

## CHAPTER XXII.

Parliamentary Reform taken up by the ignorant and uneducated.—Extended circulation of the writings of Cobbett.—The Hampden Clubs.—The Spenceans.—Orator Hunt and the Spa-fields Meeting.—Riot in the City.—Meeting of Parliament.—Outrage on the Prince Regent.—Secret Committees.—Habeas Corpus Act suspended, and other stringent measures.—Oliver, the spy.—The Derbyshire Insurrection.—Lord Sidmouth's Circular Letter.—Prosecutions for Libel.—The Three Trials of William Hone.—The Government and the People.—Eulogies on Francis Horner in the House of Commons.

THE call for Parliamentary Reform seems to have made itself very feebly heard in the Lower House in the Session of 1816. With the exception of some four or five petitions that produced very slight discussion, it would scarcely be thought, from an inspection of the Parliamentary Debates, that such a question agitated any part of the nation at all. On one occasion, in June, some members spoke very briefly upon the subject. One complained of the apathy with which the question was regarded in England; another (Mr. Brougham) mentioned the cause as "opposed by some, deserted by others, and espoused by persons whose conduct excited no small degree of disgust out of doors." But from this time the name of Parliamentary Reform became, for the most part, a name of terror to the Government—to the elevated by rank and wealth—to the most influential of the middle classes. It became fearful from the causes which would have made it contemptible in ordinary times. It was "espoused by persons whose conduct excited no small degree of disgust out of doors." It passed away from the patronage of a few aristocratic lovers of popularity, to be advocated by writers of "twopenny trash," and to be discussed and organized by "Hampden Clubs" of "hungering philanthropists and unemployed "weaver-boys."

Samuel Bamford, who thought it no disgrace to call himself "a Radical"—a man of real native talent, and of honest intentions,—says, "At this time [1816] the writings of William Cobbett suddenly became of great authority; they were read on nearly every cottage hearth in the manufacturing districts of South Lancashire, in those of Leicester, Derby, and Nottingham; also in many of the Scottish manufacturing towns. Their influence was speedily visible."

Cobbett advocated Parliamentary Reform as the corrective of whatever miseries the lower classes suffered. A new order of politicians was called into action—"The Sunday-schools of the preceding thirty years had produced many working men of sufficient talent to become readers, writers, and speakers in the village meetings for Parliamentary Reform; some also were found to possess a rude poetic talent, which rendered their effusions popular, and bestowed an additional charm on their assemblages; and by such various means, anxious listeners at first, and then zealous proselytes, were drawn from the cottages of quiet nooks and dingles, to the weekly readings and discussions of the Hampden Clubs."\* But let it be remembered, that though the Sunday-schools of the preceding thirty years had made some working men readers, writers, and speakers, the mass of the labouring population were in the lowest state of ignorance, and were consequently ready to accept the crude and violent opinions of a few of their own class as the only maxims of political action. The speakers at the village meetings echoed the strong words of Cobbett, without the qualifying prudence which generally kept that master of our language pretty safe in argument and phraseology. He was not the man to tempt a prosecution by a rash sentence that could have been construed into sedition.

Up to the 2nd of November, 1816, "Cobbett's Weekly Political Register" was a publication not addressed to the "cottage hearth," but to persons who could afford to pay a shilling and a halfpenny weekly for a single octavo stamped sheet, printed in open type. His writings, singularly clear and argumentative, strong in personalities, earnest, bold, never halting between two opinions, powerful beyond all anonymous writings from their rare individuality, would have commanded an extensive influence under any form of publication. But at the beginning of November, he announced his intention to print "The *Twopenny* Register." We see, therefore, why, at the end of 1816, "the writings of William Cobbett suddenly became of great authority, and were read on nearly every cottage hearth in the manufacturing districts." Never before had any single writer in England wielded such a power. That his cheap Registers gave the discontent of the labouring classes a new direction cannot be doubted; that they did much to repress riot and outrage may fairly be conceded. But that they were scattering the seeds of a greater danger than the outrage and plunder of infuriated mobs cannot be denied. Their object was suddenly to raise up the great masses of labourers and mechanics

