

**TWO SPEECHES ON
CONCILIATION WITH
AMERICA AND TWO LETTERS
ON IRISH QUESTIONS**

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Two speeches on conciliation with America and Two letters on Irish questions by Edmund Burke

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EDMUND BURKE

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TWO SPEECHES
ON
CONCILIATION WITH AMERICA
AND
TWO LETTERS ON IRISH QUESTIONS

BY
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INTRODUCTION.

In July 1765 Edmund Burke, then thirty-five years old, began his political career as secretary to the Marquis of Rockingham, who had just undertaken the formation of a Ministry. Burke presently entered Parliament as member for Wendover, through the interest of Lord Verney. The American colonies were at that time united in vigorous resistance to a Stamp Act, which involved claim and use of the right of an English Parliament to impose direct taxes on colonies that were not represented in it.

There had been indirect taxation since the days of our English Commonwealth, when the Navigation Act of 1651 required all colonial exports to England to be shipped only in American or English vessels. After the Restoration, a second Navigation Act, in 1660, ordered that most of the exports from the colonies should be shipped only to England or to an English colony, and in American or English vessels. In 1663 a third Navigation Act required that most of the imports into the colonies should be shipped only from England or an English colony, and in American or English vessels. In 1672 there were added duties upon certain enumerated articles, in passing from one colony to another. This involved the establishment of royal custom-houses and revenue officers in service of the Crown. In Massachusetts these changes were opposed; the General Court of the colony resolved "that the Acts of Navigation are an invasion of the rights and privileges of the subjects of his Majesty in this colony, they not being represented in the Parliament." In 1680 a notice of the appointment of a collector of the royal customs for New England was torn down at Boston by order of the colonial magistrates. The opposition was not effectual, and the number of revenue officers increased.

In 1696 a Board of Trade was established, consisting of a President and seven members, entitled the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations. Among other duties this body had charge of the execution of the Navigation Acts, and it was to bring the colonies more strictly under royal control. The Board of Trade proposed, therefore, in 1697, the appointment of a captain-general, with absolute power to levy and organize an army without reference to any colonial

authority. In 1698 it prohibited the export of colonial woollens even from one colony to another. In 1706 it recommended, but did not obtain, the resumption of charters still held by some of the colonies. In 1714 a Secretary of State was made chief of the Board of Trade. The Duke of Newcastle, who held this office from 1724 to 1748, supposed New England to be an island.

The operations of the Royal African Company, which had been first formed in 1688, reconstituted in 1631, and again in 1663, and which acquired wealth by the trade in slaves, were at the same time promoted. The Treaty of Utrecht, in 1713, contained a contract on the part of Spain that Great Britain alone should supply her colonies with slaves; and in 1750 Great Britain received, by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, an indemnity of a hundred thousand pounds for giving up this right. When Virginia and South Carolina laid a prohibitory duty on the importation of slaves, their acts were annulled by royal command. In 1750, when the trade in slaves was made independent of this company, the reason given in the British Parliament was that "the slave trade is very advantageous to Great Britain." The colonists of the Southern States of America had therefore endeavoured in vain to check the importation of slave labour.

In 1733 the Molasses Act laid duties in the American colonies upon molasses, sugar, and rum imported from any but the British West India Islands. The agent of New York in England protested that this was "divesting the colonists of their rights as the king's natural-born subjects and Englishmen, in levying subsidies upon them against their own consent." In 1732 the American colonists were forbidden to export hats; in 1750 they were forbidden to erect mills for slitting or rolling iron, or furnaces for making steel.

In 1754 the Mutiny Act, providing for the discipline and quarters of the English army, was extended to the colonies. In 1755 the Earl of Loudoun was sent over as Governor of Virginia, and commander-in-chief over the thirteen colonies of America. Permanence of the appointment of judges was next struck at; their commissions were issued, which were to run no longer "during good behaviour," but "during the king's pleasure." New York in 1761 refused to pay the salary of a chief justice appointed, and he procured for himself from the Board of Trade a grant to be paid from the quit-rents of the province. There came claims also in 1761 for writs of assistance authorizing search for goods imported in defiance of the acts of trade.

Thus a long course of unwise policy had raised a spirit of antagonism, and much advance had been made towards the alienation of the American colonies, when there was added for the first time a direct taxation for revenue to the long series of taxations for regulation of trade. At the beginning of the year 1764 the British Parliament voted that it had a right to tax the colonies. George Grenville by the Sugar Act in 1764 laid duties upon sugar and other articles of colonial import. By the Stamp Act in 1765 he imposed in the American colonies a stamp duty, like that in England, upon business documents and newspapers.

This disregard of American feeling not only gave new force to the growing discontent, but provoked the organizing of resistance. Massachusetts proposed a Colonial Congress at New York, which first met on

the 7th of October 1765, and twelve days afterwards, on the 19th of October, agreed to a Declaration of Rights.

