

A Defence of the Rockingham Party

In Their Late Coalition With The Right Honourable Frederick Lord North

William Godwin

1783

THE present reign will certainly appear to our posterity full of the noblest materials for history. Many circumstances seem to have pointed it out as a very critical period. The general diffusion of science has, in some degree, enlightened the minds of all men, and has cleared such, as have any influence upon the progress of manners and society, from a thousand unworthy prepossessions.

The dissipation and luxury that reign uncontrolled have spread effeminacy and irresolution every where.— The grand defection of the United States of America from the mother country, is one of the most interesting events, that has engaged the attention of Europe for centuries. And the number of extraordinary geniuses that have distinguished themselves in the political world, gives a dignity to the scene. They pour a luster over the darkest parts of the story and bestow a beauty upon the tragedy that it could not otherwise have possessed.

At a time like this, when the attention of mankind has been kept alive by a series of the most important events, we cease to admire at things which would otherwise appear uncommon, and wonders almost lose their name. Even now however when men were almost grown callous to novelty, and the youngest of us had, like Cato in the play, lived long enough to be "surprised at nothing," a matter has occurred which few expected and to which, for that reason, men of no great strength of mind, of no nerve of political feeling, scarcely know how to reconcile themselves. I refer to the coalition between the friends of the late marquis of Rockingham and the noble commoner in the blue ribbon.

The manner of blaming this action is palpable and easy. The censure is chiefly directed against that wonderful man, whom, at least in their hearts, his countrymen, I believe, have agreed to regard as the person of brightest genius, and most extensive capacity, that now adorns the British senate. Has not this person, we are asked, for years attacked the noble lord in the most unqualified manner? Is there any aspersion, any insinuation, that he has not thrown out upon his character? Has he not represented him as the weakest man, and the worst minister, to whom the direction of affairs was ever committed? Has he not imputed to his prerogative principles, and his palpable misconduct the whole catalogue of our misfortunes? If such men as these are to unite for the detested purposes of ambition, what security can we have for any thing valuable, that yet remains to us? Is not this the very utmost reach of frontless profligacy? What dependence after this is to be placed in the man, who has thus given the lie to all his professions, and impudently flown

in the face of that honest and unsuspecting virtue which had hitherto given him credit for the rectitude of his intentions?

I do not mean for the present to enter into a direct answer to these several observations. I leave it to others, to rest the weight of their cause upon founding exclamations and pompous interrogatories. For myself, I am firmly persuaded, that the oftener the late conduct of the Rockingham connexion is summoned to the bar of fair reason, the more coolly it is considered and the less the examiner is led away by the particular prejudices of this side or of that, the more commendable it will appear. We do not fear the light.

We do not shun the scrutiny. We are under no apprehensions for the consequences.

I will rest my argument upon the regular proof of these three propositions.

First—That the Rockingham connexion, was the only connexion by which the country could be well served.

Secondly—That they were not by themselves of sufficient strength to support the weight of administration.

Thirdly—That they were not the men whose services were the most likely to be called for by the sovereign, in the present crisis.

First—I am to prove, that the country could not be well served but by the Rockingham connexion.

There are three points principally concerned in the constituting a good administration; liberal principles, respectable abilities, and incorruptible integrity. —Let us examine with a view to these, the other four parties in the British government. The connexion of the earl of Shelburne, that of lord North, the Bedford party, and the Scottish. In reviewing these, it is necessary that I should employ a manly freedom, though, at the same time, I should be much unwilling to do a partial injustice to any of them.

It is true, there is some difference between the language of the same men in office, and out of office. The Bedford connexion, however, have never been conceived to bear an over favourable aspect to the cause of liberty. They are the avowed enemies of innovation and reform.

The Scottish party are pretty much confounded with the set of men that are called, by way of distinction, the king's friends. The design of these men has been to exalt regal power and prerogative upon the ruins of aristocracy, and the neck of the people. Arguments, and those by no means of a frivolous description, have been brought to prove, that a most subtle and deep-laid scheme was formed by them, in the beginning of the reign, to subserve this odious purpose. It has been supposed to have been pursued with the most inflexible constancy, and, like a skiff, when it fails along the meandering course of a river, finally to have turned to account the most untoward gales.

Lord North, whatever we may suppose to have been his intrinsic abilities, stands forward, as, perhaps, the most unfortunate minister, that this country ever produced. Misfortune overtook him in the assertion of the highest monarchical principles. In spite of misfortune, he adhered inflexibly to that assertion. In the most critical situations he remained in a state of hesitation and uncertainty, till the tide, that "taken at the flood, led up to fortune," was lost. His versatility and the undisguised attachment, that he manifested to emolument and power were surely unworthy of the stake that was entrusted to him.

