

others felt, "that a person in my confidential post, taking a different line from him on a question of such infinite magnitude, might lead to a doubt of his sincerity." *

At the opening of the Session on the 24th of January, 1789, the king informed the parliament that disputes which appeared to threaten an interruption to the tranquillity of Europe had been brought to an amicable conclusion. The tranquillity of Europe was always liable to be interrupted by the intrigues of the great powers for extended territory and influence. The emperor Joseph had been attempting to coerce the States of Holland, distracted by two contending political parties, into a surrender of the fortresses of the Austrian Netherlands, which had been always garrisoned by the Dutch since the conclusion of the War of the Succession, as a bulwark against the inroads of France. After four years of dispute and threatened war, the court of Versailles concluded a treaty of commercial league, and close alliance, with Holland, by which the emperor was restrained, but which placed the States very much in the power of France. Great Britain abstained from interference. It would have been difficult to interfere, whilst in Holland there was a powerful faction opposed to the House of Orange.

Pitt, at this time, was almost exclusively occupied with a great financial scheme, from which, with more than ordinary complacency, he sanguinely expected the most wonderful results. He wrote to Wilberforce, "The produce of our revenues is glorious; and I am half mad with a project which will give our supplies the effect almost of magic in the reduction of debt." † It was the scheme of the Sinking Fund. The public income now happily exceeded the expenditure, and it was proposed that the notion of an accumulating fund to be applied to the reduction of the debt, which was partially attempted by Sir Robert Walpole, should be engrafted upon the perpetual financial arrangements; that a million should be annually placed in the hands of commissioners, so as to be beyond the power of a minister to withdraw. It was believed that accumulating at compound interest, with the addition of such terminable annuities as should fall in, it would gradually extinguish the claims of the public creditor. The plan might have worked well, if the minister had been debarred from contracting any new loans. For years the public had as much confidence in this scheme as its author had. It was boasted, that "in eight years, Mr. Pitt's sinking fund, in fact, purchased 13, 617, 895*l.* of

* "Diaries and Correspondence of George Rose," vol. i. p. 35.

† "Correspondence of Wilberforce," vol. i. p. 9.

stock at the cost of 10, 599, 265*l.* of cash;" and it was proclaimed that "this measure, then, is of more importance to Great Britain than the acquisition of the American mines." * There was a superstitious belief, long entertained, that the new sinking fund would, "by some mysterious power of propagation belonging to money, put into the pocket of the public creditor great sums not taken out of the pocket of the tax-payer" † The delusion was manifest when it was demonstrated that during the war the debt had been actually augmented, to the extent of eleven millions, by the less advantageous terms upon which money was borrowed by the Exchequer, compared with the purchases made by the commissioners who managed the sinking fund. A great authority in finance has put the whole philosophy of the matter in the form of an axiom: "No sinking fund can be efficient for the purpose of diminishing the debt if it be not derived from the excess of the public revenue over the public expenditure." ‡

On the opening of the Session on the 23rd of January, 1787, the king announced that he had concluded a treaty of navigation and commerce with the king of France. The negotiation was completed at Versailles, on the 26th of September, 1786. The provisions of this treaty were of the most liberal character. There was to be the most perfect freedom of intercourse allowed between the subjects and inhabitants of the respective dominions of the two sovereigns. The duties to be paid on French commodities in England were thus rated: Wines, no higher duties than on those of Portugal; brandy, seven shillings per gallon; vinegar, less than half the previous duty; olive-oil, the lowest duty paid by the most favoured nation. The following duties were to be levied reciprocally on both kingdoms: hardwares and cutlery, cabinet wares, furniture, turnery, not higher than 10 per cent. ad valorem; cotton and woollen manufactures, except mixed with silk, 12 per cent.; gauzes, 10 per cent.; linens, same as linens from Holland; saddlery, 15 per cent.; millinery, 12 per cent.; plate glass and glass ware, porcelain and earthenware, 12 per cent. We have already glanced at the general nature of this treaty in a commercial point of view. § Mr. Pitt set forth the political advantages of this measure in an argument worthy of a great statesman asserting principles of lasting importance: "Considering the treaty in its political view he should not hesitate to contend against the too-frequently advanced doctrine, that France was, and must be, the unalterable

* Chalmers' "Comparative Estimate, corrected to 1812," p. 139.

