

## CHAPTER XV.

Illness of the king.—Interruption to the proceedings in Parliament.—The Regency Bill passed.—The king's ministers continued in office.—State of Europe at the commencement of the Regency.—Wellington and the Ministry.—Massena evacuates Portugal.—The British army pursues.—Battle of Fuentes de Onoro.—Battle of Aibura.—Restrictions on the Prince Regent about to expire.—His letter as to his choice of a Ministry.—The Administration not altered.—Resignation of the Marquis Wellesley.—Character of the Regent.—Assassination of Mr. Perceval.—Attempts to form a Cabinet of which lord Grey and lord Grenville should be the heads.—The earl of Liverpool Prime Minister.—Luddism.—Repeal of the Orders in Council.—The United States declare war against Great Britain.

THE Parliament, which had been prorogued to the 1st of November, was, by an order made in a council at which the king presided on the 17th of October, to have been further prorogued by Commission to the 29th of November, and a proclamation to that effect appeared in the Gazette. On the 29th of October Mr. Perceval wrote to the Speaker that the calamitous situation of the princess Amelia had so worked upon the king's mind that he was incapable of signing the Commission, and that, according to all usage, such instrument never passes the Great Seal without the king's signature. Mr. Perceval had seen the king on that day. "His conversation was prodigiously hurried, and, though perfectly coherent, yet so extremely diffuse, explicit, and indiscreet upon all the most interesting subjects upon which he could have to open his mind; and, at the same time, so entirely regardless of the presence of all who were about him, that he was evidently labouring under a malady."\* From that malady the king never recovered. The "interesting subjects upon which he had to open his mind" had, doubtless, more relation to domestic affairs than to public events. His favourite daughter was dying; and upon her deathbed she is said to have revealed to her father the circumstances of an attachment which, as was believed, had involved a violation of the Royal Marriage Act. The princess Amelia died on the 2nd of November. The king was then under restraint. When told of his daughter's death, he "did not seem to feel or take much notice of it." He had been heard to count over the

\* Lord Colchester's "Diary," vol. ii. p. 262.

several times and occasions of his former attacks; and he ascribed this last to the illness of the princess.\*

The meeting of Parliament on the 1st of November could not be postponed. The Chancellor met the Lords; informed them that there was no Commission to open the Session, and explained the circumstances which had prevented him affixing the Great Seal to such a Commission. Mr. Perceval addressed the Commons; the Speaker having stated that he had thought it his duty to take the chair, in order that the House might adjourn itself. The adjournment was to the 15th. When that day arrived, the House again adjourned for another fortnight, the physicians having expressed a strong opinion as to the probability of the king's recovery. Another adjournment took place to the 13th of December. On that day a Committee was appointed in both Houses to examine the physicians. On the 20th, the ministers proposed three Resolutions, following the precedent of those of 1788. They affirmed the king's incapacity; they declared the right and duty of the two Houses to provide for this exigency; and proposed to proceed by Bills determining the powers to be exercised in the king's name and behalf, to which the Royal Assent should be given in some mode upon which the Houses should determine. The mode which the ministers desired to adopt was a fictitious use of the king's name,—the "Phantom," as it was called. The Opposition contended, as in 1788, for addressing the prince of Wales to assume the royal authority as Regent. The seven dukes of the blood-royal supported the measure of proceeding by Address, when the subject came to be debated in the House of Lords. But the ministerial Resolutions were adopted. They contained restrictions on the power of the Regent, which were offensive to the prince of Wales, and to the party who were considered to be his friends. The limitations upon his authority were to continue only for twelve months; but they were sufficiently stringent to produce great debate and many divisions, in which the ministers had small majorities. The Resolution which was considered most obnoxious was that which gave the queen very extensive powers over the king's person and the royal household. It was finally determined that the queen should have "such direction of the household as may be suitable for the care of his majesty's person, and the maintenance of the royal dignity." The Parliament having been opened on the 15th of January, by a Commission under the Great Seal, the Regency Bill was passed on the 5th of February. During these proceedings the prince of Wales had been negotiating with lord

\* Lord Colchester's "Diary," vol. ii. p. 287.

Grenville and lord Grey as to the arrangement of a new Administration. On the 1st of February, he sent to acquaint these peers that "it was not his royal highness's intention to make any change at present." It had begun to be confidently expected that the king would recover. He had become "much alive to what was passing, and was quite sure," as he told Mr. Perceval, "that it could never enter into the prince's mind to change the ministry."\* On the 4th the prince announced to Mr. Perceval his intention not to remove from their situations those whom he finds there as his majesty's official servants, lest "any act of the Regent might, in the smallest degree, have the effect of interfering with the progress of his sovereign's recovery." The letter added "This consideration alone dictates the decision now communicated to Mr. Perceval." On the 6th, the Prince Regent took the oaths before a Privy Council assembled at Carlton House. During several months the king appeared to be occasionally convalescent. His bodily health was good, and he talked more naturally. But it soon became sufficiently clear, whatever might be the expectations that his life might be prolonged, that he was not likely to be able ever to resume the royal functions. The reign of George III. had been virtually closed on the 5th of February, 1811.

At the commencement of the Regency, it would have appeared the most extravagant expectation to have believed that within three years the gigantic power of Napoleon would have been crumbling into ruin,—that, like the ice-palace of the empress of Russia,—

"'Twas transient in its nature, as in show  
'Twas durable; as worthless as it seemed  
Intrinsically precious." †

In March, 1811, the empress Maria Louisa presented to the French nation a son, who was saluted by his father as king of Rome. Rome and the southern Papal Provinces were annexed to France; and the Pope was a prisoner at Savona. Louis Bonaparte, having refused to concur in the tyrannical projects of his brother for enforcing the Continental System upon his Dutch subjects, had surrendered his mockery of sovereignty, and had come to reside at Powys Castle, in Montgomeryshire, upon his parole. The kingdom of Holland was then formally annexed to France. This annexation of the territory of the Zuyderzee was not enough in that direction. Ten additional departments were added to France on the 13th of December, 1810, which comprehended Hol-

\* Lord Colchester's "Diary," vol. ii. p. 315.  
† Cowper, "Task," book v.

land, Friesland, Oldenburg, Bremen, and all the line of coast to Hamburg and all the country beyond Hamburg to Lubeck. The French empire now consisted of a hundred and thirty departments, containing forty-two millions of people. The millions that were dependent upon the will of the mighty emperor—a godhead with some infatuated English; a "restless barbarian" \* with others not wholly given up to party—can scarcely be numbered. The kingdom of Italy, which was under his sway, contained six millions. The kingdom of Naples, in which his brother-in-law, Joachim Murat, now ruled, contained five millions. The kingdom of Westphalia, of which his brother Jerome was the sovereign, submitted to the law that was enforced upon his other satellites, that "every thing must be subservient to the interests of France." Protector of the Confederation of the Rhine, he had at his feet the kings of Saxony, Bavaria, and Würtemberg, and a train of minor German princes. Prussia was wholly at his mercy. Denmark would obey any command of Napoleon since Copenhagen was bombarded and her fleet carried off. Marshal Bernadotte, prince of Ponte Corvo, had been elected by the States of Sweden as successor to the aged and childless Charles XIII., who had succeeded the deposed Gustavus. The French marshal was installed Crown Prince on the 1st of November, 1810. There only wanted the quiet possession of Spain and Portugal, under his brother king Joseph—Austria being his own by family ties, and Russia his ally, in the sworn friendship of her emperor—to make the world his own. England was to perish in the great league of Europe against her commerce; and in the resistance of America to her maritime claims. When Wellington stood within the lines of Torres Védras, and Massena was without, preparing to attack him, the fate of the nations of Europe rested upon the successful defence of this promontory. "The English," says Thiers, "once expelled from Portugal, all would tend in Europe to a general peace. On the contrary, their situation consolidated in that country, Massena being obliged to retrace his steps, the fortune of the Empire would begin to fall back before the fortune of Great Britain, to sink in the midst of an approaching catastrophe." † In his place in Parliament, about this time, the marquis Wellesley proclaimed a great truth, which he repeated in 1813: "As Bonaparte was probably the only man in the world who could have raised his power to such a height, so he was probably the only man who could bring it into imminent danger. His eagerness for power was so inordinate; his jealousy of independ-

\* Francis Horner—Letter to Hallam—"Memoirs," vol. ii. p. 115.

