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THE ECLIPSE OF THE YORKES.

BY BASIL WILLIAMS, M.A.

Read January 16, 1908.

IN one of his greatest novels Balzac describes the sudden accession to fortune of César Birotteau, the hairdresser, and his lamentable fall, due to overweening confidence and neglect of the business to which he owed his elevation. It is the tragedy of the man who rests too long upon his laurels, and has failed to learn life's lesson, that a breathing space to prepare for further effort is the only rest possible for one who would not slip back in the struggle. Such tragedies are common, though it requires a Balzac, a Shakespeare, or an Æschylus to make them manifest. Sometimes, however, they may be dimly perceived in the utterances of the victims, themselves barely conscious of the significance of the facts which they relate.

Among the valuable sources of information on the political history of the eighteenth century is the collection of manuscripts belonging to the first two earls of Hardwicke and presented by the family to the British Museum. Most of the volumes contain notes on old law cases, letters on the politics of the day, and State papers relating to foreign affairs or domestic intrigues, all useful to the historical student, but otherwise of no immediate human interest. One volume,¹ however, stands out by itself, containing all the elements of the most poignant tragedy. It is a collection of memoirs and letters relating to the history of the Yorke family between the years 1760 and 1770, written by the principal

¹ Add. MS. 35428.

actors in the story. This material has been quarried by the industrious author of the first Lord Hardwicke's life, and by Sir George Trevelyan and other writers, but no one seems to have noticed how complete a story the volume forms in itself. It is, in a word, the picture of a great family's arrogant success and self-sufficiency turned in ten short years to hopeless failure and loss of honour; and the fact that the story is brought out in unconscious simplicity by members of this very family only adds to its tragic irony. The volume might well be published as it stands, with a few explanatory comments; meanwhile an attempt will be made in this paper to indicate the story, allowing the writers to speak as far as possible for themselves.

First a few words of introduction on the history of the Yorke before 1760. The family fortunes were founded by Philip Yorke, the son of a provincial attorney, who was born in 1690, and became successively Solicitor-General at thirty, Attorney-General, Chief Justice of the King's Bench and Baron Hardwicke, Lord Chancellor in 1737, and Earl of Hardwicke in 1754. In 1757 he was no longer Chancellor, but still attended Cabinet Councils in Pitt's ministry. A great and sound lawyer, and a safe unenterprising statesman with a strong belief in reasonable liberty for the people and in their government by certain select Whig families, he was well chosen by Walpole for his policy of repose. During the years succeeding Walpole's fall his imperturbable common sense and his tact made him an indispensable member of ministries, which always contained the foolish Duke of Newcastle and often no one else of much superior capacity. The greatest proof of his worldly wisdom and mother wit is that Newcastle, with all his distrust of talents greater than his own, always consulted him, and even up to the last submitted to his reproofs and his judgment. His wisdom was not unrewarded. During his thirty-seven years of office he amassed an immense fortune, and, by purchasing the great country estate of Wimpole in Cambridgeshire, secured the position he had always coveted in the ranks of the Whig landed nobility. But not content

with his own power and wealth, he cherished the ambition of handing down to his family a position unassailable in the government of England. The eldest son, Viscount Royston, was provided through his father's influence with a rich sinecure in the Exchequer and with the post of lord-lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, and he married the Marchioness Grey, a peeress in her own right. Charles, the second son, became Solicitor-General at thirty-five. The third, Joseph, was a major-general at thirty-four and his country's representative at the Hague. John held two sinecures, and the youngest son, James, who took orders, became a dean when little over thirty. Moreover Lord Anson, who had married one of the Chancellor's daughters, largely owed his appointment as First Lord of the Admiralty in Pitt's great ministry to this connection. But Hardwicke was not content with planting out his children in favourable soil and then leaving them to grow by themselves. On the contrary, he encouraged them to look upon him as the great arbiter in all their difficulties, and to rely upon his prudent counsels instead of on their own judgment. For example, the lord-lieutenant writes to his father to know what he should do about Mr. Pitt's circular relating to the militia, and Lord Hardwicke gives him the fullest directions. The solicitor-general, as will appear hereafter, consults the head of the family on his own legal opinions. Joseph, the minister at the Hague, guilty of some indiscretion, is protected from Mr. Pitt's just and terrible wrath by his father's bland arts of management. That they form one great family, which must stand or fall together and must look for guidance from its head, is the essence of the old lord's teaching to his children. What he failed to show them was that he himself had risen by hard work and good service to the State. Moreover, having been well-nigh supreme at the Council Board for so many years himself, he almost unconsciously handed down to his children the belief that they were also indispensable to the common weal and, apart from any exertions of their own, had incontestable claims to honour and position.