† Macaulay—"Biography of Pitt."

‡ "Works of David Ricardo," p. 140.

enemy of Britain. His mind revolted from this position as monstrous and impossible. To suppose that any nation could be unalterably the enemy of another was weak and childish. It had neither its foundation in the experience of nations, nor in the history of man. It was a libel on the constitution of political societies, and supposed the existence of diabolical malice in the original frame of man. But these absurd tenets were taken up and propagated; nay, it was carried farther; it was said, that by this treaty, the British nation was about blindly to throw itself into the arms of its constant and uniform foe. Men reasoned as if this treaty were not only to extinguish all jealousy from our bosoms, but also completely to annihilate our means of defence; as if by the treaty we gave up so much of our army, so much of our marine; as if our commerce was to be abridged, our navigation to be lessened, our colonies to be cut off or to be rendered defenceless, and as if all the functions of the State were to be sunk in apathy. What ground was there for this train of reasoning? Did the treaty suppose that the interval of peace between the two countries would be so totally unemployed by us as to disable us from meeting France in the moment of war with our accustomed strength? Did it not much rather, by opening new sources of wealth, speak this forcible language—that the interval of peace, as it would enrich the nation, would also prove the means of enabling her to combat her enemy with more effect when the day of hostility should come? It did more than this; by promoting habits of friendly intercourse, and of mutual benefit, while it invigorated the resources of Britain, it made it less likely that she should have occasion to call forth those resources. It certainly had at least the happy tendency to make the two nations enter into more intimate communion with one another, to enter into the same views even of taste and manners; and while they were mutually benefited by the connexion, and endeared to one another by the result of the common benefits, it gave a better chance for the preservation of harmony between them, while, so far from weakening, it strengthened their sinews for war. That we should not be taken unprepared for war, was a matter totally distinct from treaty." It is painful to behold Mr. Fox contending "that France was the natural foe of Great Britain, and that she wished by entering into a commercial treaty with us to tie our hands, and prevent our engaging in any alliances with other powers." The argument for perpetual international hostility was carried to the point of absurdity by Mr. Francis, who thus declaimed: "It seems we are arrived at a new enlightened era of affection for our neighbours, and of liber-

ality to our enemies, of which our uninstructed ancestors had no conception. The pomp of modern eloquence is employed to blast even the triumphs of lord Chatham's administration. The polemic laurels of the father must yield to the pacific myrtles which shadow the forehead of the son. Sir, the first and most prominent feature in the political character of lord Chatham was anti-gallican. His glory is founded on the resistance he made to the united power of the House of Bourbon. The present minister has taken the opposite road to fame; and France, the object of every hostile principle in the policy of lord Chatham, is the *gens amicissima* of his son."

That the commercial treaty was not a failure as regarded the products of our own country is evident from the fact that the annual average export of British manufactures to France in the six years ending with 1774 was 87,164*l.*; in the six years ending with 1792 it was 717,807*l.* Arthur Young, after the treaty had been in existence less than a year, found the French crying out for a war with England. "It is easy enough to discover that the origin of all this violence is the commercial treaty, which is execrated here as the most fatal stroke to their manufactures they ever experienced." He found this temper prevailing at Lisle.* The next year, at the fair of Guibray, near Caen, he saw many English goods, especially the crockery known as queen's ware. Of this ware there were French imitations, but very inferior. Young asked the dealer if he did not think the treaty of commerce would be very injurious, with such a difference in the goodness of the manufactured articles. The sensible Frenchman replied, "Quite the contrary. However bad is our imitation, it is the best thing we have yet produced in France. We shall produce better next year—we shall improve—we shall go beyond you." I believe, adds Young, he is a very good politician, and that without competition it is not possible to improve any fabric.† The treaty was annulled in the frenzy of the Revolution.