\* "Passages in the Life of a Radical," by Samuel Bamford, vol. i. p. 8.  
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into active politicians; to render the most impatient and uncontrollable materials of our social system the most preponderating. The danger was evident; the means of repression were not so clear. The effect of Cobbett's writings may be estimated by the violence of his opponents, as well as by the admiration of his disciples. From the date of his twopenny Registers he was stigmatized as a "firebrand"—"a convicted incendiary." "Why is it that this convicted incendiary, and others of the same stamp, are permitted, week after week, to sow the seeds of rebellion, insulting the Government, and defying the laws of the country? . . . We have laws to prevent the exposure of unwholesome meat in our markets, and the mixture of deleterious drugs in beer. We have laws also against poisoning the minds of the people, by exciting discontent and disaffection; why are not these laws rendered effectual, and enforced as well as the former?"\* The answer is very obvious. The laws, as they stood at the end of 1816, when this was written, could not touch William Cobbett. He knew well how to manage his strength. He risked no libels. He dealt with general subjects. He called upon the people to assemble and to petition. He exhorted the people against the use of force. He sowed the dragons' teeth, it is true, but they did not rise up as armed men. They rose up in the far more dangerous apparition of the masses, without property, without education, without leaders of any weight or responsibility, demanding the supreme legislative power—the power of universal suffrage. The idea ceased to be a theory—it became a tremendous reality.

In a Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons, presented on the 19th of February, 1817, the Hampden Clubs are described as "associated professedly for the purpose of Parliamentary Reform, upon the most extended principle of universal suffrage and annual parliaments;" but that "in far the greater number of them, and particularly in those which are established in the great manufacturing districts of Lancashire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire, and which are composed of the lower order of artisans, nothing short of a Revolution is the object expected and avowed." The testimony of Samuel Bamford shows that, in this early period of their history, the Hampden Clubs limited their object to the attainment of Parliamentary Reform—a sweeping reform, indeed, but not what is understood by the term "Revolution." They contended for the right of every male above eighteen years of age, and who paid taxes, to vote for the election of Members of Parliament; and that Parliaments should be

\* "Quarterly Review," vol. xvi. p. 275.

elected annually. These demands Bamford describes as "the moderate views and wishes of the Reformers of those days."\* He adds, "It was not until we became infested by spies, incendiaries, and their dupes—distracting, misleading, and betraying—that physical force was mentioned amongst us. After that, our moral power waned; and what we gained by the accession of demagogues, we lost by their criminal violence, and the estrangement of real friends." It would appear, however, that in Scotland, at a very early stage of the proceedings of Reform Clubs, that is in December, 1816, the mode in which large masses of men ordinarily look for the accomplishment of political changes was not so cautiously kept out of view.

Of the Hampden Club of London, sir Francis Burdett was the chairman. Vanity, as well as misery, "makes a man acquainted with strange bed-fellows." Bamford, at the beginning of 1817, came to London as a delegate from the Middleton Club, to attend a great meeting of delegates to be assembled in London. The Crown and Anchor Tavern was the scene of these deliberations. There, was Major Cartwright in the chair—a placid enthusiast, sincere in his belief that unmingled good would be the result of the great experiment which he had so long advocated. The chief supporters were Cobbett, with his shrewd self-possession and "bantering jollity;" and Hunt—"Orator Hunt," as he was called,—the incarnation of an empty, blustering, restless, ignorant, and selfish demagogue. The great Baronet was absent, and his absence provoked not a little comment. But he was accessible in his own mansion. Samuel Bamford was awe-struck by the passionate belabouring of Hunt, frozen by the proud condescension of sir Francis Burdett, but charmed by the unaffected cordiality of lord Cochrane. These were the chief actors in the procession scenes of the popular drama that was then under rehearsal. Other and more important parts were filled quite as appropriately.

The Middleton delegate was introduced, amidst the reeking tobacco fog of a low tavern, to the leading members of a society called the "Spencean Philanthropists." They derived their name from that of a Mr. Spence, a schoolmaster in Yorkshire, who had conceived a plan for making the nation happy, by causing all the lands of the country to become the property of the State, which State should divide all the produce for the support of the people. Socialism, in its extremest principles, is not a new doctrine. The schoolmaster was an honest enthusiast, who fearlessly submitted his plan to the consideration of all lovers of their species, and had

\* "Passages in the Life of a Radical," vol. i. chap. ii.