In what I have now said, I do not much fear to be contradicted. It was not with a view to such as are attached to any of these parties, that I have taken up the pen. Those who come under this description, are almost universally the advocates of monarchy, and think that they have

nothing to regret, but that power and police are not established upon a more uncontrollable footing among us. To such persons I do not address myself. I know of nothing that the friends of lord Rockingham have to offer that can be of any weight with them; and, for my own part, I should blush to say a word, that should tend to conciliate their approbation to a system, in which my heart was interested. The men I wish chiefly to have in view, are those that are personally attached to the earl of Shelburne; such as stand aloof from all parties, and are inclined to have but an indifferent opinion of any; and such as have adhered to the connexion I have undertaken to defend, but whose approbation has been somewhat cooled by their late conduct. The two last in particular, I consider as least under the power of prejudice and most free to the influence of rational conviction.

The friends of freedom have, I believe, in no instance hesitated, but between the Rockingham connexion, and the earl of Shelburne. It is these two then that it remains for me to examine. Lord Shelburne had the misfortune of coming very early upon the public stage. At that time he connected himself with the earl of Bute, and entered with warmth into the opposition to Mr. secretary Pitt. In this system of conduct, however, he did not long persist; he speedily broke with the favourite, and soon after joined the celebrated hero, that had lately, been the object of his attack. By this person he was introduced to a considerable soft in administration. In office, he is chiefly remembered by the very decisive stile of authority and censure he employed, in a public letter, relative to the resistance that was made to the act of 1767, for imposing certain duties in America. From his resignation with lord Chatham, he uniformly and strenuously opposed the measures that were adopted for crushing that resistance. He persevered, with much apparent constancy, in one line of conduct for near ten years, and this is certainly the most plausible period of his story. He first called forth the suspicions of generous and liberal men in every rank of society, by his resolute opposition to the American independency in 1778. But it was in the administration, that seemed to have been formed under so favourable auspices in the spring of 1782, that he came most forward to general examination.

The Rockingham connexion, in conformity to what were then supposed to be the wishes of the people, united, though not without some hesitation, with the noble earl and his adherents, in the conduct of public affairs. And how did he reward their confidence? He was careful to retain the question respecting his real sentiments upon the business of America, in as much obscurity as ever. He wrote officially a letter to Sir Guy Carleton, which has never seen the light, by which that officer was induced to declare the American independency already irreversibly recognised by the court of London; by which he appears to have deceived all his brother ministers without exception; and by which Mr. Fox in particular, was induced to make the same declaration with general Carleton to foreign courts, and to come forward in the commons peremptorily to affirm, that there was not a second opinion in the cabinet, upon this interesting subject. How must a man of his undisguised and manly character have felt, when, within a week from this time, he found the noble earl declaring that nothing had ever been further from his thoughts, than an unconditional recognition; and successfully exerting himself to bring over a majority in the cabinet to the opposite sentiment? Lord Shelburne's obtaining, or accepting, call it which you will, of the office of first lord of the treasury, upon the demise of lord Rockingham, without the privity of his fellow Ministers, was contrary to every maxim of ingenuous conduct, and every principle upon which an association of parties can be supported. The declaration he made, and which was contradicted both by his own friends in the cabinet, and those of Mr. Fox, that he knew

of no reason in *God's earth* for that gentleman's resignation, but that of his having succeeded to the office of premier, was surely sufficiently singular.

But he is celebrated for being a man of large proessions, and by these proessions he has induced some persons in different classes in society, to esteem him the friend of liberty and renovation. What he has held out, however, upon these heads, has not been entirely consistent. He has appeared the enthusiastical partisan of the aristocracy, a kind of government, which, carried to its height, is perhaps, of all the different species of despotism, the most intolerable. He has talked in a very particular stile of his fears of reducing the regal power to a shadow, of his desire that the extension of prerogative should keep pace with the confirmation of popular rights, and his resolution, that, if it were in his power to prevent it, a king of England should never be brought to a level with a king of Mahrattas. The true sons of freedom will not certainly be very apprehensive upon this score, and will leave it to the numbers that will ever remain the adherents of monarchical power, to guard the barriers of the throne. In opposition, his declarations in favour of parliamentary reform seemed indeed very decisive. In administration, he was particularly careful to explain away these declarations, and to assure the people that he would never employ any influence in support of the measure, but would only countenance it so far as it appeared to be the sense of parliament. In other words, that he would remain neutral, or at most only honour the subject with an eloquent harangue, and interest himself no further respecting it.

