

"Wednesday, the 7th, was the fatal day."* Walpole writes to a friend, "You may like to know one is alive, after a massacre, and the conflagration of a capital—the most horrible sight I ever beheld, and which, for six hours together, I expected to end in half the town being reduced to ashes."† The first great operation of the morning was to attack to Bank of England. Two attempts were made to force an entrance; but the building was well guarded by parties of soldiers, and the assailants retreated upon the first volley. The shops were shut. The terrified inhabitants of the great thoroughfares chalked "No Popery" on their shutters. The mob appeared to have the lives and property of a population of a million wholly in their power. Yet their numbers were not everywhere formidable in comparison with the mischief they effected. Johnson observed not more than a hundred men plundering the Session House in the Old Bailey—leisurely, in full security, as men lawfully employed. This "full security," which Johnson imputes to "the cowardice of a commercial city," was really to be ascribed to the extraordinary timidity of the king's responsible advisers. London and the neighbourhood were full of soldiers, who had been sent for from distant parts. But there was hesitation about their employment. There was a prevailing notion—a very proper scruple under ordinary circumstances—that the military could not act except under the direction of a magistrate; and there was a mistaken belief that they could not fire until an hour had expired after the reading of the Riot Act. The king himself called a Council on Wednesday; and submitted the question to them as to the construction of the Riot Act. In 1768 verdicts had been found by juries against officers and soldiers who had put down riots with the loss of life. The Council would not decide upon a doubtful point of law. The king turned to Wedderburn, the attorney-general, and desired his opinion. He immediately declared that military force might, be exercised, if no other means of restraint are effectual, when a tumultuous assemblage are engaged in committing a felony, such as setting fire to a house. This opinion was subsequently confirmed by lord Mansfield in the House of Lords, upon a debate as to the employment of that military power which had saved the capital: "The military have been called in, and very wisely called in, not as soldiers but as citizens: no matter whether their coats be red or brown, they have been called in aid of the law." The opinion of Wedderburn satisfied the doubts of the Council. The king declared that to have been his own opinion; and a Proclama-

* Walpole's "Last Journals."

† Letter to Cole.

tion was immediately issued, commanding all householders to keep within doors, with their servants and apprentices, and announcing that the king's officers were now authorized to repress the riots by an immediate exercise of force. The decision did not come an hour too soon. On that evening, when every decent citizen was hurrying home to obey the proclamation, London was on fire in thirty-six different places. "One might see," says Johnson, "the glare of conflagration fill the sky from many parts. The sight was dreadful." The most terrible scene was in Holborn, where the distillery of Mr. Langdale, a Roman Catholic, was set on fire; and the unrectified spirits pouring into the streets were lapped up by the wretched crowds of men, women, and children, who perished in helpless drunkenness amidst liquid fire or falling timbers. The military poured into every street where there was tumult. If the command of the officer to disperse was not obeyed, they fired at once. Through that terrible night sleep was banished from a metropolis wholly unused to scenes of anarchy. The next morning all was quiet. Nothing remained to do but to bury the dead, to attend the wounded, and to fill the remaining gaols with miserable prisoners.

It is unnecessary for us to pursue the painful history of these disgraceful riots into the subsequent details, which afforded abundant matter for the meagre newspapers of the time. Lord George Gordon was committed to the Tower on a charge of high treason; and, being tried early in the following year, was so successfully defended by Erskine, then rising into high reputation, that the jury returned a verdict of acquittal. Of the miserable rioters, a hundred and thirty-five were tried in Middlesex and Surrey, of whom about half were convicted, and twenty-one were executed. The Session of Parliament was approaching to a close. Matters of the greatest importance had been agitated without any practical results. Proposals for Economical Reform, which had been welcomed at the beginning of the Session, were rejected or frittered away during its progress. Parliamentary Reform came to be regarded as an impossible theory. The contemporary historian describes this period with a calm judgment: "It may be said with confidence, that so great a number of important affairs were never agitated in any one Session. The riot, in the close, threw a general damp upon all endeavours whatever for reformation, however unconnected with its particular object. Popular fury seemed, for that time at least, the greatest of all possible evils. Administration then gathered, and afterwards procured, no small degree of power, from a tumult which appeared to threaten the subversion of all govern-

ment."* The Parliament was prorogued on the 8th of July; and on the 1st of September it was dissolved.

