


EARL OF CHATHAM

ILLIAM PITT, first Earl of Chatham, great English Whig statesman and orator, was born at Westminster, London, Nov. 15, 1708, and died at Hayes, Kent, May 11, 1778. Educated at Trinity College, Oxford, where Demosthenes, it is related, was his favorite author, young Pitt travelled for awhile on the Continent and obtained a cornet's commission in an English regiment of dragoons. His military career, however, was short, for in 1735 he entered Parliament, became one of the chief opponents of Walpole, and from 1756 to 1761, save for a brief interval, was the ruling spirit of the government. During these years, it is customary to say that Pitt's biography is an epitome of the contemporary history of England, for much of the doings in Parliament and of the success of the British army at this period is due to this great statesman. In 1756, he was made secretary of state, and during the Seven Years' War his vigorous and large-minded policy did much to restore England's military fame abroad and add to the laurels of the nation. His nobility of character and lofty, unsullied patriotism, together with his great talents as an orator and a war minister, won him the respect and affection of the people. His steady advocacy of the rights of the people, his passionate and almost resistless eloquence, and his marvellous power to animate and inspire a desponding nation, earned for him the esteem and gratitude of his country. He stoutly opposed the coercive policy pursued toward the American colonies. When he resigned office in 1761, he received a pension of £3,000 a year for three lives, and his wife was created Baroness Chatham in her own right. For himself, he still preferred to retain the title of "The Great Commoner," but in 1766, when he was invited to form a Cabinet, he accepted the office of Lord Privy Seal, and thereupon became Viscount Pitt and Earl of Chatham. In 1768 he resigned, and did not resume his seat in the House of Lords until 1770. His last appearance in the House of Lords was on April 2, 1778, when he opposed the Duke of Richmond's motion for an address praying the King to conclude peace with America, since he strongly disliked the idea of dismemberment. He died on May 11 of the same year. The speech which we here reproduce was one of many pronounced against the policy followed by Lord North in dealing with the Colonies of the New World.

(262)

REPLY TO WALPOLE

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, MARCH 6, 1741

SIR,— The atrocious crime of being a young man, which the honorable gentleman has, with such spirit and decency, charged upon me, I shall neither attempt to palliate nor deny, but content myself with wishing that I may be one of those whose follies may cease with their youth, and not of that number who are ignorant in spite of experience. Whether youth can be imputed to any man as a reproach, I will not, sir, assume the province of determining; but surely age may become justly contemptible if the opportunities which it brings have passed away without improvement, and vice appears to prevail when the passions have subsided. The wretch who, after having seen the consequences of a thousand errors, continues still to blunder, and whose age has only added obstinacy to stupidity, is surely the object of either abhorrence or contempt, and deserves not that his gray hairs should secure him from insult. Much more, sir, is he to be abhorred who, as he has advanced in age, has receded from virtue and becomes more wicked with less temptation; who prostitutes himself for money which he cannot enjoy, and spends the remains of his life in the ruin of his country. But youth, sir, is not my only crime; I have been accused of acting a theatrical part. A theatrical part may either imply some peculiarities of gesture, or a dissimulation of my real sentiments and an adoption of the opinions and language of another man.

In the first sense, sir, the charge is too trifling to be confuted, and deserves only to be mentioned to be despised. I am at liberty, like every other man, to use my own language; and though, perhaps, I may have some ambition to please this

gentleman, I shall not lay myself under any restraint, nor very solicitously copy his diction or his mien, however matured by age or modelled by experience. If any man shall, by charging me with theatrical behavior, imply that I utter any sentiments but my own, I shall treat him as a calumniator and a villain; nor shall any protection shelter him from the treatment he deserves. I shall, on such an occasion, without scruple, trample upon all those forms with which wealth and dignity intrench themselves, nor shall anything but age restrain my resentment — age, which always brings one privilege, that of being insolent and supercilious without punishment. But with regard, sir, to those whom I have offended, I am of opinion that if I had acted a borrowed part I should have avoided their censure. The heat that offended them is the ardor of conviction and that zeal for the service of my country which neither hope nor fear shall influence me to suppress. I will not sit unconcerned while my liberty is invaded, nor look in silence upon public robbery. I will exert my endeavors, at whatever hazard, to repel the aggressor and drag the thief to justice, whoever may protect them in their villainy, and whoever may partake of their plunder. And if the honorable gentlemen —

[At this point Mr. Pitt was called to order by Mr. Wynn-ington, who went on to say, “No diversity of opinion can justify the violation of decency, and the use of rude and virulent expressions, dictated only by resentment and uttered without regard to —.” Here Mr. Pitt called to order, and proceeded thus:]

Sir, if this be to preserve order, there is no danger of indecency from the most licentious tongues. For what calumny can be more atrocious, what reproach more severe, than that of speaking with regard to anything but truth. Order may

sometimes be broken by passion or inadvertency, but will hardly be re-established by a monitor like this, who cannot govern his own passions while he is restraining the impetuosity of others.

Happy would it be for mankind if every one knew his own province. We should not then see the same man at once a criminal and a judge; nor would this gentleman assume the right of dictating to others what he has not learned himself.

That I may return in some degree the favor he intends me, I will advise him never hereafter to exert himself on the subject of order; but whenever he feels inclined to speak on such occasions to remember how he has now succeeded, and condemn in silence what his censures will never amend.

ON TAXING AMERICA

[The news of the resistance of the American colonies reached England at the close of 1765, and Parliament was summoned on the 17th of December. The plan of the ministry was to repeal the Stamp Act; but, in accordance with the King's wishes, to reassert (in doing so) the right of Parliament to tax the colonies. Against this course Mr. Pitt determined to take his stand; and when the ordinary address was made in answer to the King's speech he entered at once on the subject of American taxation, in a strain of the boldest eloquence. His speech was reported by Sir Robert Dean, assisted by Lord Charlemont, and, though obviously broken and imperfect, gives us far more of the language actually used by Mr. Pitt than any of the preceding speeches.]

MR. SPEAKER,— I came to town but to-day. I was a stranger to the tenor of his Majesty's speech and the proposed address till I heard them read in this House. Unconnected and unconsulted, I have not the means of information. I am fearful of offending through mistake,

and therefore beg to be indulged with a second reading of the proposed address.

[The address being read, Mr. Pitt went on:]

I commend the King's speech, and approve of the address in answer, as it decides nothing, every gentleman being left at perfect liberty to take such a part concerning America as he may afterward see fit. One word only I cannot approve of: an "early," is a word that does not belong to the notice the ministry have given to Parliament of the troubles in America. In a matter of such importance the communication ought to have been immediate!

I speak not now with respect to parties. I stand up in this place single and independent. As to the late ministry [turning himself to Mr. Grenville, who sat within one of him], every capital measure they have taken has been entirely wrong! As to the present gentlemen, to those at least whom I have in my eye [looking at the bench where General Conway sat with the lords of the treasury], I have no objection. I have never been made a sacrifice by any of them. Their characters are fair; and I am always glad when men of fair character engage in his Majesty's service. Some of them did me the honor to ask my opinion before they would engage. These will now do me the justice to own I advised them to do it—but, notwithstanding (for I love to be explicit), I cannot give them my confidence. Pardon me, gentlemen [bowing to the ministry], confidence is a plant of slow growth in an aged bosom. Youth is the season of credulity. By comparing events with each other, reasoning from effects to causes, methinks I plainly discover the traces of an overruling influence.