To Mr. Pitt belongs the honour, in this, the fourth year of his administration, of simplifying the complicated system of indirect taxation, by consolidating the several duties of customs, excise, and stamps. The duties required to be paid upon one article were sometimes to be hunted through twenty or thirty acts of parliament, each charging some additional duty, or making a special appropriation of the proceeds of a particular tax. The complication may be judged from the fact that three thousand resolutions were required to carry a measure of consolidation into effect. When Pitt had introduced his measure, Burke characterized the speech of the minister as one of ex-

* "Travels in France," p. 73.

† *Ibid.*, p. 79.

traordinary clearness and perspicuity, and said that it behoved those who felt it their duty frequently to oppose the measures of the government, to rise up manfully, and, doing justice to the right honourable gentleman's merit, to return him thanks on behalf of themselves and the country, for having in so masterly a manner brought forward a plan which gave ease and accommodation to all engaged in commerce, and advantage and increase to the revenue. "Thus," says lord John Russell, "in the course of little more than three years from Mr. Pitt's acceptance of office as First Lord of the Treasury, great financial and commercial reforms had been effected The nation, overcoming its difficulties, and rising buoyant from its depression, began rapidly to increase its wealth, to revive its spirit, and renew its strength. Such was the work of Mr. Pitt, now no longer the minister of the court, but of the nation. The cry of secret influence, and the imputation of his being an organ of an unseen power, was heard less and less as the resources of his powerful understanding developed their energies and ripened their fruits."*

The amicable relations between the governments of Great Britain and France, which appeared to have been consolidated by the commercial treaty, were interrupted in the autumn of 1787 by the interference of France with the civil dissensions amongst the States of the United Provinces, which had taken a new direction after the disputes with the emperor Joseph had been terminated. To the firmness and moderation of the British government it is owing that a war was averted. The great Frederick of Prussia had died on the 17th of August, 1786. His nephew and successor, Frederick William III., brother-in-law to the prince of Orange, had espoused the cause of his sister's husband against those States who had stripped the Stadtholder of his power and prerogatives. The princess of Orange, a lady possessing great vigour of character, was proceeding to the Hague from Nimeguen, to hold a conference with the leaders of the Orange party, when she was stopped by a troop of armed burghers and placed under arrest. The king of Prussia immediately marched an army into the province of Zealand, and avowed his intention to restore the Stadtholder to his hereditary authority. It is unnecessary for us to trace the course of these events, except as they bear upon the acts of the British government. These are very clearly related in the king's speech on opening the Session on the 27th of November. Whilst Great Britain had endeavoured by good offices to restore tranquillity and maintain lawful government, she avowed her intention of counteracting all

* "Life of Fox," vol. ii. p. 138.

forcible interference on the part of France in the internal affairs of the Dutch republic. The king of Prussia having determined to obtain satisfaction for the insult offered to the princess of Orange, the party who had usurped the government of Holland applied to the king of France for his assistance, who notified to the king of Great Britain his intention of granting their request. "I did not hesitate," said the king to parliament, "to declare that I could not remain a quiet spectator of the armed interference of France, and I gave immediate orders for augmenting my forces by sea and land." The success of the Prussian troops enabled the Provinces "to deliver themselves from the oppression under which they laboured, and to re-establish their lawful government." An explanation took place between France and Great Britain, and both countries mutually agreed to disarm, and to place their naval establishments upon the same footing as at the beginning of the year.

The career of Mr. Pitt,—the only minister who appears to have received the entire confidence of George the Third without surrendering his own independent convictions on large questions of policy,—was not wholly without difficulty and danger as regarded his relations to the king and the prince of Wales, in the serious differences which had arisen between them. The pecuniary embarrassments of the prince of Wales were of so onerous a nature that his friends thought it necessary to bring them under the consideration of Parliament. When he took up his residence at Carlton House in 1783, 60,000*l.* had been voted by parliament to defray the expense of establishing a separate household. The king allowed his son 50,000*l.* a year out of the Civil List, and the annual revenue of the duchy of Cornwall amounted to 12,000*l.* At the Midsummer of 1786 the prince owed 160,000*l.* The king refused to give any assistance; and the heir-apparent dismissed the state officers of his household, sold his horses, and stopped the improvements going forward in his residence. But the debts were very slightly diminished. There were serious difficulties in making that application to Parliament, which eager worshippers of the rising sun overlooked, although public rumour spoke with no doubtful voice upon a very delicate question. It was believed that the prince of Wales, contrary to the provisions of the royal marriage act, was married to Mrs. Fitzherbert; and that the lady being a Roman Catholic, such marriage, according to the Act of Settlement, had rendered the prince "for ever incapable to inherit, possess, or enjoy the crown of this kingdom." On the 27th of April, 1787, alderman Newnham, one of the members for the City, stated that he should propose an Address to the king, praying him to take into consideration the