Just in this critical time the Ministry of Lord Rockingham had newly taken the responsibility of government. Lord Rockingham—himself no speaker; one who had been attacking him was asked, "How could you worry a poor, dumb creature so?"—made Burke his private secretary, brought Burke into the House of Commons, and spoke through the voice of Burke. If Burke did not inspire his American policy, the policy was also Burke's, and Burke was its great interpreter. The Ministry was Whig; but Burke was essentially Conservative. He had the practical mind of a statesman; and he strongly dreaded revolutionary change. Inconsiderate zeal to force the colonies into submission to imperial claims, against which opposition was fast rising to revolutionary heat, he met by steady labour in the interests of peace. The Stamp Act was repealed, and Parliament satisfied itself with the assertion of imperial right to tax. Assert by all means, argued Burke, your right to tax the colonies directly for imperial revenue. If you take care never to exercise the right, it will be undisputed. He taught by the experience that shows the peril of enforcing such a right. The Rockingham Ministry was followed in July 1766 by that of the elder Pitt, who took only a small office in his own Ministry, and with it a peerage as Earl of Chatham. The Duke of Grafton took the place at the head of the Treasury vacated by Lord Rockingham, and the Ministry included men who would be foremost in enforcing rights of taxation against the colonists.

American opposition was disarmed by the repeal of the Stamp Act; statues were voted to Pitt and to the king; removal of the active cause of irritation brought back the old spirit of loyalty; while at home the Parliament of 1767 was reversing all the policy of peace. It created a Board of Revenue Commissioners for America; it passed a Tea Act that imposed duties on tea and other imports into the colonies, as means of providing for payment of troops and for the salaries of royal governors and judges; it also declared the New York Assembly incapable of legislation until it had assented to the Quartering Act of 1765. In 1768 the ordering of British troops into Boston, to control the public feeling excited by this policy of coercion, led to the gathering of a convention from all Massachusetts, that urged in vain upon the governor the summoning of the Legislature. In 1769 a new Act of Parliament directed that all cases of treason in the colonies should be tried in the mother country. This drew from Washington the declaration that no man should scruple or hesitate a moment to use arms in defence of freedom. "Yet arms, I would beg leave to add, should be the last resource."

In 1770 the Assembly of Virginia endeavoured to lay restrictions on the slave trade; but the royal Governor was at once directed by the Ministry at home to consent to no laws affecting the interests of the slave-dealers. Attempts of other colonies in the same direction were met in the same way. By 1773 the irritation of the colonists had been urged so far that three ships in the port of Boston, bringing cargoes of tea upon which duty was to be raised, were boarded and their tea thrown into the dock.

The Duke of Grafton's Ministry had been succeeded by that of Lord North who ruled as agent for the king, and during the whole of his disastrous Ministry, from 1770 to 1782, the country suffered from that interference of the king and the king's friends which Burke condemned in 1773 in his *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*. It was on the 19th of April 1774 that Burke made the famous speech on *American Taxation* which is the first piece in the present volume.

In 1774, at a meeting of the county of Fairfax, with George Washington in the chair, it was resolved "that during our present difficulties and distress no slaves ought to be imported into any of the British colonies on this continent; and we take this opportunity of declaring our most earnest wishes to see an entire stop for ever put to such a wicked, cruel, and unnatural trade.

The Government at home met opposition by enactments that virtually deprived Massachusetts of its charter, and placed it under strict British rule. Virginia voted in May 1774 that an attack upon one colony was an attack upon all British America, and recommended a General Congress, which first met as the Continental Congress at Philadelphia on the 5th of September 1774. On the 20th of October it signed the agreement that established the American Association. On the day of the separation of this Congress, October 26th, the Congress of Massachusetts organized its militia, and began to prepare for the alternative of forcible resistance. Other colonies followed the example.

In the month of the first meeting of the Continental Congress at Philadelphia there was a general election in England, swayed by strong feeling against the colonists, and a large majority was returned of members pledged to a policy of coercion. Burke entered that Parliament as member for Bristol, then the second town in the kingdom; and on the 22nd of March 1775 he laid before the House of Commons thirteen resolutions for reconciliation with America, and made the greatest of all his speeches, that on *Conciliation with America*, which is also contained in this volume. The resolutions were rejected by a vote on the first of 270 against 78.

On the 19th of April 1775 occurred, at Lexington and Concord, the first serious affray between British soldiers and colonial militia. The British were repulsed, and about three hundred were killed, wounded, or taken prisoners.

On the 10th of May a new Congress assembled in Philadelphia; and on the 15th of June George Washington received his commission as Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United Colonies. Until after the rejection of a second petition of Congress in 1775, "I never," said John Jay, "heard an American of any class or of any description express a wish for the independence of the colonies." But the wish now was forced upon the colonists, and a Declaration of American Independence, having obtained the unanimous vote of all the colonies, was adopted on the 4th of July 1776. Finally, after a vain struggle, into which the mother country was misled, American Independence was obtained by treaties signed with the United States on the 3rd of September 1783.

H. M.

BURKE'S TWO SPEECHES
ON
CONCILIATION WITH AMERICA.



AMERICAN TAXATION.

SIR,—I agree with the honourable gentleman who spoke last, that this subject is not new in this House. Very disagreeably to this House, very unfortunately to this nation, and to the peace and prosperity of this whole empire, no topic has been more familiar to us. For nine long years, session after session, we have been lashed round and round this miserable circle of occasional arguments and temporary expedients. I am sure our heads must turn, and our stomachs nauseate with them. We have had them in every shape; we have looked at them in every point of view. Invention is exhausted; reason is fatigued; experience has given judgment; but obstinacy is not yet conquered.

The honourable gentleman has made one endeavour more to diversify the form of this disgusting argument. He has thrown out a speech