know what snares are spread about his path.... But he has put to hazard his care, his serenity, 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."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Adams, p. 310.

⁴¹ Quoted by Ibid., pp. 388-9.

Burke's docility and his trust in Fox are further manifested in his November 1788 letter, which he wrote to assure Fox of his support on the Regency question and to offer some very cautious opinions. Beginning "My dear Fox," Burke writes,

If I have not been to see you before this time, it was not owing to my not having missed you in your absence, or my not having much rejoiced in your return. But I know that you are indifferent to every thing in friendship but the substance; and all proceedings of ceremony have for many years been out of the question between you and me. When you wish to see me, say as much to my son, or my brother, and I shall be in town in a few hours after I hear from them. I mean to continue here until you call on me; and I find myself perfectly easy, from the implicit confidence I have in you and the Duke, and the certainty I am in, that you two will do the best for the general advantage of the cause, and for your own and our common reputation. In that state of mind I feel no desire whatsoever of interfering, especially as too great an infusion of various and heterogeneous opinions may embarrass that decision, which it seems to me so necessary that you should come to....

Going on, Burke cautiously advances his opinions on the reasons for backing the Prince's regency, the necessity and advantages of rapidly bringing his office about; and uses such expressions of humility as "I mention this to you, not as supposing that you and the rest of our friends are not aware of it....," and "Might it not be better....," concluding

his advising thus:

But I am going farther than I intended. God bless you. There is a good deal to be done for your security and credit, supposing the prince's dispositions to you to be all that they are represented; and that I believe them to be. Your business formerly was only to take care of your own honour. I hope you have now another trust. ... You are to act a great, and though not a discouraging, a difficult part; and in a scene which is wholly new. If you cannot succeed in it, the thing is desperate. Adieu!

Yours ever,
Edmund Burke⁴²

A strong difference of opinion over the Hastings trial appeared in 1789. Burke and Fox had disputed in Parliament on April 2, 1787, over the proceeding to follow in the impeachment, and on that occasion Burke expressed his consternation: "nothing could give him so much concern as to differ from his right honorable friend near him [Fox],--and Heaven forbid that it should prove an omen of future frequent variances of opinion...."⁴³ Later on, however, it appears that Fox was like the great majority of the public in opposing the length of the trial itself; Hunt testifies that Burke did continue the trial longer than Fox wished,⁴⁴ and Adams writes that after postponements began to exhaust public interest in it,

⁴²Burke, Correspondence, III, 81-5.

⁴³Burke, Speeches, III, 298.

⁴⁴Hunt, p. 357.

"The only person really in earnest was Burke...."⁴⁵ Certainly Burke must have felt great disappointment when Fox too deserted him in this crusade.

A letter Burke wrote to Fox on May 11, 1789, mirrors Burke's hurt pride over a recent disagreement they have had concerning the trial. Burke's vexation is increased by the fact that he now sees so little of Fox, but the letter is permeated most of all by anguish--anguish that he and his friend should have so disagreed.

Russell's introduction to the letter explains that a vote had been taken in the House blaming Burke, and that some difference of opinion had arisen over whether the trial should proceed. Although Fox "had defended Mr. Burke warmly and ably" in the House, he seemed to feel that, in the light of the House vote, Burke should not have hurried as he did into Westminster Hall to resume the prosecution. Burke's letter, Russell explains, evidently was written in reply to a censorious note from Fox. Burke begins "My dear Fox," continuing:

The only part of your letter which has given me serious concern is the word which concludes it. The word me. If I had meant to act unkindly by

⁴⁵Adams, p. 310.

you, it must be admitted that I chose my time for an unfriendly act with very little judgement. You had just at that moment behaved most nobly, not only in regard to the cause in which we are engaged in common, but with regard to myself personally. This behavior ought to make its due impression on my mind at the same time, and it ought not to be forgotten speedily. I think it did affect me as it ought to do, and I am mistaken if I shall not retain it in no ungrateful memory.

You pass by, however, this fault of mine, whatever it may be. It is certainly good to be pardoned; but to stand in need of a pardon is not so pleasant. I am persuaded that you have received some very erroneous account of the transaction, or you could not possibly have felt, much less retained, any soreness about it. It is unlucky that things are so circumstanced that we seldom can meet, and that, with us, an explanation cannot always follow on the heels of a misapprehension. It is on Monday that I am to clear up to you the steps which I found myself obliged to take in your absence on Tuesday last.

Burke protests, in a peevish tone, that Fox had given him personally no instructions; that, in addition, most members of the Committee did not know Fox's wishes, though two or three claimed that Fox wished the trial deferred. Since Lords was filling and Westminster Hall filled, most urged Burke to go in immediately; some of Fox's friends came in with the same purpose. But until some had pledged that Fox would not be displeased Burke refused to go. He had felt very ill at the time himself, and certainly disinclined to proceed.