state of the affairs of the prince of Wales, and to grant him relief, which the House would make good. Mr. Rolle without hesitation said that this was "a question which went immediately to affect our Constitution in Church and State," and that he would oppose the motion, whenever it was brought forward, by moving the previous question. Something was necessary to be done. On the 30th, alderman Newnham stated that he had been much pressed, from various quarters, to forego his purpose. He did not wish to bind the House to the form of an Address, but said that the prince did not shrink from any inquiry. Mr. Fox, in the course of a short speech, took notice of the previous allusion to something full of danger to the Church and State. He supposed that allusion must have reference to a low malicious falsehood, propagated to depreciate the character of the prince—a pretended report of a fact impossible to have happened. In answer to a question from Mr. Rolle, Mr. Fox further said, that "he did not deny the calumny in question, merely with regard to the effect of certain existing laws; but he denied it *in toto*, in point of fact, as well as law. The fact not only never could have happened legally, but never did happen in any way whatsoever." He added, that "he had spoken from direct authority." Bishop Tomline gravely remarks that "this unequivocal and authentic assurance could not but be highly satisfactory both to parliament and the public." And yet many of the parliament and some of the public had no belief in the assurance, although they believed that Mr. Fox was authorized to deny what he termed the malicious falsehood. At the end of December, 1785, Mr. Fox had written to the prince a letter, pointing out the extreme danger of "a desperate step" which he was informed that his royal highness intended to take. The prince replied, on the 11th, that "the world will soon be convinced that there not only is not, but never was, any ground for these reports which of late have been so malevolently circulated." Within ten days of the date of this letter, namely, on the 21st of December, Mrs. Fitzherbert was married by a Protestant clergyman to the prince of Wales, in the presence of six witnesses. "Although the marriage of Mrs. Fitzherbert was void by the English law, it was sanctioned by the law of her own church, and she could without scruple live with the prince of Wales as her husband."* On the day after his declaration in parliament, a gentleman at Brooks's told Mr. Fox that he had been misinformed; "I was present at that marriage."† The prince is recorded on the same day to have said to Mrs.

* Lord J. Russell's "Life of Fox," vol. ii. p. 185.

† *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Fitzherbert, "Only conceive, Maria, what Fox did yesterday: he went down to the House and denied that you and I were man and wife."* Mr. Fox, says lord J. Russell, "perceived how completely he had been duped. He immediately renounced the acquaintance of the prince, and did not speak to him for more than a year." The matter was hushed up; the prince's debts were paid by parliament after negotiations and squabbles which are now of little interest. Mr. Fox could not retract his declaration, without exposing the prince to the risk of losing his succession to the Crown, according to lord John Russell. His indignation at having been made the instrument of declaring a falsehood did not prevent him advocating the claims of the prince of Wales to almost uncontrolled power, in the great question of The Regency which arose in 1788.

