

placed on record Johnson's opinion of a man who professed to be indifferent about his dinner? Third, the subject under discussion was India, about which Johnson knew he knew next to nothing. And fourth, the offender was Edmund Burke, whom Johnson loved from the first day he set eyes upon him to their last sad parting by the waters of death.

In 1761 that shrewd old gossip, Horace Walpole, met Burke for the first time at dinner, and remarks of him in a letter to George Montague:—

“I dined at Hamilton's yesterday; there were Garrick, and young Mr. Burke, who wrote a book in the style of Lord Bolingbroke, that was much admired. He is a sensible man, but has not worn off his authorism yet, and thinks there is nothing so charming as writers, and to be one. He will know better one of these days.”

But great as were Burke's literary powers, and passionate as was his fondness for letters and for literary society, he never seems to have felt that the main burden of his life lay in that direction. He looked to the public service, and this though he always believed that the pen of a great writer was a more powerful and glorious weapon than any to be found in the armory of politics. This faith of his comes out sometimes queerly enough. For example, when Dr. Robertson in 1777 sent Burke his cheerful “History of America” in quarto volumes, Burke, in the most perfect good faith, closes a long letter of thanks thus:

“You will smile when I send you a trifling temporary production made for the occasion of the day, and to perish with it, in return for your immortal work.”

I have no desire, least of all in Edinburgh, to say anything disrespectful of Principal Robertson; but still, when we re-

member that the temporary production he got in exchange for his “History of America” was Burke's immortal letter to the sheriffs of Bristol on the American war, we must, I think, be forced to admit that, as so often happens when a Scotchman and an Irishman do business together, the former got the better of the bargain.

Burke's first public employment was of an humble character, and might well have been passed over in a sentence had it not terminated in a most delightful quarrel, in which Burke conducted himself like an Irishman of genius.

Some time in 1759 he became acquainted with William Gerard Hamilton, commonly called “Single-Speech Hamilton,” on account of the celebrity he gained from his first speech in Parliament, and the steady way in which his oratorical reputation went on waning ever after. In 1761 this gentleman went over to Ireland as Chief Secretary, and Burke accompanied him as the Secretary's secretary, or, in the unlicensed speech of Dublin, as Hamilton's jackal.

This arrangement was eminently satisfactory to Hamilton, who found, as generations of men have found after him, Burke's brains very useful, and he determined to borrow them for the period of their joint lives. Animated by this desire, in itself praiseworthy, he busied himself in procuring for Burke a pension of £300 a year on the Irish establishment, and then the simple “Single-Speech” thought the transaction closed. He had bought his poor man of genius, and paid for him on the nail with other people's money. Nothing remained but for Burke to draw his pension and devote the rest of his life to maintaining Hamilton's reputation. There is nothing at all unusual in this, and I have no doubt Burke would have stuck to his bargain had not Hamilton conceived the fatal idea that Burke's brains were ex-

clusively his (Hamilton's). Then the situation became one of risk and apparent danger.

Burke's imagination began playing round the subject: he saw himself a slave, blotted out of existence—mere fuel for Hamilton's flame. In a week he was in a towering passion. Few men can afford to be angry. It is a run upon their intellectual resources they cannot meet. But Burke's treasury could well afford the luxury; and his letters to Hamilton make delightful reading to those who, like myself, dearly love a dispute when conducted according to the rules of the game by men of great intellectual wealth.

Hamilton demolished and reduced to stony silence, Burke sat down again and wrote long letters to all his friends, telling them the whole story from beginning to end. I must be allowed a quotation from one of these letters, for this really is not so frivolous a matter as I am afraid I have made it appear—a quotation of which this much may be said, that nothing more delightfully Burkean is to be found anywhere:

* "My Dear Mason,—I am hardly able to tell you how much satisfaction I had in your letter. Your approbation of my conduct makes me believe much the better of you and myself; and I assure you that that approbation came to me very seasonably. Such proofs of a warm, sincere, and disinterested friendship were not wholly unnecessary to my support at a time when I experienced such bitter effects of the perfidy and ingratitude of much longer and much closer connections. The way in which you take up my affairs binds me to you in a manner I cannot express; for, to tell you the truth, I never can (knowing as I do the principles upon which I always endeavor to act) submit to any sort of compromise of my character; and I shall never, therefore, look upon those who, after hearing the whole story, do not think me perfectly in the right, and do not consider Hamilton an infamous scoundrel, to be in the smallest degree my friends, or even to be persons for whom I am bound to have the slightest es-

teem, as fair and just estimators of the characters and conduct of men.

"Situated as I am, and feeling as I do, I should be just as well pleased that they totally condemned me, as that they should say there were faults on both sides, or that it was a disputable case, as I hear is (I cannot forbear saying) the affected language of some persons. . . . You cannot avoid remarking, my dear Mason, and I hope not without some indignation, the unparalleled singularity of my situation. Was ever a man before me expected to enter into formal, direct, and undisguised slavery? Did ever man before him confess an attempt to decoy a man into such an alleged contract, not to say anything of the impudence of regularly pleading it? If such an attempt be wicked and unlawful (and I am sure no one ever doubted it), I have only to confess his charge, and to admit myself his dupe, to make him pass, on his own showing, for the most consummate villain that ever lived.