During the domestic excitement that had lasted through the Session of Parliament, the external affairs of the country were regarded with comparative indifference. The dread of invasion had passed away. The war with America appeared to drag on without any decisive results. Gibraltar was invested by the Spaniards; but the siege had not as yet assumed the interesting character which the resolute defence of the key of the Mediterranean subsequently commanded. The naval ascendancy of Great Britain was, however, manifested in a way that gave the nation confidence that its ships could be well manned and bravely led to battle. Sir George Rodney, on the 16th of January, engaged the Spanish admiral off Cape St. Vincent, and obtained a complete victory, having captured four ships of the line, and destroyed four others. He then proceeded to the relief of Gibraltar. Sailing to the West Indies, he there encountered a combined French and Spanish fleet, but was unable to bring them to a general engagement. But the vigilance of the Spanish government inflicted a severe blow upon our mercantile marine. Knowing when the East India and West India fleets would be off the Azores, with a convoy of only two ships of war, a powerful squadron intercepted them, and carried sixty sail, laden with valuable merchandize, as prizes into Cadiz. The Dutch and English governments were beginning to squabble about violations of neutrality, which the next year gave occasion to a war with Holland. The maritime claims of England produced also an "Armed Neutrality" between Russia, Sweden, and Denmark, which threatened danger. At this period it would have been difficult to affirm that the government of George III. had a friend in Europe.

We have now to return to the events of the war in America. At the end of December, 1779, general Clinton, with a force of five thousand men, sailed from New York in the fleet of admiral Arbuthnot, for the purpose of investing Charleston, in South Carolina. The American forces within this important place were under the command of general Lincoln; who, with the assistance of French engineers, had constructed some formidable defences. The progress of the expedition was delayed by bad weather. It was the first of April before the British army broke ground before Charleston. The siege was pursued with great vigour and ability, under the direction of Clinton, who had detached lord Cornwallis, with a large force, to cut off the communication between the garrison and

* "Annual Register," 1780, p. 280*.

the interior. An assault was contemplated; but on the 12th of May, Lincoln capitulated. The surrender of six thousand men, with four hundred pieces of cannon, and large magazines, was an important triumph for the British commanders, and gave a renewed spirit to the war. General Clinton in June returned to New York, leaving lord Cornwallis in command. He had only four thousand regular troops to defend Charleston, to contend against a probable invasion of the province, and to repress a spirit of disaffection amongst the inhabitants. It is to be regretted that he considered it within the line of his duty to make severe examples of those Americans who, from those shifting influences of fear and hope which mark such contests, deserted the royal cause for which they had engaged their services. The laws of war certainly justified the punishment of desertion; but the peculiar circumstances of this war called for the exercise of great forbearance, except in cases of signal treachery. The American army which was approaching Charleston was under the command of general Gates. The vanguards of the two armies became engaged at Camden on the 16th of August, when the Americans sustained a complete defeat. Some of the prisoners taken in this battle were hanged, they having manifested their change of opinion by having British protections on their persons. Death was denounced against all militia-men who, having served in the British armies, had joined the revolutionists. Estates were threatened to be sequestered of those who had opposed the British interests in the province. American citizens of Charleston were forcibly removed on board ship to St. Augustine, in Florida. Complaint was made of this proceeding; and Cornwallis thus defends it: "I have only to say that the insolence of their behaviour, the threats with which they, in the most daring manner, endeavoured to intimidate our friends; the infamous falsehoods which they propagated through the town and country, and the correspondence which they constantly kept up with the enemy, rendered it indispensably necessary that they should be either closely confined or sent out of the province."* In a letter to Clinton of the 29th of August, Cornwallis details how he had ordered militia-men, who had been enrolled and then revolted, to be hung up.† He makes constant complaints to American generals of their severities. Washington writes a letter of remonstrance against the severities of Cornwallis, which he addresses to Clinton; and Clinton replies, that it has been his invariable desire to soften the horrors of war, as it was the desire of every officer in his majesty's service; "but proper punishments upon guilty per-

* "Correspondence of Cornwallis," vol. i. p. 72.