But let us proceed from his language to his conduct in office. Almost every salutary measure of administration, from the resignation of lord North downward, was brought about during the union of the noble earl with the Rockingham connexion. What inference are we to draw from this? That administration, as auspicious as it was transitory, has never been charged with more than one error. They were thought too liberal in the distribution of two or three sinecures and pensions. To whom were they distributed? Uniformly, exclusively, to the friends of lord Shelburne. Lord Shelburne proposed them to his august colleague, and the marquis, whose faults, if he had any, were an excess of mildness, and an unsuspecting simplicity, perhaps too readily complied. But let it be remembered, that not one of his friends accepted, or to not one of his friends were these emoluments extended. But, if the noble marquis were sparing in the distribution of pensions, the deficiency was abundantly supplied by his successor. While the interests of the people were neglected and forgotten, the attention of the premier was in a considerable degree engrossed by the petty arrangements of office. For one man a certain department of business was marked out; the place had been previously filled by another. Here the first person was at all events to be promoted; and the second gratified with a pension. Thus, in the minute detail of employment, in adjusting the indeclinables of a court calendar, to detach a commis from this department, and to fix a clerk in that, burthen after burthen has been heaped upon the shoulders of a callous and lethargic people. –But no man can say, that the earl of Shelburne has been idle. Beside all this, he has restored peace to his country. His merits in this business, have already been sufficiently agitated. To examine them afresh would lead me too far from the scope of my subject I will not therefore now detain myself either to exculpate or criminate the minister, to whom, whatever they are, they are principally to be ascribed.

From the considerations already suggested, I am afraid thus much may be fairly inferred, that the earl of Shelburne is a man, dark, insidious and inexplicit in his designs; no decided friend of the privileges of the people; and in both respects a person very improper to conduct the affairs of this country. I would hope however, that the celebrated character given of him by the late lord

Holland was somewhat too severe. "I have met with many, who by perseverance and labour have made themselves Jesuits; it is peculiar to this man to have been born one."

Such then is the estimate we are compelled to form of a man who in his professions has sometimes gone as far, as the most zealous votaries of liberty. And what is the inference we shall draw from this? Shall we, for the sake of one man so specious and plausible, learn to think the language of all men equally empty and deceitful? Having once been betrayed, shall we avoid all future risk, by treating every pretender to patriotism and public spirit, as a knave and an impostor? This indeed is a conclusion to which the unprincipled and the vicious are ever propense. They judge of their fellows by themselves, and from the depravity of their own hearts are willing to infer, that every honesty has its price. But the very motive that inclines the depraved to such a mode of reasoning, must, upon the very same account, deter the man of virtue from adopting it. Virtue is originally ever simple and unsuspecting.

Conscious to its own rectitude, and the integrity of its professions, it naturally expects the same species of conduct from others. By every disappointment of this kind, it is mortified and humbled. Long, very long must it have been baffled, and countless must have been its mortifications, ere it can be induced to adopt a principle of general mistrust. And that such a principle should have so large a spread among persons, whose honesty, candour forbids us to suspect, is surely, of all the paradoxes upon the face of the earth, incomparably the greatest.—The man of virtue then will be willing, before he gives up all our political connexions without distinction, to go along with me to the review of the only one that yet remains to be examined, that of the late marquis of Rockingham.

Too much perhaps cannot be said in their praise. They have nearly engrossed the confidence of every friend of liberty. They are the only men, whose principles were never darkened with the cloud of suspicion. What, let me ask, has been their uniform conduct during the whole course of the reign? They have been ever steady in their opposition, to whatever bore an ill aspect to the cause of freedom, and to the whole train of those political measures, that have terminated in calamity and ruin. They have been twice in administration. Prosperity and power are usually circumstances that prove the severest virtue. While in power how then did this party conduct themselves.

Of their first administration the principal measure was the stamp act. A law that restored tranquility to a distracted empire. A law, to which, if succeeding administrations had universally adhered, we had been at this moment, the exclusive allies and patrons of the whole continent of North America. A law, that they carried in opposition to the all-dreaded Mr. Pitt, on the one hand, and on the other, against the inclination of those secret directors, from whose hands they receive their delegated power. They repealed the excise upon cyder. They abolished general warrants. And after having been the authors of these and a thousand other benefits in the midst of storms and danger; they quitted their places with a disinterestedness, that no other set of men have imitated. They secured neither place, pension, nor reversion to themselves, or any of their adherents.

Their second administration was indeed very short. But it was crowded with the most salutary measures. The granting a full relief to Ireland. The passing several most important bills of economy and reformation. The passing the contractors bill. The carrying into effect that most valuable measure, the abolishing the vote of custom-house officers in the election of members of parliament. And lastly, the attempt to achieve, that most important of all objects, the establishment of

an equal representation What might not have been expected from their longer continuance in office?

But I will not confine myself to the consideration of their conduct as a body. The characters of the individuals of which they are composed, will still further illustrate their true principles, and furnish a strong additional recommendation of them, to every friend of virtue and of liberty. That I may not overcharge this part of my subject, I will only mention two or three of their most distinguished leaders.