Such then was the state of the Yorke family in 1760, the fourth year of Pitt's great ministry and the last of George II.'s reign, a time of unexampled splendour in the history of England. The first paper in the volume of family records is 'A Memorial of Family Occurrences from 1760 to 1770 inclusive,' written in January 1771 by the Lord Chancellor's eldest son, by that time second earl. It opens with a picture of the family in all its glory, hardly inferior to that of Agamemnon when Clytemnestra spreads in his path the carpets too gorgeous and too costly for mortal feet.

'At the beginning of the first of these years our family was in a situation as honourable, as distinguished and as advantageous as can well be imagined. That incomparable man, my Father, though in no employment, had the full confidence and esteem of the Crown and of the better part of the Nation. He was a Cabinet Counsellor, and, though Sir Robert Henley held the Seals, had the lead and management of the House of Lords as far as the public business was concerned. Lord Anson, my Brother-in-Law, was at the head of the Admiralty, and directed the business of that department with an ability and success unknown to former times. From the lively, chearful, and amiable disposition of my Sister, her house was rendered very agreeable not only to our family, but to all Lord Anson's friends and dependants, who were very numerous, and I shall ever remember with pleasure and gratitude the many happy days and hours which I spent in that Society. My second Brother, Mr. Yorke, was high in the opinion of his profession, getting forward in it daily in the office of Solicitor General, in which he may be said to have had the labouring¹ oar, and even then destined by every body for the Great Seal as soon as it became decent and practicable to carry so young a man so far. My third Brother, Joseph Yorke, was Minister at the Hague, trusted with the most secret parts of foreign correspondence on both sides of the water, and intimately connected with his own family. I say

¹ 'The preparing reports for which the King's lawyers are called upon by various references was entirely left to him by Sir Charles Pratt.'

nothing of myself or my other Brothers, who partook of the many *agrémens* and Benefits which arose from this situation ; at least I can say for one that I was truly sensible of the advantages we enjoyed, for which of course we were sufficiently envied by the rest of the world.'

Then came domestic losses, the first hints of impending doom, but still no decline in the family's material prosperity.

'The first alloy to this scene of domestic felicity was the death of Lady Anson, carried off by a malignant Fever in May that year. It was a heavy blow on all of us ; she was the Life and Soul of our Societies, was always desirous to please, and capable of doing it. Whatever failings she had (as none are exempt) were totally eclipsed by her superior accomplishments ; and she had a fund of humanity and benevolence in her temper which exerted itself in serving many worthy and distressed objects. Indeed, as far as she was able, she made it a rule of conduct to oblige *all* who came in her way, and justly to provoke or offend none. Lord Anson bore this loss with great philosophy, though he was deeply afflicted, and his house never could forget the chearful and lively sunshine (if I may use the expression) which she spread over it. Scarcely had we dried up our tears for this melancholy and unexpected event, when another happened that very year in October, which produced consequences to our Family of a very different nature—I mean the death of the good old King George II. in the fulness of years and glory. In the beginning of the new reign no apparent alteration happened in our situation ; we were even cajoled and courted in the first weeks of it. Mr. Yorke had an audience of the King within the first twenty-four hours of his accession, and was desired to hasten my Father up to town. Lord Bute made an offer to the latter of the President's place very soon after his coming up, and said the King considered Lord Granville as worn out, and was determined to lay him aside. My Father absolutely declined the proposal, assured Lord Bute that he chose to serve his Majesty out of office ; that if his Family partook at any time of the King's goodness it was all he desired or

wished for at his time of life. An honorable Cushion at the Privy Council was bestowed on me, upon the first intimation that it would be agreeable. Mr. John Yorke was soon brought into the board of Trade. I think that very winter when Lord Sandys was appointed first commissioner, Sir Joseph had the red Ribbon, and was in the course of 1761 appointed Plenipotentiary to Augsburg and Ambassador Extraordinary to the States General. In short, the Exterior was fair and plausible, but in reality Lord Bute had the sole power and influence, and he was determined to work out the old servants of the Crown as soon as he could possibly bring it about, notwithstanding the many difficulties which seemed to stand in the way of it. How he accomplished this great task which has made him ever since so unhappy a man, is not within the compass of this Paper. . . . It will suffice to mention here that Lord Bute principally availed himself, and with great art and finesse, of the dissensions between the Duke of Newcastle and Mr. Pitt; that he played off one against the other occasionally till he had got rid of the popular minister, and when that was compassed, he strengthened himself in the Cabinet by bringing in Lord Egmont and Mr. Grenville, and never left intriguing and undermining till he had rendered it impracticable for the old Duke to continue in office with credit or honor. I resume now the thread of our domestic history by mentioning the death of my poor Mother in November, 1761. She was greatly broken by infirmities, but retained a strong sense, a quick comprehension, and a sincere piety to the last. Her loss deeply afflicted my father, as he lived with her in the strictest confidence and harmony, and he expressed his grief in an elegant Latin epigram the next time he went to Wimple alone, without his usual companion.'

