

“originated in his sincere conviction (founded upon an attentive observation of the general state of public opinion, and of the condition of the empire) that no administration which should not comprise some of those persons, could prove advantageous to the Prince Regent, conciliatory towards Ireland, and equal to the conduct of the war, on a scale of sufficient extent.” Marquis Wellesley must have been strangely deceived when he supposed that public opinion supported him in this notion: and it is even more remarkable that he should have expected those persons to co-operate with him in his vigorous plans for prosecuting the war, knowing as he did, that from the beginning they had considered it as hopeless, and had not less repeatedly than confidently predicted its total failure. Farther, the Marquis stated that the considerations which had induced him to resign office had since acquired additional force, and would constitute an insuperable obstacle to his acceptance of any station in the present administration. He had withdrawn from Mr. Perceval’s because his general opinions on various important questions had not sufficient weight in that cabinet to justify him towards the public, or towards his own character in continuing in office. “My objection,” said he, “to remaining in that cabinet arose, in a great degree, from the imperfect scale on which the efforts in the Peninsula were conducted. It was always stated to me that it was impracticable to enlarge that system. I thought it was perfectly practicable; and that it was neither safe nor honest towards this country or the allies to continue the present inadequate scheme. Since my resignation it has been found practicable to make some extension; but it is still intimated, that my views are more extensive than the resources of the country can enable the government to reduce to practice. I, however, still entertain the same views and opinions, without diminution or alteration; and I am convinced that a con-

CHAP.

XLI.

1812.

May.

CHAP.
XLI.

1812.

May.

siderable extension of the scale of our operations in the Peninsula, and also an effectual correction of many branches of our system in that quarter, are objects of indispensable necessity and of easy attainment. With such a decided difference of opinion in relation to the conduct and management of the war, my return into a cabinet composed as the present is, would offer to me no better prospect than the renewal of discussions which have hitherto proved unavailing."

Mr. Canning's.

Mr. Canning rested his refusal of office solely upon the Catholic question: "To accept it," he said, "would be to lend himself to the defeating of his own declared opinions on that most important question; opinions which were as far as those of any man from being favourable to precipitate an unqualified concession. But by entering into the administration while all consideration of that question was to be resisted, I should incur," said he, "such a loss of personal and public character as would disappoint the object which his Royal Highness the Prince Regent has at heart, and must render my accession to his government a new source of weakness rather than an addition of strength." Lord Liverpool had stated to Mr. Canning, that Lord Castlereagh had from motives of delicacy absented himself from the cabinet when the grounds on which the overture was to be made were discussed; and that he would be no obstacle in the way of arrangement. This was consistent with the manliness and generosity of Lord Castlereagh's character, and it was received in a corresponding spirit by Mr. Canning. "After the expressions," said he to Lord Liverpool, "with which you were charged on the part of all your colleagues, I should not be warranted in omitting to declare that no objection of a personal sort should have prevented me from uniting with any or all of them, if I could have done so with honour. . . I cannot deny myself the satisfaction of adding, that the manner of your com-

munication with us has entirely corresponded with the habits and sentiments of a friendship of so many years; a friendship which our general concurrence on many great political principles has strengthened, and which our occasional differences have in no degree impaired.”

CHAP.
XLI.

1812.

May.

If the failure of this overture disappointed the hopes which ministers had reasonably entertained of strengthening themselves by the accession of the two persons who were most in accord with them upon all points of foreign policy, it had no tendency to widen their differences; but just as it terminated, a statement of the causes which had induced Marquis Wellesley to resign found its way into the newspapers through the indiscretion of some of his friends. It spoke in no measured terms of his late colleagues: in his judgement, it was said, the cabinet neither possessed ability and knowledge to devise a good plan, nor temper and discernment to adopt what was recommended to them: . . . it said also that Marquis Wellesley could not pay any deference to Mr. Perceval's judgement and attainments without injury to the public service: that if his own opinions had been adopted, he might have been willing to have served with him, but would never have consented to serve under him in any circumstances: that he had offered to act under Earl Moira or Lord Holland, and made no exception to any person as prime minister but Mr. Perceval, whom he considered incompetent to fill that office, although sufficiently qualified for inferior stations. The publication of this statement would have been indiscreet at any time; but being published a few days only after the murder of Mr. Perceval, it excited a strong feeling of displeasure. Just at this juncture, Mr. Stuart Wortley moved in the House of Commons, that an address should be presented to the Prince, praying him to take measures for forming a strong and efficient government. This ill-judged motion was carried

M. Wellesley's statement.

Mr. Stuart Wortley's motion.