† "Le Consulat et l'Empire," tome xii. p. 412.

ence so fierce; his keenness of appetite so feverish in all that touched his ambition even in the most trifling things; that he must plunge into desperate difficulties. He was of an order of mind that by nature make for themselves great reverses.\* There was no one who had a more absolute conviction of this truth than the brother of the marquis Wellesley, who had to enforce, by his unerring sagacity and his indomitable perseverance, the realization of the change of fortune so eloquently predicted.

The Regent had not been appointed more than a fortnight, when his ministers threw in the way of lord Wellington whatever obstacles a weak government could present to a strong mind. The British general had informed lord Liverpool of the probability that the command of the Spanish armies would be offered to him. The Secretary of War answers him that, "it is the unanimous opinion of every member of the government, and of every person acquainted with the finances and resources of the country, that it is absolutely impossible to continue our exertions in the Peninsula for any considerable length of time;" and that "we see no adequate advantage that would result from the command of the Spanish armies being conferred upon you."† The answer of Wellington, however, conceived in the most respectful terms, was the answer of a statesman. It implied his contempt for the whining over expense of a government that was continually frittering away its resources in petty undertakings—a government that had not the courage to do right for its own sake, but made the war in the Peninsula more a party question than a national object; yielding to the clamours of the Opposition, instead of rendering their objections futile by a vigorous policy that would have commanded success. Wellington said that the ministers had it not in their power to form an opinion of the real expenses of the war in the Peninsula; that the first step should be to analyze the charge, and see what the same army would cost elsewhere, at home for instance; that the transports formed a large item of expense, and that if he had been furnished with ten thousand more men in 1810 he would not have kept the transports; that he had sent them away now, because he thought that the events of the campaign had brought the enemy to such a situation that the necessity for an embarkation was very remote. He told the ministry that if the army were withdrawn from the Peninsula, and the French government were relieved from the pressure of military operations on the continent, Napoleon would incur all risks to land an army in his majesty's dominions. His indignation at the thought gives

\* Hansard, vol. xxv. col. 46

† "Supplementary Despatches," p.

him eloquence. "Then, indeed, would commence an expensive contest; then would his majesty's subjects discover what are the miseries of war, of which, by the blessing of God, they have hitherto had no knowledge; and the cultivation, the beauty, and prosperity of the country, and the virtue and happiness of its inhabitants, would be destroyed, whatever might be the result of the military operations. God forbid that I should be a witness, much less an actor, in the scene."\* Lord Liverpool had ventured upon some childish babble about Wellington determining between an offensive or defensive system, and he was thus answered: "In respect to offensive or defensive operations here, if they are left to me, I shall carry on either the one or the other, according to the means in my power, compared at the time with those of the enemy." With this key to his operations, we shall understand, what the public of that time could not understand, why after gaining a victory he was sometimes obliged to retreat. Far less could they understand the nature of the difficulties he had often to encounter: "The people of England," he said after the retreat from Burgos in 1812, "so happy as they are in every respect, so rich in resources of every description, having the use of such excellent roads, &c., will not readily believe that important results here frequently depend upon fifty or sixty mules, more or less, or a few bundles of straw to feed them."†

When Massena retired from before Torres Védras he took up a defensive position at Santarem. He was now really blockaded by the British forces, and had to depend for his supplies upon the bare country behind him. During this state of inaction in Portugal, general Graham, with three thousand English and seven thousand Spaniards, had attacked the French who were blockading Cadiz, and had won the battle of Basrosa, on the 5th of March. On the 6th of March, Wellington, who had long maintained, contrary to the opinion of every person in the army, that Massena would be compelled to retire for want of provisions, received information that he had retired, and immediately put his troops in motion, in three columns.‡ The pursuit of the enemy was conducted with skill equal to that displayed by the French general in ordering his retreat. The course of the French army was marked by the most fearful cruelties. An officer of the English army writes, "There are no enormities, however great, and no wanton barbarities, that have not been committed by Massena's order on people of all classes and ages; nor have they neglected to de-

\* "Despatches," vol. vii. p. 329.