By this time the King and Bute had drawn their own moral from Pitt's ministry. The Great Commoner, it is true, had been unable to rule without the support of the Whig clique which Newcastle led and Hardwicke advised, but he had proved that it owed its importance rather to voting power than to any capacity for administration. The King,

meaning to rule as absolutely as Pitt had ruled, and to be even less dependent on the whims of office-holders, carried the war into the very stronghold of patronage. At first his success was rapid. By midsummer, 1762, Newcastle was dismissed, Anson was dead, and, to resume the words of the family chronicler, 'our family had lost all favour at Court; my Father was left out of the Cabinet Council on the Duke of Newcastle's resignation without having it left to his option; my Brothers indeed remained in their employments, but it was understood with regard to the two at home that their continuance was only present, and till it was seen more clearly what turn things would take.'

From this point a blind folly seemed to impel the family to its ruin. Wilkes, the irresponsible demagogue who flouted the King in his famous No. 45 of the *North Briton*, to some extent played the King's own game by creating further confusion and uncertainty among the old Whig families; for they were quite unprepared to deal with the novel questions raised by his conduct. Unfortunately, Charles Yorke, by that time Attorney-General, was obliged to commit himself to an opinion as to the legality of the measures adopted by ministers. With characteristic distrust of his own judgment he sought the advice of his learned father; but fate was against him.

'Webb, then Solicitor to the Treasury, brought it [the Attorney-General's opinion] to my Father in Grosvenor Square, who, after reading it over, said to him: "Pray, Mr. Webb, carry it back to my Son and desire him forthwith to come to me." Webb was too eager and officious towards his new superiors to comply with the request of his old Patron and Benefactor, and went with the Paper directly to the Secretaries of State, and in consequence of it Mr. Wilkes was apprehended. My Father had not the least doubt of the Legality of the opinion, and always maintained it firmly and strongly to the day of his death, but he thought it was a delicate Question for the Crown Lawyers to give written opinions upon, and that the Attorney and Solicitor should

have talked with the King's servants first, and endeavoured to conduct the business in a way less liable to clamor. I had this anecdote from Mr. Yorke the winter after. As the Session of Parliament which was to meet in November, 1763, approached, the Opposition grew more inflamed on this point of Privilege and the other appendages to Wilkes's case. Lord Hardwicke was embarrassed about the conduct of his Family. The Duke of Newcastle and his other Friends, he knew, strongly wished for their resignations. He did not in his own Judgment approve the plan of conduct which was formed by opposition, and detested such brutal and personal attacks as those with which the *North Briton* abounded; neither did he think it becoming at his time of Life to counteract those ideas of Law and Order which he had been labouring all his life to establish. At last, however, the point of honor prevailed, and in compliance with his sentiments, my Brothers, Mr. Yorke and Mr. John Yorke, gave up their employments just before the Parliament met.'

It is difficult to understand the reason for Charles's resignation at this juncture except on the assumption of his father's overmastering influence, for the 'point of honor' is not obvious. He had definitely, and it appears quite sincerely, approved of the ministerial policy in the Wilkes case, then the only question at issue; and, as his brother, wise after the event, points out, he pleased neither side by withdrawing at this stage:—

'I have often since thought it would have been the wisest measure if Mr. Yorke had either resigned when so many of the Duke of Newcastle's Friends were turned out for voting against the Peace, or not at all. In the former case he would have had merit with them, and not been involved in the troublesome prosecution about Wilkes; in the latter, he would only have continued to support his opinion in office, which for his own credit he was obliged to do out of it, and his line of promotion in the Profession would never have been broken. Whereas by the part he took, neither side thought itself much obliged to him. But, as I said before, the point

of honor and our good Father's inclination turned the scale.'

Thus the whole family was now left stranded except for Sir Joseph, who, as his brother plaintively remarks, always kept free from dissensions at home, and contented himself with the quiet and efficient performance of his duties at the Hague. Finally in March the old Earl died, weary and somewhat discouraged. When he had gone, the family could safely be treated with contumely. The writer of this chronicle, now Earl of Hardwicke, sorrowfully notes:—

'I well remember that when I was presented at the Levee as Earl of Hardwicke, the King took no more notice of me than if I had just come out of Bedfordshire for the winter, which, considering my then situation, the late Archbishop when I related it to him said, with more warmth than generally fell from him, "was very shocking."'

