

as long as possible at a distance from home? . . . I see more, and must know more, of what is going on here than others; and I certainly have no prejudice in favour of the continuance of our exertions here, founded upon any partiality for the business of guiding them. But I sincerely feel what I write—that if the resources of Great Britain were fairly applied to this contest, as they have been to any other in which the country has been engaged, the French would yet repent the invasion of Spain.*

When two Cabinet Ministers meet to fight a duel, and one is wounded, the natural consequence is, that the house divided against itself must fall. Lord Castlereagh, the Secretary at War, challenged Mr. Canning, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and they had a hostile meeting on Wimbledon Common on the 22nd of September. Canning was slightly wounded. It is scarcely possible to investigate the causes of this transaction without encountering the difficulties that arise from the partisanship of contemporary narratives. After the lapse of half a century the subject is scarcely worth investigation by a writer who has only to present a rapid view of the more important public affairs. Upon the surface it might appear that Canning had been intriguing for six months to remove Castlereagh from office for some motive of personal ambition. He "was much and unjustly blamed at the time."† The duke of Portland, the Prime Minister, wrote to the Chancellor in June, "The great object, and indeed the *sine qua non* with Canning, is to take from lord Castlereagh the conduct of the war." Lord Castlereagh, in his letter of challenge, complained that Mr. Canning, after receiving a promise that the seals of the War Office should be transferred from their holder, continued to act with him as his colleague, and permitted him to originate the Walcheren enterprise. There seems to be no doubt, however, that Canning several times tendered his own resignation, but was overpersuaded to remain in office,—believing that Castlereagh had been apprised by the duke of Portland, and other members of the Cabinet, of the desire and the intention to make the change which so materially affected the public service. Both the Secretaries of State were injured by the want of moral courage in the head of the government to do a disagreeable act—by telling the truth to take out of the hands of the War Minister the completion of a great enterprise which he had devised. The end of the affair was that Canning and Castlereagh both quitted the administration. The duke of Portland also resigned; and, long broken in health, died

* "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vi. p. 531.

† Brougham—"Sketches of Statesmen"—Canning.

on the 29th of October. There was many difficulties in constructing a new administration. Mr. Perceval became Premier; the marquis Wellesley came from Spain to be Secretary for Foreign Affairs; lord Liverpool took lord Castlereagh's post as Secretary of State for the department of War and Colonies; the Secretary at War was lord Palmerston.

The 25th of October was celebrated throughout the kingdom as "The Jubilee"—the fiftieth anniversary of the accession to the throne of George the Third. Romilly considered "this Jubilee as a political engine of ministers;" but the people fell into the proposal of the celebration with a very hearty spontaneity. Romilly also thought that when posterity should look at the measures of the king's government, his popularity for many years would appear unaccountable.* The people were not only gay amidst bell-ringing, and bonfires, and dinners in civic halls. There was a feeling of enthusiastic attachment to their old sovereign, manifested amongst the many who pitied his growing infirmities; who sympathized with his sturdy hatred to Bonaparte and French domination; and who were not quite sure that what the wiser called his prejudices were not great public virtues. One thing the people dreaded—that this reign should come to a close; that the example of the domestic virtues that prevailed at Windsor should be succeeded by the license of Carlton House; that the scandals about the princess of Wales—which rival factions were constantly speculating upon as weapons of political offence or defence—should become a source of national danger and disgrace when the unhappy quarrel should be between a king and a queen. Caroline of Brunswick could not be put aside as easily as Josephine Beauharnais. If the time should come, when the Fourth George should turn over the chronicles of the Eighth Harry to search for precedents, it would not suit the genius of representative government, that he should proclaim his will to his assembled family that his wife should be divorced, as Napoleon proclaimed his will at the Tuileries on the 15th of December; that an obsequious senate should confirm the dissolution of the marriage; and that the ruler of England should be free to look around for a Princess to share his throne, after the fashion in which the ambitious Corsican first threw the handkerchief at a Grand Duchess of Russia, and then—a slight hesitation being manifested—at an Archduchess of Austria. Such a crisis was postponed in England by the life of George the Third being prolonged beyond another decade.