the misfortune to be prosecuted for its promulgation in 1800. In 1816 "Spence's Plan" was revived, and the Society of Spencean Philanthropists was instituted, who held "sectional meetings," and discussed "subjects calculated to enlighten the human understanding." This great school of philosophy had its separate academies, as London was duly informed by various announcements, at "the Cock, in Grafton-street, Soho;" and "the Mulberry Tree, Moorfields;" and "the Nag's Head, Carnaby Market;" and "No. 8, Lumber-street, Borough." At these temples of benevolence, where "every individual is admitted, free of expense, who will conduct himself with decorum," it is not unlikely that some esoteric doctrines were canvassed, such as, that "it was an easy matter to upset Government, if handled in a proper manner." \* The Committee of the Spenceans openly meddled with sundry grave questions besides that of a community in land; and, amongst other notable projects, petitioned Parliament to do away with machinery. Amongst these fanatics some dangerous men had established themselves, such as Thistlewood, who subsequently paid the penalty of five years of maniacal plotting; and some, also, who were clearly in communication with the police, and hounded on the weak disciples of the Cock in Grafton-street and the Mulberry Tree in Moorfields, to acts of more real danger to themselves than to the public safety. If we are to believe the chief evidence in these transactions, John Castle, a man of the most disreputable character, who became a witness against the leading Spencean philanthropists, they had murderous designs of sharp machines for destroying cavalry, and plans for suffocating quiet soldiers in their barracks, destroying them as boys burn wasps' nests; and schemes for taking the Tower and barricading London Bridge to prevent the artillery coming from Woolwich. † And there were to be five commanders to effect all these great movements of strategy,—Mr. Thistlewood, Mr. Watson the elder, and Mr. Watson the younger, Mr. Castle, and Mr. Preston, who came the last in dignity "because he was lame." And then there was to be a Committee of Public Safety, who were to be called together after the soldiers were subdued—twenty-four good and true men. And then they calculated at what amount of public expense they could buy the soldiers, by giving them each a hundred guineas, and upon an accurate computation it was found that the purchase-money would be somewhere about two millions, which would be nothing in comparison with the national debt, which would be wiped off. ‡ With this preparation, if we may believe the very ques-

\* "State Trials," vol. xxxii. pp. 215, 216; Watson's Trial.

† *Ibid.*, p. 218. &c.

‡ *Ibid.*, pp. 233, 234.

tionable evidence of Mr. Castle, a meeting was held in Spa-fields on the 15th November.

The district known as Spa-fields, now covered with dwellings of industry, and comfortable residences of the middle classes, was, at the beginning of the present century, and for some years afterwards, a large, unenclosed space, utterly neglected and useless. A public-house was there, called by the mysterious name of Merlin's Cave; and thither Mr. Hunt came in a chariot with the Watsons, and harangued a mob from the chariot roof, attended with a flag and cockades and "everything handsome." After adjourning the meeting for a fortnight, Mr. Hunt and the chariot went away, drawn by the mob; and the mob running the chariot against a wall, they all got out and walked. So innocently passed the first Spa-fields meeting—innocently, save that at a dinner at Mr. Hunt's hotel in Bouverie-street, where, as he represented the matter, the philanthropists having thrust themselves upon him very much against his will, the betrayer, Castle, gave a toast, which is too infamous to be repeated here, and was threatened to be turned out of the room, but quietly remained, and went into what is described as "a fox-sleep." But the 2nd of December, the day to which the first meeting was adjourned, closed not so peaceably. Mr. Hunt came down to Essex in his tandem, and, as he passed along Cheapside, at "twenty minutes to one o'clock," he was stopped by Mr. Castle, who was moving along with a considerable crowd; and the worthy man told him that the meeting had been broken up two hours, and that they were going to the Tower, which had been in their possession for an hour. The country squire, to whom "the boisterous hallooing of multitudes was more pleasing than the chinking of the plough-traces, the bleating of lambs, or the song of the nightingale,"—(in these terms Cobbett defended his friend for his aspirations after mob popularity)—was not weak enough to believe the tempter; and his tandem went on to Spa-fields, where the greatest number of people were collected together that he had ever beheld. But more active Reformers were in Spa-fields before Mr. Hunt. The Spencean philanthropists had provided a waggon for their own operations, and arrived on the ground considerably before the appointed hour of meeting, with banners and inscriptions, one of which was, "The brave Soldiers are our Friends!" These men also brought arms and ammunition, which they deposited in their waggon. Mr. Watson the elder commenced a sufficiently violent address, and then his son followed him. The young madman, after declaiming against the uselessness of petition, cried out, "If they will not give us what we want, shall

