

an admirer of the French National Assembly to be the most zealous of Anti-Jacobins, and had thus made his peace at St. James's.

The vast majority which Pitt acquired by the accession of the Whigs who seceded from Fox was supported by the greater portion of the higher and middle classes, who had an extravagant dread of the possible progress of French principles, and not a sufficient dread of the certain evils of a contest that would entail the most fearful sacrifices upon the humbler classes, and thus produce real discontent in the place of theoretical disaffection. A very short time before this, the English ministers, although sufficiently alive to the danger of extreme democratic opinions, saw their best safety in the improvement of the condition of the mass of the people. Lord Grenville, at no more distant period than the 7th of November, wrote, in fraternal confidence, these remarkable words: "All my ambition is that I may at some time hereafter, when I am freed from all active concern in such a scene as this is, have the inexpressible satisfaction of being able to look back upon it, and to tell myself that I have contributed to keep my own country at least a little longer from sharing in all the evils of every sort that surround us. I am more and more convinced that this can only be done by keeping wholly and entirely aloof, and by watching much at home, but doing very little indeed; endeavouring to nurse up in the country a real determination to stand by the Constitution when it is attacked, as it most infallibly will be if these things go on; and, above all, trying to make the situation of the lower orders among us as good as it can be made."* It must have been perfectly clear to a minister as sagacious and experienced as Mr. Pitt, that the remarkable prosperity which had been built up during a peace of ten years would receive a severe shock from the cost of war,—that "the situation of the lower orders" would be materially deteriorated by the pressure of taxation and the interruption of industry. But Mr. Pitt thought that the contest would be soon decided; that revolutionary France would quickly exhaust her resources for war; that the opinions of the Revolution were only dangerous when they were "armed opinions." In the retrospect of the origin of the war which he took in 1800, when he maintained that he had laboured to the last "to preserve peace on any terms consistent with our safety," he confessed that the government had been too slow in anticipating the danger which was to be apprehended from France: "We might even then have seen, what facts have since but too incontrovertibly proved, that nothing but vigorous and open hostility can afford complete and

* "Court, &c., of George III." vol. iii., p. 224.

adequate security against revolutionary principles, while they retain a proportion of power sufficient to furnish the means of war." It was revolutionary principles in arms for conquest and rapine that statesmen dreaded. The terror of domestic revolution, through the contagion of revolutionary principles extending beyond a small band of obscure republican enthusiasts, was a nightmare that only disturbed the sleep of alarmists—the "thoroughly frightened," who talked as familiarly of "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter," "as maids of thirteen do of puppy-dogs." These mistook "the meetings and idle rant of such sedition as shrank appalled from the sight of a constable, for the dire murmuring and strange consternation which precedes the storm or earthquake of national discord. . . . The panic of property had been struck in the first instance for party purposes; and when it became general, its propagators caught it themselves, and ended in believing their own lie—even as the bulls in Borodale are said sometimes to run mad with the echo of their own bellowing."*

The state of public opinion in England, at the period immediately preceding the commencement of the war, may be traced in the proceedings of "Associations in support of the Constitution," and in counter resolutions of Societies such as those which Burke denounced in 1790. These Clubs, really insignificant in themselves, were raised into importance by the exaggerated alarm of the "friends of established law and peaceable society," and the inopportune enthusiasm of the advocates of parliamentary reform. At a meeting of "Gentlemen at the Crown and Anchor in the Strand, November 20, 1792, John Reeves, Esq., in the chair," the danger was set forth "to which the public peace and order are exposed by the circulation of mischievous opinions, founded upon plausible but false reasoning." This circulation of dangerous doctrines was alleged to be mainly carried on by the industry of Clubs and Societies; and these opinions were held to be conveyed in the terms, "The Rights of Man—Liberty and Equality—No King—No Parliament." On the 29th of November "The London Corresponding Society" published an Address, denouncing "the artifices of a late aristocratic association;" declaring that "whoever shall attribute to us the expressions of No King—No Parliament, or any design of invading the property of other men, is guilty of a wilful, an impudent, and a malicious falsehood;" but adding, "we admit and we declare that we are friends to Civil Liberty, and therefore to Natural Equality, both of which we consider as the Rights of Man." "The Society for Constitutional

* Coleridge—"Friend," Essay I.

Information," on the 14th of December, resolved, that it disclaimed the idea of making any change by violence and public commotion; "but that it trusts to the good sense of the people, when they shall be fully enlightened on the subject, to procure, without disturbing the public tranquillity, an effectual and permanent reform." "The Society of the Friends of the People," at a meeting on the 15th of December, at which Samuel Whitbread took the chair, held themselves bound to persevere in their endeavours to accomplish, through the known channels of the Constitution, an effectual reform in the construction of the House of Commons; but remonstrating against the endeavours "to confound the idea of a reform in parliament with that of disaffection to the established constitution of this kingdom, as if a real representation of the Commons were incompatible with the security of a limited monarchy; as if the Crown were not safe with an honest unbiassed House of Commons; or as if the idea of such reform had been at all times reprobated, as it now is, by those who occupy the highest station of profit and confidence under the Crown."* At this period of political heat the trial of Thomas Paine, upon a prosecution for libel in publishing "The Rights of Man," took place on the 18th of December. "No one," says lord Campbell, "could justly complain of it as an infringement of public liberty." The eloquent defence of Erskine did not influence the decision of the jury, who returned a verdict of Guilty, even without waiting for the Attorney-General to reply. This great advocate maintained as the basis of the liberty of the press, "that every man not intending to mislead, but seeking to enlighten others with what his own reason and conscience, however erroneously, have dictated to him as a truth, may address himself to the universal reason of a whole nation, either upon the subject of government in general or upon that of our own particular country." But the argument was too broad for those excited times. The clamour against the republican had already condemned his book, in some respects very justly.

At the time of this trial Paine was a member of the National Convention of France; and he took occasion to write an insolent letter to the Attorney-General, in which he says, "The duty I am now engaged in is of too much importance to permit me to trouble myself about your prosecution. . . . The time, sir, is becoming too serious to play with court prosecutions and sport with national rights. The terrible examples that have taken place here upon men who, less than a year ago, thought themselves as secure as

* For these various Resolutions, &c., see "Annual Register," 1793, pp. *155 to *170.

any prosecuting judge, jury, or Attorney-General can now do in England, ought to have some weight with men in your situation." The Attorney-General read this letter to prove the authorship of the "Rights of Man," therein avowed by Paine; but it was quite clear that language such as this would ensure the conviction of this furious democrat, who thus threatened with the perils of the lamp-post and the guillotine those who were discharging their constitutional functions. Still less would a jury bear the scurrilous allusions to "Mr. Guelph and his profligate sons." The king was at this time almost universally popular. The mistakes of the early years of his reign, when he sought to govern by secret influence and favouritism, had been forgotten. The odium attached to his pertinacity in the American war had been chiefly confined to statesmen, who addressed themselves to the reason and justice of the few rather than to the passions of the many. The coalition had been distasteful to the people; and the young minister chosen by the king had fully vindicated the choice. The example of the court had produced a considerable reformation in the manners of the higher classes; open profligacy was a bar to royal favour. The simple tastes of the king; his domestic piety and decorum; his habitual attention to the best pursuits of a country gentleman in his love of agriculture; his unrestrained intercourse with his subjects on public occasions; even his garrulity and familiar curiosity, made him really an object of affectionate attachment to the great bulk of the people. They did not believe him to be a great king, but they knew him to be a good king, as far as they could judge of royal attributes. His narrow views upon large political questions, such as that of the admission of Roman Catholics to civil offices, were a recommendation to the majority. They probably had no very exalted opinion of his understanding; which, however, was far more acute than it has been the fashion to regard it in very recent years. They laughed at the ribaldry of Peter Pindar; but they were not convinced by it that their king was a simpleton—because he was exhibited at Whitbread's brewery exclaiming, "What's this? hæ, hæ! what's that? what this? what's that?" or, as hunting with "Parson Young," and when a fatal accident occurred to his reverend friend, ejaculating, "What, what? Young dead? Take him up, and put him home to bed;" or learning from the widow of Salthill the way to catch a mouse in a trap baited with toasted cheese; or taking shelter in a farm-kitchen, and making the discovery how the apple got into the dumpling. These were not the things to abate one jot of the king's popularity—perhaps they increased it. The sneer of Paine

at the "capacity of Mr. Guelph" fell harmless. The king had courage and common sense—qualities perhaps more important to a constitutional sovereign than great intellectual refinement. The nation clung to him as representing the principles most antagonistic to French philosophy.