When parliament was opened on the 23rd of January, the failure

* "Diary"—October.

of the expedition to Walcheren naturally became a subject of grave inquiry. The Opposition and the country were in ill-humour, and they mixed up their reproofs of the unhappy policy of the Scheldt enterprise with the operations of sir Arthur Wellesley, contending that the government which had given him a peerage must stand or fall by him. They little knew how time would accomplish this result in a different manner from that which they anticipated. The pension which was proposed to be granted to lord Wellington was carried by a very small majority. A constitutional question arose upon a motion of censure, moved by Mr. Whitbread, against lord Chatham, in presenting to the king a narrative of his proceedings in the Scheldt, with a request of secrecy, and without communicating it to the other members of the cabinet. The motion was carried. Lord Mulgrave succeeded lord Chatham in the office of Master-General of the Ordnance. The constitutional law was sufficiently asserted without any further proceedings.

A time of great popular excitement was coming in England. The old question of Privilege, in which the House of Commons had manifested such an impotent tyranny in the case of John Wilkes, was about to be renewed in a struggle with a favourite of the democracy, who was bent upon asserting what he held to be popular rights. Sir Francis Burdett, the member for Westminster, was in 1810 the subject of a contest which had no real bearing upon the liberties of the people, but which gratified the vanity of one who aspired to be their leader. The interest of the war in the Peninsula; the marriage of Napoleon with a daughter of the emperor of Austria, by which his complete ascendancy over the continent appeared to be established; the commercial effects of the Orders in Council; the difficult problem of the depreciation of the Currency which was under discussion;—these matters became of small importance compared with the resistance of the member for Westminster to an order of the Speaker for his arrest. The turmoil was soon over, and as it had no lasting consequences our relation must be very brief. John Gale Jones, the manager of a Debating Society, on the occasion of the enforcement of the Standing Order for the exclusion of strangers during the Walcheren inquiry, issued a handbill, announcing that the Society had decided that the enforcement was “an insidious and ill-timed attack upon the liberty of the press, tending to aggravate the discontents of the people, and render their representatives objects of jealousy and suspicion.” Jones was brought to the bar; confessed himself the author of the bill; and was committed to Newgate, the House resolving that he having published a paper

containing libellous reflections upon the conduct and character of the House, was guilty of a high breach of its privileges. Sir Francis Burdett, having made an unsuccessful motion for the discharge of Jones, published a violent letter in Cobbett's “Register,” in which he contended that the House had no authority to imprison for such an offence. Sir Thomas Lethbridge, on the 27th of March, moved “that the publication of which Sir Francis had acknowledged himself to be the author, was a scandalous libel upon the rights of the House.” There was a debate of two nights. Romilly doubted the right of commitment. The Master of the Rolls maintained the right, in which he was supported by some members of the Opposition, but who nevertheless objected to the agitation of the question. During the violence of debate there was an amusing interlude. Sir Joseph Yorke angrily called Whitbread “a brewer of bad porter.” There was a furious uproar. Whitbread, with perfect good humour, rose and said, “Mr. Speaker, I rise as a tradesman to complain of the gallant officer for abusing the commodity which I sell;” and the House burst into laughter and approbation.* On the 5th of April, in an adjourned debate, the House divided at six in the morning upon the question whether the paper by Francis Burdett was a breach of privilege, an amendment for postponing the question for six months being rejected by a large majority. But the question whether the baronet should be committed to the Tower, or reprimanded, was carried by 190 against 152, the same morning at half-past seven. In the course of that day the populace began to break the windows of members who had taken part against their favourite. The tumult became serious on the 7th, when sir Francis declared his determination to resist the warrant for his committal, and to defend himself in his own house in Piccadilly. The Riot Act was read; the Guards were called out; several persons were wounded; and troops arrived from the country. On Monday, the 9th, the house of Sir Francis was broken open; and he was conveyed to the Tower, under a strong military escort. On the return of the troops they were grossly insulted and attacked by a furious mob, and several persons were killed when the soldiers at length fired, having had to fight their way through Eastcheap. The subsequent proceedings upon this question of privilege have been succinctly stated by a recent constitutional historian: “Overcome by force, sir Francis brought actions against the Speaker and the Sergeant, in the Court of King's Bench, for redress. The House would have been justified by precedents and ancient usage, in resisting the prose-

* Lord Colchester's “Diary,” vol. ii. p. 242.

cution of these actions, as a contempt of its authority; but instead of standing upon its privilege, it directed its officers to plead, and the Attorney-General to defend them. The authority of the House was fully vindicated by the Court; but Sir Francis prosecuted an appeal to the Exchequer Chamber, and to the House of Lords. The judgment of the Court below being affirmed, all conflict between law and privilege was averted. The authority of the House had indeed been questioned; but the Courts declared it to have been exercised in conformity with the law.* When Parliament was prorogued on the 21st of June, the imprisonment of sir Francis came to an end. A procession was announced to convey him home in triumph; but he departed secretly by water, and the mob followed an empty car to Piccadilly.

When Parliament was prorogued on the 21st of June, the royal speech briefly alluded to the Peninsular war. It said, that Portugal, with the assistance of his majesty's arms, had exerted herself with vigour and energy, in making every preparation for repelling any renewed attack on the part of the enemy; and that in Spain, notwithstanding reverses which had been experienced, the spirit of resistance against France still continued unsubdued and unabated. The nation could scarcely have expected from this somewhat cheerless notice of the operations of the British army, with no mention of the British general, that he had been doing some useful work. His retreat to Portugal after Talavera had been denounced in Parliament as having converted victory into defeat. The Common Council of London presented a petition to the House of Commons praying that a pension of 2000*l.* a year should not be granted to Viscount Wellington; conceiving it "to be due to the nation, before its resources shall be thus applied, that the most rigid inquiry should be made why the valour of its armies had been thus uselessly and unprofitably displayed." † The impatient taxpayers, who fancied that Wellington and his army were idling in Portugal, and would soon be obliged to return home, could not readily have believed, even if they had been told, that he had been accomplishing the greatest design that was ever conceived by military genius, for resting the future operations of the war upon no sudden and casual triumph, but upon a comprehensive plan upon which his army's safety might be assured, if decisive battles could not at once be won. There had been six months of comparative inaction, which appeared to superficial observation as six months lost. From January till the end of April Wellington remained in

* May—"Constitutional History of England," vol. i. p. 450.
† Hansard, vol. xv. col. 601.

his head-quarters at Viscu, watching the movements of the French in Old Castile and Leon, who were evidently preparing for an attack on Portugal. There was doubt at home, but there was no doubt in the mind of the sagacious and provident commander. On the 31st of March he wrote to colonel Torrens, "I am in a situation in which no mischief can be done to the army, or to any part of it. I am prepared for all events; and if I am in a scrape, which appears to be the general belief in England, although certainly not my own, I'll get out of it." * The time would come when the Correspondence of lord Wellington would show how profound had been his views and how accurate his calculations, extorting from the somewhat prejudiced although the ablest of the French historians of this great crisis, a striking eulogy, of which this is the subject: With a rare penetration he had formed a judgment upon the march of affairs in the Peninsula better than that of Napoleon himself. He had appreciated the force of resistance which national hatred, which climate and distance, opposed to the French; the draining of their forces when they arrived in the heart of the Peninsula; the want of unity in their operations under various generals. He entertained the conviction that the vast scaffolding of the grandeur of the empire was undermined in all its parts; that if England could continue to excite and to maintain by her succour the hatred of the Portuguese and the Spaniards, Europe, sooner or later, would throw off the yoke of Napoleon. "This opinion," continues M. Thiers, "which is the highest honour to the military and political judgment of lord Wellington, had become with him an invariable idea; and he persevered in it with a firmness of mind and an obstinacy of character worthy of admiration." All depended, says the historian, upon the resistance which he could oppose to the French when he was driven into the extremity of the Peninsula. He had searched for, and had discovered with the rare accuracy of a *coup d'œil*, a position almost impregnable, from which he could brave all the efforts of the French armies. This position, which he has made immortal, was that of Torres Védras, near Lisbon. †

But it was not alone the rare accuracy of a glance of the eye that determined upon these famous lines. Founded upon personal examination of every part of the ground, during a few weeks of October and November 1809, the Memorandum of lord Wellington to colonel Fletcher, commanding the Royal Engineers, is a masterpiece of large views and minute detail. ‡ That Memorandum, altered afterwards in

* "Despatches," vol. v. p. 611.