we not take it? Are you willing to take it? Will you go and take it? If I jump down amongst you, will you come and take it? Will you follow me?" And as at every question the encouraging "Yes" became louder and louder, and put down the dissentient "No," he jumped from the waggon, seized a tri-coloured flag, and away rushed the mob to take the Tower. Two resolute men, the chief clerk of Bow-street and a Bow-street officer, had the boldness to attack this mob, and destroyed one of their banners, without any injury to themselves. The young fanatic led his followers to the shop of Mr. Beckwith, a gunsmith on Snow-hill; and, rushing in, demanded arms. A gentleman in the shop remonstrated with him, and, without any pause, was immediately shot by him. Instantly some compunction seems to have come over this furious leader, and he offered to examine the wounded man, saying he was himself a surgeon. The assassin was secured; but the mob, who destroyed and plundered the shop, soon released him, and proceeded along Cheapside, where they fired their recently-acquired arms, like children with a new plaything. They marched through the Royal Exchange, where they were met by the Lord Mayor, and several were secured. The City Magistrates on this occasion behaved with a firmness which admirably contrasted with the pusillanimity of their predecessors in the riots of 1780. The courage of the Lord Mayor, Alderman Wood, and of Sir James Shaw, is worthy of honourable record; and it shows, not only the insignificance of the so-called conspiracy, its want of coherence and of plan, but the real power of virtue in action to put down ordinary tumult. Sir James Shaw says, "On the 2nd of December last I was at the Royal Exchange at half-past twelve; I saw the mob first in Cornhill; the Lord Mayor and I went in pursuit of them; they crossed the front of the Royal Exchange; we rushed through the Royal Exchange to take them in front on the other side; the Lord Mayor and I having received information of prior occurrences, determined on putting them down. I seized several of them, and one flag of three colours, extended on a very long pole. I did not then perceive any arms. . . . The Lord Mayor and I went to meet the mob with Mr. White and two constables; we got five constables in all; the whole party consisted of eight."

Such is the way in which the beginnings of seditions ought to be met. Firmness such as this would have saved Bristol in 1832. After a further plunder of gunsmiths' shops in the Minories, and the summoning of the Tower by some redoubted and unknown champion, who Bamford tells us was Preston, the insurrection fell to pieces, altogether from the want of cohesion in the materials of

which it was composed. The only blood shed was that of the gentleman in Mr. Beckwith's shop, who eventually recovered. A wretched sailor was convicted of the offence of plunder at the shop on Snow Hill, and was hanged. The younger Watson escaped from his pursuers. The elder Watson was tried for high-treason on the 9th of June. The trial lasted seven days. It was memorable from "the eccentric exuberance of sir Charles Wetherell, and the luminous energy of Serjeant Copley,"\* who were assigned as council for the prisoner. The exposure of Castle, the spy, was so complete, that the jury, without hesitation, returned a verdict of Not Guilty. Four other prisoners, who were to have been tried upon the same evidence, were at once acquitted.

On the 28th of January, 1817, the Prince Regent opened the fifth session of the existing Parliament. The speech from the Throne contained the following passage: "In considering our internal situation you will, I doubt not, feel a just indignation at the attempts which have been made to take advantage of the distresses of the country, for the purpose of exciting a spirit of sedition and violence. I am too well convinced of the loyalty and good sense of the great body of his Majesty's subjects, to believe them capable of being perverted by the arts which are employed to seduce them; but I am determined to omit no precautions for preserving the public peace, and for counteracting the designs of the disaffected." It would have been difficult to infer from this language that the Government believed that a formidable and widely-organized insurrection was threatening the country, and that the only remedy was a violation of the constitutional safeguards of the liberties of the nation. Attempts to excite a spirit of sedition, amongst a people incapable "of being perverted by the arts employed to seduce them," were subjects for vigilance towards the few, without infringement of the rights of the many. The seconder of the Address in the Commons asserted that the demagogues and their acts would die of themselves. The debate in the Lower House was suddenly interrupted by a message from the Lords. An outrage had been offered to the Prince Regent on his return from opening the Parliament. The windows of the state-carriage had been broken by some missile. The two Houses, after agreeing upon an Address to the Prince Regent on this event, adjourned. Upon the resumption of the debate the next day in the Commons, and upon its commencement in the Lords, the insult to the representative of the sovereign, which was at first asserted to be an attempt upon his life, gave a decided tone to the proceedings of both Houses.

\* Lord Campbell's "Chief Justices," vol. iii. p. 220.