The Alien Bill, which had been read a third time in the House of Lords, was read a second time in the House of Commons on the 28th of December. On that occasion, Burke "mentioned the circumstance of three thousand daggers having been bespoke at Birmingham by an Englishman, of which seventy had been delivered. It was not ascertained how many of these were to be exported, and how many were intended for home consumption." The Parliamentary History then adds, "here Mr. Burke drew out a dagger which he had kept concealed, and with much vehemence of action threw it on the floor." The orator, pointing to the dagger, said, "This is what you are to gain with an alliance with France; wherever their principles are introduced their practice must follow."* The Alien Bill, after much debate, was passed on the 4th of January. On the 7th of that month, M. Chauvelin, styling himself "minister plenipotentiary from the French Republic," addressed a Note to lord Grenville, remonstrating against this Bill as a violation of the Treaty of Commerce, by which the subjects of the two nations had liberty to come and go freely and securely without license or passport. He says, "It is thus that the British government has first chosen to break a treaty to which England owes a great part of its actual prosperity, burthensome to France." Lord Grenville returned the Note, stating that M. Chauvelin had therein assumed a character which is not acknowledged; he being in "no otherwise accredited to the king than in the name of his most Christian Majesty." In a letter of the 9th of January, lord Grenville stated, as he had stated in a private conversation of the 29th of November, that "he would not decline receiving non-official communications, which, without deciding the question either of the acknowledgment of the new government in France, or of receiving a minister accredited by her, might offer the means of removing the misunderstanding which already manifested itself between the two countries." On the 13th M. Chauvelin informed lord Grenville that the Executive Council, "to discard every reproach of having stopped, by the mere want of formality, a negotiation on the success of which the tranquillity of two great nations is depending, have taken the resolution of sending letters of credence to citizen Chauvelin, which would furnish him the

* "Parliamentary History," vol. xxx. col. 189. See Note to this Chapter.

means of treating in all the severity of diplomatic forms. He then enters into the various points of difference, and thus concludes: "If the explanations of France appear insufficient, and if we are still obliged to hear a haughty language; if hostile preparations are continued in the English ports; after having exhausted every means to preserve peace, we will prepare for war." Lord Grenville, still protesting against the unofficial form of the notifications, answers that "a threat of declaring war against England, because she thinks proper to augment her forces, as well as a declaration of breaking a solemn treaty, because England has adopted, for her own security, precautions of the same nature as those which are already established in France,* could neither of them be considered in any other light than that of new offences, which, while they subsisted, would preclude all negotiations." On the 17th of January, M. Chauvelin required to be informed whether his Britannic majesty would receive his letters of credence; and on the 20th lord Grenville replied, "I am to inform you, that his majesty does not think fit, under the present circumstances, to receive those letters;" and he added that, "after what has just passed in France," M. Chauvelin must return, as a private person, to the general mass of foreigners in England. On the 17th of January a majority of the National Convention had pronounced for the death of the king of France. "What had just passed" in France was followed up on the 21st by the execution of Louis; and on the 24th M. Chauvelin was ordered, by direction of the king in council, to retire from this country within eight days.