The character of the present chancellor of the exchequer is entirely an *unique*. Though mixing in all the busy scenes of life, though occupying for many years a principal place in the political affairs of this country, he has kept himself *unspotted from the world*. –The word of the elder Cato was esteemed so sacred with the Romans, that it became a proverb among them respecting things, so improbable, that their truth, could not be established even by the highest authority, "I would not believe it, though it were told me by Cato." And in an age much more dissipated than that of Cato, the integrity and honour of the noble lord I have mentioned, has become equally proverbial. Not bonds, nor deeds, nor all the shackles of law, are half so much to be depended upon as is his lightest word. He is deaf to all the prejudices of blood or private friendship, and has no feelings but for his country.

Of the duke of Portland, I can say the less, as not having had an opportunity of knowing much respecting him. His candour and his honour have never been questioned. And I remember, in the debate upon the celebrated secession of the Rockingham party, upon the death of their leader, to have heard his abilities particularly vouched in very strong terms, by Mr. chancellor Pitt, and the present lord Sidney. The latter in particular, though one of my lord Shelburne's secretaries of state, fairly avowed in so many words, that he should have been better satisfied with the appointment of his grace, to the office he now holds, than he was, with the noble lord, under whom he acted.

The character of lord Keppel, with persons not attached to any party, has usually been that of a man of much honesty and simplicity, without any remarkable abilities. It is a little extraordinary however, that, though forced by a combination of unfavourable circumstances into a public speaker, he is yet, even in that line, very far from contempt. His speeches are manly, regular, and to the purpose. His defence upon his trial at Portsmouth, in which he must naturally be supposed to have had at least a principal share, has, in my opinion, much beauty of composition. The adversaries of this party, though unwilling to admit that the navy was so much improved under his auspices as was asserted, have yet, I believe, universally acknowledged his particular activity and diligence.

But I come to the great boast of his own party, and the principal object of attack to their enemies, the celebrated Mr. Fox. Men of formality and sanctity have complained of him as dissipated. They do not pretend however to aggravate their accusation, by laying to his charge any of the greater vices. His contempt of money, and his unbounded generosity are universally confessed. Let such then know, that dissipation, so qualified, is a very slight accusation against a public man if indeed it deserves a serious consideration. In all expansive minds, in minds formed for an extensive stage, to embrace the welfare and the interests of nations, there is a certain incessant activity, a principle that must be employed. Debar them from their proper field, and it will most inevitably run out into excesses, which perhaps had better have been avoided. But do these excrescences, which only proceed from the richness and fertility of the soil, disqualify a man for public business? Far, very far from it. Where ever was there a man, who pushed dissipation and debauchery to a greater length, than my lord Bolingbroke? And yet it is perhaps difficult to say,

whether there ever existed a more industrious, or an abler minister. The peace of Utrecht, concluded amidst a thousand difficulties, from our allies abroad, and our parties, that were never so much exasperated against each other at home; must ever remain the monument of his glory. His opposition to sir Robert Walpole seems evidently to have been founded upon the most generous principles. And though the warmth and ebullition of his passions ever more broke in upon his happiest attempts, yet were his exertions in both instances attended with the most salutary consequences. But Mr. Fox appears to me to possess all the excellencies, without any any of the defects of lord Bolingbroke. His passions have, I believe, never been suspected of having embroiled the affairs of his party and he has uniformly retained the confidence of them all. His friendships have been solid and unshaken. His conduct cool and intrepid. The littleness of jealousy never discoloured a conception of his heart. In office he was more constant and indefatigable than, lord Bolingbroke himself. All his lesser pursuits seemed annihilated, and he was swallowed up in the direction of public affairs.

He has been accused of ambition. Ambition is a very ambiguous term. In its lowest sense, it sinks the meanest, and degrades the dirtiest of our race. In its highest, I cannot agree with those who stile it the defect of noble minds. I esteem it worthy of the loudest commendation, and the most assiduous culture. Mr. Fox's is certainly not an ambition of emolument. Nobody dreams it. It is not an ambition, that can be gratified by the distribution of places and pensions. This is a passion, that can only dwell in the weakest and most imbecile minds. Its necessary concomitants, are official inattention and oscitancy. No. The ambition of this hero is a generous thirst of fame, and a desire of possessing the opportunity of conferring the most lasting benefits upon his country. It is an instinct that carries a man forward into the field of fitness, and of God.