The letter closes,

I think if you were there, and had the view of things that I then had, you would have proceeded as I did; and to this hour I cannot conceive that any other ill has happened from it, except, what indeed I consider as no small ill, that it has given you uneasiness. I might have a number of compurgators among your friends, if I thought it would be right to make your feelings on this subject generally known. An ill use would be made of it by our common enemies, who would be sure to exaggerate a thing which, I hope, hardly merits (at least I hope so) the name of a difference. Surely it is a time when those who love and trust each other, as I hope is the case with us two, ought not to permit any soreness in our minds from mistakes that could not arise from any unfriendly intention. ... Adieu; and believe me, with some uneasy sense of your letter, but always most truly and faithfully your old friend,

Edmund Burke⁴⁶

Recurring evidence of Fox's personal neglect of Burke and of those of whom Burke felt Fox should be more considerate--and a strong implication that Burke feels Fox is carried away by his own glory--appears in Burke's letter of September 9, 1789,⁴⁷ about four months after the letter cited above. He writes to Fox that a new acquaintance of his at Beaconsfield, Mr. Blair,

is a little out of humor with you. You cannot doubt of his attachment to your cause and your person, and therefore I think this is not quite what you would

⁴⁶From Fox, Memorials, II, 355-8.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 359-60.

wish. Some time ago he wrote to you at Dr. Priestley's desire, wishing you to apply to the Prince of Wales for his leave to dedicate a great collection of his (Priestley's) aerial disquisitions to his Royal Highness. He has had no answer, and is a little piqued.

Fox should write to him, Burke continues, whatever the Prince's decision may be; this mark of consideration would certainly be of political advantage since Priestley leads a powerful group of Dissenters who already seem inclined toward Fox. Then Burke closes, after describing his recent trip to Yorkshire with the Prince, with a very incisive note:

I suppose we are not to flatter ourselves with seeing you here very speedily. When you can come, you will make us very happy. My barley has made me a little melancholy, but we are now in great spirits. We are as subject to ups and downs in our carts and wagons as those that glory carries ventoso curru. I wish you a good journey in yours.

Ever very faithfully and affectionately yours,

Edmund Burke

Thus, between 1782 and 1789 we see Fox, the leader, breaking free of his political dependence on Burke, neglecting their old friendship, and manifesting other signs of the infection of glory. For his ardent political altruism, however, Burke can still love him. And we see Burke, the led, through loss of all external supports, intensify his

bulldog adherence to principles, and, though chafing at mistreatment by his friend, strenuously work to maintain the friendship. With the pressure of Fox's neglect laden on top of national disrepute and political impotence, Burke's irritability grows more pronounced--and vibrations thus initiated into their relationship were soon to intensify into a shuddering convulsion.

The crisis in Burke and Fox's friendship came in July 1789--a few months before Burke wrote the letter last cited. The occasion was Bastille Day, the crashing outbreak of the French Revolution. By leaders in England the event was applauded as a tremendous gain for the cause of liberty. Pitt sincerely praised the new French government,⁴⁸ and Fox, Fox was simply exhilarated, exclaiming on Bastille Day, "'How much the greatest event that ever happened in the world, and how much the best.'" ⁴⁹ He immediately became the enthusiastic advocate of the Revolution.

But Burke's reaction was exactly the opposite. From the violence of the Revolution he almost instantly recoiled;⁵⁰ to him it represented a force destructive of all liberty

⁴⁸Adams, p. 314.

⁴⁹Copeland, p. 162.

⁵⁰Ibid..

and established order. Intensely religious man that he was, unerring foe of arbitrary power, staunch adherent to the solidarity of rightfully established institutions, Burke saw the Revolution as a tremendous threat. He had visited France in 1772 and had been alarmed by the religious scepticism of the followers of Voltaire and Rousseau; in their teachings, he "saw the probable overthrow of religion and government."⁵¹ In the session of Parliament following that trip, Burke asserted a principle which was to animate his whole vigorous campaign against the French Revolution, fifteen years later:

"he pointed out the conspiracy of atheism to the watchful jealousy of governments. He professed that he was not overfond of calling in the aid of the secular arm to suppress doctrines and opinions; but if ever it was to be raised, it should be against those enemies of their kind, who would take from us the noblest prerogative of our nature, that of being a religious animal. ... Already, under the systematic attacks of those men, I see many of the props of good government beginning to fail. I see propagated principles which will not leave to religion even a toleration, and make virtue herself less than a name...."⁵²

After the Revolution broke out, within the Whig party, and between Burke and Fox in particular, signs of convulsion became apparent. Burke's obsessive opposition to the

⁵¹Bisset, I, 264.

⁵²Quoted by Ibid., pp. 264-5. Bisset represents this entire passage as direct quotation from Burke. The switch from third to first person is characteristic of the method of narration in Burke, Speeches.

Revolution was pitted against Fox's glowing enthusiasm: both being such firm political idealists, compromise was out of the question. And in this irreconcilable divergence of conviction was the culmination of symptoms which had first appeared after 1774 and had intensified after 1782.⁵³

Originally Burke and Fox had been drawn together by a mutual political altruism, a fervent belief in freedom and justice. But Burke's altruism, based upon his hierarchical view of life, his deeper philosophical thought, was always thoughtful and conservative: this tendency is evident in the fact that while he had consistently defended the American colonists' rights to liberty, a basic, underlying aim during the American conflict was the preservation of their constitutional union with England. Fox's altruism, on the other hand, was in keeping with his open, impulsive nature: motivated by strong emotion, unaccustomed to personal discipline, to limitations of his own freedom, Fox drew no limits to his political aspirations. During the American war, Fox showed a tendency to rally around the cry for liberty; more than anything else, it appears, he hated the curbing of the colonists' freedom. Even though the deepest motives of

⁵³Adams, p. 297.