† *Ibid.*, vol. ix. p. 574.

‡ "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 85—Letter of an Officer.

stroy a single town or village through which they have passed." \* The invasion of Portugal was terminated on the 6th of April, when the French crossed the Agueda into Spain. The allied armies now commenced the blockade of Almeida. The Spaniards had not been able to make a stand against Soult at Badajoz, which was surrendered on the 11th of March. Connected with the possession of these two fortresses, were fought the two great battles of the campaign of 1811. Massena, powerfully reinforced, had returned to raise the blockade of Almeida. The battle of Fuentes de Onoro, in the neighbourhood of Almeida, was fought on the 5th of May. Wellington says of this battle, "It was the most difficult one I was ever concerned in, and against the greatest odds. We had very nearly three to one against us engaged; above four to one of cavalry; and, moreover, our cavalry had not a gallop in them, while some of that of the enemy were fresh and in excellent order. If Boney had been there we should have been beaten." † On the 15th of May, whilst marshal Beresford was besieging Badajoz, very insufficiently provided with the means of carrying on a great siege, Soult came to its relief; and the sanguinary battle of Albuera was fought the next day. The British and Portuguese had to sustain the brunt of that terrible contest. No one who has read the description of the battle of Albuera by sir William Napier can forget the terrible struggles in which "was seen with what a strength and majesty the British soldier fights." ‡ On the 18th of May, Soult retired towards Seville. The siege of Badajoz was recommenced, when Wellington arrived at Albuera with two other divisions. But the *matériel* of a siege was still wanting. Early in June Wellington heard that Marmont was marching from Salamanca to join Soult. He hastened back to the frontier of Portugal which was thus menaced. The two French generals united their forces; but they did not venture upon an attack. The British took up their old position upon the Coa; and there was no more fighting in 1811.

The Session of Parliament was opened on the 7th of January, 1812. On the 16th, Mr. Perceval proposed Resolutions with regard to the Royal Household, which were framed in the belief that the king's recovery was very improbable, although not altogether hopeless. The Prince Regent, on the 13th of February, addressed a letter to the duke of York, explaining his views with regard to the choice he desired to make of his official servants. The restrictions

\* "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 88.

† *Ibid.*, p. 176—Letter to Wellesley Pole.

‡ "Peninsular War," vol. iii.

of the Regency Bill were to expire on the 18th, and it was generally expected that great changes would take place—that the party long supposed to be in the special interest of the Prince, would return to the possession of that power which they had lost in 1807. These expectations came to an end when the Regent's letter was made public—the letter which Moore parodied so wittily that even the most devoted Tory could scarcely forbear to smile. The sentence, "I have no predilections to indulge, no resentments to gratify, no objects to attain but such as are common to the whole empire"—which implied that the Regent would make no sweeping alterations in his Cabinet—was followed up by a wish that some of those persons with whom the early habits of his public life were formed would strengthen his hands and constitute a part of his government. These sentiments were to be communicated to lord Grey, who would make them known to lord Grenville. The answer of those peers, addressed to the duke of York, said, "All personal exclusion we entirely disclaim; we rest on public measures; and it is on this ground alone that we must express, without reserve, the impossibility of our uniting with the present government. Our differences of opinion are too many and too important to admit of such an union." In the case of Ireland, especially, they were firmly persuaded of the necessity of a total change in the system of government, and of the immediate repeal of the civil disabilities on account of religious opinions.