CHAP.

XLI.

1812.

*May 23.**M. Wellesley charged to form an administration.*

by a small majority; and the Prince in consequence sent for Marquis Wellesley, and desired him to form a plan of an administration. The Marquis requested Mr. Canning, as the channel which might be most agreeable to Lord Liverpool, to inquire whether he and all or any of his colleagues would form part of a ministry constituted upon the principles of taking the Catholic question into early consideration, with a view to its final and satisfactory settlement, and of prosecuting the war in the Peninsula with the best means of the country. There was the strongest wish, it was added, to comprehend in the arrangement, without any individual or party exclusion whatever, as many as possible of such persons as might be able to agree in giving their public service to the country upon these two principles. With regard to the distribution of offices nothing was stipulated; every thing, therefore, was open to be arranged to the honour and satisfaction of all parties. An immediate answer was returned by Lord Liverpool, for himself and his colleagues, saying, that it was not necessary for them to enter into any discussion of the two principles, because they all felt themselves bound, particularly after what had recently passed, to decline the proposal of becoming members of an administration to be formed by Marquis Wellesley.

*The ministers refuse to act with him.**Lords Grey and Grenville also decline.*

Marquis Wellesley made a similar communication to Lords Grey and Grenville, and through them to their friends, observing, that he neither claimed nor desired for himself any place in the new arrangement, looking upon himself merely as the instrument of executing the Prince's commands in this instance. Lords Grey and Grenville professed in reply, that they felt it to be the duty of all public men at such a moment, both by frank and conciliatory explanations of principle, and by the total abandonment of every personal object, to facilitate the means of giving effect to the late vote of the House of

Commons, and of averting the imminent and unparalleled dangers of the country. They cordially agreed with him upon the Catholic question. As to the second point, "No person," they said, "feels more strongly than we do the advantages which would result from a successful termination of the present contest in Spain; but we are of opinion, that the direction of military operations in an extensive war, and the more or less vigorous prosecution of those operations, are questions not of principle but of policy; to be regulated by circumstances in their nature temporary and fluctuating, and in many cases known only to persons in official stations; by the engagements of the country, the prospect of ultimate success, the extent of the exertions necessary for its attainment, and the means of supporting those efforts without too great a pressure on the finances and internal prosperity of the country. On such questions, therefore, no public men, either in or out of office, can undertake for more than a deliberate and dispassionate consideration, according to the circumstances of the case as it may appear, and to such means of information as may then be within their reach. But we cannot in sincerity conceal from Marquis Wellesley, that in the present state of the finances we entertain the strongest doubts of the practicability of an increase in any branch of the public expenditure." Lords Lansdowne and Holland concurred in this answer of the two opposition leaders. Earl Moira's reply was, "That a plan of government on the basis proposed would have his most cordial wishes; but that this declaration was not to imply any engagement on his part to accept office." In the subsequent correspondence, Marquis Wellesley and Mr. Canning said respecting the Catholic question, that they did not conceive any farther parliamentary proceeding to be necessary or practicable that session, than such as might be sufficient to ensure, either by compulsion upon a hostile administration, or

CHAP.
XLI.
1812.

May.

CHAP.
XLI.

1812.

May.

by pledge from a friendly one, the consideration of the question during the recess, with a view to its being brought before Parliament by the recommendation of the Crown early in the ensuing session." Earl Grey replied to this, "That he should very reluctantly abandon the hope of passing a bill even during the present session for the repeal of the disabilities whereof the Catholics complained; but if this could not be done, he held it indispensable that the most distinct and authentic pledge should be given of the intention both of the executive government and of Parliament to take the matter up as one of the first measures of the next." Touching the conduct of the war, "It is impossible," said he, "to reduce a question of this nature to any fixed principle. Whatever we can say with our present means of information must necessarily be general and inconclusive. I can have no hesitation in subscribing to the proposition, that if it shall be found expedient to continue the exertions we are now making in the Peninsula, they should be conducted in the manner best calculated to answer their end."