In both assemblies the Opposition loudly proclaimed the necessity of a rigid and unsparing economy, and the proposed amendment upon the Address went directly to pledge the most severe reduction of every possible expense. The practical answer to these abortive proposals was the intimation of lord Sidmouth, that in three days he should present a message from the Prince Regent on the subject of the alleged disaffection of large bodies of the people.

On the second night of the debate on the Address, Mr. Canning took a leading part in the proceedings. He had returned from the embassy to Lisbon. An office so below the proper ambition of such a man was to him a degradation. He had been excluded from power for three years. The Government opened the Session of 1816 in the confidence that they could do without "the greatest speaker in either House of Parliament. . . . They wondered what use he could be of."\* The ministerial inefficiency in that session was the cause of Canning's recall to jealous colleagues. He became President of the Board of Control. He was now put forward as the eloquent anti-reformer, to deny that the existing state of the representation was a grievance; to confound the most moderate projects of reform with the doctrines of universal suffrage and annual parliaments. It would seem that Reformers of all grades had, in his mind, a family resemblance to the Spenceans. He chose to forget what had been the opinions of his great master, Pitt; maintaining that our representative system "satisfies the wants, the opinions, and the feelings of the great bulk and body of the nation." He asked the moderate reformers in that House if they hoped to guide the whirlwind which they might raise? "Are they not aware that mightier spirits are abroad, who will take that task out of their hands?" † It scarcely needed eloquence like his to call up the ghosts of the French Revolution. The day had dawned; the shadows had lost their midnight terrors.

The message of the 3rd of February announced that the Prince Regent had given orders that there be laid before the Houses, "Papers containing information respecting certain practices, meetings, and combinations in the metropolis, and in different parts of the kingdom, evidently calculated to endanger the public tranquillity, to alienate the affections of his Majesty's subjects from his Majesty's person and government, and to bring into hatred and contempt the whole system of our laws and institutions." In moving the order of the day for the consideration of this message, lord Sidmouth, in the House of Lords, affirmed that the communication

\* Lord Dudley's "Letters," p. 137.

Hansard, vol. xxxv. col. 131

was in no degree founded on, or connected with, the outrage upon the Prince Regent on the first day of the Session. The message of the Prince Regent was referred to a Secret Committee in each House, and these Committees made their Reports on the 18th and 19th of the same month. The Spencean Societies, the Hampden Clubs, the Spa-fields Riot, now called conspiracy, formed the staple of these Reports. The objects of the conspirators are described not only to be "the overthrow of all the political institutions of the kingdom, but also such a subversion of the rights and principles of property as must necessarily lead to general confusion, plunder, and bloodshed." Under the influence of these Reports, it would have been impossible to have made such a resistance to the Government as would have prevented the enactment of stringent measures, one of which was decidedly unconstitutional. Bills were brought in and passed by large majorities, to guard against and avert the dangers which had been so alarmingly proclaimed. The first of these renewed the Act for the prevention and punishment of attempts to seduce soldiers and sailors from their allegiance; the second extended to the Prince Regent all the safeguards against treasonable attempts which secure the actual sovereign; the third was for the prevention of seditious meetings; the last of the four gave to the executive power the fearful right of imprisonment without trial. In common parlance, the Habeas Corpus Act was suspended, under "An Act to empower his Majesty to secure and detain such persons as his Majesty shall suspect are conspiring against his person and government." The suspension was, however, in this instance, limited to the ensuing 1st of July.

The Habeas Corpus Suspension Act was passed on the 3rd of March; the Bill for restraining Seditious Meetings did not become law till the 29th of March. Within a week after the passing of the Act for imprisonment without trial, and before the magistrates had received any accession to their powers as to the dispersion of tumultuous assemblies, an occurrence took place at Manchester, which was at once evidence of the agitated condition of distressed multitudes in the manufacturing districts, and of the extreme weakness of their purpose. This was the famous march of the Blanketeers. The Blanket Meeting, which took place in St. Peter's Field at Manchester, was so called because many of the vast body of workmen who attended were observed to have blankets, rugs, or large coats, rolled up and tied knapsack-like, on their backs. Some carried bundles under their arms; some had papers, supposed to be petitions, rolled up; and some had stout walking-sticks. The magistrates came upon the field and read the Riot Act; the