We have to take up the thread of a painful narrative, from the time when the king went back to the Temple, after having appeared at the bar of the Convention on the 11th of December. He named two persons as his counsel—Target, and Tronchet. Target had a cowardly dread of accepting the offer, and his place was taken by the venerable Malesherbes, who volunteered his services to the President of the Convention saying, that he had been twice called to the councils of Louis, when to serve him was an object of ambition; and that he owed him the same service when it might be considered dangerous. With Malesherbes and Tronchet, Desèze was associated. There was no impediment offered to their free consultations with the king; and a fortnight was spent in preparations for the defence. On the 26th of December, the king again appeared at the bar of the Convention. Desèze conducted the defence. His arguments were logical, but

* The system of passports, introduced during the Revolution, was rigidly applied to British subjects, in contravention of the treaty of commerce.

he was unequal to the task of moving an assembly that was swayed more by passion and sentiment than by reason. He said, "History will sit in judgment on your judgment, and the judgment of history will be the judgment of ages." His Will, which the suffering king made before this conclusion of a pretended trial the issue of which was pre-determined, is sufficient to fix the judgment of History as to the personal character of this kind-hearted king. In this solemn document, written on the 25th of December, he says, "I recommend my son, if he has the misfortune to become king, to remember that he owes himself to the happiness of his fellow-citizens; to forget all hatred and resentment, and especially that which relates to the misfortunes and sorrows I now undergo." It was with perfect consistency that Louis declared, in the few words that he addressed to the Convention after his counsel had spoken, that his greatest grief was that he should have been accused of wishing to shed the blood of his people—"I, who have exposed myself in order to avert the shedding of one drop of their blood." For many days there were stormy discussions in the Convention, on propositions made by those who were afraid to declare Louis not guilty, but who wished to save him without compromising themselves. One proposed that the Convention should decide on the guilt of Louis, but refer to the primary assemblies the question of his death or his exile. The principal Girondins, speaking through their great orator, Vergniaud, proposed that the judgment which should be pronounced upon Louis, whether that of Guilty or Not Guilty, should be submitted to the ratification of the people. It was at length decided that three questions should be determined by the vote at the tribune of each member, on the *appel nominal*,—the call by name. Upon the first question, put on the 15th of January, "Is Louis Capet guilty of conspiracy against the liberty of the nation, and of attempts against the general security of the state," six hundred and eighty-three members replied, "Yes, Louis is guilty." On the second question, "Shall the decision of the Convention be submitted to the ratification of the people," two hundred and eighty-one voted for the appeal; four hundred and twenty-three against it. The third question, "What shall be the sentence," was to be decided on the morrow. The Convention during the whole of that day had been occupied with various preliminary discussions, especially upon a proposition that two-thirds of the votes should be necessary to constitute a majority. This proposition was rejected. It was eight o'clock in the evening before the voting commenced. The fearful ceremony which every

member had to go through in the presence of a blood-thirsty audience in the galleries, and a furious mob without doors, was continued through the night, and was renewed the next day. The greater number of the Girondins, including Vergniaud, joined the Mountain, in voting for the sentence of Death. The one Prince of the blood, who had laid down his title to become a member of the Convention, voted for Death.* The one Englishman who had been elected a deputy, Thomas Paine, voted for imprisonment, and banishment at the peace. It was late at night before the votes were counted. Three hundred and eighty-seven were for death without any condition; three hundred and thirty-four were for imprisonment on conditional death. Vergniaud, as President, declared the sentence. On the 19th the question was put, "Shall the execution of the sentence of Louis Capet be deferred?" For the suspension of the sentence there were three hundred and ten members; for its immediate execution there were three hundred and eighty. On the 20th of January, the decision of the Convention was officially communicated to Louis. He requested a delay of three days to prepare himself to appear before his Maker; he requested that he should have a priest, whose name he wrote down; he requested to see his family without witnesses, and that they might be allowed to leave France. The Convention refused the respite. They granted the priest, and the permission to see his family, which permission the brutal Commune refused to have carried out, causing them to be watched through a glass-door. They "authorized the Executive Council to reply to Louis, that the nation, always magnanimous and always just, would consider the situation of his family." We spare our readers the heart-rending details of the parting of the king with his wife, his son and daughter, and his sister. The priest that Louis had chosen was the Abbé Edgeworth. He attended the king to the scaffold; and as the knife of the guillotine was about to fall, exclaimed, "Son of St.

