

CHAPTER XI.

Separation of Hanover from Great Britain.—Departure of the King of Hanover.—The Queen meets the Parliament.—Dissolution.—Ministry at the Queen's Accession.—The New Parliament.—Canada.—Insurrection in Canada.—Lord Durham appointed Lord High Commissioner.—Resigns his office.—His Report.—Coronation of the Queen.—Prorogation.—Review of the Session.—Canterbury Fanatics.—Career of John Thom.—Proclaims himself the Messiah at Boughton.—The Three Days' March of his deluded followers.—Neglect of Education in the District.—The Tragedy of Bosenden Wood.—Meeting of Parliament.—Chartism.—Condition of the Labouring Classes.—Jamaica.—Resignation of the Ministry.—Failure in the attempt to form a New Administration.—The Bedchamber Question.—Disloyal Tories.—Chartist Riots.—Insurrection at Newport.—John Frost and others tried for High Treason.

FROM the hour that the Crown of these kingdoms devolved upon Queen Victoria, dates a change which was a real blessing in the relations of the Sovereign to the Continent of Europe. Hanover was at that instant wholly separated from Great Britain. By the law of that country a female could not reign except in default of heirs male in the Royal family. But in addition to the great advantage of separating the policy of England wholly from the intrigues and complications of a petty German State, it was an immediate happiness that the most hated and in some respects the most dangerous man in these islands was removed to a sphere where his political system might be worked out with less danger to the good of society than amongst a people where his influence was associated with the grossest follies of Toryism and the darkest designs of Orangeism. On the 24th of June the duke of Cumberland, now become Ernest Augustus, King of Hanover, left London. On the 28th he made a solemn entrance into the capital of his states, and at once exhibited to his new subjects his character and disposition by refusing to receive a deputation of the Chambers, who came to offer him their homage and their congratulations. By a proclamation of the 5th of July he announced his intention to abolish the representative constitution, which he had previously refused to recognize by the customary oath. We shall have little further occasion to notice the course of this worst disciple of the old school of intolerance and irresponsible government, and we may therefore at once state that he succeeded in depriving Hanover of the forms of freedom under which she had begun to live;

ejected from their offices and banished some of the ablest professors of the University of Göttingen, who had ventured to think that letters would flourish best in a free soil; and reached the height of his ambition in becoming the representative of whatever in sovereign power was most repugnant to the spirit of the age.

The funeral of William the Fourth had taken place at Windsor on the 9th of July. On the 17th the Queen went in state to Parliament. The chronicles of the time are eloquent in their descriptions of the enthusiasm with which her Majesty was received, and of the extraordinary concourse of ladies of rank in the House of Lords to do honour to the rare occasion of the presence there of the third female sovereign who had thus met the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament. In the speech from the throne her Majesty stated that amongst the useful measures which Parliament had brought to maturity she regarded with peculiar interest the amendment of the Criminal Code and the reduction of the number of capital punishments. She hailed this mitigation of the severity of the law as an auspicious commencement of her reign. "It will be my care," she said, "to strengthen our institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, by discreet improvement wherever improvement is required, and to do all in my power to compose and allay animosity and discord." These were not words of course. They were the key-note of that harmony which, during the progress of a quarter of a century, has superseded in a great degree the harsh discords which had too long distinguished the contests of parties and of principles. The Parliament was prorogued and was dissolved the same evening.

The ministry which Queen Victoria found at her accession* was one whose general character was in harmony with the opinions in which she had been educated. Viscount Melbourne, the First Lord of the Treasury, was at her hand to guide and assist her in the discharge of the technical business of her great office. The daily duties of the Sovereign are of no light nature. Many of the complicated details of the various departments of the State must pass under the eye of the Constitutional Monarch for approval, and a vast number of documents can only receive their validity from the signature of the Sovereign. During the elections, which were over early in August, the party contests assumed a tone not entirely constitutional; for the adherents of the ministry alleged to their constituents that in supporting them they were exhibiting their loyalty to the Queen, whilst the adverse party main-

* See List, p. 203.