On the 19th of February, the marquis Wellesley resigned the seals as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He had tendered his resignation in January. The main point of difference between lord Wellesley and his colleagues was that they pursued half measures in Spain—that "their efforts were just too short." These dissensions had been going on for two years. "Lord Liverpool usually agreed with lord Wellesley on the necessity and policy of extending our efforts, if practicable; but submitted entirely to Mr. Perceval's statement of the impracticability." \* Lord Castle-reagh succeeded lord Wellesley as Foreign Secretary.

Three months had passed without the ascendancy of Mr. Perceval's ministry being shaken by the fact that it was not founded upon "the most liberal basis," such as the Regent had affected to desire. It was founded upon Court favour; and that influence was powerful enough to ensure the support of parliament. A tragical event for a while opened the question whether the Tory party, or the Whig party, should conduct the affairs of the State. Neither party would be perfectly free to conduct them upon principles that

\* Memorandum in "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 257.

would ensure the support of the reflecting portion of the public, complicated as was the position of the responsible advisers of the Crown, by what was denounced in Parliament as "a base system of unprincipled favouritism known to prevail in the Court. It was notorious," said Mr. Lyttleton, "that the Regent was surrounded with favourites, and, as it were, hemmed in by minions."\* The safeguard of a ministry was to be found in the luxurious indolence of the Regent, who did not care to govern with incessant and laborious interference, such as his father had always exerted; who, having the pomp of power to amuse him, did not care what manner of men did the work,—always provided that nothing occurred to disturb his egotistic solicitude for his own personal interest, convenience, or pleasure. The ministers he had chosen had espoused the cause that was most obnoxious to his feelings. The ministers he had not been able to unite in his service had taken a different side. If the question that the people were continually agitating about the wrongs of the princess of Wales could be settled by some bold measure of any ministers, it was possible that his "predilections" might be fixed for the future. As it was, matters were going on smoothly enough, though commercial distress was pressing heavily upon capitalists; though workmen were rising in insurrection against the use of machinery; though perseverance in the Orders in Council was on the point of producing a rupture with the United States, as it had already destroyed the greatest trade which England possessed; though the finances of the kingdom were held to be so crippled, that the fight for national independence could not much longer be maintained. A sudden catastrophe in a moment broke up the official calm.

On the 11th of May, the House of Commons was in Committee in the afternoon, hearing evidence on the Orders in Council. Mr. Brougham had examined a witness, and the cross-examination was proceeding, when a noise was heard from the lobby, like the report of a pistol. That lobby was a large shabby room, with four pillars marking a gangway to the door of the House. The space on each side of the pillars was generally occupied by persons who came to speak to members or to gratify their curiosity. On the left side, generally crowded, was a fire-place and benches. A stone staircase led up to the lobby, which staircase was common to members and to the public. About five o'clock, Mr. Perceval, with his habitual light step, was entering the lobby door, when a shot was fired in the inside of the lobby, and he fell. Mr. William Jerdan, then a Reporter of the Debates, was close by the minister as he entered,

\* Hansard, vol. xxii. col. 1163—May 4.