One unsatisfied ambition, however, the family even in its most depressed condition, kept steadily in view. The father had been Chancellor for twenty years, the great Chancellor Somers was a connection by marriage, and it had always been the father's hope and the family's settled conviction that Charles the lawyer would succeed to what they regarded almost as a family office. Even now there seemed a very good prospect that this ambition might be fulfilled. Trained in all the traditions of the office, a law officer when most men are barely earning a fee, and undoubtedly the most brilliant of an able family, Charles even in retirement might well hope with his brothers that a turn of the wheel would bring him the coveted preferment. And during the next years chances came to the family which it needed but a little resolution to turn to account. But with the old Earl's death not merely public spirit but worldly craft seemed to have deserted them. Accustomed as they had been to look to him in everything, his death had left them like a rudderless ship in a stormy sea, for 'he died,' his son laments, 'without leaving any *Testament politique* for our future conduct, or taking any formal leave of us.' During the next few years the family record is

one of missed opportunities. In the winter of 1764-65 Charles was offered his choice of the Mastership of the Rolls or of the post of Attorney-General. His sympathies were rather with the Government than against it, and yet in spite of the King's insistence he was afraid, and refused, though at the same time he put himself under an obligation to the Court by accepting a patent of precedence, useful to him only in his profession.¹ In 1765 a better and more honorable chance occurred. The King, thinking anything better than Grenville's pedantry, handed over the government to the Whig families under Rockingham. Charles even now spent some weeks of hesitation before agreeing to be Attorney-General, and then only on a distinct promise that he should be Chancellor next session. John also came into office at the Admiralty.

On this occasion the eldest brother, Lord Hardwicke, displayed the family indecision and dread of responsibility to the full. Offered the Board of Trade, he refused, chiefly on the ground that in that office he would have to take a strong line on the difficult question of the American Stamp Act. Next year he had an even better offer of the Secretaryship of State, and he devoted a separate memorandum, contained in the volume of family records, to an account of his reasons for rejecting this also. It is worth transcribing in part as an illustration of the narrow selfishness and absence of consideration for any public interest which at this time characterised the family's calculations.

'The offer of the Seals was made me in form by the Marquis of Rockingham not long before the Whitsun Holydays in May 1766. There was great temptation in the

¹ The President (Dr. Hunt) reminded the meeting at which this paper was read of the detailed version of this transaction contained in Geo. Grenville's Diary (*Grenville Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 525-532). Charles Yorke's indecision, his anxiety to be begged to accept what he had himself asked for, and the arrogance of his pretensions are there brought out with ironical simplicity. From Grenville's account it is equally obvious that Charles drew back at the last moment not from any conscientious scruples in joining the Government, but from fear of standing ill with the old Whigs, such as the Duke of Newcastle, with whom he was connected.

object ; the dignity and Figure the employment gave were self-evident ; the opportunities it afforded of serving one's friends were considerable ; the business was of a nature for which I had always had a sort of predilection, and in which I had been conversant as far as theory and study could carry me. I was tolerably well acquainted with the modern state of Europe, and by the confidence which my Father had for some years reposed in me had been kept well informed of the most important anecdotes of a very long period. But on the other side there were strong and cogent objections to my undertaking so great a Branch. I could not flatter myself that my experience of the world (having never conversed largely in it and lived a good deal amongst my books) was sufficient to steer me through the Rocks and Quicksands of a Court and Public Life ; and I thought myself rather too much on the other side of 40, and had lived too much in my own way to begin acting a new part in it. I knew that a constant load of business would hurry my spirits in a way which would affect my health, and I was apprehensive that as the weight of supporting the King's measures in the House of Lords would lie upon my shoulders, I was not enough used to Parliamentary speaking to go through such a course of political altercation. Over and above these considerations I was very diffident of the strength and stability of that administration ; though I was not aware and perhaps at that time it was not intended that so short a period should be put to it.

' On the weighing the whole matter as well as I could and talking it over with some of my friends (amongst whom none but the *Duke of Newcastle* and *Lord Grantham* strongly encouraged me to accept) I soon determined to decline this great offer as I had done the former.

' When I communicated this Resolution to Lord Rockingham he received it with much candor ; admitted that I was best able to judge for myself, though he could have wished my determination had been otherwise ; but expressed his hopes that I would consent to be called to the Cabinet Council,

where he was pleased to say I should be of use, and might take no greater share of the business upon me than was agreeable. I readily consented to this last proposal, which was to me very flattering, and had as many of the *agrémens* of the greater offer as I wished to enjoy, and none of the supposed difficulties, and I was in hopes that my being of the cabinet might tend to facilitate my Brother's promotion to the Great Seal, and the confidential Information which I should receive from it would be of service in the station he then filled, at the same time that his knowledge and abilities would be of use to me.'