† *Ibid.* p. 61.

sons may become sometimes necessary." * Sir Henry takes rather a high tone at the notion of any remonstrance being addressed to him: "I desire to conclude this subject by informing you, sir, that I esteem myself accountable for my public conduct to his majesty the king, to my country, and my own conscience." Lord Rawdon, afterwards lord Moira, who commanded a post in connection with the main army, appears to have gone somewhat beyond the proper bounds of punishment for guilty persons. He offered a reward of ten guineas to the inhabitants of the country if they would bring in the head of any deserter, and five guineas if they would bring him in alive. He justifies his measure as being merely intended to terrify. During the war in the Southern States the severities practised by both parties were a proof that embittered feelings on both sides would endure far too long for the restoration of a cordial amity, whatever might be the issue of the war. The word "retaliation" was of too frequent use by those in command; and Cornwallis himself saw that the contest was assuming a character in which it would "become truly savage." After various encounters, each of the Southern armies went into winter-quarters.

Until the summer of 1780 the British and American armies in the Central States were comparatively inactive. Washington had to encounter the greatest difficulties in the maintenance of his troops. During the absence of Clinton the royalist forces were not strong enough to attempt any important movement. The prospect was changed by the arrival in July, off Rhode Island, of a French armament of six thousand men, under the command of the comte de Rochambeau. A commission of lieutenant-general in the French service had been sent to Washington, and the French troops were to be under his orders. This great reinforcement of the Americans landed in Rhode Island. There were various delays which prevented Clinton attacking them. But a considerable addition to the fleet under admiral Arbuthnot having arrived from England, the French troops were effectually blockaded in their position at Newport, and their purpose of combined operations with Washington was prevented. The two generals, however, arranged a meeting at Hartford, in Connecticut; Greene having the command of the American army during the temporary absence of Washington.

Benedict Arnold, who had done such signal service against the British in Canada, had, in his capacity of chief in Philadelphia, after that city had been evacuated by Clinton, been guilty of some

* "Correspondence of Cornwallis," vol. i. p. 58.

irregularity for which he had been reprimanded by a court-martial. He was dissatisfied with Congress; and the French alliance was distasteful to him. Washington recommended his appointment to the charge of West Point, and other important posts, commanding the Hudson; and at West Point he was stationed in August. He had, long previously, opened a secret correspondence with sir Henry Clinton; in which he proposed to join the royal army, and give possession of the forts and their garrisons under his orders. The treacherous overture was accepted, and all honour and advantage promised to the traitor. The correspondence was conducted on the part of Clinton by major John André, the adjutant-general of the army, who signed his letters "John Anderson." Arnold adopted the signature of "Gustavus." A meeting between the correspondents was proposed to take place during the time when Washington had gone to confer with Rochambeau. Clinton consented, warning the ardent young officer against entering the American lines, carrying papers, or assuming any disguise.

On the night of the 21st of September, André went up the Hudson in the Vulture sloop of war, and was conveyed in a boat to the place appointed for his rendezvous with Arnold. It was on the western bank, on the neutral ground. The conference lasted till the dawn; when, to complete their arrangements, André was persuaded to accompany Arnold to a house within the American lines. When his business was finished, and he went to the river to be conveyed on board the sloop, he found that it had been compelled to drop down the Hudson nearer New York. He returned; received a pass from Arnold, under his assumed name of John Anderson; changed his uniform for plain clothes; and did the other dangerous thing against which he was expressly cautioned—he received papers from Arnold, explaining the state of the fort at West Point. Having crossed the river, with the intention of proceeding on horseback to New York, he had passed securely through the American lines, and was again on neutral ground, when he was seized by three men of the American militia. He was conducted to their commander colonel Jameson. The mode in which Arnold was informed of the capture of André does not very clearly appear, the narratives being somewhat conflicting; but, upon learning the event, Arnold saw the immediate necessity of his own escape; and getting on board the sloop which was to have secured safety to André, he reached the British quarters at New York. Two days after, Washington arrived at Arnold's house, and learnt the news of his absence and his defection.

