

thought proper to insinuate that our measures have been influenced by a desire of retaining our offices, I am sure the house will not be of opinion that our situation is particularly enviable, or one that could by any possibility be an object of choice. We feel . . . we admit . . . all the inconvenience of the present state of things ; but, considering the duration to be but short, are they in any degree equal to the inconvenience of appointing another person to execute the functions of the sovereign ; or, in other words, of appointing a regent, unless the necessity of the case absolutely requires it ? It is not from feelings of delicacy only that his Majesty's ministers have acted, but from the conviction that the preserving to his Majesty the power of exercising his authority immediately upon his recovery, without the interruption of a regent, would be a great national advantage. The regent, when appointed, would of course act as he thought best for the interests of the state ; and even admitting that the plans which he would adopt would be better than those now pursued, yet I contend, that this change from a bad to a better system, with the probability of again shortly recurring to the old system, would be much more injurious to the welfare of the public, than the inconveniences which have been so strongly urged by the gentlemen on the other side of the house.

“ The delay which has taken place has been no covert delay : it has been perfectly open, and the reason why it was asked was fairly stated. We have had no disguise, no subterfuge ; our object was broadly and fairly stated to parliament. Sir, I say again, that ministers feel deeply the heavy responsibility of their situation : they know that their conduct will necessarily be examined and scrutinized by parliament ; they know that they may have to request justice from parliament for their conduct, at a time when those who are now censuring their conduct with so much acrimony may possess a greater sway than they do at

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CHAP. present. Is such a situation, then, a desirable one? Is it an  
 XXXII. object of ambition? Is it possible that any man, or set of men,  
 1810. can covet such a situation, or wish to retain it, except from the  
 December. imperious sense of the duty which they owe to their sovereign  
 and to their country? That duty I will perform to the best of  
 my humble abilities, and cheerfully submit my conduct to the  
 justice of parliament and of my country.

“It has been asked, whether, if under the present circumstances, the evacuation of Portugal were deemed necessary, any order could be sent out to Lord Wellington for that purpose? And do gentlemen really believe that any difficulty exists upon such a subject? Do they really believe that Lord Wellington would refuse to obey an order transmitted to him, by his Majesty’s secretary of state, for that purpose, merely because he had heard of the King’s indisposition? Undoubtedly they do not: the case they have put is then an imaginary one. . . Sir, in the office which I have the honour to hold, money must be taken out of the Exchequer for the public service; it is the bounden duty of ministers to see that service performed; and do the honourable gentlemen opposite think that I would hesitate to draw the money for that purpose?” . . . At this a loud cry of Hear! hear! was raised from the opposition benches. . . “Sir,” pursued Mr. Perceval, “I am unable to account for the distinction which the gentlemen opposite appear to me to make between the two cases which I have put. When I said that ministers would not hesitate to give orders for the evacuation of Portugal, if it were deemed necessary, they seemed, by their silence at least, to acquiesce in what I said; but when I spoke of applying the money voted for the public service to the public service, they affect great astonishment, as if the principle of the two cases was not the same. But do they think that where money has been voted by parliament, and ordered by parliament to be applied to a parti-

cular service, that I would hesitate to have that public service performed, for fear of the responsibility that would attach to me? Do they think that I would endanger the best interests of the country, from any consideration of personal danger to myself? Do they think that I would risk a mutiny in the army or the navy, rather than take upon me the responsibility of issuing their pay? No, sir, if I could be guilty of such conduct, I should be unfit indeed for the situation which I hold! I should be guilty of a base dereliction of my duty to my sovereign and my country!"

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This was no empty language; and however the manly appeal might be lost upon those persons to whom it was immediately addressed, it was not lost upon the people of England. The ministers, with a spirit which alone might be sufficient to atone for all their errors, and entitle them to the lasting gratitude of these kingdoms, had ordered off reinforcements to Lord Wellington, on their own responsibility, at a crisis when they held their power by so precarious a tenure, that it was not unlikely their successors' orders for the evacuation of Portugal might be upon the seas at the same time. For that this was the policy which the opposition intended to pursue, if, as they now fully expected, they were to be invested with power, was what they themselves avowed. Issues of money also became necessary for the army and navy: money had been appropriated by parliament for these services; but the exchequer act requires that the issue should be under the great seal, or under the privy seal, or by authority of an act of parliament. Mr. Perceval thought that under the existing circumstances it would be proper to use the privy seal: the keeper of the privy seal was willing to take upon himself this responsibility; but the signature of Mr. Larpent, clerk of the privy seal, was likewise necessary, and that gentleman refused to affix it, pleading scruples on account of his oath of office.