tained that her Majesty had only passively adopted that administration of her uncle which she found established. But amidst these fluctuating demonstrations of political management there was one feeling predominant, which was certainly favourable to the duration of the ministry—that of a deep and growing attachment to the person of the young Sovereign. Never was there a more enthusiastic demonstration of popular feeling than when, on the 9th of November, the Queen went in state to the City to dine with the Lord Mayor at Guildhall. In less than a fortnight after the gorgeous banquet and the universal excitement of a general holiday in London, the real business commenced which was to test the position of the Government. On the 15th of November the new Parliament met. Mr. Abercromby was re-elected speaker without opposition. On the 20th the Queen in person opened the new Parliament. The most important paragraph in her Majesty's speech was—"I recommend to your serious consideration the state of the province of Lower Canada." At the opening of the last Parliament of king William the Fourth a similar expression of solicitude as to the condition of Canada is found in the king's speech. We shall endeavour to trace as briefly as possible how the discontents which existed at the beginning of 1837 broke out into open insurrection at the end of that year, and how they were finally allayed.

In the House of Commons on the 6th of March, 1837, lord John Russell brought forward a series of resolutions which declared that since the 31st of October, 1832, no provision had been made by the legislature of the province of Lower Canada for defraying the charges of the administration of justice, and for the support of the civil government within the province; that for four years the payments in arrear had amounted to a large sum which the House of Assembly, in answer to a recommendation of the Governor, declined to discharge by a vote of supply, declaring, amongst other things, that it persisted in the demand of an elective legislative council, and a free exercise of its control over all the branches of the executive government. The resolutions of lord John Russell expressed the refusal of the British Legislature to accede to these demands, although it was held expedient to adopt certain improvements in the legislative council and in the executive council. These resolutions were passed by large majorities in both Houses. The promulgation in Canada of the determination of the British Government was a signal for revolt. On the 22nd of December the Government announced in both Houses of Parliament that there was an open insurrection and rebellion in

Lower Canada, and it was in consequence proposed that the adjournment for Christmas should be for a shorter period than originally intended. The debate on this occasion shows how completely it had become a creed of those who held strong democratic opinions that the dominion of England in America should at once be brought to a conclusion. "Great," said sir William Molesworth, "would be the advantages of an amicable separation of the two countries." The civil war which sir William Molesworth considered almost inevitable, would, he believed, involve this country in a contest with the United States of America. A passage in the philosophical baronet's speech is worth considering, although a quarter of a century has passed over since its utterance. "How powerful soever the central government of the United States may be when it goes along with the wishes of the people, it is most feeble when the people are opposed or indifferent to its commands, or when one or more of the sovereign states are desirous of evading its decrees. It is exactly in a case like this that the central government of that republic is weakest; for how anxious soever it may be, from general views of policy, to prevent all interference in the affairs of Canada—all hostilities with this country—yet its people will see in this struggle but a repetition of their own glorious struggle for independence; they will behold in the conduct of England toward Canada the sequel of those despotic and unjust principles which a little more than half a century ago caused them to shake off our yoke."* The ultimate consequence of this temporary estrangement of the popular party in Canada from the Imperial government was the establishment of a better system of policy. This change had been strenuously advocated by colonial reformers, who contended that all which was needed to preserve our colonies was "a clear demarcation of their rights from ours, a full exemption from all control in the matters which solely regarded them, with a supervision only on the part of the empire in matters strictly of imperial concernment." This view, it is added, "may be said to have rendered Canada loyal."†

Between the adjournment and the re-assembling of Parliament, important events had taken place in Canada. On the 14th of December the rebels were defeated at St. Eustace, their leaders saving themselves by flight. On the 29th of December the United States' steamboat "Caroline," which was laden with arms and ammunition for the insurgents, was attacked and burnt on the territories of the United States. This act was committed under the

* Hansard, vol. xxxix. col. 1465.

† "Secularia," by Samuel Lucas, M.A., p. 265.

orders of the governor, sir Francis Head. It produced a long controversy between the two governments, and was justified by the necessity of defending the British territory, which had been assaulted from the American side. The President of the United States subsequently forbade the attacks of the citizens of the republic on neighbouring states. On the 5th of January, 1838, the insurgents, headed by Dr. Mackenzie, surrounded Toronto, but were repulsed by sir Francis Head. Such was the course of the insurrection, when, on the 22nd of January, in the House of Commons, lord John Russell moved for leave to bring in a bill, by which, for a certain time, the calling of an assembly in Lower Canada, which was a duty incumbent on the governor for the time being, might be suspended, and authority be given to meet the present emergency, and to provide for the future government of the province. He thought with respect to the principal question on which the alleged grievances of the Canadians were based, a satisfactory adjustment might, in the course of time, be arrived at. He proposed that a high functionary should be sent out, who should be conversant with matters of administration, with the most important affairs which are from time to time brought before Parliament, as well as with the affairs of the various states of Europe, and moreover that it should be implied by his nomination that he was favourable to popular feelings and popular rights. He then announced that her Majesty had been pleased to entrust the conduct of this affair, with the high powers implied in the appointment, to the earl of Durham, who had accepted the office. Lord Durham, in his place in the House of Lords, stated that he did not go to Canada for the purpose of suspending the constitution, but in the endeavour to provide for the extraordinary state of circumstances produced by the rebellious part of the Canadian community, that would render it impossible for the constitution to continue in operation. "I go," he said, "not for the purpose of exercising that power, that species of discreditable power, as the noble and learned lord [Brougham] calls it, which is to be vested in me; but in the first place to restore, I trust, the supremacy of the law, and next, to be the humble instrument of conferring upon the British North American provinces such a free and liberal constitution as shall place them on the same scale of independence as the rest of the possessions of Great Britain."*

Lord Durham landed at Quebec on the 29th of May, 1838. The history of the administration of Canada by her Majesty's High Commissioner furnishes a remarkable proof of how great and

* "Hansard," vol. xl. col. 243.

salutary changes may be effected in the government of a great dependency, by the union of firmness and conciliation, and by the application of liberal political principles in the place of a continued system of coercion and tutelage. Lord Durham had at his side an adviser, a person of eminent ability and with large views of statesmanship—Mr. Charles Buller. All went well for a few months. The rebellion was dying out. The French population had given up their notion of being supported by the borderers of the United States, and were conciliated by seeing that no difference was to be made between British and French subjects. A general amnesty was published, and measures were taken for inquiring into the feasibility of a plan for constituting a Federal Union of the British North American provinces. The measure which lord Durham pursued with regard to the disposal of the rebel prisoners was successful in the colony, but obnoxious to many of influence in the legislature of Great Britain. By an ordinance of the 28th of June it was declared that eight rebel leaders in the jail of Montreal who had acknowledged their guilt should be transported to Bermuda; that sixteen other rebel leaders who were named had fled, and that if any of either class should return without permission, and be found in the province, they should suffer death. On the 7th of August lord Brougham made a strong attack upon what he described as the "appalling fact of fourteen persons, and M. Papi-neau making fifteen, being adjudged to suffer death, if they appeared in Canada, not one of those individuals having been previously tried. Such a proceeding was contrary to every principle of justice, and was opposed to the genius and spirit of English law, which humanely supposed every accused party to be innocent until he was proved to be guilty."* On the 10th of August lord Melbourne announced that her Majesty's Government had counselled the disallowance of the ordinance. When lord Durham received the news of this censure of his administration he resolved to resign his great office; and on the 9th of October he issued a proclamation, according to the terms of the Indemnity Act which lord Brougham had proposed and carried, which proclamation was a humiliating abrogation of the ordinance of the 28th of June. Lord Durham at the same time published a document in which he justified the policy pursued by him since his arrival in Canada, and announced his determination of resigning his government. He did not wait to obtain leave for his return. This was a grave error. He arrived home in a state of wretched health, produced by the irritation of a proud and sensitive nature working upon a feeble con-

* "Hansard," vol. xlv. col. 1022.