meeting was dispersed by the military and constables; three hundred commenced a straggling march, followed by a body of yeomanry, and a hundred and eighty reached Macclesfield at nine o'clock at night. Some were apprehended, some lay in the fields. The next morning the numbers had almost melted away. The avowed Reform-leaders—delegates and Hampden-Club men—were now under perpetual terror. Some wandered from their homes in dread of imprisonment; others were seized in the bosoms of their families. Public meetings were at an end. The fears and passions of large bodies of men had no safety valve. "Open meetings thus being suspended, secret ones ensued; they were originated at Manchester, and assembled under various pretexts. . . . Their real purpose, divulged only to the initiated, was to carry into effect a night attack on Manchester, the attempt at which had before failed for want of arrangement and co-operation." \* This scheme was noticed in the Second Report of the Lord's Secret Committee: "It is stated to have been proposed that Manchester should be made a Moscow, for the purpose of strengthening their cause, by throwing numbers of people out of employment." † A little while after this "Moscow" proposal, a co-delegate came to Bamford, to propose the assassination of all the ministers. We know that this scheme smouldered for several years. "The fact was," says Bamford, "this unfortunate person, in the confidence of an unsuspecting mind, as I believe, had, during one of his visits to London, formed a connection with Oliver, the spy; which connection, during several succeeding months, gave a new impulse to secret meetings and plots in various parts of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Derbyshire, and ended in the tragedy of Brandreth, Ludlow, and Turner, at Derby." This tragedy is the only one of the insurrectionary movements of the manufacturing districts in 1817 that has left any traces of judicial investigation, with the exception of proceedings at York, at which all the state prisoners were discharged by the Grand Jury, or acquitted upon trial. All the persons connected with the Blanket expedition, and the expected risings at Manchester, were discharged before trial.

The Midland Counties of Nottingham, Leicester, and Derby, had been in a disturbed state for several years. The habit of daring outrage was familiar to large numbers of the manufacturing population. The course of ignorant and brutal violence, known as Luddism, had revived in redoubled fury. At the Leicester assizes, on the 1st of April, eight men were tried and convicted of the most daring outrages at Loughborough, and six of these offenders

\* Bamford, vol. i. p. 45.

† Hansard, vol. xxxvi. vol. 952.

were executed on the 17th of the same month. There was not the slightest attempt at this trial to connect the crimes of these men with any political opinions. But amongst a population that for four years had witnessed the night attacks of armed men upon machinery, and with whom some of the leaders of such organized attacks were in habitual intercourse, it is manifest that the materials for political insurrection were abundantly accumulated. It was not the part of a wise and humane government to permit the feeblest spark of excitement from without to approach these inflammable materials. The secret operations of "the Spy System" in the manufacturing districts were first brought to light by the sagacious energy of the late Mr. Baines of Leeds. The circumstances of this discovery are briefly told by his son, to the effect, that Mr. Baines having learnt that a government emissary, named Oliver, had been attempting to entrap Mr. James Willan, a printer, of Dewsbury, to attend a meeting where ten persons had been arrested, thought it his duty to investigate the facts by personal inquiry. Mr. Willan proved that Oliver, who represented himself as a delegate from the Radicals of London, had several times, for the space of two months, endeavoured to seduce him into acts of violence and situations of danger, and that he had especially urged him to attend a meeting of "delegates" at Thornhill-Lees on the previous Friday, at which meeting ten men were arrested by a party of military, under the command of major-general sir John Byng. Willan, who was a conscientious man, and a professor of the principles of the Society of Friends, indignantly repelled every invitation to violence, and refused to attend the meeting. The ten prisoners had been conveyed, with Oliver himself, to Wakefield, for examination by the magistrates; but at that town Oliver was seen at liberty, and in communication with the servant of general Byng. It was further learnt that Oliver had been at general Byng's house at Campsall, a few days before.\* Mr. Baines having published a statement of these circumstances in his paper, 'The Leeds Mercury,' the transaction formed the subject of a violent debate in the House of Commons on the 16th of June. In the 'Life of Lord Sidmouth,' this affair has been minutely gone into, for the purpose of justifying the Secretary of State for the Home Department against the imputations which arose out of the employment of such persons as Oliver. "None of them," says the author of the Life, "were employed in the first instance by lord Sidmouth; but themselves sought him out; and if, which is not probable, they, in any instances, instigated the conspirators to crime in order to betray

\* "Life of Edward Baines," by his son, Edward Baines, pp. 92, 93.

them, the treacherous act must have been entirely their own, as nothing would have excited more his lordship's indignation than the bare idea of so base a proceeding.\* This opinion is supported by a letter of lord Strafford (formerly sir John Byng), written in 1846. Sir John Byng himself was perfectly incapable, as was acknowledged on all hands, of turning the spy into a tempter.