In a subsequent interview with the King, which Lord Hardwicke describes at length, he tried unsuccessfully to obtain a definite statement with regard to Charles's prospects of the Chancellorship, but at the end, delighted at having escaped responsibility for himself, exclaimed joyfully :—

'I verily believe had he pressed me to take the Seals with any Earnestness before I left the Closet I should have accepted out of pure Duty and Zeal—*sed me servavit Apollo.*'

During the first ten years of George III.'s reign hardly any administration lasted much beyond a year, and in July 1766 the Rockingham ministry followed the fate of its predecessors. New hope came to the country when Pitt, now Lord Chatham, returned to form his third ministry. For Chancellor he chose his old and faithful friend Pratt, now Lord Camden, who, as Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, had done good service to the cause of liberty in the dark days of 1763. The choice was eminently just, though none the less disappointing to Charles. Still he was young, and as attorney could have done good service in the House of Commons. However, he and the rest of the family chose to nurse their grievances. Lord Hardwicke, with shameless candour, expounds their selfish views, in which their one remaining loyalty is to the supposed interests of the family.

'One of the terms insisted upon by Lord Chatham was that his favorite Lord Campden should have the Seals, and that being agreed to and no compensation or equivalent pro-

posed to my Brother, he thought himself in honor obliged to resign the office of Attorney-General. Lord Chatham endeavoured to avert him from his purpose in a smooth and flattering conversation at Hampstead, urging the services he could do and the weight he carried in the House of Commons. When Mr. Yorke had his audience of the King, he complained of the force put upon him, and seemed concerned at his resignation, but made no Proposal; except once in a dry way, "There is the Common Pleas for you." "Surely, Sir, said my Brother, your Majesty will not wish me to take it in a manner different from that in which Lord Campden has enjoyed it," meaning without a peerage—to which the King made no answer; nor do I think the matter was pressed so far as it might have been. Certain it is that such a distinction with the Common Pleas would have made Mr. Yorke happy, that he would have accepted it with thankfulness, and that it would have been a political as well as an honorable measure in the King to have granted it. In consequence of this ill-usage of Mr. Y., Mr. J. Yorke very disinterestedly and quite spontaneously gave up his seat at the Admiralty. . . . So when this great change was effected, every friend and relation we had of consequence (Sir Joseph excepted) being out, we were of course considered as disobliged men and thrown into the Ranks of opposition. I pressed Mr. Y. often to have exposed the behaviour of the Court towards him, and to have taken a warmer part on some occasions in Parliament, but he always hung back as to personalities and political appeals to the Public, and I thought no other methods could make an impression on the unfeeling and ungrateful.'

Though stranded thus a second time within three years, the family had still sufficient interest to re-enter Parliament in a body at the general election of 1768. But with characteristic languor, 'when the Elections for a new Parliament came on in the spring of 1768, Mr. Y. preferred a quiet election for the University of Cambridge to one for the county, which as Parties then stood might have been attended with trouble. The Duke of Newcastle gave him his interest

in the University very readily, and he had a very good personal one, which he had been fond of cultivating there preferably to any other place. The Government acquiesced in Sir Joseph Yorke's being rechosen for Dover, and Mr. J. Y. came in for Ryegate on a family interest, so we were all prepared to take our fortune in the contest and squabble of a new Parliament.'

Lord Hardwicke himself, though exempt from the necessity of standing for Parliament, had in the same year an opportunity of becoming Chancellor of Cambridge University owing to the death of the old Duke of Newcastle, and Charles urged him to stand. Inclined to do so at first, he soon withdrew on the prospect of opposition, saying, 'I was easily prevailed with to drop my pretensions . . . and entirely acquiesced in my giving myself no further trouble about the matter,' a phrase which hits off exactly the attitude of mind now habitual with himself and Charles.

Long before the general election Lord Chatham had become too ill to retain any control over his ministry, and in October 1768 he formally resigned office. The government, under the influence of Lord North and the Duke of Bedford's 'Bloomsbury gang,' now frankly cast aside all remnants of Whig principles, and once more plunged the House of Commons into the morass of the Wilkes affair. But Lord Camden, though overruled in Council, still held the Great Seal; Charles Yorke therefore sulked in his garden at Hampstead, and by over-indulgence in the pleasures of the table destroyed the little strength of character he ever possessed. The only important question then at issue was the Wilkes case, and on this Charles obstinately refused to commit himself. To resume his brother's narrative:—