Burke and Fox during the American Revolution had diverged--the former tending toward preserving the established order, the latter toward uncontrolled liberty,--this divergency in no way interfered with their complete political union. But the French Revolution threw this basic difference in political philosophy into the open; because of it a split between them became inevitable. Burke ultimately came to a conservative Whig position, while Fox became the first English liberal.⁵⁴

Despite the conviction with which both clung to their opinions on the Revolution, their deep affection for one another might have been strong enough to withstand the division--had it not been that disagreements and injuries had weakened their bonds during the last years before the Revolution. Fox's neglect had clearly injured Burke because it came at a time when he had no real political friends or political influence, because he was beset by many other foes. Moreover, because his political convictions had hardened into obsessive independence during the Hastings trial, because his irritability and violence were heightened by the ceaseless opposition he met, Burke found it more

⁵⁴Drinkwater, pp. 160-2, and Hobhouse, p. 404.

difficult to bear any wrongs from his friend. Now the French Revolution so aroused him that fear of it obliterated all other considerations. And now Fox too had learned to believe in his own political opinions; like Burke his convictions on the Revolution could not waver. In the events which occurred between the start of the Revolution and 1791, a deep convulsion shook their already vibrating union. But because they loved one another, the personal pain this crisis inflicted on both was remarkably intense.

The first painful breach over the Revolution opened in Commons on February 9, 1790. The question at hand was Army estimates: Fox claimed it was unnecessary to increase the size of the army; to him the French Revolution represented no danger. But Burke strenuously urged defense preparations. The distress which this disagreement caused to both is evident from the Parliamentary account, as full of outbursts of personal feeling as of assertions of political view. Burke had begun by calling the "example of France a menace to civilization"; Fox firmly dissented—but then "paid Burke a remarkable tribute," almost weeping as he spoke.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Magnus, p. 188.

Deeply moved, Burke answered,

He was sorry that his right honorable friend [Fox] had dropped even a word expressive of exultation on that circumstance.... He attributed this opinion of Mr. Fox entirely to his known zeal for the best of all causes, Liberty. That it was with a pain inexpressible that he was obliged to have even the shadow of a difference with his friend, whose authority would be always great with him, and with all thinking people.... His confidence in Mr. Fox was such, and so ample, as to be almost implicit. That he was not ashamed to avow that degree of docility. That when the choice is well made, it strengthens instead of oppressing our intellect. ... He had found the benefit of such a junction and would not lightly depart from it.

But Burke felt compelled to follow this warm commendation of Fox with another strong protest against the Revolution.⁵⁶

Fox applauded the oratorical beauty of his friend's speech but said that he yet wished parts of it had been omitted or deferred. He explained at great length his admiration for Burke personally, declaring in summary that "He had learnt more from his right honorable friend than from all the men with whom he had ever conversed." He assured Burke "that they could never differ in principles, however they might differ in their application." But he could not now help rejoicing at French attempts to achieve liberty and was convinced that the Revolution would be greatly

⁵⁶Burke, Speeches, III, 458-67.

beneficial to England.⁵⁷

Again Burke got to his feet, declaring to Fox "that the separation of a limb from his body could scarcely give him more pain, than the circumstance of differing from him, violently and publicly, in opinion." He protested that he personally took his stand not because he was an enemy to innovation but because he aimed above all to protect the English constitution.⁵⁸

For his speeches on this occasion, solemn and beautifully free from "the vulgarity and rant which had latterly deformed his orations," Pitt and others warmly commended Burke.⁵⁹ Fox praised the speeches too, obviously shrinking from a quarrel with him.

But later in the session, Sheridan brought the situation to a crisis. Motivated partly by jealousy, partly by ideological extremeism, Sheridan broke into an enthusiastic flow of praise for the French Revolution, attacking Burke's position with determination. Burke became indignant; a total break between him and Sheridan followed this attack.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 467-9.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 469-70.

⁵⁹Adams, p. 314.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 314-17.

This occurrence intensified the threat of an explosion between Burke and Fox.

After the split between Burke and Sheridan, a meeting was called at the Duke of Portland's in an attempt to reconcile Burke, Sheridan, and Fox, to keep the party from outright cleavage. But there "Fox adhered to the opinions he had already enunciated" and Sheridan and Burke held to theirs.⁶¹ Although political reconciliation appeared impossible, Burke and Fox "still continued on terms of friendship" after the meeting.⁶²

But another deep tremor shook their relationship on March 2nd. Burke suddenly rose in Parliament to oppose Fox's bill supporting a matter on which they had always firmly agreed--the removal of restrictions on Dissenters; Fox advocated the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Burke opposed him. "Fox declared Burke's speech filled him with grief and shame."⁶³ And the bill was lost. This move on Burke's part was an apparent abandonment of his principles, for he had previously supported the Dissenters' cause consistently.⁶⁴

⁶¹Ibid., p. 317.

⁶²Bisset, II, 356.

⁶³Hunt, p. 358.

⁶⁴Magnus, pp. 189-90.

