THE CREEVEY PAPERS.

CHAPTER I.

1793–1804.

THE earliest letter preserved in the huge mass of Mr. Creevey's correspondence is a very brief one; but it strikes the note which carried dismay and indignation into every court in Europe, and was the prelude to twenty years of widespread war.

Hon. Charles Grey, M.P. [*afterwards 2nd Earl Grey*], *to Mrs. Ord.*

"24th Jan., 1793.

"DEAR MRS. ORD,

"I have only a moment before the post goes out. . . . An account is come that the King of France was executed on Monday morning. Everything in Paris bore the appearance of another tumult and massacre. Bad as I am thought, I cannot express the horror I feel at this atrocity.

"Yours affectionately,

"C. GREY.

"War is certain, and—God grant we may not all lament the consequences of it!"

There are few letters during the remaining years of the eighteenth century referring to anything except

private affairs of little interest. Dr. J. Currie of Liverpool wrote pretty regularly to Mr. Creevey, who seems to have been reading for the Bar at this time.

Dr. Currie to Thomas Creevey.

"Liverpool, 30th Dec., 1795.

". . . I once thought you a modest fellow—now I laugh at the very idea of it. Upon my soul, Creevey, it was all a damned hum. What with your election songs and your rompings—what with your carousings with the men and your bamboozlings with the women, you are a most complete hand indeed. Widow, wife, or maid, it is all one to you. . . . If you go on in this way, and keep out of Doctors Commons, the Lord knows what you may rise to. . . ."

"17th Dec., 1798.

". . . I am, I assure you, deeply concerned to hear that you think so poorly of Dr. Tennant's health; and perfectly disturbed to think that he has had any trouble about my thermometers.* The truth is I wished to avail myself of his intuitive skill in framing an instrument free of all exception for taking heat in contagious diseases where approach is hazardous. But since he left us . . . I have so far succeeded in constructing a *sensible* [? sensitive] instrument with Six's iron index as to answer my purpose. . . . I have done very little but read Voltaire since I saw you. He is an exquisite fellow. One thing in him is peculiarly striking—his clear knowledge of the limits of the human understanding. He pursues his game as far as the scent carries him, but no further. Where this fails, he turns off with a jest, that marks distinctly where a wise man ought to stop. . . . You know, my dear fellow, I owe the delight of reading him to you."

* The most enduring part of Dr. Currie's work as a physician consists in the advance he made in the use of the thermometer in fevers.

"20th Jan., 1801.

". . . I envy you the company you keep. When you tell me of meeting Erskine, Parr and Mackintosh familiarly, I sigh at my allotment in this corner of the Island. It is impossible not to rust here, even if one had talents of a better kind. In London, and perhaps there only, practice and exercise keep men polished and bright. . . . So you are become an intimate friend of Lady Oxford. My dear Creevey—these women—these beautiful women—are the devil's most powerful temptation—but I will not moralize, on paper at least. . . ."

In 1802 Mr. Creevey was returned to Parliament as member for Thetford, a pocket borough in the gift of the Duke of Norfolk. How he obtained this nomination there is no evidence to show; but he was an enthusiastic Whig of the advanced type which was about to reject that time-worn title, and adopt the more expressive one of Radical. Indeed, the animosity of this section against the old Whigs, under the lead of Lord Grenville, was almost as intense as it was against the Tories under Pitt.

Sir Francis Burdett, M.P., to Mr. Creevey, M.P.

"Piccadilly, August 18th, 1802.

"MY DEAR CREEVEY,

"I have scarcely time to turn round, but will not defer sending a line in answer to your very kind letter—as I am entirely of your opinion in every point. I look upon your advice as excellent, and intend consequently to follow it. You know by this time the Petition is taken out of my hands, in a manner most flattering and honourable. The conduct of the Sheriffs I believe quite unprecedented, but whether they will be punished, protected or rewarded exceeds my sagacity to foretell, perhaps both the latter.

"I regard the issue of this contest exactly in the same light as you do—a subject of great triumph and not of mortification. My friend is compleatly satisfied.

I have done my duty and the Public acknowledge it—surely this is sufficient to satisfy the ambition of an honest man.

"I, however, cannot help envying you your happiness and comfort, and wish most heartily I was of the party. You cannot think how friendly Ord was nor how much I feel obliged to him—we used his house, but I hope not injure it.

"Sherry is quite grown loving again; he came here yesterday with all sorts of [*illegible*] from the Prince, Mrs. Fitzherbert, &c., &c.; it is a year and half, I believe before this Election, since we almost spoke. Mrs. Sheridan came one day on the Hastings, and was much delighted and entertained at being hailed by the multitude as Mrs. Burdett. . . .

"Yours sincerely,
"F. BURDETT."

Mr. Creevey, M.P., to Dr. Currie.

"Great Cumberland Place, 8th Nov., 1802.

". . . The Grenvilles are in great spirits; the *Morning Post*, and *Morning Chronicle* too, are strongly suspected of being in their pay, and to-day it is said Tom Grenville is to be started as Speaker against Abbott. Great are the speculations about Pitt: it is asserted that he is fonder of his relations [the Grenvilles] than the Doctor,* but I hear of no authority for this opinion. I, for one, if they try their strength in the choice of a Speaker, tho' I detest Abbott, will vote for him or anybody else supported by Addington, in opposition to a Grenville or a Pittite. I am affraid of this damned Addington being bullied out of his pacific disposition. He will be most cursedly run at, and he has neither talents to command open coadjutors, nor sufficient skill in intriguing to acquire private ones. Still I think we cannot surely be pushed again into the field of battle.

"Now for France—all the world has been there, and various is the information imported from thence.

* The Right Hon. Henry Addington, created Viscount Sidmouth in 1805. He was nicknamed "the Doctor" because his father was a physician.

Whishaw was my first historian, and I think the worst. He was at Paris only a fortnight, but he travelled through France. I apprehend, either from a scanty supply of the language or of proper introductions, he has been merely a stage coach traveller. He has seen soldiers in every part of his tour, and superintending every department of the Government . . . and has returned quite scared out of his wits at the dreadful power and villainy of the French Government. . . . Romilly* is my next relator, and much more amusing. His private friends were the Liancourts, de la Rochefoucaults, &c., and he dined at different times with Talleyrand, Berthier, and all the other Ministers at their houses. