





MEMOIRS

OF THE

L I F E

OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

C. J. FOX,

THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE,

*Secretary of State for the Foreign Department, &c.*

————— Here the man behold,  
In truth unshaken, and in virtue bold;  
Whose patriot zeal and uncorrupted mind,  
Dared to assert the freedom of mankind.

DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE.

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# MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE

OF

## *The Right Hon. C. J. Fox.*

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**C**HARLES JAMES FOX was born on the 13th of January 1749 and is the second son to Henry first Lord Holland, by Lady Georgiana Carolina, eldest daughter of the late Duke of Richmond ——— By the mother's side then he is descended from the royal house of Stuart: he is, therefore, not only related to most of the ancient families of rank in this kingdom, but actually allied to the present reigning family. By the father's side, however, Mr. Fox derives no consequence from his ancestors. Without giving credit to the idle stories about that parent, it is sufficient to say that he laid the foundation of his own honours by his talents and application to business. Nothing was too intricate for him in the way of figures, and his address in Parliament recommended him to the notice of George II. who, in the year 1754 made him Secretary at War, and in the following year, upon the resignation of Sir Thomas Robinson, appointed him Secretary of State for the southern de-

partment. In 1763 he was, in the present reign, created a peer, by the title of Baron Holland, of Foxley. The seven years war, as it has been called, broke out in 1756, and commenced under very unfortunate auspices. The people grew dissatisfied, and wished for a change of ministry. The monarch, then so well advised gave way to the nation; and changing Mr. Fox for Mr. Pitt, all went well and prosperous.

Mr. Fox, however, was not long unemployed for as most of those with whom he had acted were re-instated in power, by a coalition between the two parties, he was nominated to the lucrative post of pay-master-general of the forces. It was in this office he accumulated that vast wealth, which he left to his heirs, and which exposed his character, in the decline of life, to cutting sarcasm, and himself to the opprobrious appellation of "the public defaulter of uncounted millions." This nobleman commenced and pursued his career in an opposite direction to that of his son, for he continued to the end of his life the steady supporter of government. Whatever criminal speculations, therefore, he might be guilty

of, he had numerous friends, who were willing to wink at them. It is generally found, that those persons who are determined government in all its measures are the least sound in principle. They seem to say, with an equal culpable nobleman of the present day, 'What wants me must pay me?' Indeed it is with money as it is with power, if it lie too long in the same hand it will corrupt the possessor. But the nobleman of that day was not half so much to blame as the nobleman of this. There was no law at that time forbidding the practice of turning the public money to private advantage, whereas there is an act of Parliament, framed in part by the recent noble delinquent, who thought proper to break it! What will become of the virtue of our House of Commons, if a member of it, by the connivance of higher authority, rewards such persons as he pleases with the interest of a few hundred thousand pounds now and then, for we cannot suppose he would be so inordinately avaricious as to keep the interest of so many millions to himself!!! When we exclaim, Ah poor England! we do not mean to say that our country has not precious boons to

bestow on the guardians of its virtue and honour! But to return to the man, who is the professed subject of this brief memoir. His father, though addicted to libertine habits in the early part of his life, was exemplary in the care he took of his children's education. He very soon perceived his son Charles James a genius which would one day attract universal admiration. His rapid progress in the acquisition of classical learning at Eton School obtained him a decided superiority in every class he entered. As his father had always encouraged him to think freely he acquired the habit of speaking readily, and therefore in every enterprize which required an orator, he was generally fixed on by his playmates as their leader. That manliness which a wise parent inspired him with while young, never left him for a moment under any circumstance of life. He was under the direction of Dr. Barnard while at Eton, but he had Dr. Newcombe, the late Bishop of Waterford, for private tutor, who thought with reason that he derived more celebrity from the circumstance of having such a pupil than from any preferment whatever in the church. Nothing can better shew the strength of his mind and of his constitution

then that by turns of literature. by turns dissipation appeared to engross his whole attention, and yet apparent preference of the one was not allowed to interfere with the other. He was observed never to be satisfied with mediocrity in any pursuit. Whatever he set his heart on, he followed with ardour. He soon demonstrated his attachment to the finer sensibilities of humanity by always espousing the weakest side, in those contests which occasionally disturb the society of youths. He often presided as judge in disputes, and when he saw a school-fellow born down by partiality and prejudice, he exerted his maiden eloquence in favour of justice. Lord Carlisle was a cotemporary, and so admired the young Mr. Fox for his generosity and penetration in speaking, that he wrote the following beautiful verses, in prophecy of what might be expected from this precious and elegant scholar.