stitution. The censure implied in the abrogation of the ordinance of lord Durham was a severe measure towards a man whose great hope was to have secured the allegiance and prosperity of Canada, by a system of high policy which was utterly opposed to the old methods of colonial government. Great lawyers at home differed as to the legality of the course which he pursued. The eloquence of lord Brougham in denouncing it as an illegal act of despotic authority met with supporters amongst those who hated lord Durham's liberal policy. He came home a broken-hearted man; and his career, which might otherwise have been so glorious, terminated in his death in 1840, but not without the noble satisfaction he derived from establishing his policy in his counsels to his successor, Mr. Poulett Thompson. During the voyage home his Report on the affairs of British North America, which is attributed to the pen of his friend Mr. Charles Buller, was in great part prepared. It is a most able view, not only of the particular circumstances of the provinces which were placed under lord Durham's government, but generally of colonial administration. A passage in the conclusion of this Report is now of higher interest than the occurrences to which it had a special reference. "The experiment of keeping colonies and governing them well ought at least to have a trial, ere we abandon for ever the vast dominion which might supply the wants of our surplus population, and raise up millions of fresh consumers of our manufactures and producers of a supply for our wants. The warmest admirers, and the strongest opponents of republican institutions, admit or assert that the amazing prosperity of the United States is less owing to their form of government, than to the unlimited supply of fertile land, which maintains succeeding generations in an undiminishing affluence of fertile soil. A region as large and as fertile is open to your Majesty's subjects in your Majesty's American dominions." At that time emigration from the United Kingdom was upon a very limited scale. The vast resources of Australia were yet undeveloped. In 1837 the emigrants to the North American colonies were about 30,000, and to the United States 36,000; to the Australian colonies and New Zealand the number was only 5,000. In 1838 the emigration to America was reduced to one-fourth of the amount of the previous year, whilst that to Australia was trebled. From 1815 to 1838 the annual average of emigrants to all places during the 24 years was 38,376. From 1839 to 1852, when what is termed the Irish Exodus was in full operation, and the gold discoveries had been made in Australia, the annual average during the 14 years was 181,612. The

realization of the great triumph of science in accomplishing the passage by steam power alone across the Atlantic offered new facilities for emigration. The first vessels which solved this problem were the "Sirius" and the "Great Western;" the one having accomplished the voyage to New York in twenty days, the other in sixteen days. We may conclude this rapid notice of the affairs of our American colonies by stating that, after a series of defeats in November, especially one on the 17th near Prescott in Upper Canada, the insurrection was wholly suppressed. In 1840 an Act was passed for the union of the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada as one province, under one Legislative Council and one Assembly.

The coronation of the Queen at Westminster Abbey took place on the 28th of June. The splendours which had attended the coronation of George the Fourth were to some extent dispensed with. There was no solemn procession of the Estates of the Realm. There was no banquet in Westminster Hall, with its accompanying feudal services. But there was a gorgeous cavalcade which more than realized the pomp of ancient times, when the king came "from the Tower of London to his Palace at Westminster through the midst of the City, mounted on a horse, handsomely habited, and bare-headed, in the sight of all the people." Charles the Second was the last king who thus went to his coronation in procession from the Tower. Queen Victoria went from Buckingham Palace through the line of streets from Hyde Park Corner, where the houses were not hung with tapestry, as of old, but where galleries and scaffolding were raised throughout the line, and the windows were filled with ladies whose enthusiasm was as hearty as that to which Elizabeth bowed. Never were the streets more crowded. Never were the cheers of an enormous multitude—swelled, it is said, by two hundred thousand persons from the country—more deafening than when the Queen passed along; the last of a cavalcade in which, next to herself, the persons most greeted by the popular voice were the Duke of Wellington and his old opponent Marshal Soult, who came as a Special Ambassador on this occasion. The day was remarkable, not only for the entire absence of accidents, but for the wonderful forbearance of that class who are most usually active on public occasions; there being only seven persons brought to the police stations for picking pockets. The day was observed throughout the kingdom as a general holiday; with public dinners, feasts to the poor, and brilliant illuminations. On this occasion, when the attachment of the people to their young queen was so universally manifested, some