having preceded him up the staircase, but had pushed open the swing door of the lobby to give him precedence. Mr. Jerdan's relation is more interesting than the ordinary accounts: "I saw a small curling wreath of smoke rise above his head, as if the breath of a cigar; I saw him reel back against the ledge on the inside of the door; I heard him exclaim, 'Oh God!' or 'Oh, my God!' and nothing more or longer, for even that exclamation was faint; and then, making an impulsive rush, as it were to reach the entrance to the House on the opposite side for safety, I saw him totter forward, not half way, and drop dead between the four pillars of blood stood there in the centre of the space, with a slight trace of blood issuing from his lips. All this took place ere with moderate speed you could count five."\* There were about a score of people in the lobby, and the confusion was necessarily extreme. The body was lifted up by Mr. William Smith, the member for Norwich, and it was carried into the office of the Speaker's secretary. The assassin was now recognized and seized. The discharged pistol was found on him, and another loaded and primed was taken from his pocket. "Except for his frightful agitation," he was as passive as a child. Mr. Perceval had been shot through the heart, and when the unhappy murderer knew that he was dead, he exclaimed, "I am sorry for it." He mentioned that he had received wrongs from Government. He was ascertained to be a bankrupt Liverpool merchant, John Bellingham. Examined by three magistrates, he was committed to Newgate. On the next day a message from the Regent was presented to the House of Commons, recommending that a provision should be made for Mr. Perceval's family. "By common consent, no other business was done. Lord Castlereagh presented the Message, and moved the Address. In most faces there was an agony of tears; and neither lord Castlereagh, Ponsonby, Whitbread, nor Canning could give a dry utterance to their sentiments."† Friends and political adversaries united in a tribute of honest feeling to the private worth of Perceval. "As a private man," writes Romilly, "I had a very great regard for Perceval. We went the same circuit together, and for many years I lived with him in a very delightful intimacy. No man could be more generous, more kind, or more friendly than he was. No man in private life had a nicer sense of honour. Never was there, I believe, a more affectionate husband, or a more tender parent."‡ The regret at his death led to two great public mistakes. The unhappy Bellingham was tried at the Old Bailey on the fourth day after he had

\* "Autobiography of William Jerdan," vol. i. p. 234.

† "Lord Colchester's 'Diary,' vol. ii. p. 380. ‡ Romilly, "Diary," May, 1812.

fired the fatal shot. The law authorities would not postpone the trial to receive evidence of his insanity that it was stated could be produced; he was hanged a week after the assassination. The feelings of the House of Commons carried extravagant grants to Perceval's family, beyond the proper measure of his services as a public man.

And now was to come another struggle for power. No man was more busy behind the scenes than the Chancellor. He was authorized by the Regent to learn the sentiments of the Cabinet, whether they thought they could carry on the government with any one of their own members at the head of it. They doubted. Could they carry on the government with Wellesley and Canning? Some said No; some said it was difficult; some said it was very improbable; one said it was very dangerous both to prince and country. But they thought that they should have less chance of "public support for a government of their own, if office should not previously have been offered either to lords Grey and Grenville, or to lord Wellesley and Mr. Canning."\* The Chancellor believed that Wellesley and Canning would "bite."—"If they don't, we shall try what we can do without them." They did not bite. Wellesley suggested that a Cabinet should not be formed "on an intermediary principle regarding the Roman Catholic claims, exempt from dangers of instant unqualified concession, and from those of inconsiderate peremptory exclusion." This would not suit the intolerance of the majority. He further required that "the entire resources of the empire might be applied to the great objects of the war." This would not suit those who were hankering after little objects, with their due provision of profitable employment for carpet warriors. The existing Ministry then resolved to keep the work in their own hands. Another authority stepped in. The House of Commons determined upon an Address to the Prince Regent, praying him to take measures for forming "a strong and efficient Administration." The Cabinet now tendered their resignations. The Regent confided to lord Wellesley the formation of a government of which he should be the head, suggesting an application to those still holding office to join him. They had all agreed in a refusal. He was then permitted to apply to lords Grey and Grenville; but there were certain limitations proposed to them to which they could not assent. Lord Wellesley then resigned the commission which he had received; and negotiations were opened direct from the Court with lord Grey and Grenville. They were somewhat too peremptory in requiring that the appointment of the

\* Twiss, "Life of Eldon," vol. ii. p. 210.

