

caution should be used in the resumption of the royal authority, by a person thus afflicted?" . . . "Throw him into a corner!" exclaimed a ministerial writer, when he exposed with indignation the wishes of this party; "tell him, this is the lot reserved for a king who has reigned so long!" The reply to this was any thing rather than a confutation or denial of the charge. "We have had nothing to do with the *lot*," said a mouthpiece of the anarchists; "we have had no hand in making the King either old or blind, or mentally deranged. The *lot* has fallen upon him. The first is the lot of every man, and is generally esteemed a very fortunate lot; the second is nothing very rare, and it is by no means an unfrequent companion of old age; and the third, and all three, are the work of nature, and not of any of us. And as to the King's having reigned so long, there is neither merit nor demerit in that, either in him or his people."

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Whether the agitators and anarchists really believed that the Prince could be so infatuated as to countenance their plans for a radical and sweeping change, . . . or whether they held out this hope to their dupes and disciples, in order that their certain disappointment might engender a deadlier disaffection, is best known to themselves: but if, abstaining from their indecent attempts to show that the King ought never to be permitted to resume his authority, they had talked of no other reform than that of curtailing the power of what they called the borough-mongering faction, there never was a time when the better part of the people would have been so well inclined to listen to their arguments. Mr. Perceval had never stood so high in public estimation as at this moment. When first he came into power, the tide of popularity was in favour of him and his colleagues; because any men would have been popular who succeeded to the administration which was then displaced; but a series of untoward events had for a time lessened his hold upon the

Mr. Perceval popular at this time.

CHAP. country, without in any degree diminishing the general dislike
 XXXII. with which his opponents were regarded. The unhappy ex-
 1811. pedition to Walcheren drew after it a cry of grief and disap-
January. pointment, against which, perhaps, he could scarcely have borne
 up, if Sir Francis Burdett, by a factious dispute with the House
 of Commons, had not, most unintentionally, but most effectually,
 drawn off the public attention at the very moment when the
 decision upon the inquiry came on. It was always asserted by
 his enemies, that he held his situation, not through any weight
 of influence in the country, nor of talents in parliament, but
 through the confidence and especial favour of the King; and
 that nothing could be more unfit than that the British prime
 minister should be thus dependent upon, and literally, as it were,
 the servant of the crown. They who argued thus against Mr.
 Perceval's administration did not perceive how strong an argu-
 ment they supplied against that system, to which they them-
 selves owed their only power; certain, however, it is, that
 Mr. Perceval was thought a weak minister, because he wanted
 that influence; and a sense of this weakness seems sometimes to
 have made him assent to measures which he would gladly have
 prevented, if he had held his situation by a stronger tenure.
 But when the prop upon which he really had leaned, and by
 which it was believed that he was entirely supported, was sud-
 denly taken away, then it was that he felt his own resources,
 and the people saw him confident in his motives and measures,
 and with the strength of integrity hold on his steady course;
 not to be deterred from what he knew to be his duty, either by
 the clamours and threats of the faction within doors, and the
 demagogues without; nor by the expressed displeasure of the
 Prince, in whose power it would presently be to dismiss him from
 office. Then, perhaps for the first time, he became conscious of
 his own powers, and the dignity of his nature shone forth; it

was seen that the man, whose individual character was without a spot, carried the pure principles of his privacy into public action, and possessed the steadiness and intrepidity of a statesman in as eminent a degree as the milder and most endearing virtues of domestic life. Mr. Perceval never held so high a place in public opinion as the favoured minister of the King, in full and secure possession of power, as now, when he was only the faithful servant of a master who was no longer sensible of his services, and no longer capable of supporting him.

Accustomed as the various members of opposition were to coalitions, and compromises, and concessions, it was no easy task to form a coherent ministry out of such heterogeneous elements. At the very commencement of the arrangements, Lords Grey and Grenville could not accord, and the Earl left town in disgust; they found it, however, expedient to agree, and he returned in time to give counsel when the Prince had to answer the proposed restrictions sent to him by parliament. It is said that the answer which these lords had advised was shown by the Prince to Mr. Sheridan, and that Mr. Sheridan declared it would prove of the most pernicious consequences, inasmuch as it could hardly fail to involve the Prince in a dispute with the House of Commons. This opinion was followed, and the answer which was delivered was composed according to Mr. Sheridan's counsel. The two leading opposition lords were offended at this, and intimated, that as his Royal Highness had not deemed it proper to adopt their advice, they could not be of any service to him in the intended arrangement. The Prince upon this requested Lord Holland to form an administration; but Lord Holland had no influence, and was utterly unable to ensure majorities. The Prince, therefore, who now began to feel the difficulties of government, was driven back to Lords Grey and Grenville, and a temporary conciliation took place. The triumph

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*Schemes
for a new
ministry.*

CHAP. of the opposition seemed now to be complete; they thought the
 XXXII. field was their own, and that nothing remained but to distribute
 1811. the spoils. This distribution, however, excited claims and con-
 February. tentions, of which the Prince heard more than he liked.