'It happened very unluckily for Mr. Yorke, that before the sitting down of the new Parliament the whole attention of Government as well as Opposition was engaged in Wilkes's business. My brother had always a strong dislike to his cause and character, had filed the first information for the famous No. 45 as Attorney-General, and spoke with remark-

able zeal and spirit at Guildhall on the actions brought by the Journeymen Printers against the King's Messengers. He took a warm part in both the Middlesex elections in favour of Sir William Beauchamp, who was his relation by marriage, and all the ill-usage he had received from the Court could not induce him to support one of the many Opposition points which arose out of this complicated subject. . . . When the question arose towards the close of this Session about the *power* of the House of Commons to disqualify, he would never give his opinion on it in public, tho' to a few friends in private, if he was asked, he declared himself strongly for the power. After the House of Commons had voted in Colonel Luttrell, the question of Right was taken up again on a petition of some Middlesex Electors, and, as I foresaw it was likely to become a very serious matter, I pressed him most earnestly one morning when he called upon me in St. James's Square to go down to the House and give his full opinion in the cause. I thought it incumbent upon him both as a lawyer and a member of Parliament, and I thought he might do it without being suspected of any intention to compliment the Court. There was not then the least prospect of Lord Campden's removal, and it was basely whispered abroad that his opinion went the other way. Lord Chatham's indeed was more publicly known. However, most unfortunately all my instances (and I never used stronger to him) did not prevail and he was inflexible in not attending the House.¹ I spoke to him at the same time upon his previous reserve to us, and the rather that Mr. John Yorke had without knowing his sentiments, much less his reasons (of which he was often too incommunicative), gone to the House and voted with the minority. He seemed not to dislike that, at the same time, he could not himself take that side of the Question, but was really of the contrary. In short, I never was so much dissatisfied with any conversation in my Life, and was very apprehensive that his conduct would

¹ 'Lord Temple told me in the summer of 1770—you gave very good counsel for himself but very bad for us.'

become more embarrassed and uncertain, and that he would end in pleasing nobody, not even himself.'

However, by Christmas 1769 Camden was so much out of harmony with the rest of his colleagues that he was certain to be dismissed if he did not resign. The Great Seal seemed once more within Charles's grasp, and his brother spurred him on to seize it.

'We talked the matter over backwards and forwards, and I must own my opinion then inclined for his accepting it. I remember I concluded with telling him, that if he had a mind to be Chancellor, he must not expect it could come to him in any agreeable mode; he must take it as the Times would give it. I should not have said this if his coming in would have laid any necessity upon him of acting against his real opinion or breaking any Engagement. I heartily wish I had stuck firm to *this* text, and never entered into speculative comments upon it; and it has confirmed me in an opinion, that people of a tolerable understanding judge better when left to themselves, than when confounded by the various opinions of Friends, where the point is at all delicate. . . .

'Not many days before Christmas, I had a private dinner at my own House with Mr. Yorke and my Brother John, on purpose that we might agree upon some plan of conduct. Mr. Y. seemed more irresolute than ever, and notwithstanding all we could urge was determined not to be at the House the first day, tho' it was said that some debate of consequence would arise. As well as I can recollect Mr. John Yorke and myself were clear in two points, That it would be unbecoming not to attend, and that he ought long ago to have explained himself to Lord Rockingham, that the world might not have run away with the idea that he particularly belonged to that connection. I believe we differed in opinion whether, *Rebus sic stantibus*, it would be expedient for Mr. Y. to accept the Great Seal.

'The meeting broke up without Mr. Yorke's coming to any clear decision, and when I pressed him to give his opinion in the House on the Disqualification question, he used these

memorable tho' unhappy words, "I cannot do it, because if I go with the Court they will betray me, or give me up as they did before, and if with the Opposition, it will be against my convictions." Mr. Yorke went to Tittenhanger three days before the Parliament began. He stayed over the first day, and on his return met with the Duke of Grafton's note which opened that future treaty.'

Lord Hardwicke was right. The debate was indeed one of consequence, and before Charles returned from Tittenhanger the storm of indignation which had long been gathering against the Government burst out in full fury. At the opening of the session on January 9, 1770, Lord Chatham, after an absence of three years, suddenly reappeared in the House of Lords, and in one of his finest speeches poured out the pent-up torrent of his wrath on the ministers who by their conduct of the Wilkes case had disgraced Parliament and by their arrogant incompetence in America were goading that country to revolt. The effect of the great statesman's battle-cry was instantaneous. The Opposition, if unable to conquer the King's corrupt majority, at least had a leader and a clear issue for which to fight; and the Government was plainly no longer the place for any true Whigs. Camden found his tongue again, and gave ministers the long-sought excuse for his dismissal.

At this point we may leave the Earl's narrative. An account by him of the succeeding days' events is to be found in the volume of MSS., besides other letters and documents written by Charles and himself and the Duke of Grafton. But the simplest and the most vivid recital of the facts is in a document begun in October 1772 by Charles's second wife, Agneta Yorke, and completed by her on November 20, 1774. Her dates, as is perhaps natural, considering the lapse of time, require some slight correction from other memoranda in the volume; but otherwise no one reading her account could fail to be convinced of its truth, for it seems to be wrung from her very soul. She is said to have been a most beautiful woman; without doubt she was a most unhappy

wife. Sir George Trevelyan, in his well-known and truly graphic account of these events, appears to have been in ignorance of this memoir; at any rate, he attributes to Lord Hardwicke a better part than he actually chose, even on his own showing. This memoir, if not the whole volume, will, it is hoped, some day be printed entire. All that is possible in this paper is to attempt to give by an epitome some idea of Mrs. Yorke's story.¹

