

been assured by the debates on the American discontents ; but no, he retired to Ireland and wrote his masterly "Observations on the Present State of the Nation." We may admire his fidelity to his patrons and party by his insisting on sharing their exclusion, while we regret his loss to the nation as an honourable and able official, and the still greater loss to himself of the kind of work that would have curbed his passions, given a hearing to his eloquent wisdom, and afforded him that serenity in old age which would have dispensed with the necessity for his saying, "At every step in my progress of life, for in every step was I traversed and opposed, and at every turnpike I met, I was obliged to show my passport, and again and again to prove my sole title to the honour of being useful to my country, by a proof that I was not wholly unacquainted with its laws, and the whole system of its interest both abroad and at home ; otherwise no rank, no toleration even for me."

The constitutional struggle was the first in which Burke proved himself to be among the foremost men of his day. It is not necessary in this place to go into the details. All know the victory of Wilkes at the polls, after his return from exile. All know of his imprisonment and the enormous fine he was compelled to pay. All know, also, of his triumph at the polls, while still in prison, and the excitement which sympathy on his behalf aroused. So great was the disturbance in London that Franklin, who was present, remarked, that if the King had had a bad character, and Wilkes a good one, the latter might have banished the former from his kingdom. The military were called out and some loss of life occurred. Burke moved for a committee of inquiry in a speech admirable for its lucidity and eloquence. He denounced calling out the troops and

condemned the action of the court in its fruitless and mischievous contest with Wilkes. Defeated in this, he wrote one of his most celebrated pamphlets, the "Present Discontents." In it, he took strong ground against the undue influence of the King. Taking the word *Constitution* for his text, he preached to the court a sermon it was not likely to forget. He defended the action of the people in the election of their chosen representative. The "Present Discontents" contains some memorable sentences. "I am not one of those," he says, "who think the people are never wrong. They have been so, frequently and outrageously, both in other countries and in this. But I do say that in all disputes between them and their rulers, the presumption is at least upon a par in favour of the people." Again :—"The people have no interest in disorder. When they go wrong, it is their error and not their crime." Once more :—"Nations are governed by the same methods and on the same principles by which an individual without authority is often able to govern those who are his equals or superiors ; by a knowledge of their temper and by a judicious management of it. Constitute government as you please, infinitely the greater part of it must depend upon the exercise of powers which are left at large to the prudence and uprightness of ministers of state. Without them the Commonwealth is no better than a scheme upon paper, and not a living, active, effective Constitution."

When Burke came to advise upon remedies for the present disorders, his Conservatism came to the surface. So sensitive was he about touching the sacred Constitution, and so fearful lest by tampering with it he might injure its delicate machinery, that he declined to advocate shorter parliaments, or the closing up of the rotten boroughs. He contented him-