*The King's
 opinion
 during an
 interval of
 amendment.*

When the time of the regency drew near, Mr. Perceval waited on the King at Windsor, and found him well enough to converse upon public affairs, though not sufficiently recovered to bear the weight of business. He inquired anxiously concerning the Prince's conduct, and expressed great joy at finding that he had not thrown himself entirely into the hands of a party who were directly hostile to all the measures of his father's government; and he desired that the Queen would write to the Prince, to signify this approbation, and to request that he might not be harassed on his return to society by having to change an ephemeral administration. The Prince, it is said, was well pleased to be thus relieved from the difficulties in which he found himself involved by jarring opinions and contending claims. He made known his determination of making no change to the opposition; and on the day before the regency bill passed, he officially acquainted Mr. Perceval that it was his intention not to remove from their stations those whom he found there as the King's official servants. "At the same time," said he, "the Prince owes it to the truth and sincerity of character, which, he trusts, will appear in every action of his life, explicitly to declare, that the impulse of filial duty and affection to his beloved and afflicted father leads him to dread that any act of the Regent might, in the smallest degree, have the effect of interfering with the progress of his Sovereign's recovery. This consideration alone dictates the decision now communicated to Mr. Perceval. Having thus performed an act of indispensable duty, from a just sense of what is due to his own consistency and honour, the Prince has only to add, that, among the many blessings to be

*The Prince
 Regent an-
 nounces his
 intention of
 making no
 change.*

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derived from his Majesty's restoration to health, and to the personal exercise of his royal functions, it will not, in the Prince's estimation, be the least, that that most fortunate event will at once rescue him from a situation of unexampled embarrassment, and put an end to a state of affairs ill calculated, he fears, to sustain the interests of the united kingdom in this awful and perilous crisis, and most difficult to be reconciled to the genuine principles of the British constitution."

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Mr. Perceval replied, that, in the expression of the Prince's anxiety for the speedy restoration of his father's health, he and his colleagues could see nothing but additional motives for their most anxious exertions to give satisfaction to his Royal Highness, in the only manner in which it could be given, by endeavouring to promote his views for the security and happiness of the country. "Mr. Perceval," he continued, "has never failed to regret the impression of your Royal Highness with regard to the provisions of the regency bill, which his Majesty's servants felt it to be their duty to recommend to parliament. But he ventures to submit to your Royal Highness, that, whatever difficulties the present awful crisis of the country and the world may create in the administration of the executive government, your Royal Highness will not find them in any degree increased by the temporary suspension of the exercise of those branches of the royal prerogative which has been introduced by parliament, in conformity to what was intended on a former similar occasion; and that whatever ministers your Royal Highness might think proper to employ, would find in that full support and countenance, which, as long as they were honoured with your Royal Highness's commands, they would feel confident they would continue to enjoy, ample and sufficient means for enabling your Royal Highness effectually to maintain the great and important interests of the united kingdom. And Mr. Perceval humbly trusts, that, what-

Mr. Perceval's reply.

CHAP. ever doubts your Royal Highness may entertain with respect to
XXXII. the constitutional propriety of the measures which have been
1811. adopted, your Royal Highness will feel assured, that they could
February. not have been recommended by his Majesty's servants, nor sanc-
tioned by parliament, but upon the sincere, though possibly
erroneous, conviction, that they in no degree trespassed upon the
true principles and spirit of the constitution."

The opposition had made so sure of coming into power, that they let the list of their intended arrangement get abroad; "an arrangement," they told us, "of one united, compact body of men, all holding the same principles, and all animated by the same views; and an administration," they added, "of more internal strength, by the ties of mutual friendship, . . . of more public influence, by talents, integrity, and stake in the country, never had been submitted to any Prince." A meeting of the common council was called by their city partizans, to prepare an address of congratulation to the Regent upon the change of men and measures which he was about to make. Their disappointment was in proportion to their hopes; they affirmed, however, that the Prince's determination would be received with real satisfaction by the friends of Lords Grey and Grenville, who must all feel that nothing but a sense of imperious duty could have induced them to undertake the irksome and arduous task of office in such times. "Three months," they said, "had already elapsed under a total suspension of the functions of government, . . . three months the most important, perhaps, that had ever occurred in our history; another month must have been added to the delay, if the Prince had yielded to his patriotic sentiments, and recurred all at once to the principles upon which he thought the administration would be most beneficially conducted. Thus much time must have been required for the re-election of those who would have vacated their seats, and for

the re-establishment of the routine of office; but this delay might certainly, in a moment of such emergency, be productive of the most serious evil." But while the Whigs thus affected the language of resignation, the radical journalists declared, "that a ministry formed by the two joint opposition lords would have excluded almost all the Prince's friends; that from those lords the people could have expected nothing; but that they would have hoped for something from an arrangement that should have placed Lord Holland at the head of affairs, to the great mortification of those less popular and less liberal leaders. It was as well to retain Perceval and Liverpool, as to supersede them by Grey and Grenville." Whigs and anarchists, however, both agreed in asserting, that the Prince had no confidence whatever in his ministers. "He signs papers," said one of these journalists, "receives addresses, expresses his opinions respecting courts martial and criminal, and has ten or a dozen people to walk before him; but with regard to the nation, he can only wish its prosperity, and has no more to do with its government than a keeper of geese."