How will my Fox alone by strength of parts,  
 Shake the loud senate, animate the hearts  
 Of fearful statesmen! while around you stand  
 Both-peers and commons, list'ning your command;  
 While Sully's sense its weight to you affords,  
 His nervous sweetness shall adorn your words.  
 What praise to Pitt, to Townshend e'er was due,  
 In future times, my Fox, shall wait on you.



From Eton he went to Oxford, where he is said to have read nine or ten hours every day, during the whole term, without inconvenience, from a series of nocturnal rambles, in which he displayed equal assiduity. The tedious uniformity of a college did not agree with the ardour of his mind. His talents were not to be chained to the frigid acquisition of science, and the languid enjoyments of a contemplative life. He wished for active and enterprising scenes, and obtained leave of his father to make the usual tour.

Though every thing in the form of luxury and dissipation struck his fancy, yet had he an equal appetite for enquiry and no man was better qualified to derive instruction from that novelty which travelling affords. To resist the attractions of French vivacity and Italian luxury, he had the considerations of his country's welfare and the honour of his character. These were sometimes of too feeble an influence so prevent him from taking intoxicating pleasure and withholding him from the gaming table. His father being apprized of these excesses, urged him to return home. He was obliged to comply, though we doubt not with considerable reluctance, as he had entered into the clo-

gant and pleasurable societies of some of the most beautiful women on the continent. From the theatre of dissipation and pleasure, he was transplanted into that of oratory and politics; if the former had been to him the more attracting and fascinating, this was the most important and honourable: and the father being no stranger to the lively and impetuous disposition of his son, foresaw that a seat in Parliament would detach him from a course which threatened injury to his health and ruin to his fortune. Lord H. had, therefore, at the general election in 1768, procured him the return for Midhurst, in Sussex. Every person under age is, by law, incompetent to judge for himself, and still less, deemed capable of making laws for others: on this ground he was ineligible to sit in the House of Commons, not being quite twenty years of age. However this happened, whether by design or accidental oversight in the committee of privileges, and in the speaker, it may be considered as a singular circumstance in this great political actor entering on the public stage. No notice being taken of his non-age, was perhaps a compliment of indulgence, or some other venal motive in

those who counted on his support at his outlet. The exertions and display of talents in a youth never fail to conciliate good will and even affection; it was afterward the case with his rival Mr. P. — No member in his noviciate ever excited so much anxiety and expectation. He satisfied the fondest hopes of all who knew him. He was the subject of conversation in every fashionable company. His mode of speaking had so much originality in it, and had so much of the voice of nature, that he attracted universal admiration. His maiden speech was on the subject of Mr. Wilkes' petition from the King's Bench prison, to be admitted to take his seat and thereby satisfy the desire of his constituents. It is true that on this question he did not take the popular side, the side on which the best and most constitutional lawyers declared the justice to lie. It has been imagined, that if he had favoured that side, he would not have been allowed to retain his seat, on account of his minority. — Thus his parliamentary career began in the support of the measures of government, and so much did the minister of that day value that support, that in a short time Mr. Fox was advanced to a

seat at the Admiralty Board. No sooner, however, was he made acquainted with the arcana of government than he retired in disgust, as his friends say, (and we have no reason or desire to deny it) because his honest mind recoiled at the measures that were preparing for the great and iniquitous scene in the American war. The measures, however, were said to have been softened down, and he was persuaded to resume his seat for a short time, when in December 1772, he was raised to a seat at the Treasury Board. On this occasion he was quitted by the opposition as a placeman, and these reproaches he parried by steadily and in a manly way denying the acceptance of his appointment, as the price of his services. He in some measure silenced the clamours of his antagonists, by declaring that he should support the measures of the government no longer than while he believed from his conscience they were calculated to promote the welfare of the British empire.