† "Le Consulat et l'Empire," tome xii. p. 319 to 320. ‡ "Despatches," vol. v. p. 234.

a few particulars derived from further personal surveys, was sufficiently exact for thousands of Portuguese labourers immediately to be employed, under British engineers, in the rapid construction of works, of which the cuttings of miles of railroad in a mountainous country can furnish but an imperfect idea of their colossal proportions. In one year, these works, behind which the city of Lisbon, the roadstead, the transports, the munitions of war, would be safe from all attack, were sufficiently complete to test the practical grandeur of their conception. A line of intrenchments was first constructed, about twenty miles in advance of Lisbon, running completely across the promontory from Torres Védras on the sea, to Alhandra on the Tagus. The heights of Alhandra, rising perpendicularly from the river, ascended to Sobral, in the centre of the lines. The road to Lisbon, on the bank of the Tagus, beneath the heights, was defended by barricades mounted with cannon. All the sides of the hills towards Sobral that were not sufficiently steep, were cut into escarpments with prodigious labour. Their summits were crowned with forts, where heavy guns commanded all the avenues by which the enemy could approach. At Sobral, from which the hills descended on either side, was a plateau, where works of laborious construction supplied the place of natural inequalities of surface; and the whole of this position was strengthened by a citadel, which could only be taken by a regular siege. The chain of hills from Sobral to the sea was defended in a similar manner, by escarping the sides, by shutting up their gorges with redoubts, by connecting them with forts on their summits. The river Zizambre, which passed Torres Védras to the sea beneath the chain of hills, was rendered impracticable by dams. All the fortifications of these works, stretching thus for twenty-nine miles across the whole breadth of the promontory of Portugal, had their own magazines. Some contained six pieces of cannon; others contained fifty pieces. The arsenal of Lisbon had chiefly furnished the prodigious quantity of ordnance that was required. Some of the garrisons, all of which were permanently occupied by Portuguese, contained a thousand men. All the disposable British forces were to occupy the points of encampment supposed to be most liable to attack. A system of signals along the whole extent of the lines would have brought all the force within them upon a given point in a few hours. A second line of works had been prepared, in case the first line had been forced; and a third series of defences also were formed at the extremity of the promontory to keep an enemy in check had he overcome these stupendous arrangements for an army's safety. These secondary means were unnecessary. The redoubts and

guns in battery of the first line presented such an array of power, that when the leader who had conceived this great work first tried its security in the autumn of 1810, Massena, who had been commanded by Napoleon to drive the English into the sea, at all risks, looked with his fifty thousand men upon the lines of Torres Védras for a month; saw that his proud course was staid; and retired with his starved and dispirited army, to know that effectual barriers could be raised even against the progress of the invincible legions of the Republic and the Empire.

The summer was approaching when Massena took the command of the French forces in Old Castile and Leon. He had seventy-two thousand men under arms in the field. The name by which they were called, "the Army of Portugal," indicated the special service to which they were devoted. Wellington had about fifty-four thousand British and Portuguese. By the great exertions of marshal Beresford, the Portuguese had become valuable troops, and some were brigaded with the British army. In June the French invested Ciudad Rodrigo. It was bravely defended by the Spaniards till the 10th of July. Wellington was not strong enough to attempt its relief. He could only have advanced with thirty-two thousand men, having been obliged to leave nearly a third of his army to prevent the enemy in Estremadura from cutting him off from Lisbon. He saw Ciudad Rodrigo fall. The Spanish general, Romana, in whom the British general had great confidence, was as anxious as Wellington that Ciudad Rodrigo should be relieved; but neither of them could risk the attempt in the presence of a far stronger enemy. On the 15th of August, Massena commenced the siege of Almeida. It was defended by a Portuguese garrison, under the command of an English officer. Wellington moved forward to be ready to seize any opportunity for its relief. On the second night of the bombardment, a magazine, containing all the ammunition of the fortress, blew up; and the garrison were compelled to capitulate, the greater part of the town and the defences having been destroyed by the explosion. This accident disconcerted all the projected operations of the British army. Wellington had no fault to find with the unfortunate event of the surrender of Almeida;—except that he was not informed by telegraph of the misfortune which had happened, when he would have made an effort to have saved the garrison. As it was, he had made all his preparations for falling back.*