The vulgar, incapable of comprehending these exalted passions, are apt upon the slightest occasions to suspect, that this heroical language is only held out to them for a lure, and that the most illustrious characters among us are really governed by passions, equally incident to the meanest of mankind. Let such examine the features and the manners of Mr. Fox. Was that man made for a Jesuit? Is he capable of the dirty, laborious, insidious tricks of a hypocrite? Is there not a certain manliness about him, that disdains to mislead? Are not candour and sincerity bluntness of manner, and an unstudied air, conspicuous in all he does? –I know not how far the argument may go with others, with me, I confess, it has much weight. I believe a man of sterling genius, incapable of the littleness and meannesses, incident to the vulgar courtier. What are the principal characteristics of genius? Are they not large views, infinite conceptions, a certain manliness and intrepidity of thinking? But all real and serious vice originates in selfish views, narrow conceptions, and intellectual cowardice. A man of genius may possibly be thoughtless, dissipated and unstudied; but he cannot avoid being constant generous, and sincere. The union of first rate abilities with malignity, avarice, and envy, seems to me very nearly as incredible a phenomenon, as a mermaid, a unicorn, or a phoenix.

I cannot overcome the propensity I feel to add Mr. Burke to this illustrious catalogue, though the name of this gentleman leads me out of the circle of the cabinet. Mr. Burke raised himself from an obscure situation, by the greatness of his abilities, and his unrivalled genius. Never was distinction more nobly earned.

Of every species of literary composition he is equally a master. He excels alike in the most abstruse metaphysical disquisition, and in the warmest and most spirited painting. His rhetoric is at once ornamented and sublime. His satire is polished and severe. His wit is truly Attic. Luxuriant in the extreme, his allusions are always striking, and always happy. But to enumerate his

talents, is to tell but half his praise. The application he has made of them is infinitely more to his honour. He has devoted himself for his country. The driest and most laborious investigations have not deterred him. Among a thousand other articles, that might be mentioned his system of economical reform must for ever stand forth, alike the monument of his abilities, and his patriotism. His personal character is of the most amiable kind. Humanity and benevolence are strongly painted in his countenance. His transactions with lord Rockingham were in the highest degree honourable to him. And the more they are investigated, and the better they are understood, the more disinterestedness of virtue, and generous singularity of thinking, will be found to have been exhibited on both sides.

It is necessary perhaps, that I should say a word respecting the aristocratical principles of this gentleman, by which he is distinguished from the rest of his party. To these principles I profess myself an enemy. I am sorry they should be entertained by a person, for whom, in every other respect, I feel the highest veneration. But the views of that man must be truly narrow, who will give up the character of another, the moment he differs from him in any of his principles. I am sure Mr. Burke is perfectly sincere in his persuasion. And I hope I have long since learned not to question the integrity of any man, upon account of his tenets, whether in religion or politics, be they what they may. I rejoice however, that this gentleman has connected himself with a set of men, by the rectitude of whose views, I trust, the ill tendency of any such involuntary error will be effectually counteracted. In the mean time this deviation of Mr. Burke from the general principles of his connexion, has given occasion to some to impute aristocratical views to the whole party. The best answer to this, is, that the parliamentary reform was expressly stipulated by lord Rockingham, in his coalition with the earl of Shelburne, as one of the principles, upon which the Administration of March, 1782, was formed.

From what has been said, I consider my first proposition as completely established, that the Rockingham party was the only connexion of men, by which the country could be well served.

I would however just observe one thing by the way. I foresee that my first proposition lies open to a superficial and childish kind of ridicule. But in order to its operation, it is not necessary to say, that the friends of lord Rockingham were persuaded, that the country could not be well served, but by themselves. In reality, this is the proper and philosophical state of it that each individual of that connexion was persuaded, that the country could not be well served but by his friends. And I trust, it has now appeared, that this was a just and rational persuasion.

The next argument adduced in confirmation of my thesis, is, that they were not by themselves of sufficient strength, to support the weight of administration. It is certainly a melancholy consideration, that there should not be virtue enough left in a people to support an administration of honest views and uniform principles, against all the cabals of faction. This however, is incontrovertibly the case with Britain. The bulk of her inhabitants are become, in a very high degree, inattentive, and indifferent to the conduct of her political affairs. This has been, at one time, ascribed to their despair of the commonwealth, and their mortification in perceiving a certain course of mal-administration persisted in, in defiance of the known sense of the country. At another time, it has been imputed to their experience of the hollowness of all our public pretenders to patriotism. I am afraid, the cause is to be sought in something, more uniform in its operation, and less honourable to the lower ranks of society, than either of these. In a word, luxury and dissipation have every where loosened the bands of political union. The interest of the public has been forgotten by all men; and we have been taught to laugh at the principles, by which the patriots of former ages were induced, to sacrifice their fortunes and their lives for the welfare of

their citizens. Provided the cup of enjoyment be not dashed from our own lips, and the pillow of sloth torn away from our own heads, we do not ask, what shall be the fate of our liberties, our posterity, and our country, Disinterested affection seems to have taken up her last refuge in a few choice spirits, and elevated minds, who appear among us, like the inhabitants of another world. In the mean time, while the lower people have been *careful for none of these things*, they have been almost constantly decided in the senate, not by a view to their intrinsic merits, but in conformity to the jarring interests, and the inexplicable cabals of faction. In such a situation, alas! what can unprotected virtue do? Destitute of all that comeliness that allures; stripped of that influence that gives weight and consideration; and unskilled in the acts of intrigue?