On the 24th of October, the king, having been out of health, went to the levée, "with a view of putting an end to the stories that were circulated with much industry."† A violent fever ensued; and in a few days the sovereign was decidedly insane. On the 7th Mr. Grenville wrote, "I am afraid that it would be very sanguine indeed to say that there is even any hope that the king will recover both his health and his understanding."‡ The public were to be kept in ignorance of this alarming event. But the parliament was to meet on the 20th of November. An adjournment of a fortnight was agreed to. Meanwhile the physicians who had attended his majesty were examined on oath before the Privy Council. All agreed that the king could not attend to public affairs; three expressed confidence in his recovery. A Committee of the two Houses had also examined the medical authorities, and had reported their opinions. Mr. Fox had been travelling in Italy, but being summoned home, he appeared in his place in parliament on the 10th of December; and there declared that, "in his firm opinion, his royal highness the prince of Wales had as clear, as express a right to assume the reins of government, and exercise the power of sovereignty, during the continuance of the illness and incapacity with which it had pleased God to affect his majesty, as in the case of his majesty having undergone a natural and perfect demise." The two Houses, he said, "were alone qualified to pronounce when the prince ought to take possession of, and exercise, his right; but as short a time as possible ought to intervene between the prince of Wales assuming the sovereignty, and the

* Lord John Russell, quoting "Memoirs of Mrs. Fitzherbert."

† W. W. Grenville, "Court of George III.," vol. i. p. 431.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

present moment."* Mr. Pitt maintained that, although the claim of the prince was entitled to the most serious consideration, in the case of the interruption of the personal exercise of the royal authority, without any previous lawful provision for carrying on the government, "it belonged to the other branches of the legislature, on the part of the nation at large, to provide, according to their discretion, for the temporary exercise of the royal authority, in the name, and on the behalf of the sovereign, in such manner as they should think requisite; and that, unless by their decision, the prince of Wales had no more right—speaking of strict right—to assume the government, than any other individual in the country." In this first debate an amount of passion was displayed on the part of Burke, which greatly detracted from his reputation as a sound authority upon constitutional questions. Pitt had said that to assert a right in the prince of Wales, independent of the decision of the two Houses of Parliament, was treason to the constitution. Burke exclaimed, "where was the freedom of debate, where was the privilege of parliament, if the rights of the prince of Wales could not be spoken of in that House, without their being liable to be charged with treason by one of the prince's competitors?" Pitt quietly asked whether, "at that period of our history when the constitution was settled on that foundation on which it now existed, when Mr. Somers and other great men declared that no person had a right to the crown independent of the consent of the two Houses, would it have been thought either fair or decent for any member of either House to have pronounced Mr. Somers a personal competitor of William the Third?"

The question of abstract right became merged in the more practical question of what powers should be confided to the prince of Wales as Regent. The views of Mr. Fox on this point were extreme. On the 15th of December he wrote to a friend in confidence, "I am afraid they will get up some cry against the prince for grasping, as they call it, at too much power; but I am sure I cannot in conscience advise him to give up anything that is really necessary to his government; or, indeed, to claim anything else as Regent but the full power of a king, to which he is certainly entitled."† Mr. Pitt, on the other hand, brought forward propositions to prohibit the Regent from creating peers; from disposing of the king's real or personal property; and from granting offices except during pleasure; and that the queen should have the custody of his majesty's person. There was a doubt whether the

* "Parliamentary History," vol. xxvii. col. 707.

† "Correspondence of Fox," vol. ii. p. 300.

Prince would not refuse the Regency, under these restrictions. But that imprudence was not added to the other grave errors of his friends. Burke had shocked the loyalty of all men, by saying that the king had been hurled from the throne by the decree of the Almighty. Sheridan maintained that the prince had shown great moderation in not at once assuming the title and powers of Regent, and thus disgusted those who possessed any knowledge of the principles of the English constitution. There was such an evident avidity to seize upon power in the prince and his friends—there was such a distrust of his character, and such a dread of beholding a court polluted with the abominations of gaming and riot—that the national sympathy was almost wholly with Pitt, who laboured all along in the resolution that if his sovereign should be restored, he should not find everything changed. He knew that his own chances of power under the Regency were forfeited by the course he had adopted. He would "take his blue bag, and return to the bar."* Fox appears to have acted on the conviction that the chance of the king's recovery was very small indeed. The Regency Bill had passed the Commons on the 12th of February. But in the middle of the month it was known that a great amendment had taken place in the king's condition. On the 23rd, Mr. Pitt received a letter, "written in his majesty's own hand, couched in the warmest terms, thanking him for his unshaken attachment to his interests, and desiring to see him the next day."† On the 25th, the issue of bulletins by the royal physicians was discontinued. On the 10th of March, the commissioners who had been appointed by former letters patent to open the parliament, by another commission declared farther causes for holding the same; and proceeded to state to both Houses that his majesty, being by the blessing of Providence recovered from his indisposition, and enabled to attend to public affairs, conveyed through them his warmest acknowledgments for the additional proofs they had given of affectionate attachment to his person. The other subjects of a royal speech on opening parliament were then detailed.