Two days after Lord Chatham's speech Charles Yorke received a letter from the Duke of Grafton asking him to call on the following day. He guessed that this meant the offer of the Great Seal, and told his wife that he should probably refuse it. On the evening of January 12, 1770, he saw the Duke, but, instead of refusing outright, agreed to take a little time to consider his final answer, and was given until Sunday, the 14th, to decide. The right course to adopt would not, perhaps, have been obvious even to a less irresolute character than Charles Yorke. It seems fairly clear from his brother's journal that he had no profound aversion from the chief ministerial measures, and he must have felt that were he now to refuse the Great Seal he would never have it offered to him again; on the other hand, Lord Chatham's speech had brought it home to his family and to all the politicians to whom he was bound by early association that they could have no further part with the ministerial party, so that his acceptance would mean a definite severance from all his friends. This, however, is certain: that it was essentially a question to be decided by a man quietly in accordance with his own conscience. Instead of taking this course, poor weak Charles spent his few hours of respite rushing round to his friends' and relations' houses, collecting opinions from them all. His wife earnestly begged him to decline, and to live at peace with her and her children. Lord Rockingham was equally strong on the same side, and so also was

¹ I shall take the liberty of altering Mrs. Yorke's dates where they are obviously wrong. The only real mistake she makes is to antedate the offer of the Great Seal to her husband by four days.

his brother John. Lord Hardwicke did not at first commit himself. Charles himself was still unshaken in his first idea of refusing. But on the 13th he went to see Lord Mansfield, and his wife received a visit from Lord Hardwicke's wife. Lady Grey was all for Charles's accepting, and during a long visit brought up every possible argument for that view, including the statement that she represented her husband's opinion as well as her own. Mrs. Yorke, already half-distracted by the uncertainty, was so overborne by the flood of reasoning that, as soon as her sister-in-law had left, she wrote out for her husband a memorandum of reasons for acceptance. Charles meanwhile had been undergoing a similar experience with Lord Mansfield, who, having previously refused the post himself, now exerted all his unrivalled arts as a pleader to induce Charles to accept. With a mind, therefore, half-prepared, he took his wife's memorandum to read by his dressing-room fire. 'I could perceive,' she says, 'that it made an impression on him, for I saw the tears stand in his eyes.' He then decided to ask for further time for consideration, and 'from this moment Mr. Yorke began to lose rest and appetite.' She herself began ardently to wish he would accept, if only to settle the matter.

The next three days were spent by Charles in further going to and fro to collect opinions from his friends. Lord Chief Justice Wilmot, who, like Lord Mansfield, had also refused the Chancellorship, urged Charles to undertake the office. Lord Rockingham and John Yorke again dissuaded him, while Lord Mansfield once more encouraged him. Lord Hardwicke now changed his ground and adopted Lord Rockingham's tone. Finally, on the evening of the 16th, Charles had an interview with the King, and, in accordance with his intention previously announced to his wife, declined the Great Seal. But on his return Mrs. Yorke saw that 'peace was never more to return to his bosom,' for when he had refused, the King had made it plain that he would never have another such opportunity.

The wife was right in her forebodings. Next day, the 17th, there was a levée, which Charles told her he should attend. She begged him not to, since the matter was now decided, and instead, as he was looking very ill, to go off at once to the country. But the poor moth could not resist the light; and, with the lame excuse that he must needs make his bow to the King, he went once more to the Palace. She, full of anxious fear, remained at home. Four o'clock, the dinner hour, struck, but he had not returned. She waited dinner till six, and soon afterwards his clerk came with the rumour that her husband was Lord Chancellor. Then at last Charles himself appeared—the rumour was true—the King had taken him into his closet after the levée and there commanded him to accept, adding that he himself had not slept for anxiety. Charles had yielded, and for the moment 'felt a serenity to which he had for some time been a stranger'; but on his way home had been to see his brother, with whom he found Lord Rockingham. Both were 'outrageous . . . Lord Hardwicke (tho' formerly so anxious that I should take it) has exceeded all bounds of Temper, Reason, and even common Civility. . . . If I lose the support of my Family I shall be undone.' It appears from Lord Hardwicke's own account that he was chiefly annoyed at the figure he himself would cut after announcing Charles's refusal to all his friends, and that he had very little thought of higher considerations.

After dinner Charles had to return to the Palace to receive the Great Seal and kiss hands on his appointment, and his wife, by his orders, went to St. James's Square to soften matters with Lord Hardwicke. In this she partially succeeded, until Charles came in on his return from the King. Thereupon the Earl broke out afresh, and was only softened by Mrs. Yorke's tears. 'I believe,' she adds, 'he meant to say something kind, but he has not a graceful manner of doing things.' Then the new Chancellor and his wife returned home, and 'Mr. Woodcock followed in the chariot with the Great Seal.'