M. Wellesley receives fuller powers.
June 1.

Here Marquis Wellesley's commission ended: but the ministers considered themselves as holding office only till their successors should be appointed; and in a few days the Marquis received full authority to form an administration on the two principles which he had laid down, and he was specially instructed to communicate with Lords Grey and Grenville. The Prince signified his pleasure that Marquis Wellesley should conduct the formation of the administration in all its branches, and should be first Commissioner of the Treasury; and that Earl Moira, Lord Erskine, and Mr. Canning should be members of the cabinet. A cabinet formed on an enlarged basis must be extended to the number of twelve or thirteen members; and the Prince wished Lords Grey and Grenville to recommend four persons if it consisted of twelve, five if it should consist

of thirteen; these persons to be selected by the two lords without any exception or personal exclusion, and to be appointed by His Royal Highness to such stations as might hereafter be arranged. It was added, that entire liberty had been granted to Marquis Wellesley to propose for the Prince's approbation the names of any persons then occupying stations in His Royal Highness's councils, or of any other persons. In reply, the two lords repeated their declaration, that no sense of the public distress and difficulty, no personal feelings of whatever description, would have prevented them from accepting with dutiful submission any situations in which they could have hoped to serve His Royal Highness usefully and honourably; "But the present proposal," they said, "could not justify any such expectation. We are invited," they pursued, "not to discuss with your lordship, or with any other public men, according to the usual practice in such cases, the various and important considerations, both of measures and of arrangements, which belong to the formation of a new government in all its branches, but to recommend to His Royal Highness a number, limited by previous stipulation, of persons willing to be included in a cabinet of which the outlines are already definitively arranged. To this proposal we could not accede without the sacrifice of the very object which the House of Commons has recommended, . . . the formation of a strong and efficient administration. . . It is to the principle of disunion and jealousy that we object; . . . to the supposed balance of contending interests in a cabinet so measured out by preliminary stipulation. The times imperiously require an administration united in principle and strong in mutual reliance; possessing also the confidence of the Crown, and assured of its support in those healing measures which the public safety requires, and which are necessary to secure to the government the opinion and affections of the people. No such

CHAP.
XLI.

1812.

June.

*The two
Lords per-
sist in their
reply.*

June 3,

CHAP.

XLI.

1812.

June.

hope is presented to us by this project, which appears to us equally new in practice and objectionable in principle. It tends, as we think, to establish within the cabinet itself a system of counteraction inconsistent with the prosecution of any uniform and beneficial course of policy. We must therefore request permission to decline all participation in a government constituted upon such principles, satisfied as we are that the certain loss of character which must arise from it to ourselves could be productive only of disunion and weakness in the administration of the public interests."

Earl Moira's letter to Earl Grey.

June 3.

This called forth an explanatory letter to Earl Grey from Earl Moira, who thought that the answer of the two lords conveyed an oblique imputation upon him, as a party involved in the procedure. "You represent the proposition," said he, "as one calculated to found a cabinet upon a principle of counteraction. When the most material of the public objects which were to be the immediate ground of that cabinet's exertion had been previously understood between the parties, I own it is difficult for me to comprehend what principle of counteraction could be introduced. . . . With regard to the indication of certain individuals, I can assert, that it was a measure adopted through the highest spirit of fairness to you and your friends. Mr. Canning's name was mentioned because Marquis Wellesley would have declined office without him, and it was a frankness to apprise you of it; and Lord Erskine's and mine were stated with a view of showing, that Marquis Wellesley, so far from having any jealousy to maintain a preponderance in the cabinet, actually left a majority to those who had been accustomed to concur upon most public questions; and he specified Lord Erskine and myself, that you might see the number submitted for your exclusive nomination was not narrowed by the necessity of advertence to us. The choice of an additional member of

the cabinet left to you must prove how undistinguishable we consider our interests and yours, when this was referred to your consideration as a mere matter of convenience, the embarrassment of a numerous cabinet being well known. The reference to members of the late cabinet, or other persons, was always to be coupled with the established point, that they were such as could concur in the principles laid down as the foundation for the projected ministry; and the statement was principally dictated by the wish to show that no system of exclusion could interfere with the arrangements which the public service might demand. On the selection of those persons, I aver, the opinions of you, Lord Grenville, and the others whom you might bring forward as members of the cabinet, were to operate as fully as our own; and this was to be the case also with regard to subordinate offices. The expression that this was left to be proposed by Marquis Wellesley was intended to prove that His Royal Highness did not, even in the most indirect manner, suggest any one of those individuals. It is really impossible that the spirit of fairness can have been carried further than has been the intention in this negotiation. I therefore lament most deeply that an arrangement so important for the interests of the country should go off upon points which I cannot but think wide of the substance of the case."

This frank and manly remonstrance produced no effect upon the determination of the two lords. The objections stated in their joint letter "could not," they said, "be altered by a private explanation, which, though it might lessen some obvious objections to a part of the detail, still left the general character of the proceeding unchanged. They were, however, happy to receive it as an expression of personal regard, and of that desire which they readily acknowledged in Lords Wellesley and

CHAP.

XLI.

1812.

June.

June 4.