On the death of Lord Holland, in 1774, a new and memorable epoch occurred in the life of his son. At the age of twenty-six he now felt himself completely free from all restraint, in the possession of an

ample patrimony, to which was added the reversion of a profitable place, the Clerkship of the Pelis in Ireland.

The reign of the passions now commenced, and swept away his fortune in the torrent; he was also doomed, nearly at the same time, to be deprived of his employment; for having given offence to Lord North, who was then first Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, that nobleman formed a new board, and having mentioned this circumstance in a laconic note, added, somewhat ironically, "that he did not see Mr. Fox's name in the list of members."

Before this period, the extraordinary talents of Mr. Fox had only been known to his particular friends, but a field was, from this moment, opened for their display, which finally led to the most astonishing results. Happily, he had not pledged himself on the grand colonial question respecting taxation independent of representation, so that he rose in the House of Commons to debate on the subject of the American war free and unincumbered. He had hitherto but little studied the nature and end of a free government, in a political point of view

and on this occasion the author of the " Sublime and Beautiful " then in the zenith of his talents, was his mentor.

Barke, one of the most accomplished speakers of his age, without possessing the advantages of either birth or fortune, deservedly attained a high degree of celebrity by his learning and his talents.—The Treasury Bench seemed to tremble under the thunder of his eloquence, while royalty itself was shorn of half its splendour, in consequence of his economical reforms. He argued against the American war, chiefly on the ground of its impolicy; but Fox, young, bold, and impetuous, attacked it on account of its injustice. Liberated, at length, from the seductions of wine and of play he rose with a giant's might, and being armed with the better cause, his adversaries, although arrayed in all the power and influence of the state, appeared but as pigmies before him. The friend and associate of Camden, of Chatham, of Shelburne, and of Portland, who supported the same cause in the House of Peers, he was already considered as the second man of the Whig party, and in reality was the first; for he, who excelled others, was alone entitled to direct them.

At length all the predictions of Mr. Fox and his associates were fully and fatally verified; for Burgoyne was captured, Cornwallis was obliged to capitulate, and France and Holland having become parties in the struggle, the contest itself became extremely unpopular. Lord North, confounded, overwhelmed, and almost driven to despair, was now obliged to resign; but he did not, like former ministers, take refuge in the House of Peers; on the contrary, he remained in the midst of his partisans, who still formed a numerous band, braving all the clamours of his adversaries, defied their threats, and declared himself ready to meet any inquiry they might wish to institute.

Mr. Fox obtained the office of Secretary for foreign affairs, in the spring of 1782 when the Marquis of Rockingham, the most uniform, honest, and upright statesman whom we have possessed since the Revolution, was nominated first Lord of the Treasury. Much was expected from, and much it must be owned, was performed by a ministry, the most respectable of any that has been seen in England during the present reign, but the sudden death of the nobleman just mentioned,

at once split the nation, and divided the friends of liberty, while the ex minister and his adherents knew how to derive advantage from the storm, and reap benefit from the dismay that unhappily ensued.

A dispute, as had been foreseen, immediately took place about who should succeed as first Lord of the Treasury. The candidates were Lord Shelburne, afterwards Marquis of Lansdowne and the present Duke of Portland; the favour of preponderance, and a schism having ensued, Mr. Fox retired in disgust. As the Earl of Chatham was accustomed to observe, "that he would be responsible for actions which he did not direct." so the Secretary of State, when he withdrew, remarked, "that he had determined never to connive at plans which he could not publicly avow."

What those plans may have been, we are left to guess. We have reason to believe that the ostensible dispute in the cabinet was relative to the independence of America, which Mr. Fox wished to grant as a boon, while Lord Shelburne desired to confer it in the manner of a bargain: the secret, and perhaps leading cause, of the



present occasion originated in friendship to the Duke of Portland, then a very popular nobleman, whose exclusion had produced the most fatal jealousies among the best friends of liberty.

Mr. Fox now resumed his old seat facing the Treasury Bench, while his former colleague the Earl of Shelburne was busied in concluding a peace with France, Spain, Holland, and the United States of America.

The political success of Mr. Fox and Lord North was, however, ephemeral. While they agreed in no one great measure for the common good the nation seemed to unite as one against them; and the King having become jealous of his prerogative, on the introduction of the East India Bill, they were obliged to retire, but not until means had been resorted to, which no friend of the constitution could either advise or practice.