"The only difference between us is, not whether he is not a rogue—for he not only admits but pleads the facts that demonstrate him to be so; but only whether I was such a fool as to sell myself absolutely for a consideration which, so far from being adequate, if any such could be adequate, is not even so much as certain. Not to value myself as a gentleman, a free man, a man of education, and one pretending to literature; is there any situation in life so low, or even so criminal, that can subject a man to the possibility of such an engagement? Would you dare attempt to bind your footman to such terms? Will the law suffer a felon sent to the plantations to bind himself for his life, and to renounce all possibility either of elevation or quiet? And am I to defend myself for not doing what no man is suffered to do, and what it would be criminal in any man to submit to? You will excuse me for this heat."

I not only excuse Burke for his heat, but love him for letting me warm my hands at it after a lapse of a hundred and twenty years.

Burke was more fortunate in his second master, for in 1765, being then thirty-six years of age, he became private

secretary to the new Prime Minister, the Marquis of Rockingham; was by the interest of Lord Verney returned to Parliament for Wendover, in Bucks; and on January 27, 1766, his voice was first heard in the House of Commons.

The Rockingham Ministry deserves well of the historian, and on the whole has received its deserts. Lord Rockingham, the Duke of Richmond, Lord John Cavendish, Mr. Dowdeswell, and the rest of them, were good men and true, judged by an ordinary standard; and when contrasted with most of their political competitors, they almost approach the ranks of saints and angels. However, after a year and twenty days, his Majesty King George III managed to get rid of them, and to keep them at bay for fifteen years.

But their first term of office, though short, lasted long enough to establish a friendship of no ordinary powers of endurance between the chief members of the party and the Prime Minister's private secretary, who was at first, so ran the report, supposed to be a wild Irishman, whose real name was O'Burke, and whose brogue seemed to require the allegation that its owner was a popish emissary.

It is satisfactory to notice how from the very first Burke's intellectual pre-eminence, character, and aims were clearly admitted and most cheerfully recognized by his political and social superiors; and in the long correspondence in which he engaged with most of them, there is not a trace to be found, on one side or the other, of anything approaching to either patronage or servility. Burke advises them, exhorts them, expostulates with them, condemns their aristocratic languor, fans their feeble flames, drafts their motions, dictates their protests, visits their houses, and generally supplies them with facts, figures, poetry, and romance.

To all this they submit with much humility. The Duke of

Richmond once indeed ventured to hint to Burke, with exceeding delicacy, that he (the Duke) had a small private estate to attend to as well as public affairs; but the validity of the excuse was not admitted. The part Burke played for the next fifteen years with relation to the Rockingham party reminds me of the functions I have observed performed in lazy families by a soberly clad and eminently respectable person who pays them domiciliary visits, and, having admission everywhere, goes about mysteriously from room to room, winding up all the clocks. This is what Burke did for the Rockingham party—he kept it going.

But fortunately for us, Burke was not content with private adjuration, or even public speech. His literary instincts, his dominating desire to persuade everybody that he, Edmund Burke, was absolutely in the right, and every one of his opponents hopelessly wrong, made him turn to the pamphlet as a propaganda, and in his hands—

“The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
Soul-animating strains.”

So accustomed are we to regard Burke's pamphlets as specimens of our noblest literature, and to see them printed in comfortable volumes, that we are apt to forget that in their origin they were but the children of the pavement, the publications of the hour.

If, however, you ever visit any old public library, and grope about a little, you are likely enough to find a shelf holding some twenty-five or thirty musty, ugly little books, usually lettered “Burke,” and on opening any of them you will come across one of Burke's pamphlets as originally issued, bound up with the replies and counter-pamphlets it occasioned. I have frequently tried, but always in vain, to read these replies, which are pretentious enough—usually

the works of deans, members of Parliament, and other dignitaries of the class Carlyle used compendiously to describe as "shovel-hatted"—and each of whom was as much entitled to publish pamphlets as Burke himself.

There are some things it is very easy to do, and to write a pamphlet is one of them; but to write such a pamphlet as future generations will read with delight is perhaps the most difficult feat in literature. Milton, Swift, Burke, and Sydney Smith are, I think, our only great pamphleteers.

I have now rather more than kept my word so far as Burke's pre-parliamentary life is concerned, and will proceed to mention some of the circumstances that may serve to account for the fact, that when the Rockingham party came into power for the second time in 1782, Burke, who was their life and soul, was only rewarded with a minor office.

First, then, it must be recorded sorrowfully of Burke that he was always desperately in debt, and in this country no politician under the rank of a baronet can ever safely be in debt. Burke's finances are, and always have been, marvels and mysteries; but one thing must be said of them—that the malignity of his enemies, both Tory enemies and Radical enemies, has never succeeded in formulating any charge of dishonesty against him that has not been at once completely pulverized, and shown on the facts to be impossible.