As the French Revolution swept violently on, all of Burke's old fervor, all of his old dynamism was marshalled to its opposition. By October he felt it mandatory to halt the wave of enthusiasm not only in Parliament but throughout England. With violent invective, with all the eloquence of genius and conviction, he wrote the famous Reflections on the Revolution in France, indicting the Revolution as the enemy of tradition, the enemy of stable social organization, the enemy of established class distinctions, the enemy of religion.⁶⁵

The Reflections had tremendous impact. Thirty-thousand copies were sold immediately and Burke's virulent anti-Jacobin stand "split the Whig party from top to bottom."⁶⁶ A large portion of the English populace which, notwithstanding the fervent enthusiasm of their political leaders, had simply been astonished at the outbreak of the Revolution, unsure of the proper reaction,⁶⁷ were converted now by Burke's force and eloquence to his point of view. A barrage of replies to his pamphlet--among them Thomas Paine's Rights of Man--stirred the nation into a frenzy of divided opinion.

⁶⁵Adams, pp. 313-14.

⁶⁶Magnus, pp. 209-10.

⁶⁷Adams, p. 313.

Now both Burke and Fox recognized that theirs were diametrically opposed objectives; now both recognized that their twenty-five year alliance was nearing a breaking point. The climactic explosion was soon to come.

CHAPTER IV

EXPLOSION TO ANNIHILATION: 1791 TO 1797

The cataclysm which Burke and Fox shrank from but could not defer came in 1791—came, as had their fusion, in the House of Commons.

The immediate occasion was Fox's proposal of the Quebec Bill, for which he urged on April 8th that the House "would keep in view those enlightened principles of freedom, which had already made a rapid progress over a considerable portion of the globe, and were every day hastening more and more to become universal. As the love of liberty was gaining ground, ...he thought that a constitution should be formed for Canada as consistent as possible with the genuine principles of freedom."¹

Thus in his Quebec Bill Fox was bringing the ideas which underlay the French Revolution into direct institutional application to England; nothing more horrifying

¹Burke, Speeches, IV, 1.

to Burke could have been proposed--and at the time he was not present in the House.

But Burke was there on April 15th to hear Fox compare the France of the past and present, to hear him conclude that the Revolution and the new government of France were a great success, to hear him laud both to the skies:

With regard to the change of system that had taken place in that country, Mr. Fox said, that he knew different opinions were entertained upon the point by different men, and added, that he for one admired the new constitution of France, considered it altogether as the most stupendous and glorious edifice of liberty, which had been erected on the foundation of human integrity in any time and country.²

Hearing this, Burke immediately leaped to his feet "in much visible emotion"--but since the cry of "Question!" was general, "he unwillingly gave way to the division...."³ Noting Burke's intense frustration, Fox seemed to regret that his retort had been cut off.⁴ When they privately spoke on the question, however, Fox asked Burke to postpone his rebuttal; but Burke was determined to seize the nearest opportunity.

²Ibid., p. 2.

³Ibid...

⁴Ibid...

After they had returned together to the House, Fox again professed his admiration for the French constitution. Finally given leave to speak, Burke exclaimed "that nothing depressed him more--nothing had ever more afflicted him in body and mind--than the thought of meeting his friend as an adversary and antagonist,"⁵ but that in setting up a constitution for Quebec, the records of other constitutions must be carefully examined: and the French constitution much saddened him. He declared that during the future progress of this Quebec Bill, he intended to assert his opinion on certain principles of government in full. Concluding with mention of Fox's earlier speech and his own thwarted attempt to answer, Burke "acquitted his friend from all design of personal offense in it"; yet he made it clear that he had reached a decision: "should he and his friend 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...."⁶

"From the moment of the debate on the fifteenth of April," the editor of Burke's speeches declares, "a rupture between Mr. Burke and Mr. Fox was distinctly foreseen."⁷

⁵Ibid., p. 3.

⁶Ibid., p. 5.

⁷Ibid., p. 2.

The deep personal anxiety which this impending event stirred in Burke is reflected in his Letter to a Member of the National Assembly, a writing provoked by Fox's Quebec Bill and his enthusiastic espousal of the French constitution. Likewise distressed, Fox visited Burke on April 21st to beg for a deferment of the crisis⁸--but both knew that it was inevitable.

Explosion rocked the House on May 6th, when the bill was once again brought forward. Burke's irritation was mightily aroused by constant obstructions to his speaking, and especially by Fox's public jeering at him. At the start of the session, Burke rose and began to discuss the French government; he was called to order. Fox began to stab at him, sarcastically remarking that Burke

could hardly be said to be out of order. It seemed that this was a day of privilege, when any gentleman might stand up, select his mark, and abuse any government he pleased, whether it had any reference or not to the point in question. Although nobody had said a word on the French Revolution, his right honorable friend had risen up and abused that event. ... Every gentleman had a right that day to abuse the government of every country as much as he pleased, and in as gross terms as he thought proper, or any government, either antient [sic] or modern, with his right honorable friend.⁹

⁸Hunt, p. 359.

⁹Burke, Speeches, IV, 5.

Visibly wounded by this, Burke again tried to speak, again was called to order, and again was personally attacked by Fox. Finally Burke, "in a reserved and grave tone," declared that "a personal attack had been made on him from a quarter he could never have expected, after a friendship and intimacy of more than two and twenty years...."¹⁰ Never a cautious man, Fox nevertheless continued his incisive retorts as Burke proceeded.