In conformity to these ideas, when the choice of an administration was once again thrown back upon the people, in March, 1782, we perceive, that no one party found themselves sufficiently strong for the support of government; and a coalition became necessary between the Rockingham connexion, and a person they never cordially approved, the earl of Shelburne. Even thus supported, and called to the helm, with perhaps as much popularity, as any administration ever enjoyed, they did not carry their measure in parliament without difficulty. The inconsiderate and interested did even think proper to ridicule their imbecility; particularly in the house of lords. The most unsuspected of all our patriots, Mr. Burke, was reduced to the necessity of so far contracting his system of reform upon this account, as to have afforded a handle to superficial raillery and abuse.

But turn we to the administration that succeeded them; who still retained some pretensions to public spirit; and among whom there remained several individuals, whose claim to political integrity was indisputably. Weaker than the ministry of lord Rockingham, to what shifts were they not reduced to preserve their precarious power? These are the men, who have been loudest in their censures of the late coalition. And yet did not they form coalitions, equally extraordinary with that which is now under consideration? To omit the noble lord who presided at the treasury board, and to confine myself to those instances, which Mr. Fox had occasion to mention in treating my subject. Was there not the late chancellor of the exchequer, who has been severest in his censures of lord North, and the lord advocate of Scotland, who was his principal supporter and was for pushing the American measures, even to greater lengths, than the noble patron himself? Was there not the master general of the ordnance, who has ever gone farthest in his view of political reform, and declaimed most warmly against secret influence; and the lord chancellor, the most determined enemy of reform, and who has been supposed the principal vehicle of that influence? Lastly, was there not, in the same manner, the secretary of state for the home department, who was most unwearied in his invectives against lord Bute; and the right honourable Mr. Jenkinson who has been considered by the believers in the invisible power of that nobleman, as the chief instrument of his designs.

With these examples of the necessity of powerful support and extensive combination, what mode of conduct was it, that it was most natural, most virtuous, and most wise, for the Rockingham connexion to adopt? I confess, I can perceive none more obvious, or more just, than that which they actually adopted, a junction with the noble commoner in the blue ribbon. At least, from what has been said, I trust, thus much is evident beyond control, that they had just reason to consider themselves abstractedly, as too weak for the support of government.

Still further to strengthen my argument, I affirm, in the third place, that they were not the men, whose services were likely to be called for by the Sovereign. I believe, that this proposition will not be thought to stand in need of any very abstruse train of reasoning to support it. The

late events respecting it have been, instead of a thousand arguments. From an apprehension, probably, of the uncourtierliness of their temper, and their inflexible attachment to a system; it seems to appear by those events, that the sovereign had contracted a sort of backwardness to admit them into his councils, which it is to be hoped, was only temporary. It was however such, as, without any other apparent cause to cooperate with it, alone sufficed to delay the forming an administration for six weeks, in a most delicate and critical juncture. Even the union of that noble person, who had been considered as his majesty's favourite minister, did not appear to be enough to subdue the averseness. However then we may hope, that untainted virtue and superior abilities, when more intimately known, may be found calculated to surmount prejudices and conciliate affection; it seems but too evident, that in the critical moment, those men, by whom alone we have endeavoured to prove, that the country could be well served, would not voluntarily have been thought on.

But it does not seem to have been enough considered, at what time the coalition was made. The Rockingham connexion, along with thousands of their fellow citizens, who were unconnected with any party, were induced, from the purest views, to disapprove of the late treaty of peace. The voting with the friends of lord North upon that question, was a matter purely incidental. By that vote however, in which a majority of the commons house of parliament was included, the administration of lord Shelburne was dissolved. It was not till after the dissolution was really effected, that the coalition took place. In this situation something was necessary to be done. The nation was actually without a ministry. It was a crisis that did not admit of hesitation and delay. The country must, if a system of delay had been adopted, have immediately been thrown back into the hands of those men, from whom it had been so laboriously forced scarce twelve months before; or it must have been committed to the conduct of persons even less propitious to the cause of liberty, and the privileges of the people. A situation, like this, called for a firm and manly conduct. It was no longer a time to stoop to the yoke of prejudice. It was a time, to burst forth into untrodden paths; to lose sight of the hesitating and timid; and generously to adventure upon a step, that should rather have in view substantial service, than momentary applause; and should appeal from the short-sighted decision of systematic prudence, to the tribunal of facts, and the I judgment of posterity.