The next public affair in which we find him engaged, was the prosecution of Mr. Hastings: and it must be allowed, while the charges against the governor-general of India on one hand required, nay demanded investigation, that on the other, the period of time to which the trial was protracted, appears to have been equally

impolitical and unjust. Alas! who will now think of impeaching successful delinquency, or dragging victorious oppression, by which the individual and the nation have alike profited before the tribunal of the House of Peers?

On two great occasions the talents of Mr. Fox proved eminently serviceable to the nation: one when Mr. Pitt, at the instigation of the Court of Berlin, wished to wage an unprofitable war with Russia relative to the possession of Oczakow; the other when in the wantonness of power he urged a contest with Spain.—Experience has since proved that these objects were contemptible, and the finger of posterity will point with scorn to that page of our history, when a minister, who derived all his credit from his management of the finances, laboured to impoverish the nation by two ridiculous, but bloody conflicts, one of which had for its object the preservation of the Turkish frontier and the other a participation in the trade of cat skins and sea otters!

In 1783 Mr. Fox, worn out and perhaps disgusted with public business, repaired to the continent, in company with Mrs. Armistead, whom he afterwards married, in 1780. After spending a few

days at Lausanne, with Gibbon, the historian he entered the classic regions of Italy. But he was suddenly recalled. In consequence of the alarming illness of the King, and the business of the Regency Bill was so ably managed by his rival, who now perceived it to be for his interest to stand on constitutional principles.

We now approach an awful and memorable epoch, that which gave birth to the French Revolution. On this occasion, Mr Fox declared himself strongly, uniformly and decisively on the side of liberty. The two great rival chiefs, who agreed in nothing else at first cordially united in this cause, and while the one professed a long peace, the extinction of our national debt, and the prosperity of the empire, the other gloried in beholding a whole people rescued from the most oppressive servitude, and at the same time, augured the most auspicious results in favour of the human race.

The conduct of the French troops, (he observed) during the late commotions tended greatly to remove one of the objections which he had always entertained against standing armies. By

refusing to obey the dictates of the Court, they had set a glorious example to all the military of Europe and had shown, that by merely becoming soldiers, they did not cease to be citizens.

Mr. Pitt is supposed to have been at first dragged into the contest with reluctance. No sooner had he entered on it, however, than, as usual he did not hesitate at the means by which he was to secure the end in view. Incorruptible himself, he opened the public purse without scruple to others. The heroic age of profusion seemed to have arrived and he distributed money and titles and offices with so liberal a hand, that the opposition benches were thinned of their members, and his ancient enemy was left to contend with a handful of adherents against a host of foes.

On this occasion the mind of the Premier stood open to little personalities; for, not content with triumphing he was determined also to insult, and the name of Mr. Fox was accordingly struck out of the list of Privy Counsellors.

The latter on this, as on all other occasions, proved magnanimous in adversity. To the clamours relative to his disaffection he calmly replied, " That he never

had approved of the excesses of the French Revolution, and that he was alike the enemy of all absolute forms of government, whether an absolute aristocracy, or an absolute democracy; and approved only of a mixed government like our own.

Nearly at the same time he had conciliated the affections of a large portion of the people, by declaring himself a friend to a reform of the House of Commons; and when Mr. Flood's proposition to that effect was brought forward, he boldly avowed his conversion. On the other hand his adversary, who had solemnly pledged himself to the very measure which he now opposed, was reduced to a most mortifying dilemma,

As it was a leading principle in the conduct of Mr. Fox, that without the most urgent necessity peace was the best policy on the part of a commercial nation, from the commencement of the revolutionary war, he perpetually maintained, "that we ought to husband our resources." In 1794 he deprecated the idea of continuing hostilities without any settled object. After condemning the proposition, "that while the Jacobin system existed no peace could take place with France," he asked, "pro-

vided honourable terms could be obtained, what er it would not be more advisable to, trust to our caution and vigilance for the preservation of the country, than to continue hostilities, with an enormous waste of blood and treasure, but not more productive of security, than a pacification? Conscious that he could not oppose the golden torrent that issued from the treasury bench, he withdrew from Parliament for a while, and evinced a wish to retire altogether from public business; but the entreaties of his friends, and the occurrence of new and singular events, happily prevented this measure. We accordingly find him once more at the head of an opposition, feeble in point of numbers, but truly formidable in respect to talents and abilities.