might recollect an eloquent passage of a speech made by lord Brougham in the House of Lords six months before, in which he qualified his opposition to some of the details of the Civil List: "Not any one among you all can rejoice more sincerely than I have done in the enthusiasm of affection which has burst from all her subjects, to greet the accession of the reigning Monarch. They have generously let expectation usurp the place of gratitude. They have taken counsel with hope, rather than experience. For as memory scatters her sweets with a cold and churlish hand, it has been found more pleasing to array the object of the general love in the attire of fancy; and as fervent a devotion has been kindled towards the yet untried ruler, as could have glowed in her people's bosom after the longest and most glorious reign, in which she should have only lived and only governed for the country's good; by some chronic miracle escaping all error and all failure, and only showering down blessings upon mankind. I heartily rejoice in this enthusiasm, and I do not complain of it as premature. I rejoice in it because it must prove delightful to the royal object of it. I rejoice still more because I know that it will stimulate the queen to live for her country, in order to earn the affections which have already been bestowed, and justify the opinion which has been formed, and is so fondly cherished upon trust. But most chiefly do I rejoice, because it extinguishes for ever all apprehensions of the English people's loyalty and trustworthiness; puts to shame all who would represent them as disaffected towards monarchical institutions; demonstrates the safety of entrusting them with an ample measure of political rights; and teaches to statesmen this great practical lesson, that the more we extirpate abuse from our system, the more searching we make our reforms, the more we endear the Constitution to the people by making them feel its benefits—the safer will be the just rights of the monarch who is its head, and the stronger will be the allegiance of the subject who cheerfully obeys." *
 Parliament was prorogued by the Queen in person on the 16th of August. The chief measures which had occupied the discussions in both Houses were the settlement of the Civil List and the state of Canada. Other measures, which provoked less conflict, were not less important. In his review of the measures of the Session the Speaker emphatically dwelt upon the provision made for the destitute in Ireland. He said that no measure like the introduction of a Poor Law into a country circumstanced as Ireland

* "Speeches of Henry lord Brougham," vol. iv. p. 337.

is with respect to the number and condition of its population, could be proposed without incurring heavy responsibility; but that looking at what had been done on this subject by former parliaments with respect to England, they had thought that the time was come when they might legislate for Ireland with safety and with a reasonable prospect of success. The Irish Poor-Law Statute was in great degree founded upon three comprehensive Reports of Mr. Nicholls. The Speaker expressed a hope that the execution of that most important law would be watched over and guided by the same prudent and impartial spirit which governed the deliberations which led to its enactment. It was felt by every one conversant with the subject, that no better prospect could be afforded of the probable realization of this hope than the immediate determination of the Government that Mr. Nicholls should proceed to Ireland for the purpose of carrying the new law into operation, which he had, in great part, planned, basing it upon the most searching inquiry and the most careful consideration. Amongst the other important measures of the Session were a mitigation of the law of imprisonment for debt; the abridgment of the power of holding benefices in plurality; and the abolition of composition for tithes in Ireland, substituting rent-charges payable by those who had a perpetual interest in the land. In his Address to her Majesty the Speaker adverted to "the improving opinions and increasing knowledge of the educated classes of the community." He probably considered that the time was distant when there would be "improving opinions and increasing knowledge" amongst the bulk of the population who could scarcely be recognized as "educated classes." A circumstance which occurred during this Session furnished a sufficient proof of the necessity for exertion before the labours of Parliament to maintain respect for our laws and institutions by salutary amendments should be generally appreciated.

A month before the coronation of the Queen, that manifestation of popular ignorance took place in Kent, to which we alluded in our last chapter. The Reports of the parliamentary discussions upon the subject at the beginning of June in that year, are under the head of "Canterbury Fanatics." The debates to which these occurrences gave rise were little more than personal and party squabbles; except in the argument of Mr. Hume that such an exhibition of brutal ignorance, in a district within fifty miles of London, where the people were surrounded by country gentlemen of great wealth, and where there was a large body of clergy, presented an occasion for endeavouring to arouse the government to the absolute necessity of a comprehensive system of education for the

people.* Little as the attention of parliament was aroused by the proceedings of a band of Kentish fanatics, the notice of foreign countries was painfully directed towards this contradiction of our boasted advance in civilization as an event almost inconceivable in the Nineteenth Century.†