Highly provoked now, Burke quickly recapitulated the questions on which he and Fox had differed during the course of their relationship, exclaiming finally, as the editor records the event,

There might, perhaps, be other instances; but in the course of their long acquaintance, no one difference of opinion had ever before for a single moment interrupted their friendship. It certainly was indiscretion, at any period, but especially at his time of life, to provoke enemies or give his friends occasion to desert him; yet if his firm and steady adherence to the British constitution placed him in such a dilemma, he would risk all; and, as public duty and public prudence taught him, with his last words exclaim, "Fly from the French constitution." (Mr. Fox here whispered that there was no loss of friends.) Mr. Burke said, Yes, there was a loss of friends—he knew the price of his conduct—he had done his duty at the price of his friend—their friendship was at an end."

¹⁰ Ibid...

¹¹ Ibid.., pp. 22-3.

Stunned, Fox rose to reply--but he was paralyzed by emotion for some minutes. Tears streamed down his cheeks; he was unable to control his feelings enough to answer. Every member in the hushed House was deeply stirred. Fox finally regained himself, but his expressions of friendship were sharpened by several biting remarks. First he alluded to Burke's previous statement that Fox "had of late years forborne that friendly intercourse with him, by visits, etc., which he had formerly preserved," an omission which, as we have seen, much injured Burke. Fox answered "that the omission complained of was purely accidental; that men, at different periods, fell into different habits; and without any intentional neglect, it frequently happened that they did not see their friends so often as they might have done in preceding years; but at the same time, that their friendship was as warm and as sincere as ever."¹²

Then suddenly gathering force, Fox went on to lash his already wounded friend.¹³ When Burke rose to answer he beseeched the House, "Could his most inveterate enemy have acted more unkindly toward him?"¹⁴

¹²Ibid., pp. 22, 24.

¹³Ibid., pp. 23-4.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 25.

The explosion had stunned all the members of the House; as Pitt closed the sequence, he judged that Burke had not been out of order earlier and expressed his astonishment at this "singular situation."¹⁵ The impact of the scene is mirrored in Wilberforce's exclamation just after it: "I scarce recollect being so much struck at anything, and I have been lamenting ever since that I did not myself interfere--a long and tried and close worldly connection of five-and-twenty years trampled to pieces in the conflict of a single night."¹⁶

That their friendship was now totally shattered became unmistakable five days later, in the session of May 11th. After Fox's extravagant glorification of the Revolution and charges that Burke was politically inconsistent, Burke retorted that Fox's was an "insidious design to ruin him in reputation, and crown his age with infamy...."¹⁷ Fox's ingratitude astounded Burke; he

complained of being obliged to stand upon his defence by that honorable gentleman who, when a young man, in the vigour of his abilities, at the age of fourteen years, had been brought to him, and evinced the most promising talents, which he had used his best efforts to cultivate; and this

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁶ Quoted by Adams, p. 324 n..

¹⁷ Burke, Speeches, IV, 28.

man, who had arrived at the maturity of being the most brilliant and powerful debater that ever existed, had described him as having deserted and abandoned every one of his principles!¹⁸

But Fox went on with the vituperative attack, likening Burke to King Lear in continually begging the members to assure him that they loved the English constitution. Fox declared, further, that if Burke was separated from the party, the fault was his own. Were he to repent, the members would happily receive him.¹⁹ But angry Burke retorted that if he had been publicly disgraced by his party, Fox ought not to receive him. "He declared that he had gone through his youth without encountering any party disgrace; and though he had then in his age been so unfortunate as to meet it, he did not solicit the right honorable gentleman's friendship, nor that of any man, either on one side of the House or the other."²⁰

In these dramatic scenes were thrown into conflict all the ultimately antagonistic political principles and personal traits of Burke and Fox. Their complete division of opinion on the Revolution demonstrates Burke's fundamental conservatism,

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 35-6.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 37.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 37-8.

Fox's fundamental liberalism. In both men is evident a steely adherence to political views; Burke's dogmatism had been hardened by continual political opposition, Fox's by confidence in his power. Other character traits which had gradually been evolving also stand out in strong relief. The cocky assurance which power had stimulated in Fox underlies his public ridicule of Burke; Burke's gradually increasing irritability was by this attitude strongly aroused. But most of all evident is Burke's habitual, strict subordination of all personal considerations to political principle: because his conviction on the Revolution had become so strong, because his personal friendship with Fox had become so weak, Burke was able to overcome even his affection for Fox for the sake of what he considered public duty. That Fox, unlike Burke, wholly severed his personal from his public life is evident from his actions shortly to be related.

Throughout England after the split, sympathy was "overwhelmingly" with Burke because of his Reflections: his political caricature was totally reversed, a Doctor of Laws degree was conferred on him by the University of Dublin, congratulations were awarded him by Oxford, praise was

lavished on him by expatriated French clergy, and his support was eagerly sought by Irish Catholics.²¹ But within the Whig party dissension ensued. About a week after the May 6th split, the Morning Chronicle, Fox's official organ, printed this paragraph:

"The great and firm body of the Whigs of England, true to their principles, have decided upon the dispute between Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke; and the former is declared to have maintained the pure doctrine by which they are bound together, and upon which they have invariably acted. The consequence is that Mr. Burke retires from Parliament."²²

This lash at Burke made its mark, but he had already determined to leave Parliament and would have immediately, had he not been involved in the Hastings trial.²³

Burke, now totally implacable in his opposition to Fox's position, determined to "enlighten his friends and lead them back to the true principles" of Whiggism.²⁴ He wrote Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs and another pamphlet, Thoughts on French Affairs, the former directed toward swaying Whigs from Fox, the latter warning against the influence of the French Revolution. And events in France soon proved Burke's

²¹ Adams, p. 325. (The edition used has a misprinted page number: it reads 235, but in sequence is 325.)