But why did I talk of the tribunal of facts? Events are not within the disposition of human power. "'Tis not in mortals to command success." And the characters of wisdom and virtue, are therefore very properly considered by all men, who pretend to sober reflection, as independent of it. If then, as I firmly believe, the coalition was founded in the wisest and most generous views, the man, that values himself upon his rational nature, will not wait for the event. He will immediately and peremptorily decide in its favour. Though it should be annihilated to-morrow; though it had been originally frustrated in its views, respecting the continuation of a ministry; he would not hesitate to pronounce, that it was formed in the most expansive and long-sighted policy, in the noblest and most prudent daring, in the warmest generosity, and the truest patriotism.

But it will be said, a coalition of parties may indeed be allowed to be in many cases proper and wise; but a coalition between parties who have long treated each other with the extremest rancour, appears a species of conduct, abhorrent to the unadulterated judgment, and all the native prepossessions of mankind. It plucks away the very root of unsuspecting confidence, and can be productive of nothing, but anarchy and confusion.

In answer to this argument, I will not cite the happy effects of the coalition between parties just as opposite, by which Mr. Pitt was introduced into office in the close of a former reign.

Still less will I cite the coalition of the earl of Shelburne, with several leaders of the Bedford connexion, and others, whose principles were at least as inimical to the popular cause, and the parliamentary reform, as those of Lord North; and the known readiness of him and his friends to have formed a junction with the whole of that connexion. I need not even hint at the probability there exists, that the noble lord then in administration, would have been happy to have formed the very coalition himself, which he is willing we should so much reprobate in another. I need not mention the suspicions, that naturally suggested themselves upon the invincible silence of his party, respecting the maladministrations of lord North, for so long a time; and their bringing forward the singular charge of fifty unaccounted millions at the very moment that the coalition was completed. I should be sorry to have it supported, that the connexion I am defending, ever took an example from the late premier, for one article of their conduct. And I think the mode of vindicating them, not from temporary examples, but from eternal reason, as it is in itself most striking and most honourable, so is it not a whit less easy and obvious.

Let it be remembered then, in the first place, that there was no other connexion, sufficiently unquestionable in their sincerity, and of sufficient weight in the senate, with which to form a coalition. The Bedford party, had they even been willing to have taken this step in conjunction with the friends of lord Rockingham, were already gripped of some of their principal and ablest members, by the arts of lord Shelburne. Whether these ought to be considered in found reason, as more or less obnoxious than lord North, I will not take upon me to determine. Certain I am, that the Scottish connexion were, of all others, the most suspicious in themselves, and the most odious to the people. The only choice then that remained, was that which was made. The only subject for deliberation, was, whether this choice were more or less laudable than, on the other hand, the deserting entirely the interests of their country, and leaving the vessel of the state to the mercy of the winds.

Secondly, I would observe that the principal ground of dispute between lord North and his present colleagues in administration was done away by the termination of the American war. An impeachment of the noble lord for his past errors was perfectly out of the question. No one was mad enough to expect it. A vein of public spirit, diffusing itself among all ranks of society, is the indispensable concomitant of impeachments and attainder. And such a temper, I apprehend, will not be suspected to be characteristic of the age in which we live. But were it otherwise, the Rockingham connexion certainly never stood in the way of an impeachment, had it been meditated. And, exclusive of this question, I know of no objection, that applies particular to the noble lord, in contradistinction to any of the other parties into which we are divided.

But, in the third place, the terms upon which the coalition was made, form a most important article of consideration in estimating its merits. They are generally understood to have been these two; that the Rockingham connexion (should at all times have a majority in the cabinet; and that lord North should be removed to that "hospital of incurables," as lord Chesterfield has stiled it, the house of lords. Surely these articles are the happiest that could have been conceived for preserving the power of administration, as much as may be, with the friends of the people. Places, merely of emolument and magnificence, must be bestowed somewhere. Where then can they be more properly lodged, than in the hands of those who are best able to support a liberal and virtuous administration?

I beg leave to add once more, in the fourth place, that, whatever the demerits of lord North as a minister may be supposed to have been, he is perhaps, in a thousand other respects, the fittest man in the world to occupy the second place in a junction of this sort. The union of the

Rockingham connexion with the earl of Shelburne last year, was, I will admit, less calculated to excite popular astonishment, and popular disapprobation, than the present. In the eye of cool reason and sober foresight, I am apt to believe, it was much less wise and commendable. Lord Shelburne, though he has been able to win over the good opinion of several, under the notion of his being a friend of liberty, is really, in many respects, stiffly aristocratical or highly monarchical. Lord Shelburne is a man of insatiable ambition, and who pursues the ends of that ambition by ways the most complex and insidious. The creed of lord North, whatever it may be, upon general political questions, is consistent and intelligible. For my own part, I do not believe him to be ambitious.