On the 26th of September, his army was collected upon the Serra de Busaco, in front of Coimbra. On the 27th the French

* "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vi. p. 588.

attacked the right and left of the English position. They were repulsed; one column being driven down the hill by general Picton's division; another column compelled rapidly to retreat under a bayonet charge by general Crauford's division. The Portuguese fought well; and Wellington said, "They are worthy of contending in the same ranks with British troops in this interesting cause." * "This battle," says Napier, "was fought unnecessarily by Massena, and by Wellington reluctantly." It is scarcely possible that Massena should have received the instructions of a letter written at St. Cloud on the 19th of September, in which Napoleon says to Berthier, "Send off an officer to-morrow with a letter for the prince of Essling, in which you will let him know that it is my wish that he attack and destroy the English . . . I am too far off, and the position of the enemy changes too often, for me to give advice as to the way in which the attack should be conducted; but it is certain that he is not in a state to resist it." † But Massena knew that his despotic master had become impatient of Wellington's pertinacity, and that he must risk something. Thiers holds that the British general, however prudent, was unwilling to enter his lines as a fugitive, and that, when he should find one of those strong positions against which the impetuous bravery of the French would be likely to fail, he would fight a defensive battle, and then tranquilly retire. ‡ The French lost four thousand five hundred men; the British and Portuguese, thirteen hundred.

On the 29th of September the allies, crossing the Mondego, began to retreat towards Lisbon. The sufferings of the inhabitants of a country in which two hostile armies are contending, and where the necessity for securing their own safety almost precludes compassion for the non-combatants, were never more forcibly displayed than in the course of the movements which followed the fall of Almeida. When the rear-guard of the British evacuated Coimbra, on the 1st of October, many of the inhabitants, who had remained—whilst Wellington was keeping the French at bay in the Sierra de Busaco, instead of obeying his orders to remove out of the way of the enemy with their goods and provisions—now followed the army, encumbering the road with their sick and their aged and their children. But the great mass of the population in the line of the English march willingly obeyed the orders upon which the eventual safety of their homes depended, and fled towards Lisbon, leaving the towns and villages bare for the advancing French. Their losses and miseries were great; but England made

* "Despatches," vol. vi. p. 475. † "Letters to King Joseph," vol. ii. p. 143.

‡ "Le Consulat et l'Empire," tome xii. p. 365.

a great effort to afford some compensation. Wellington continued steadily to retreat before his powerful opponent. There was no sacrifice of men by precipitate flight, no risks encountered by rash resistance. The loss in skirmishes was small. On the 10th of October, the whole army was within the lines of Torres Védras. Massena came up wholly unprepared to find such an obstacle to his further progress. He spent some days in reconnoitring. He scoured the country for provisions; but the country was a desert, behind him and around him. The distresses of his army were most severe, for they had only carried bread for fifteen days. On the 15th of November he gave up all hope of forcing the lines; and began a retrograde movement. On the 8th of December, Wellington wrote one of his unofficial letters, which best exhibits his character and habits of thought: "I have determined to persevere in my cautious system; to operate upon the flanks and rear of the enemy with my small and light troops, and thus force them out of Portugal by the distresses they will suffer, and do them all the mischief I can upon my retreat. Massena is an old fox, and is as cautious as I am. He risks nothing . . . Although I may not win a battle immediately, I shall not lose one; and you may depend upon it that we are safe, for the winter at all events." *

* "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 2.