* There are some interesting details of this crowning infamy of Egalité, in the Journal of her Life during the Revolution, by Mrs. Elliott, who had the misfortune of being the mistress of two of the most profligate men of Europe, the prince of Wales and the duke of Orleans. When this lady urged the duke to vote for the deliverance of his cousin, the king, he said sneeringly, "Certainly, and for my own death." He subsequently said, "he thought the king had been guilty by forfeiting his word to the nation, yet nothing should induce him to vote against him" on the final question of his sentence. After the execution of Louis, Mrs. Elliott said to the duke, "You, monseigneur, will die, like the poor king, on the scaffold." The duke replied, "The king has been tried, and he is no more. I could not prevent his death. . . . I could not avoid doing what I have done. I am, perhaps, more to be pitied than you can form an idea of. I am more a slave of faction than anybody in France. But from this instant let us drop the subject."—pp. 117-118-127.

Louis, ascend to heaven." This tragedy was completed at ten o'clock of the morning of the 21st of January.

On the 28th of January a message was delivered to parliament, in which the king stated the indispensable necessity of a further augmentation of force by sea and land, the correspondence between lord Grenville and M. Chauvelin having been at the same time presented. Mr. Pitt moved an Address of thanks, of which the following passages appear to have shut the door to any further negotiation with the existing government of France :—

"To offer to his Majesty our heartfelt condolence on the atrocious act lately perpetrated at Paris, which must be viewed by every nation in Europe as an outrage on religion, justice, and humanity; and as a striking and dreadful example of the effect of principles which lead to the violation of the most sacred duties, and are utterly subversive of the peace and order of all civil society.

"To assure his Majesty, that it is impossible for us not to be sensible of the views of aggrandizement and ambition, which, in violation of repeated and solemn professions, have been openly manifested on the part of France, and which are connected with the propagation of principles incompatible with the existence of all just and regular government: that, under the present circumstances, we consider a vigorous and effectual opposition to these views as essential to the security of everything which is most dear and valuable to us as a nation, and to the future tranquillity and safety of all other countries!"

NOTE ON THE DAGGER-SCENE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Lord Eldon, then Sir John Scott, in a letter to his brother of the 17th January, says, "You would hear of the dagger which Burke exhibited in the House of Commons. I have got the pattern specimen of that order, which I shall keep as a great curiosity." In a note to Twiss's Life of Lord Eldon, the inheritor of his title says, "On Lord Chancellor Eldon's death I found with his papers the dagger which, from conversations with him in the latter years of his life, I had understood to be the one thrown down by Burke in the House of Commons." But it appears that there were two specimens of this Birmingham manufacture, one of which was in the possession of Sir Charles Montoijeu Lamb, the son of Sir James Bland Burgess, who was at that period Under-Secretary of State for the Foreign Department. The dagger-scene was the subject of a famous caricature by Gill-ray; and so characteristic a likeness of Burke was never produced as in this sketch.

This dagger-scene was in some respects a matter-of-fact affair—elevated into an approach to sublimity by the imagination of the orator, and, like many other sublime actions, treading close upon the ridiculous. It certainly, upon the face of the thing, does appear a proper subject for caricature, when the man upon whom the eyes of all Europe were fixed—who at that moment exercised more influence over public opinion than any speaker or writer who ever existed,—a grave man well-stricken in years,—should draw out a dagger from his pocket, and cast it upon the floor of the House of Commons. The occurrence has been called "a stroke of oratorical acting;" but it appears, from the circumstantial account by Sir Charles Lamb, that Burke's possession of the dagger was an accidental occurrence, and that the "acting" was at any rate unpremeditated. This dagger, "a foot long in the blade, and about five inches in the handle, of coarse workmanship, and might serve either as a dagger or a pike-head," according to Sir Charles Lamb, "was sent to a manufacturer at Birmingham, as a pattern, with an order to make a large quantity like it. At that time the order seemed so suspicious, that, instead of executing it, he came to London and called on my father at the Secretary of State's office, to inform him of it, and ask him his advice; and he left the pattern with him. Just after, Mr. Burke called, on his way to the House of Commons; and upon my father mentioning the thing to him, borrowed the dagger, to show in the House. They walked down to the House together; and when Mr. Burke had made his speech, my father took the dagger again, and kept it as a curiosity."