On Sunday, the 8th of June, there was a remarkable assemblage at Pentridge, a village situated some two miles from the Ambergate station on the present North Midland Railway. The village is in the nilly and thinly-peopled district to the west of the river Derwent. In the neighbourhood of Pentridge there are several other scattered villages,—all not far removed from a direct road to Nottingham. About a mile from Pentridge, at Butterley, was a large iron foundry. Two men in the employ of the proprietors of this foundry went into the White Horse public-house at Pentridge, on the morning of the 8th of June, and found a good many persons in the parlour there, “talking about this revolution.” There was one amongst them they called “The Captain.” He had a map in his hand, and the people came in, and kept asking him questions; and he said, there would be no good to be done except a complete overthrow of the Government. All the country was to rise, all at one time. Many talked thus. They made no secret. They spoke it openly. They did not mind who heard them. They said they had plenty of pikes; and they would go and take Nottingham wholly to themselves; and when they got to Nottingham, every man would have a hundred guineas, and plenty of rum, and it would be nothing but a journey of pleasure. This extraordinary assembly lasted six or seven hours. The two men from the iron works were special constables; but they were afraid to say anything about it. Having agreed to meet on the night of the 9th after dark, the people separated. The Captain with the map in his hand was Jeremiah Brandreth, a frame-work knitter, whose family had received parochial relief. Mr. Denman (who was counsel for the prisoners), after Brandreth had been convicted, compared this man with ‘The Corsair’ of lord Byron. In spite of Mr. Denman’s rhetorical description of the mastery of this leader over his weak followers, we must be content to believe, from the evidence of Brandreth’s acts, that he was a frantic enthusiast, goaded to violence by great poverty, by imaginary oppression, and, what is more, by the grossest delusions as to his own power and the strength of his cause. We do not think that he was the less dangerous on his real character and the real circumstances around him: but, we believe, as Mr.

\* “Life of Lord Sidmouth,” vol. iii. p. 187.

Denman came to the conclusion, that, in spite of his influence and command, “he was most clearly himself an instrument wielded by other hands.” On Saturday night, the 7th of June, Oliver goes to a meeting at Nottingham, with instructions from sir John Byng “not to conceal anything as to the Yorkshire meeting by which these people could be deceived.” On Sunday morning, the Nottingham Captain is heard saying, “All the country is to rise, all at one time.” On Monday night he passes the door of a labouring man at South Wingfield, about three miles from Pentridge, in his way to an old barn up in the fields, and he urges the man to come with him, saying that “the countries, England, Ireland, and France, were to rise that night at ten o’clock,” and that “the northern clouds, men from the north, would come down and sweep all before them.” It is difficult not to regard the language of Brandreth as pure insanity, especially when we contrast it with the sober sense of some around him. “There was an old woman standing by,” says the South Wingfield man, “and she tapped him on the shoulder, and said, ‘My lad, we have got a magistrate here’”;—and the labourer himself “thought he must be drunk or mad to think of such things.” But on the madman went. In the old barn at South Wingfield he assembled twenty men, who had pikes and guns, and they went forward, stopping at solitary houses, and demanding guns, and dragging unwilling men out of their beds and hiding-places, and compelling them to march with them. At the farm-house of a widow who behaved with unflinching courage, Brandreth fired in at a window, and killed one of her servants, upon arms being refused to him. His followers said he should not have shot that poor innocent man; and he replied, it was his duty to do it. Onwards they marched—the volunteers and the conscripts; and the Captain, when they halted at some low dwellings, and met with any one who refused to march, had his ready exhortation, that “a great cloud out of the north would sweep all before them,” with the more particular information that “it would not be necessary to go farther than Nottingham, for London would be taken by the time they got there.” Some of the pressed men ran away in the darkness; one refused to march in rank, and upon Brandreth swearing he would shoot him in a moment, the bold fellow stepped up to him with his knife, and the Captain turned off from him. During all this march the rain was incessant. By the time they reached the Butterley Iron-works, their numbers amounted to about a hundred. Brandreth was boldly met by Mr. Goodwin, the manager of the works, and, when he demanded men was told, “You shall not have one of them. You