Pitt had won his second great victory. In 1784, against odds almost incalculable, he had defeated the Coalition with almost the unanimous support of the people. He had employed his unassailable tenure of power in carrying forward the resources of national prosperity by a series of measures conceived, not in the spirit of party, but with a large comprehension of what was essential to the public good. Another great trial came. He had to conduct an

* "Diaries, &c., of George Rose," vol. i. p. 95.

† Grenville, in "Court of George III.," vol. ii. p. 125.

other conflict, full of danger and difficulty, in which, fighting for his sovereign, he had in the same manner the support of the nation. Major Cartwright, so well known for his subsequent endeavours to promote a Reform in Parliament, wrote to Wilberforce: "I very much fear that the king's present derangement is likely to produce other derangements not for the public benefit. I hope we are not to be sold to the Coalition faction."* When the battle was over, George the Third wrote to his persevering minister that "his constant attachment to my interest, and that of the public which are inseparable, must ever place him in the most advantageous light." † On the 23rd of April, a public thanksgiving was appointed for the king's recovery. His majesty went to St. Paul's, accompanied by both Houses of Parliament, to return his own thanksgivings. The day was observed throughout the kingdom. Illuminations were never so general; joy was never so heartfelt. The minister, still only in his twenty-ninth year, had reached the pinnacle of power and popularity.

* "Life of Wilberforce," vol. i. p. 100.

† Rose—"Diaries, &c.," p. 97.

CHAPTER XXV.

Symptoms of great changes in France.—Constant financial difficulties.—General view of the French social system.—Expectations of a Revolution.—The Parliament of Paris—Meeting of the States-General.—The Three Orders.—The Tiers Etat demand that all the Orders shall unite.—Excitement in Paris, during this contest.—Tiers Etat assume the title of the National Assembly.—Their meeting in a Tennis Court.—The Royal Sitting.—Open resistance of the Tiers Etat to the king's orders.—The king yields.—Dismissal of Necker.—Destruction of the Bastille.—March to Versailles of a Parisian mob.—The Royal Family and National Assembly, removed to Paris.

ON the 11th of July, 1788, the king, at the close of the Session of Parliament, said: "The general state of Europe, and the assurances which I receive from foreign powers, afford me every reason to expect that my subjects will continue to enjoy the blessings of peace." The differences with France on the subject of the United Provinces had been adjusted. On the 6th of September, Mr. Pitt exultingly wrote to the marquis of Stafford, "The state of France, whatever else it may produce, seems to promise us more than ever a considerable respite from any dangerous projects."* The "state of France" was that of a country in which the disordered condition of its finances appeared to render any new disturbances of Europe, from the ambition of the government and the restlessness of the people, something approaching to an impossibility. The "whatever else it might produce" was a vague and remote danger. Yet in September, 1788, there were symptoms of impending changes, that, with a full knowledge of the causes operating to produce them, might have suggested to the far-seeing eye of that statesmanship that looked beyond the formal relations of established governments, some real cause for disquiet. Since the peace of 1763, there had been constant and increasing deficiency of revenue in France. The area of taxation was limited by the manifold exemptions from bearing a due proportion of the public burthens, which Turgot, in 1776, had vainly endeavoured to abolish. He was dismissed, as the result of his attempts to impose taxes upon the noblesse and the clergy. Necker is summoned to fill the great post of Controller-general of Finance. He carries France through the American war by various temporary expedients; but there is still a deficit. He proposes some solid measures, and is dis-

* "Diaries, &c., of George Rose," vol. i. p. 85.