

"When we were at play, he was always at work." It was the intention of the young graduate to study law and for nine years he remained at the Middle Temple in London. But the calling of a lawyer was not Burke's vocation. The great problem of social progress appealed more strongly to him, and all his time and energies were given up to its study. In order to understand the question more fully, he travelled extensively on the Continent. Some claim that he visited America, but, although he did express the wish of doing so, his wish was never realized.

The year 1756 was an important one in the life of the great orator, for it was the year in which he married, and in which he published his first work, "A Vindication of Natural Society by a Late Noble Writer." In this essay Burke imitates the style and arguments of Lord Bolingbroke but he refutes that infidel writer's attack on revealed religion. Bolingbroke tried to show that the world owed all its wickedness to Christianity, but Burke along the same lines of reasoning as employed by his adversary, proved that Christianity is, was, and always will be the cause and champion of all good and of all progress.

On January the twenty-seventh, 1766, Burke delivered his first speech in the British House of Commons and received the congratulations of Pitt for his creditable effort. From this date on, the life of Burke is the history of the times. During his long political career he was always honest and brilliant, and it was not without reason that he was named "the Bossuet of politics." He advocated freedom of the press, Catholic Emancipation, and religious tolerance, but showed his abhorrence for Atheism in the following words: "The most cruel blow that can be offered to civil society is through Atheism."

In 1774 Burke was elected Member of Parliament for Bristol, and his speech, on that occasion, in which he outlined the duties of a representative towards his constituents, is one of the most-read pieces of oratory today.

The speeches and attitude of this great parliamentarian, before, during and after the American war furnish us with a striking example of a man who did not fear to speak his mind come what may, and of a leader who had the courage of his convictions. He openly denounced the dealings of the government with the American colonists as unworthy of a nation such as England and confessed his sympathy with the oppressed thus: "I confess to you freely that the sufferings and distresses of the people of America in this cruel war have at times afflicted me more deeply than I can express."