²² Copeland, p. 80.

²³ Ibid., pp. 80-1.

²⁴ Hunt, p. 359.

prognostications to be right: his influence mounted, and when he began to urge war with France, Pitt respected his advice.²⁵ Burke labored to sever from Fox the large group of Whigs led by the Duke of Portland and to ally them with the supporters of Pitt. Despite their warm personal relations with Fox, the Duke, Lord Fitzwilliam, and Windham ultimately left his camp.²⁶ Fox was now "left almost alone,"²⁷ but he continued to cling to his opinions: throughout the conflict with France he was to stand firm against the war policies of Pitt. Again in 1793 Fox's small group rallied: the Whig Club passed a vote of confidence in him, and Burke and the others seceded. To Portland Burke wrote an indictment of Fox in Observations on the Conduct of the Minority.²⁸ The following year Burke retired from Parliament.

Although their political alienation was complete, to maintain personal enmity after the split had been difficult for both men, especially for Fox. To him, political conviction had no bearing whatever on personal friendship; he saw no contradiction in associating with those who opposed him politically. His warm, generous nature--at the root of his

²⁵Ibid., p. 360.

²⁶Russell, ed., Memorials of Fox, III, 21.

²⁷Ibid., p. 24.

²⁸Hunt, p. 360.

political sympathies--cherished friendship for its own sake. Fox had said, characteristically, in a 1783 speech, "'It is not in my nature to bear malice, nor to live in ill will. My friendships are perpetual, my enmities are not so.'" ²⁹ He had always greatly admired and respected Burke. Therefore, despite the harm which the rupture had inflicted upon him personally and politically, Fox "never ceased to entertain a regard for Burke, and at no time would suffer him to be abused in his presence." ³⁰ When given an opportunity for reconciliation, generous, impulsive Fox took the initiative: "'Fox and Burke met behind the throne of the House of Lords one day, when Fox went up to Burke, and put out both his hands to him. Burke was almost surprised into meeting this cordiality in the same spirit, but the momentary impulse passed away, and he doggedly dropped his hands, and left the House.'" ³¹

While Burke's political conviction continued to rule out reconciliation, he too was deeply grieved by his separation

²⁹Quoted by Oliver, pp. 164-5.

³⁰Quoted from Greville Memoirs, I, 136, 137, by Adams, p. 324 n..

³¹Ibid...

from Fox. Strong sorrow is evident in his Observations,³² and it appears also in this anecdote of dubious authority told by Samuel Rogers.³³ The incident, supplied by Bryant,

must have taken place...after Burke's rupture with Fox, when he carefully restricted his company to those, like Malone, who execrated the French Revolution. According to Rogers: "Malone was one day walking down Dover Street with Burke, when the latter all at once drew himself up and carried his head aloft with an air of great hauteur. Malone perceived that this was occasioned by the approach of Fox, who presently passed them on the other side of the street. After Fox had gone by, Burke asked Malone very eagerly, 'Did he look at me?'"

The last three years of Burke's life were filled with personal sorrow. In 1794 his son Richard—who he had hoped could replace him as representative of Malton—died suddenly of consumption. Tremendously grieved, from this event Burke could be seen "to have been visibly approaching the grave...."³⁴ Illness, too, had begun to afflict him. The following year,

³²Hunt, p. 360.

³³Quoted by Donald Cross Bryant, Edmund Burke and His Literary Friends, Washington University Studies, New Series, Language and Literature, No. 9 (St. Louis, 1939), p. 238. Bryant considers this act "characteristic" of Burke, but doubts its veracity on the grounds—strangely—of Burke's nearsightedness.

³⁴Adams, p. 326. Burke wrote a friend after Richard's death, "'I am alone; I have none to meet my enemies at the gate; desolate at home, stripped of my boast, my hope, my consolation, my helper, my counsellor, and my pride.'" Ibid., p. 327.

a further misfortune took place. The King had the government give Burke a pension of 3,700 pounds; this raised a great uproar in the House of Lords, where many, conspicuously the Duke of Bedford, protested that it was too ample. Stung, Burke attacked Bedford with the Letter to a Noble Lord, wherein he dramatically wrote, "'The storm has gone over me, and I lie, like one of those old oaks which the late hurricane has scattered about me. I am stripped of all my honours—I am torn up by the roots, and lie prostrate on the earth.'"³⁵

Thus weighted down by personal afflictions and by illness, Burke nonetheless wrote a great deal during his retirement and showed to the last an active concern with political affairs. He watched the English reaction to the French "revolutionary fever," always "tremblingly afraid lest the English society should catch the infection," and when in 1796 French gains led to ministerial belief that peace should be negotiated, Burke's "anger knew no bounds, his excitement could not be controlled."³⁶ This passion was channeled into a new pamphlet, Letters on a Regicide Peace. But despite such manifestations of energy, Burke's health had failed; he declined rapidly after 1796.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 327-8, 331.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 332.