But the great and quiet majority of the nation regarded the Prince Regent's determination with grateful joy: they anticipated, from the wisdom and feeling which dictated it, a perseverance in the true course of policy and honour, and in that anticipation looked on to a triumphant issue of the war, with a hope which from thenceforward suffered no abatement.

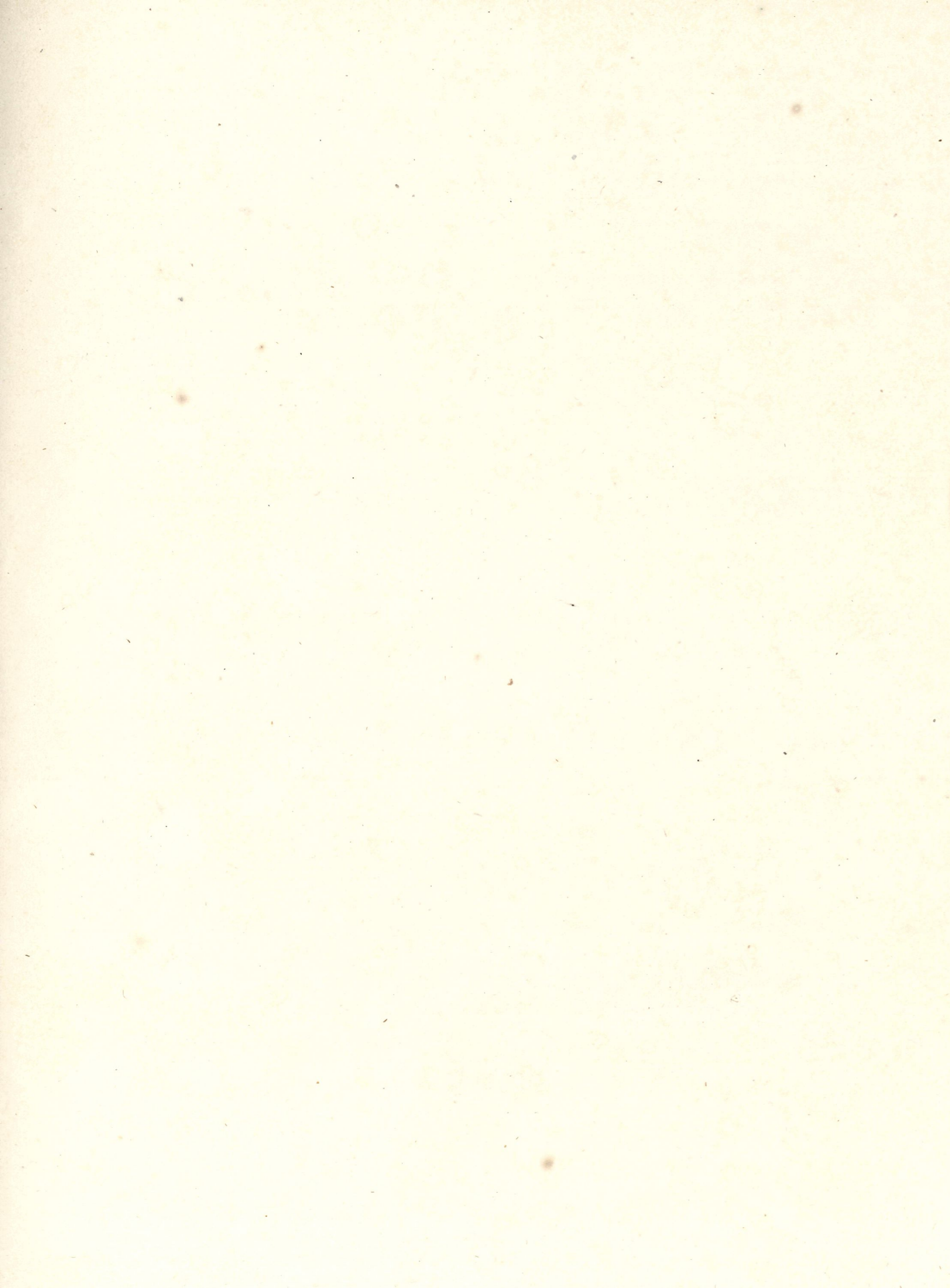
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