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to Portugal.*

*Issues of  
money re-  
quired.*

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Lord Gren-  
ville as Au-  
ditor of the  
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Mr. Perceval upon this issued an order from the Treasury to the Exchequer, deeming this sufficient, and thinking also that it was better for the responsible servants of the crown to risk the censure, or wait the indemnity of parliament, than to procrastinate public business, by bringing such topics into discussion in the house from time to time. But when these warrants were brought to Lord Grenville, in his capacity of Auditor of the Exchequer, he returned an answer to Mr. Perceval, requiring time "to consider the nature and extent of the duties which this new and unexpected course of proceeding imposed upon him;" and therefore requesting to know when it was necessary that the money should be issued. He was informed, "that, according to the usual course of supplying the weekly issues to the navy and army, it would be necessary that sums should be issued for both services, beyond the amount of the existing credit at the exchequer, either on the morrow, or the next day at farthest; but if an actual issue could be made within six days, no serious inconvenience was apprehended." Lord Grenville then desired that the opinions of the Attorney and Solicitor General should be taken. These law officers pronounced, that they "did not think the warrant of the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury was in law a sufficient authority imperative upon the Auditor, nor, consequently, a legal sanction for his proceeding to obey the same; nor that any discretion was left to him by the law on this occasion, for the exercise of which he would not be responsible." The Lords Commissioners of the Treasury transmitted this opinion to Lord Grenville, informing him at the same time "that their sense of the mischief to the public service, which would arise if any delay should take place, appeared to render it indispensable that the warrants should be forthwith complied with, and that they were consequently ready to take upon themselves the responsibility of any act which might be

essential for that purpose." Lord Grenville replied, that it was matter of the deepest concern to him to be made the involuntary cause of any, even the shortest delay, in an issue of his Majesty's treasury, stated to him from such high authority to be important to the public service. "If," said he, "I could be satisfied of the propriety of my doing what is required, there is no personal responsibility which I would not readily incur for the public interests; but I cannot persuade myself, that I could obey those warrants, without a breach of my official duty in that point, which is above all others peculiarly obligatory on the person placed in the situation of Auditor of the Exchequer; nor without a high and criminal violation both of a positive statute, and also of the essential principles of our monarchical and parliamentary constitution.

"I am told," he continued, "that I must act on my own discretion, for the exercise of which I must alone be responsible. This responsibility, if it legally attaches upon me, I certainly cannot transfer to any other persons, and least of all to your lordships, whatever willingness you have expressed to take it on yourselves. My attempting to do so would itself be criminal; tending to confound the official relations in which I have the honour to stand towards your lordships, and to annul those checks which the law has established for ensuring the faithful discharge of our respective duties, and thereby the security of the public treasure. But I beg leave humbly to submit to your lordships, that the law has in truth invested me with no discretion on this subject. The exigencies of the public service, which your lordships have condescended to detail to me in these your warrants, are matters of state, of which, as Auditor of the Exchequer, I have no knowledge, and can take no cognizance; my official duty is strictly limited to an observance of the accustomed forms of the exchequer, and of the laws which have from

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CHAP. time to time been passed for its regulation. To these I am  
 XXXII. bound to adhere; and it is on the fullest consideration which  
 1811. this pressure of time has permitted me to give them, that I am  
January. compelled to decline, but with all due respect to your lordships,  
 a compliance with the requisition contained in those warrants, to  
 which this letter refers." His lordship concluded, by recom-  
 mending that the difficulty should be submitted to the considera-  
 tion of the two houses of parliament, with whom rested the right  
 and duty to provide the means of removing it, and to whose  
 pleasure he would defer with entire submission.

Mr. Perceval immediately laid this correspondence before  
 parliament, saying, "that, though, if it had not been for the  
 difficulty thus unexpectedly started, he should not have thought  
 it expedient to bring the subject under their immediate notice,  
 yet he had always anticipated it as his duty to submit it to their  
 consideration, not for the purpose of obtaining a previous vote  
 of indemnity, but, having incurred the responsibility of action,  
 with the view of calling on the house to determine whether or  
 not ministers had acted justifiably." He now moved a resolution,  
 that the Lords of the Treasury should issue their warrants for  
 the payment of such sums as were necessary, and that the Audi-  
 tors and officers of the Exchequer should obey those warrants.  
 In the course of the debate he noticed the argument, that public  
 inconvenience was now proved to have arisen from the delay  
 occasioned by adjournments. "We have," said he, "this  
 marked, monstrous, abominable, and aggravated case before us,  
 . . . and what is it? what is this great public inconvenience? Why,  
 that ministers have found it necessary to come to parliament to  
 authorize the issue of money, for services for which that very  
 money has been appointed!"

The resolution passed without a division; but, in the Upper  
 House, twenty Peers, among whom were all the royal Dukes, pro-

tested against it; because, they said, the principle on which it was founded would justify the assumption of all the executive power of the crown by the two houses of parliament, during any suspension of the personal exercise of the royal authority. This business attracted more notice than it otherwise would have done, because, upon Lord Grenville's accession to the first place in the ministry after the death of Mr. Pitt, a bill had been passed, empowering him to hold at the same time the offices of First Lord of the Treasury and Auditor of the Exchequer; offices which, it was argued in support of the bill, might without inconvenience be held by the same person. The imprudence of bringing thus to recollection a measure, which at the time had called forth strong animadversions, did not tend to lessen the unpopularity of Lord Grenville and the coalition with which he acted.