Fox had been extremely active during this time in his efforts to attain peace with France, but he was very conscious of his former friend's personal difficulties and still anxious to be reconciled with him. He realized that only one more opportunity remained. When Earl Fitzwilliam told him in July 1797 that Burke was on the brink of death, Fox penned an urgent inquiry to Mrs. Burke. Perhaps he knew that Burke was sending "touching messages of remembrance" to his old friends, that he was "freely" forgiving his old enemies.³⁷ The day following his note, hopeful Fox received his answer, written in Mrs. Burke's hand:³⁸

Mrs. Burke presents her compliments to Mr. Fox, and thanks him for his obliging inquiries. Mrs. Burke communicated his letter to Mr. Burke, and, by his desire, has to inform Mr. Fox that it has cost Mr. Burke the most heartfelt pain to obey the stern voice of his duty in rending asunder a long friendship, but that he deemed this sacrifice necessary; that his principles remained the same; and that in whatever of life yet remained to him, he conceived that he must live for others and not for himself. Mr. Burke is convinced that the principles which he has endeavored to maintain are necessary to the welfare and dignity of his country, and that these principles can be enforced only by the general persuasion of his sincerity. For herself, Mrs. Burke has again to express her gratitude to Mr. Fox for his inquiries.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 336.

³⁸ Prior, II, 397.

The friendship was totally annihilated. On the last day of Burke's life, July 9, 1797, "he spoke of his hatred of the revolutionary spirit of France, his belief that the war was for the good of humanity...."³⁹ Yet the sorrow and regret which surged through Burke's final words to his old friend find a startling and enigmatic expression in his will, which he had written in 1794. After a long passage filled with warm commendations of and thanks to his old political friends--with special references to Fitzwilliam, Portland, Cavendish, and Devonshire,--Burke wrote another paragraph:⁴⁰

If the intimacy which I have had with others has been broken off by political difference on great questions concerning the state of things existing and impending, I hope they will forgive whatever of general human infirmity, or of my own particular infirmity, has entered into that contention. I heartily entreat their forgiveness. I have nothing farther to say.

Like Burke, Fox tried to make final amends: after Burke's death, he immediately proposed in Parliament that Burke's remains be honored by a public funeral and interment in Westminster Abbey. But Burke had already left instructions that he be buried in Beaconsfield Church, and he was, on July 15th. Many of Burke's old Whig associates served as pall-

³⁹Hunt, p. 362.

⁴⁰Quoted by Bisset, II, 447-8.

bearers at the funeral⁴¹--but Fox was not among them.

During the remainder of Fox's career, he vigorously championed these principles, pinpointed by Russell:⁴² the subordination of the King to Parliament; the abolition of religious tests for public office and of the African slave trade; the achievement of Parliamentary reform, of economy in public expenditure, and of peace with honor. In all of these objectives are discernible his firmly democratic, liberal sympathies.

But Fox was kept from power until the end of his career. While Pitt was directing the war with France, Fox stood hostile but relatively impotent. When in 1801 Pitt left office to join him in defending Catholic Emancipation, Fox had an opportunity to gain office, but because of the King's opposition to him, Pitt was later reinstated. Finally, after Pitt died in January 1806, Fox--with universal political support--became Minister, forming a coalition with the Grenville Whigs and the Sidmouth Tories.⁴³

Fox's ministry, despite the opposition of the King and of the public, worked with "great energy," achieving economic

⁴¹Adams, p. 337.

⁴²Quoted by Ibid., pp. 409-10. Five of these principles are cited in "Charles James Fox," p. 149.

⁴³Adams, pp. 411-14.

reform and abolition of the African slave trade, and paving the way for justice to Protestant and Catholic dissenters. Not long after Fox's well-earned accession to power, however, he began to show signs of serious illness. Vigorously he carried on his official duties, even when bedridden. But his death came at Chiswick on September 13, 1806.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 414-15.

CHAPTER V

SUMMATION

Two men of astonishing talent, of extraordinary achievement--these were Burke and Fox. Between them there existed a remarkable personal and public association, rooted in the qualities which made both of them great: intellectual genius, noble political and humanitarian sympathies, and deep interest in literature. Their association spanned almost all of their adult lives, almost all of their public careers, evolving with and deeply influencing their characters and political positions.

With deep erudition, firm religious beliefs, and the admiration of the literary, social, and political elite, Edmund Burke entered Parliament in 1766. He soon astonished the House with the political wisdom and oratorical brilliance which were to gain him a position of leadership in the Whig party. Two years later, Charles James Fox, a youth notable for heterogeneous qualities--amiability, scholarship, debating talent, and personal licentiousness,--made his public debut. In spite of the disparity in their ages, their backgrounds, and their personal characters, Burke and Fox had been warm

friends since about 1764: mutual admiration and common interests soon had cemented their personal union. But because Fox at first blindly adhered to his father's Tory politics, the friends were initially political opponents.

Gradually, spurred largely by Burke's personal and political influence, Fox began to think independently and to gravitate toward Burke and the Whigs. His independence of thought and his personal immorality finally led to Fox's dismissal from the Tory ministry in 1774; this event and his father's death freed him from Tory bonds just at the time when the American question was growing critical. The passing of the "Intolerable Acts" stirred Fox's natural humanitarian sympathies and wholly converted him to Burke's firm policy of opposition to the Tories. With total conviction, Fox planted himself in Burke's camp.