Burke's purchase of the estate at Beaconsfield in 1768, only two years after he entered Parliament, consisting as it did of a good house and 1,600 acres of land, has puzzled a great many good men—much more than it ever did Edmund Burke. But how did he get the money? After an Irish fashion—by not getting it at all.

Two thirds of the purchase-money remained on mortgage, and the balance he borrowed; or, as he puts it, "With all I

could collect of my own, and by the aid of my friends, I have established a root in the country." That is how Burke bought Beaconsfield, where he lived till his end came; whither he always hastened when his sensitive mind was tortured by the thought of how badly men governed the world; where he entertained all sorts and conditions of men—Quakers, Brahmins (for whose ancient rites he provided suitable accommodation in a greenhouse), nobles and abbés flying from revolutionary France, poets, painters, and peers; no one of whom ever long remained a stranger to his charm.

Burke flung himself into farming with all the enthusiasm of his nature. His letters to Arthur Young on the subject of carrots still tremble with emotion. You all know Burke's "Thoughts on the Present Discontents." You remember—it is hard to forget—his speech on Conciliation with America, particularly the magnificent passage beginning, "Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom, and a great empire and little minds go ill together."

You have echoed back the words in which, in his letter to the sheriffs of Bristol on the hateful American war, he protests that it was not instantly he could be brought to rejoice when he heard of the slaughter and captivity of long lists of those whose names had been familiar in his ears from his infancy, and you would all join with me in subscribing to a fund which would have for its object the printing and hanging up over every editor's desk in town and country a subsequent passage from the same letter:

"A conscientious man would be cautious how he dealt in blood. He would feel some apprehension at being called to a tremendous account for engaging in so deep a play without any knowledge of the game. It is no excuse for pre-

sumptuous ignorance that it is directed by insolent passion. The poorest being that crawls on earth, contending to save itself from injustice and oppression, is an object respectable in the eyes of God and man.

"But I cannot conceive any existence under heaven (which in the depths of its wisdom tolerates all sorts of things) that is more truly odious and disgusting than an impotent, helpless creature, without civil wisdom or military skill, bloated with pride and arrogance, calling for battles which he is not to fight, and contending for a violent dominion which he can never exercise. . . .

"If you and I find our talents not of the great and ruling kind, our conduct at least is conformable to our faculties. No man's life pays the forfeit of our rashness. No desolate widow weeps tears of blood over our ignorance. Scrupulous and sober in a well-grounded distrust of ourselves, we would keep in the port of peace and security; and perhaps in recommending to others something of the same diffidence, we should show ourselves more charitable to their welfare than injurious to their abilities."

You have laughed over Burke's account of how all Lord Talbot's schemes for the reform of the king's household were dashed to pieces because the turnspit of the king's kitchen was a Member of Parliament. You have often pondered over that miraculous passage in his speech on the Nabob of Arcot's debts, describing the devastation of the Carnatic by Hyder Ali—a passage which Mr. John Morley says fills the young orator with the same emotions of enthusiasm, emulation, and despair that (according to the same authority) invariably torment the artist who first gazes on "The Madonna" at Dresden, or the figures of "Night" and "Dawn" at Florence.

All these things you know, else are you mighty self-denying of your pleasures. But it is just possible you may have forgotten the following extract from one of Burke's farming letters to Arthur Young:

"One of the grand points in controversy (a controversy indeed chiefly carried on between practice and speculation) is that of deep plowing. In your last volumes you seem, on the whole, rather against that practice, and have given several reasons for your judgment which deserve to be very well considered. In order to know how we ought to plow, we ought to know what end it is we propose to ourselves in that operation. The first and instrumental end is to divide the soil; the last and ultimate end, so far as regards the plants, is to facilitate the pushing of the blade upward and the shooting of the roots in all the inferior directions.

"There is further proposed a more ready admission of external influences—the rain, the sun, the air, charged with all those heterogeneous contents, some, possibly all, of which are necessary for the nourishment of the plants. By plowing deep you answer these ends in a greater mass of the soil. This would seem in favor of deep plowing as nothing else than accomplishing, in a more perfect manner, those very ends for which you are induced to plow at all.

"But doubts here arise, only to be solved by experiment. First, it is quite certain that it is good for the ear and grain of farinaceous plants that their roots should spread and descend into the ground to the greatest possible distances and depths? Is there not some limit in this? We know that in timber, what makes one part flourish does not equally conduce to the benefit of all; and that which may be beneficial to the wood does not equally contribute to the quantity and goodness of the fruit; and, *vice versa*, that what increases the fruit largely is often far from serviceable to the tree.

"Secondly, is that looseness to great depths, supposing it is useful to one of the species of plants, equally useful to all?

"Thirdly, though the external influences—the rain, the sun, the air—act undoubtedly a part, and a large part, in vegetation, does it follow that they are equally salutary in any quantities, at any depths? Or that, though it may be useful to diffuse one of these agents as extensively as may be in the earth, that therefore it will be equally useful to render the earth in the same degree pervious to all.

"It is a dangerous way of reasoning in physics, as well as morals, to conclude, because a given proportion of anything