On the return of Washington to his camp on the 28th he found

André there under arrest. He had previously received a letter from the prisoner, avowing his name and rank. The case was immediately referred to a court of general officers, fourteen in number. Twelve of these were Americans, with whom La Fayette and Steuben were associated. The deportment of the prisoner was altogether consistent with the manliness of a British officer, and his own sense of honour. He would commit no other person. He would resort to no subterfuge to defend himself. Steuben, it is reported, was exceedingly afflicted at what he considered the inevitable result. "It was impossible," said the old German, "to save him. He put us to no proof; but in an open, manly manner, confessed everything but a premeditated design to deceive." * The verdict of the council of officers was that major André ought to be considered as a spy from the enemy; and that, agreeably to the law and usage of nations, it was their opinion he ought to suffer death. Before the inquiry took place, Clinton had addressed a letter to Washington demanding André's release, on the ground that he had gone ashore with a flag of truce sent by Arnold, and when arrested was under the protection of a pass which Arnold had authority to give. Washington informed sir Henry of the decision to which the court had come. A deputation was then sent to the American head-quarters, who were received by Greene, the president of the court; but their arguments, and offers to exchange any prisoner that might be selected, were unavailing. Washington confirmed the sentence that the brave, enthusiastic, accomplished officer should die the death of a felon. André requested to die as a soldier. To that request no answer was given. He made up his mind, as expressed in a touching letter to sir Henry Clinton, for any fate to which an honest zeal for the king's service might have devoted him. On the 2nd of October that execution took place under the warrant of Washington, which is held by a very just and right-minded historian, as "by far the greatest, and perhaps the only, blot in his most noble career." † We are constrained to dissent from this opinion; but we prefer to rest our judgment upon another authority than our own. We extract the following passage from a brief memoir of André, published in one of the earliest miscellanies that was addressed to the growing power to read amongst the humbler classes:—

"At the period when the event took place, a torrent of indignation burst forth against Washington, who was charged with cold malignity, in thus sacrificing a meritorious officer, in a manner so unworthy of his character. This is the tone of feeling which

* "Life of Steuben," p. 290. † Lord Mahon's "History," vol. vii. p. 106.

dictated Anna Seward's monody to his memory, and filled the newspapers of the day with every violent epithet. It is to be regretted that some of our historians have adopted this view of the transaction. But highly as we estimate the claims of our lamented countryman to the gratitude of this nation, we must acquit Washington of all injustice towards him. Major André fell a sacrifice to that ardent zeal which animated his whole conduct, and to the ill-advice which he received from Arnold. Against his own better judgment and intentions, he assumed a disguise in name and dress, and took charge of secret papers within the enemy's lines, which distinctly fixed upon him the character of a spy, and subjected him to all the perils of discovery. His letter to sir Henry Clinton bears witness to the personal kindness he received from Washington, who doubtless gave no reply to his last request, in order to save his feelings the pain of a refusal. Had that general consented to change the mode of his death, he would have abandoned the principle upon which his fate was determined. The critical posture of affairs at that moment compelled the American chief to avail himself of an event so important to his future success. The strong measure he adopted was designed to show that the contest must be decided by force of arms—that he had thrown away the scabbard—and that he was resolved to extinguish at a blow those intrigues by which his former operations had been betrayed. As the success of major André's confederacy with Arnold would probably have destroyed the last hope of the Revolutionists, so the terror produced by his execution, and the timely discovery of Arnold's defection, ultimately led to the independence of the United States." †

* "Plain Englishman," vol. ii. 1821. This periodical was jointly conducted by Mr. Locker, the secretary of Greenwich Hospital, and by the author of the "Popular History." Mr. Locker was selected, as the friend of the three sisters of major André, to attend on the 28th of November, 1821, as their representative, when the remains of their brother, disinterred in America, were placed in a vault in Westminster Abbey, near the cenotaph which had been erected to his memory by command of George III. The memoir of André, containing the passage we quote, was written by Mr. Locker immediately after the ceremony which he had attended.

† "Two Letters to Gentlemen in France."