officers of the household should form part of the ministerial arrangements. There was then called into play an amount of political intrigue which it is quite needless for us to unravel. The attempt to change the government was at an end. Lord Eldon, for three weeks, nearly deserted the duties of the Court of Chancery, to be closeted with the duke of Cumberland. Their business was to devise how that influence could be rendered permanent whose leading principle was to oppose the slightest amelioration of cruel laws; to keep the press in subjection by *ex officio* prosecutions and harsh punishments for what was called libel; to resist, or to discourage, the progress of general education; to encourage commerce by restrictions and prohibitions; to encourage agriculture by keeping food dear; to maintain a paper currency that was a transparent delusion; to support the religion of the State by oppressing all who differed from it; to believe "that all advances towards improvement are retrogradations towards Jacobinism;"\* to regard, in a word, the interests of government and of people as conflicting. The Regent was stimulated into hatred of the Whigs. Tory politics were triumphant. Though the ministry still mismanaged the war, they derived their almost sole popularity from the successes of lord Wellington, in the only operation of the war that was founded upon a great principle. They preserved their ascendancy in parliament, not by eloquence and courage, as Pitt had maintained his ascendancy, but by that safe mediocrity which, whether in politics or in literature, is a good marketable commodity, in spite of the Horatian belief in its worthlessness. The Earl of Liverpool, on the 8th of June, declared in parliament that he had been that day appointed by the Prince Regent as First Commissioner of the Treasury. He maintained his position for many years, during which the intellect of the community was gradually undermining the system which first gave him power; till the wiser of his associates proclaimed their renunciation of that system; till England was becoming a different world from the world of George the Third and the Regency.

The Premiership of the earl of Liverpool did not commence under auspicious circumstances. On the 27th of June, a Message was sent to Parliament from the Prince Regent, on the disturbed state of the country. In Lancashire, parts of Cheshire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire, there was an organized system of conspiracy for the destruction of machinery. This was known as Luddism—a name derived from that of a poor idiot, Ned Lud, who, thirty years before, in a fit of irritation, had broken two stocking

\* Canning's Speech, Feb. 1826.

frames. In the autumn and winter of 1811, these riots had commenced at Nottingham, where the hosiers, from the stagnation of trade, had been obliged to discharge many of the weavers. But a new frame had also been introduced, wider than the one which had long been in use, and which consequently required less manual labour. To destroy these frames was the object of the rioters, whose operations had become truly dangerous at Nottingham, in November, 1811. On February 14th, 1812, Mr. Secretary Ryder moved for leave to bring in a Bill "for the more exemplary punishment of persons destroying or injuring any Stocking or Lace Frames." As the law stood, the breaking of frames was punishable with fourteen years' transportation. It was now proposed to make the offence capital. The Bill passed both Houses very rapidly—nothing easier than to enact the punishment of death as a ready solution of every difficulty in legislating against crime. Murders had now accompanied the destruction of machinery. But the offences did not cease, even when Luddites, not murderers, were hanged under the new law. In June, as we learn from the Regent's Message, the riots had become insurrections. Lord Sidmouth was Home Secretary, and he recommended the measures which Parliament adopted, to give powers to the magistracy to search for arms; to provide for the instant dispersion of tumultuous assemblies; and to allow magistrates of neighbouring counties a concurrent jurisdiction, so that the escape of offenders might be more difficult. Gradually the disturbances ceased. A Special Commission was held at York in November, 1812, when many Luddites were convicted, and sixteen were executed.

The insurrections of workmen were essentially connected with the general depression of industry consequent upon the commercial position of England. For four or five years the Berlin and Milan decrees of Napoleon, and the Orders in Council of the ministry of Mr. Perceval, had not acted as separate cutting instruments for maiming the trading intercourse of all nations; but they had become terrible shears for the destruction of the only commerce, that of neutrals, by which the subjects of the two great belligerent governments could have their wants supplied by the interchange of their productions. The Orders in Council of November, 1807, which declared France and all its tributary States to be in a condition of Blockade, made all vessels subject to seizure which should attempt to trade with any parts of the world thus blockaded; and all neutral vessels, either going to, or clearing out from, a hostile port, were required to touch at a British port, and pay Custom dues. Their effects are thus described in one of a series