There is a clause in the Act of Settlement obliging every minister to sign his name to the advice which he gives to his

sovereign. Would it were observed! I have had the honor to serve the Crown, and if I could have submitted to influence I might have still continued to serve; but I would not be responsible for others. I have no local attachments. It is indifferent to me whether a man was rocked in his cradle on this side or that side of the Tweed. I sought for merit wherever it was to be found. It is my boast that I was the first minister who looked for it, and found it, in the mountains of the North. I called it forth, and drew into your service a hardy and intrepid race of men—men, who, when left by your jealousy, became a prey to the artifices of your enemies, and had gone nigh to have overturned the state in the war before the last. These men, in the last war, were brought to combat on your side. They served with fidelity, as they fought with valor, and conquered for you in every part of the world. Detested be the national reflections against them! They are unjust, groundless, illiberal, unmanly! When I ceased to serve his Majesty as a minister, it was not the country of the man by which I was moved—but the man of that country wanted wisdom and held principles incompatible with freedom.

It is a long time, Mr. Speaker, since I have attended in Parliament. When the resolution was taken in this House to tax America, I was ill in bed. If I could have endured to be carried in my bed—so great was the agitation of my mind for the consequences—I would have solicited some kind hand to have laid me down on this floor, to have borne my testimony against it! It is now an act that has passed. I would speak with decency of every act of this House; but I must beg the indulgence of the House to speak of it with freedom.

I hope a day may soon be appointed to consider the state of the nation with respect to America. I hope gentlemen

will come to this debate with all the temper and impartiality that his Majesty recommends and the importance of the subject requires; a subject of greater importance than ever engaged the attention of this House, that subject only excepted when, near a century ago, it was the question, whether you yourselves were to be bond or free. In the meantime, as I cannot depend upon my health for any future day (such is the nature of my infirmities), I will beg to say a few words at present, leaving the justice, the equity, the policy, the expediency of the act to another time.

I will only speak to one point, a point which seems not to have been generally understood. I mean to the right. Some gentlemen [alluding to Mr. Nugent] seem to have considered it as a point of honor. If gentlemen consider it in that light, they leave all measures of right and wrong to follow a delusion that may lead to destruction. It is my opinion that this kingdom has no right to lay a tax upon the colonies. At the same time I assert the authority of this kingdom over the colonies to be sovereign and supreme in every circumstance of government and legislation whatsoever. They are the subjects of this kingdom; equally entitled with yourselves to all the natural rights of mankind and the peculiar privileges of Englishmen; equally bound by its laws, and equally participating in the constitution of this free country. The Americans are the sons, not the bastards of England! Taxation is no part of the governing or legislative power. The taxes are a voluntary gift and grant of the Commons alone. In legislation the three estates of the realm are alike concerned; but the concurrence of the peers and the Crown to a tax is only necessary to clothe it with the form of a law. The gift and grant is of the Commons alone. In ancient days the Crown, the barons, and the clergy possessed the lands. In

those days the barons and clergy gave and granted to the Crown. They gave and granted what was their own! At present, since the discovery of America, and other circumstances permitting, the Commons are become the proprietors of the land. The Church (God bless it!) has but a pittance. The property of the Lords, compared with that of the Commons, is as a drop of water in the ocean; and this House represents those Commons, the proprietors of the lands; and those proprietors virtually represent the rest of the inhabitants.

When, therefore, in this House, we give and grant, we give and grant what is our own. But in an American tax, what do we do? "We, your Majesty's Commons for Great Britain, give and grant to your Majesty"—what? Our own property? No! "We give and grant to your Majesty" the property of your Majesty's commons of America! It is an absurdity in terms.

The distinction between legislation and taxation is essentially necessary to liberty. The Crown and the Peers are equally legislative powers with the Commons. If taxation be a part of simple legislation, the Crown and the Peers have rights in taxation as well as yourselves; rights which they will claim, which they will exercise, whenever the principle can be supported by power.

There is an idea in some that the colonies are virtually represented in the House. I would fain know by whom an American is represented here. Is he represented by any knight of the shire, in any county in this kingdom? Would to God that respectable representation was augmented to a greater number! Or will you tell him that he is represented by any representative of a borough? a borough which, perhaps its own representatives never saw! This is what is called the rotten part of the constitution. It cannot continue a