About the beginning of the year 1832 a stranger made his appearance at Canterbury who attracted a good deal of notice by his commanding figure and handsome features. He represented himself as a Jew, which character was in some degree supported by his ample beard at a time when such an ornament was not common amongst Englishmen. He gradually put forth pretensions of superior sanctity, and mysteriously intimated that he had a mission to fulfil of no common nature. Devotees soon surrounded him, not wholly of the lowest and most ignorant class, but comprising a few having wealth and respectable position. Parliament was prorogued in August of that year, after the passing of the Reform Bill, and the electors of Canterbury began to look out for proper persons to represent their opinions, whether Reforming or Conservative. The handsome Jew had then become sir William Courtenay, the expectant heir of great estates, and a Knight of Malta. There were two candidates for the suffrages of the citizens in the ministerial interest—the Hon. Richard Watson and viscount Fordwich. Two Conservative Baronets came forward to oppose them, but quickly withdrew. No other candidate of known character appearing in the field, a knot of citizens calling themselves Conservatives put forward sir William Courtenay. He came on the hustings in a velvet coat, “like a mountebank,” said some irreverent newspapers. He was proposed and seconded at the election by two Conservative tradesmen; members of the liberal professions, and even a clergyman of the Church of England, all of Conservative politics, voted for him; ‡ and the adventurer, who was manifestly an impostor or a madman, actually obtained three hundred and seventy-eight votes. Such was the indiscriminating violence of party feelings at the crisis of our great Constitutional Reform. Defeated in the object of his ambition he retired to Herne Bay, which was then more distinguished as a resort of smugglers than as a fashionable watering-place. In some affray

* Hansard, vol. xliii. col. 547.

† See “*Annuaire Historique*” for 1838, p. 487.—This most extraordinary episode in the history of the first year of the reign of Queen Victoria appearing to us as something more important than a mere outbreak of local fanaticism, we thought it our duty to ascertain by personal inquiry if any elucidation of these events could be obtained from witnesses still living in the district where they occurred.

‡ Hansard, vol. xliii. cols. 1108, 1112.

between the coastguard and a band of these free-traders, sir William Courtenay came forward as a witness; subjected himself by his evidence to an indictment for perjury; and having been convicted under his proper name of John Nicholls Thom was sentenced to a term of imprisonment. He underwent some portion of the penalty of the law until his extravagances rendered it necessary to transfer his safe keeping from the County Prison to the County Lunatic Asylum. In the fourth year of Thom's confinement, namely, in August, 1837, his father and mother-in-law presented themselves to lord John Russell, the Home Secretary, who was residing at Endsleigh in Devonshire, to express their deep distress at the continued confinement of their son; stating that they had been told by his keepers that there was no danger likely to arise from his liberation; promising that the utmost care should be taken of him by themselves; and affirming that he had sufficient property to pay for any expense attending upon such care.* Upon these assurances lord John Russell, in his official capacity took measures for obtaining Thom's release; and having recommended that a pardon should be granted in the case of the prisoner, which was equivalent to an order for his discharge, he was taken away from the asylum in October by some person not accustomed to the treatment of lunatics. The visiting justices had not opposed this discharge. During the winter of 1837, and the spring of 1838, the unfortunate man, who had been described by the medical superintendent of the asylum simply as a lunatic fancying himself a knight, and having a right to an estate and to a castle, was living in farm-houses and cottages in a rural district between Canterbury and Faversham, and there acquired a most extraordinary influence over the deluded people amongst whom he dwelt. From the subsequent parliamentary proceedings connected with this case, it appeared that Thom had been engaged in extensive mercantile transactions in Cornwall; had left Truro for Liverpool in May, 1832, for the purpose of selling a quantity of malt; and after having written a sane and affectionate letter to his wife, had never returned to his home with the money derived from this sale, and had passed entirely out of the notice of his family whilst he was pursuing the high destinies of sir William Courtenay.

On the pleasant high road to London, about six miles from Canterbury, is the village of Boughton-under-Blean. On the right of the road before reaching Boughton is an extensive wood called Bosenden. The parish of Herne Hill on the north adjoins Boughton, as does Dunkirkville, a populous non-parochial place, on the

* Lord John Russell's Statement, Hansard, vol. xliii. col. 1099.