of papers on this question: "Taken in combination with the Berlin decree, they interdict the whole foreign trade of all neutral nations; they prohibit everything which that decree had allowed; and they enjoin those very things which are there made a ground of confiscation."\* In a subsequent article it is maintained that the diminution of our foreign trade, in 1808, amounted to fourteen millions sterling. America was the only great neutral power; and had been a large purchaser of British commodities, previously to the Berlin decree. But when the Orders in Council made the prohibition of the neutral trade still more difficult to be overcome, the complaints of the Americans became loud against our government. France saw the advantage of stimulating their hostility to England, and gave an unofficial assurance that the Berlin decree should not apply to American vessels. The British government would not on that account relax the Orders in Council, insisting that America should demand from France a formal renunciation of the decree. In March, 1808, the legality of the Orders was contested in Parliament. In April, the merchants of London, Liverpool, and other towns were heard at the bar of the House of Commons, through their counsel, Mr. Brougham. This occasion was the true commencement of the great career of the orator and statesman who still flourishes with undiminished energy—in a generation which reads of what he did at the beginning of the century as part of the history of another age. His masterly speech made a sensible impression upon the country. His exertions on this occasion speedily brought Brougham into Parliament. In April, 1809, a new Order in Council was issued, by which the blockade was confined to France itself, to Holland, to part of Germany, and to the North of Italy. A system of licensing vessels to proceed to foreign ports was also introduced. But the position of America was very threatening. Napoleon was too much enamoured of his Continental System frankly to allow her flag to enter his ports,—lest it should cover British merchandise. Had he not clung to this policy—had he not endeavoured to make America the enemy of England without an official abandonment of his own decrees—the democratic party of the United States would have probably compelled a declaration of war against us in 1811. There had been serious quarrels also with regard to the right of search for British sailors serving on board American ships of war. Mutual ill-will was growing up between the two governments. The continued pressure of the Orders in Council appeared likely to lead to immediate hostilities;

\* "Edinburgh Review," vol. xii. p. 229.

but the Opposition could not readily produce any effect on Parliament. A motion of lord Lansdowne, which contemplated the entire removal of the Orders, was rejected in the House of Lords on the 28th of February, 1812. A similar motion made by Mr. Brougham was rejected in the House of Commons. On the 3rd of April an Order appeared in the "Gazette," which revoked the Orders as regarded America, on the condition that she should revoke an order which excluded British armed vessels from her ports, whilst those of France were admitted. This was not sufficient. During May and part of June, Committees of Inquiry into the effect of the Orders were sitting in both Houses. On the 16th of June, the examinations being closed, Mr. Brougham moved in the Commons that the Crown should be addressed to recall or suspend the Orders unconditionally. Ministers then conceded the question; and on the 23rd of June an unconditional suspension of the Orders, as far as America was concerned, appeared in the "Gazette." The concession was too late. On the 18th of June the American government had declared war against Great Britain.

This most unhappy quarrel produced conflicts at sea and on land, some of which were honourable to our arms, and others somewhat disgraceful to the mode in which war was conducted towards brethren of the same common stock. Hostilities were not at an end till six months after the period to which the general narrative of this volume extends. We prefer, therefore, to relate the incidents of this war consecutively, in a separate chapter of our concluding volume.

The historian of the Empire pours forth his deep regrets that Napoleon, by timely concessions and courtesies towards the United States in 1811, had not urged the Congress then to sanction such a measure of hostility against Great Britain as was resolved upon in 1812. "Let us figure to ourselves," he says, "what would have been the effect of such a declaration of war a year before, when England, finding herself without allies in Europe, should have seen a new enemy rise up beyond the seas; when the Americans, the only violators of the Continental Blockade, should have given it their ardent co-operation; when it would have been then impossible to reproach Russia with her encouragement of them in this violation, and the war with her would have been without a pretext; when France might have sent twenty thousand men with a new Lafayette, in one of the many squadrons resting idle in our ports; when, in fine, our intact force would have been able, by a last blow struck in Spain, to bring the maritime war to an end! In 1812,

after the disaster of Moscow, the war of America with England was nothing but a useless piece of good fortune for France."\*

We may add that the American war of three years, painful as it was, produced no interruption of our resistance to Napoleon; and it excited very little interest in the British public, in comparison with the greater events of that extraordinary time.

\* Thiers, tome xv. p. 38.