At length, after enjoying, and, in some measure, reveling in power during eighteen long years Mr. Pitt voluntarily retired from office, and Mr. Addington, since created Viscount Sidmouth, concluded the treaty of Amiens, on which occasion he received the support of Mr. Fox and all his friends. The latter may be said to have now experienced that species of triumph which arises out of poli-

tical anticipation, for as the terms were not so good as might have been obtained in 1796, it was obvious that all the miseries, calamities, blood, and treasure, wasted to no manner of purpose during the preceding six years would have been avoided, had his warning voice been but listened to.

When a renewal of the contest was meditated, Mr. Fox expressed himself avowedly hostile to that measure: "I do contend," said he, "that the continuance of peace is infinitely desirable. I feel its importance in the strongest manner, and I am not ashamed to avow an opinion, for which I have not infrequently been exposed to ridicule. I now again explicitly declare, that I consider the preservation of national honour to be the only legitimate cause of war."

Meanwhile an union had been effected by the Foxite and Grenville parties and from that moment the return of both to power was considered as certain. This was in part evinced by the conduct of the House of Commons, in respect to the prosecution of Lord Melville; and altho' the petition of the Irish Catholics was thrown out by a great majority, yet a large portion of the empire was, in some

measure, conciliated on this occasion, to the consideration that it was not destitute of powerful protection. In the midst of these discussions, Mr Pitt, who had been for some time tottering, sickened and died.

After an opposition of twenty-two years — a period unexampled, in point of duration, in the annals of this country — Mr. Fox, in 1800, resumed his situation, as Secretary of State for the foreign department, which he had surrendered in 1773 — 4. Soon after this event the conduct of the King of Prussia excited general indignation. Not content with seizing on Hanover, he excluded the English commerce not only from his own dominions, but also from every port which he could either terrify or influence. On this the new minister published a spirited declaration, and at the same time adopted measures for blockading all the ports, and intercepting all the trade of the House of Brandenburg.

No sooner had Mr. Fox obtained the seals than he determined, if possible, to put an end to the war; but just at the critical period, when it was supposed most of the impediments to that desirable object had been removed, the man on whose fate



the peace of Europe depended, was snatched from his friends and the world by a confirmed dropsy.

The close of his life was to the full as radiant as its meridian splendor. The three last public acts were worthy of the man—of the hero. By one, he laboured to repair the outrages of war, to obtain a breathing time to our allies; and by an extension of our commerce, to afford, if necessary, to his native country, all the advantages of a renovated contest without the danger of drying up the sources of her wealth. By another he attempted to remove all legal disabilities arising out of religion, to unite more closely the interests of Ireland with those of England and thus, by an extension of common rights, and a participation of common benefits, wisely to render that which has always been considered as the strongest portion of the empire secure.

By a third and last he obtained a solemn declaration from both houses of Parliament for the abolition of the slave trade; and thus closed his life with a measure which, while it rescues humanity from reproach, shall teach thousands yet unborn to venerate the name of their deliverer!

In his person and manner, Mr. Fox somewhat resembled the sage of Ithica: he was short and corpulent, his chest was capacious, his shoulders broad, his hair dark and thick, his eye-brows black and bushy, his complexion tinged with a yellow hue. In his youth he was celebrated for his agility, but of late years he had become obese and unwieldy, while his lower extremities, sometime before his death, began to exhibit the diagnostics of that disease which proved fatal to him, at six o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday the 13th of September, 1806, without pain, and almost without a struggle, in the 59th year of his age.

He expired at the house of his friend the Duke of Devonshire, in the arms of his nephew Lord Holland, at Cheshwick-House hitherto celebrated as one of the master-pieces of Palladio's art; but which will henceforth be viewed with a new degree of interest by Englishmen as the spot within the sanctuary of which a Fox uttered his last sigh.

Mr. Fox was interred in Westminster Abbey, immediately adjoining the monument of the great Lord Chatham, and within 18 inches of the grave of the late illustrious W. Pitt.

F I N I S.