The story of the next three days is shortly told. That

night there was no sleep for Charles, who in his anguish called out that 'his brothers had murdered sleep,' and 'that it would have been kinder of them to have shot him in the head than have wounded him so deeply.' On the 18th, though very ill, he rose to receive suitors and other visitors, among whom were John Yorke and the Dean of Lincoln. In the evening his wife, also ill herself, came up to his room. She saw that 'Death was in his Face,' and he talked of giving up the Great Seal and of going away to hide in the country with her. 'I tried every method to awake and amuse him, but in vain. I could support it no longer. I fell upon my knees and begged of him not to afflict himself so much, that he would resume his fortitude and trust to his own judgment—in short, I said a great deal which I remember now no more; my sensations were little short of distraction at that time.' On the morning of the 19th he vomited blood, and, when Mrs. Yorke came to him, was speechless, but after a time said to her: 'How can I repay your kindness, my dear Love? God will reward you! I cannot; be comforted.' She saw him alive no more, for after this she herself was too ill to be moved from her bed. Lord Hardwicke, however, who had spent the 18th in quiet reflection at Richmond, came to see him on the 19th with the intention of supporting him in his resolution to be Chancellor, but it was too late; his brother was too disordered to be talked to. In the evening of the 20th Charles Yorke died.¹

'The day after the proper officers came for the Great Seal, and the King and his Ministers forgot that there ever was such a man! whom take him for all in all, we ne'er shall look upon his like again.'

With these fond words Mrs. Yorke brings her sad tale to an end, and with that also closes the history of this generation

¹ I do not here discuss the vexed question whether Charles Yorke actually committed suicide or died a natural death. The matter can never probably be decided with certainty. I am inclined to think, especially after reading Mrs. Yorke's narrative, that the anxiety and indecision of these days preying upon a constitution already impaired by over-indulgence are quite sufficient to account for his death without resorting to the explanation of violent means.

of the Yorkes. The King had not even the grace to grant to Charles Yorke's son the barony of Morden, which would have been his had his father not been too ill to affix the Great Seal to the patent. The Earl contented himself with advising other people on politics during the rest of his life, and the Dean of Lincoln in due course became a bishop. Sir Joseph, indeed, continued to do good work for his country at the Hague, and justly earned his barony of Dover. But as a family of consequence in the State, such as we saw them at the beginning of this narrative, they were dead. It was left to later generations of the Yorkes, no longer brought up in the belief that they were indispensable to the State, to revert to the old Earl's strenuous strain, and to produce statesmen, soldiers, and sailors who have done honour to their country and their ancestry.

DISCUSSION.

THE PRESIDENT, in a detailed criticism of the subject-matter of the paper, pointed out that the resignation of Charles Yorke in November 1763 was really explained by the close alliance of his father, Lord Hardwicke, with the Duke of Newcastle and the great Whig families. Their expectations from Chatham's interview with the King in the preceding August had been disappointed, and pressure was brought to bear upon Yorke by his father and the duke to resign. Again, Charles Yorke was obviously at variance with the Government on the important question of the legality of General Warrants. He was not a man to hold a professional question lightly, and this professional feeling influenced his conduct in more than one crisis of his career.

The President considered that the probable reason why the King slighted the second Lord Hardwicke in April 1764 was, because the Yorke connection had voted with the minority against the Government in February of that year.

He certainly thought that the MS. described by Mr. Williams appeared to be worthy of publication *in extenso*. In that case, however, it would require to be very carefully edited. The family bias must be discounted, and it might be shown (as in the matter of the alleged choice of the offices of Master of the Rolls or

Attorney-General given to Charles Yorke in 1764) that its statements were not always trustworthy. Indeed, these entries were evidently made as *mémoires pour servir*, to enhance the credit of the family. He proceeded to give, from original and independent authorities, the true history of Charles Yorke's attempts to make terms with the Government and obtain office in November 1764. A narrative of these transactions in the Grenville Correspondence clearly shows that there was no intention of yielding to his pretensions. It should be remarked, however, that by virtue of his patent of precedence Charles Yorke recovered a professional standing which he had lost on his resignation in 1763. Mrs. Yorke's affecting account of her husband's death, though doubtless ingenuous, is not necessarily conclusive. Contemporary evidence, specially from the Duke of Grafton's Autobiography, was adduced in favour of the theory of suicide: a tragedy of that sort would have been carefully concealed from his wife's knowledge. It may be suggested that Mrs. Yorke's contribution to the family history was made at the request of the second Lord Hardwicke, who required it for the purpose of the *mémoire* above referred to.