After 1774 and throughout the American Revolution, Burke and Fox together championed the cause of the American colonists; their complementary talents made them a singularly powerful political team. And during this time of political fusion, their personal friendship was full of mutual admiration and personal affection. For the most part, Burke's part was paternal, Fox's filial during this time, but as their public and personal union solidified, Fox began to

gain more confidence in his ability to stand with Burke, in both areas, as an equal. As Fox's independence and renown increased, Burke acknowledged the change and fully approved of it.

After the American war, between 1782 and 1789, it became clear that Burke was politically on the decline, Fox on the ascendant. A tendency toward didacticism, toward personal austerity and irritability, but most of all toward over-amplification in oratory had been enfeebling Burke's influence; but flexibility, personal magnetism, and most of all direct and incisive debating power had gained Fox Whig leadership. Although Burke's affection for Fox prompted him to submit to his former pupil's direction, the total reversal of their political positions brought about character alterations which began to corrode their personal friendship. Fox became almost wholly independent from Burke in political thought, and because Burke's own convictions were hardened through the ceaseless opposition he faced, the friends began to disagree on political matters. Moreover, Fox's sudden elevation to power led him to neglect Burke personally, and since Burke at this time had very few external supports, since his irritability was being heightened by his consciousness of political impotence, Fox's neglect ate away

at his affection and made him less willing to submit. Yet both men still admired and loved one another; their differences always brought them deep sorrow.

The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 revealed a basic dichotomy, hitherto latent, in the political philosophies of Burke and Fox: a difference which threatened to rend them apart completely. Fox's reaction to the Revolution proved that his political sympathies were basically liberal: he proclaimed it a great victory for Liberty. But Burke shuddered at the violence of the Revolution; his fears that it would destroy established institutions proved him to be a political conservative. Because both strenuously defended their opinions, because their personal friendship had been gradually weakening, Burke and Fox both feared that a crisis in their relationship was impending. Yet they could not avoid violent public disagreement on the question; as the Revolution swept on, their antithetical stands began to rip the Whig party apart. When Burke's obsessive fear of the Revolution drove him to write the 1790 Reflections, his resultant public influence widened the chasm between his convictions and those staunchly held by Fox.

In April 1791 Fox proposed the Quebec Bill which,

because it applied to England French revolutionary principles, caused a cataclysm. In the stormy Commons sessions of May, Burke wholly shattered their friendship. Characteristically subordinating personal attachments to political convictions, Burke felt it mandatory that he sacrifice Fox to his public duty. The gradual enfeeblement of their personal ties, his own hardening political determination and personal irritability, Fox's demonstrations of independence and cockiness,--all facilitated Burke's decision, though personal cleavage brought him great distress. Successive events proved their political alienation irreconcilable; Fox adhered to his opinions despite Burke's swaying many Whigs from his camp into Pitt's.

Personal severance from Burke much afflicted Fox: he continued to revere his former friend, and, since to his warm, generous nature affection made, as Keats says, "disagreeables evaporate," Fox could see no necessity because of political opposition for complete personal alienation. But though he tried to achieve a reconciliation, he could not, for Burke was of a different complexion: personal affections in his hierarchy of values were always governed by and subordinated to public duty.

Therefore, although shaken by sorrows and illness, the

dying Burke refused Fox's final plea for reconciliation. Because Fox still stood publicly opposed to his own firm convictions on the Revolution, Burke was convinced that to prove the sincerity of his position, personal alienation from Fox had to be maintained. But his anguish at this necessity pulsates through his final letter to Fox and through a plea for forgiveness, obviously directed to Fox, included in his will. And Fox revealed his own regret, his own capacity for forgiveness in his attempts to honor Burke publicly after his death.

Fox went on to display open liberal sympathies by championing freedom for dissenters, parliamentary reform, and abolition of the slave trade (among other objectives), finally achieving the latter purpose and paving the way for later achievement of the others.

Thus, "From an admirer of Mr. Burke, Mr. Fox became his disciple, from his disciple his coadjutor, from his coadjutor his amicable rival for fame; until at length, by the occurrence of extraordinary and unlooked-for events, he terminated as he began his career, his opponent."¹

Underlying the growth and decline of their association were basic traits of character, traits which led to similar

¹Prior, I, 222-3.

interests perhaps, but traits which fundamentally diverged. Burke's nature was governed by reason primarily; Fox's by emotion. The former was always deeply philosophical, serious, personally well-disciplined: this accounts for his ultimate conservatism and for the hierarchical pattern of his values. Though the emotional side of his nature is certainly evident in his deep affections, his tendency toward violence and oversensitivity, these things seem to have been aroused by and subject to his rational convictions (in the case of his violence and irritability, aroused by threats to those convictions). But Fox's nature was fundamentally emotional: from childhood he was open, generous, spontaneous, uninhibited. These qualities account for his divergence from Burke-- his confident, unrestrained liberal sympathies, his easy reconciliation of contradictory elements in his life. Burke's was a greater strength of character, a higher nobility; he compels in us as he did in Fox an awed admiration and respect. But Fox's warmth and sincerity inspire in us, as they did in Burke, love. As Burke's firm character had governed in the beginning of their friendship, it again governed in the termination of it. But their personal love for one another, despite their political alienation, ultimately prevailed.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Susan Grace Schroeder has been read and approved by a board of three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 29, 1961
Date

James P. Spencer
Signature of Adviser