It is not possible, with his indolent and easy temper, that he should be very susceptible to so restless a passion. In the heroical sense of that word, he fits loose to fame. He is undoubtedly desirous, by all the methods that appear to him honourable and just, to enrich and elevate his family. He wishes to have it in his power to oblige and to serve his friends. But I am exceedingly mistaken, if he entered into the present alliance from views of authority and power. Upon the conditions I have mentioned, it was a scheme, congenial only to a man of a dark and plotting temper. But the temper of lord North is in the highest degree candid open and undisguised. Easy at home upon every occasion, there is not a circle in the world to which his presence would not be an addition. It is calculated to inspire unconstraint and confidence into every breast. Simple and amiable is the just description of his character in every domestic relation; constant and unreserved in his connexions of friendship. The very versatility and pliability, so loudly condemned in his former situation, is now an additional recommendation. Is this the man, for whose intrigues and conspiracies we are bid to tremble?

Another charge that has been urged against the coalition, is, that it was a step that dictated to the sovereign, and excluded all, but one particular set of men, from the national councils. The first part of this charge is somewhat delicate in its nature. I shall only say respecting it, that, if, as we have endeavoured to prove, there were but one connexion, by which the business of administration could be happily discharged, the friend of liberty, rejoicing in the auspicious event, will not be very inquisitive in respect to the etiquette, with which they were introduced into the government. In the mean time, far from intending an exclusion, they declared publicly, that they would be happy to receive into their body any man of known integrity and abilities, from whatever party he came. The declaration has never been contradicted.—

Strangers to the remotest idea of proscription they erected a fortress, where every virtue, and every excellence might find a place.

The only remaining objection to the coalition that I know of, that it shocks established opinions, is not, I think, in itself, calculated to have much weight, and has, perhaps, been sufficiently animadverted upon, as we went along, in what has been already said. The proper question is, was it a necessary step? Was there any other way, by which the country could be redeemed? If a satisfactory answer has been furnished to these enquiries, the inevitable conclusion in my opinion is, that the more it shocked established opinions, and the more intellectual nerve it demanded, the more merit did it possess, and the louder applause is its due.

I am not inclined to believe, that a majority of my countrymen, upon reflection, have disapproved this measure. I am happy to perceive, that so much of that good sense and manly thinking in public questions, that has for ages been considered as the characteristic quality of Englishmen, is still left among us. There can be nothing more honourable than this.—By it our commonality, though unable indeed to forestall the hero and the man of genius in his schemes, do yet, if I may

be allowed the expression, tread upon his heels, and are prepared to follow him in all his views, and to glow with all his sentiments

Sensible however, that in the first blush of such a scheme, its enemies must necessarily find their advantage in entrenching themselves behind those prejudices, that could not be eradicated in a moment, I was willing to wait for the hour of calmness and deliberation. I resolved coolly to let the first gust of prepossession blow over, and the spring tide of censure exhaust itself. I believed, that such a cause demanded only a fair and candid hearing. I have endeavoured to discharge my part in obtaining for it such a hearing. And I must leave the rest to my readers.

Among these there probably will be some, who, struck with the force of the arguments I have adduced on the one hand, and entangled in their favourite prejudices on the other, will remain in a kind of suspense; ashamed to retract their former opinions, but too honest to deny all weight and consideration to those I have defended. To these I have one word to say, and with that one word I will conclude. I will suppose you to confess, that appearances, exclusive of the controverted step, are in a thousand instances favourable to the new ministers. They have made the strongest professions, and the largest promises of attachment to the general cause. To professions and promises I do not wish you to trust. I should blush to revive the odious and exploded maxim, not men, but measures. If you cannot place some confidence in the present administration, I advise you, as honest men, to do everything in your power to drive them from the helm. But you will hardly deny, that all their former conduct has afforded reasons for confidence. You are ready to admit, that, in no instance, but one, have they committed their characters. In that one instance, they have much to say for themselves, and it appears, at least, very possible, that they may have been acted in it, by virtuous and generous principles, even though we should suppose these mistaken. Remember then, that popularity and fame are the very nutriment of virtue. A thirst for fame is not a weakness. It is "the noble mind's distinguishing perfection." If then you would bind administration by tenfold ties to the cause of liberty, do not withdraw from them your approbation till they have forfeited it, by betraying, in one plain and palpable instance, the principles upon which they have formerly acted. I believe they need no new bonds, but are unchangeably fixed in the generous system, with which they commenced. But thus much is certain. If any thing can detach them from this glorious cause; if any thing can cool their ardour for the common weal, there is nothing that has half so great a tendency to effect this, as unmerited obloquy and disgrace.

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William Godwin
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