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British American Colonies, 1764-84.

CHAPTER LVIII.

DURING no period of her history was England governed by men whose characters intellectually were so far below mediocrity than those who swayed her destinies between the peace of Paris in 1763 and that of Versailles in 1783. The Revolution of 1688 had placed a monopoly of power in the hands of the Whig party, a long and scarcely interrupted exercise of the patronage of the State had created an oligarchy of the great Whig families, who looked to the chief offices under the crown theirs by hereditary right. George III. knew well that if he was obliged to govern Great Britain by their means he was only a king in name, and therefore as soon as he could make the necessary arrangements he endeavored to shake off the trammels of party as understood by the Whigs and establish a Court party with himself as the sovereign at its head. He well knew at the same time that without a majority in the House of Commons such a course would be impossible, and that majority he managed to secure. The party thus created were dignified with the name of "Tories"—a Celtic or Gaelic word—*tuirigh*, which signifies "for the King," and were in reality the constitutional party of the day, holding their offices by the will of the Sovereign as long as they possessed a majority in the British House of Commons. George III. and the Tory party had solved the problem of responsible government by giving the nation a ministry accountable to the House of Commons: but as this innovation destroyed the Whig monopoly the Sovereign and his advisers were subjected to the utmost virulence of party abuse and rancour, while actual treason was resorted to under the spurious pretext that the Whig minority represented the whole of the people of England, and would support the glorious traditions of 1688—when they had

achieved the deliverance of England from tyranny and Papal supremacy. In reality, it was no special desire to advance the interests of the people which led Chatham, Burke, and Fox to secretly abet and openly advocate treason in the American Colonies, but simply a desire to re-establish Whig ascendancy, for they openly taught as a political dogma "that the only way to overcome despotism is to circumscribe its area"—the natural corollary being that when Britain was reduced to the dimensions she occupied in the reign of Charles I. the Whigs could play a similar game to that enacted by the Roundheads—their worthy ancestors. Happily for England the Sovereign who occupied the throne at this period had clear and elevated ideas of his prerogative and the duties pertaining to his office, feeling alive to the fact that the crown had been received from the people, his whole energies were bent to administering the affairs of the Empire for their benefit, and he had determined that the combination of a few families should in no wise interfere between him, the welfare of his people, and the honor of the Empire.

Lord Bolingbroke has well defined the effect of the Whig policy by saying that "party was the madness of many for the gain of the few." The discontent in America, caused by the enforcement of the navigation laws, was eagerly laid hold of by the leading men of that party as a possible and probable means to the end for which they had been working; and the malcontents were encouraged by private communications, in which Lord Chatham and Mr. Burke figured largely, and by open aid in Parliament. The first Earl of Chatham had fought his way to the front rank of politics by his ability as an orator—as a statesman, he did not know what the term meant. Haughty, arrogant, and insolent, inordinately ambitious, thoroughly selfish and egotistical, he managed to do more mischief to Great Britain than any other name recorded in her history. A confirmed invalid, with a total ignorance of financial matters he yet fancied he could direct all the affairs of the administration; his insolent and affected indiffer-

ence when in office, coupled with the assumption of superior power and wisdom, disgusted the honest and matter of fact Monarch, who could not understand why any individual should evade the performance of his duty. As history is written this man bids fair to go down to posterity as a pure and disinterested patriot, a great man and one of those of whom Englishmen ought to be proud. For his patriotism he died with an earl's coronet on his brow, and pensions levied off the industry of his countrymen. His title to greatness is to be founded on the fact that he was one of the principal agents in depriving his native land of the greater part of her Colonial Empire, raising up a hostile nation against her, lowering her prestige and honor in the dust, removing her from the commanding position she should occupy in the civilised world, and inflicting injuries on her commercial and manufacturing industries from which she has not yet recovered. Future historians will learn to estimate the character of William Pitt, first Earl of Chatham, at its true value as they will be removed from the influence of that party who look up to his example as that of a shining light.

Edmund Burke was one of those characters which has occasionally appeared in the history of English Parliamentary Government—an orator of great power; vivid imagination and versatile wit, a good politician in the lowest sense of the term, but no statesman. He stood manfully by the party which introduced him to public life; aided powerfully in precipitating the revolt of the American Colonies, and only became a Tory when the events of the French Revolution shewed what the logical sequence of his long career in preaching sedition would be.

Charles James Fox was an unscrupulous and unprincipled agitator. Constitutionally a demagogue, with him party was the end and aim of all statesmanship; too indolent to take a very active part on any side. He aided the American rebellion by his furious and wholesale denunciation of his opponents, and by his avowed preference for those counsels which advocated the independence of the rebellious Colonies. His style of