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That party fully expected their return to power. They were strong in borough influence, while Mr. Perceval, owing to the course which he pursued concerning the regency, lost the support of those members of the royal family who had been most closely connected with their father's government. Their journalists were numerous and active, and they depended upon the Prince's favour. But though all the various sects and subdivisions of opposition had united in one cry against the King's ministers, there were too many points of difference between them to be easily accommodated. On the question of what is insidiously termed catholic emancipation they were agreed; but only on that question: the Grenvilles were at variance with all their allies upon the subject of parliamentary reform, and the reformists were at variance among themselves as to the nature and extent of their purposed reformation. The war also was another ground of dissension. One party would have sacrificed our allies, our interest, and our honour, for the sake of obtaining vile popularity, by concluding a nominal and deceit-

*State of the  
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ful peace. They saw no difficulty in accommodating our differences with all our enemies; according to them, their country was in the wrong upon every disputed point; we had therefore only to concede every thing to America, and suffer Buona- parte, without farther opposition, to govern Spain and Portugal in his own way: then we might have illuminations for a definitive treaty, transparencies of Peace and Plenty, and quartern loaves and pewter pots carried in jubilant procession, in honour of the reduced prices of bread and porter. This would have been the foreign policy of the radical reformers; that of Lord Grenville and the despondents would have been equally ruinous; believing it impossible that we could resist the military power of France, and yet knowing that peace would be only a snare, they would have carried on a timid defensive war, without the hope or the possibility of bringing it to a glorious termination. Lord Holland, on the contrary, would have acted with additional vigour in aid of Spain; in this he would have been supported by Earl Moira and Mr. Sheridan, and perhaps by the Marquis of Lansdowne and Mr. Ponsonby.

*Their ex-  
pectations.*

The hopes, however, of the opposition were raised to the highest pitch, and their partizans scarcely even attempted to conceal their joy at an event, which, as they fully expected, was to restore them to their places. The disposition of the Prince was well known to be favourable to these hopes: he had a personal regard for some of the leaders of the party, and it was believed that many of his political opinions had been imbibed from Mr. Fox. It was therefore probable that a change of ministry would take place; and all the opponents of government, however greatly they differed among themselves as to their ultimate objects, from the regular opposition, under Lords Grey and Grenville, down to the very dregs of the revolutionary faction, vied with each other in exulting over a falling enemy.



Two years before the King's illness, one of their journalists had said, that "of all monarchs, since the revolution, the successor of George III. would have the finest opportunity of becoming nobly popular." This sentence, connected as it was with the anticipation of "a crowd of blessings that might be bestowed upon the country, in the event of a total change of system," had unwisely been selected for prosecution by Sir Vicary Gibbs, and the defendants were of course acquitted. Such language was perfectly consistent in the Foxites; but in the mouths of the anarchists, the flattery which was now used toward the Prince appeared not a little extraordinary. "Never," they said, "was there so fair an opportunity for producing a great and salutary effect, as the Prince now had. We want a change of the whole system, a radical and a sweeping change of it; and it is because we hope that such a change would be the consequence of giving full powers to the Prince, that we wish to see full powers given to him. Is not the Prince of Wales as likely to be able to judge of political systems as his father, . . . afflicted as the latter unhappily has been in more ways than one, and bent down with age as he now is? Is not the Prince as likely to be able to choose proper advisers as his father was, or ever can be? Why then should powers, of any sort, belonging to the kingly office, be withheld from him? I know it has been said, that we are *bidding* for the Prince; and who can bid above us? We have to offer him *hearts*, and *sinews*, and *lives*, if he needs them, and we ask for nothing but our well-known rights in return. We want to strip him of nothing. We grudge him and his family nothing that the constitution awards them, or that they could ever wish for, in the way of splendour. All we have to beseech of him is, that he will resolve to be the ruler of a free people, and not the leader of a faction." . . . "His succession to power," we were told by another of these journalists, "with such

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opportunities before him, and at so momentous a time, appeared a lot so enviable, that it might turn philosophy itself into ambition. Hitherto he had been seated in that domestic privacy, which he had learnt how to value and dignify. And so wonderfully had past circumstances held back the cause of radical reform, and so favourable for it were the present, that Fate seemed purposely to have reserved the amiable task for his royal highness, that with one restoring breath he might melt away the accumulated oppressions of half a century."

The wishes of this party concerning the King's resumption of authority were sufficiently expressed. They told us, it was exposing the government to the contempt of foreign powers, to have a person at the head of affairs who had long been incapable of signing his name to a document, without some one to guide his hand; a person long incapable of receiving petitions, of even holding a levee, or discharging the most ordinary functions of his office; and now, too, afflicted with this mental malady! They cited cases to show how doubtful and precarious were the appearances of recovery from mental derangement; observed that persons having been so afflicted were easily hurried, and inferred that a man subject to hurries was not fit to wield the executive power. When they were charged by their opponents with thus disclosing a determination, that if they acceded to power the King should never resume his functions, the manner in which the charge was repelled was such as confirmed it. "Every one," they said, "expresses regret that the King, or that any other human being, should be afflicted with blindness. But old age is old age, and blindness is blindness, in a King as well as in other men; and when blindness is unhappily added to old age, and to both are added *mental derangement*, is it unreasonable that people, whose happiness or misery must, in a great degree, depend upon their government, should be solicitous that *great*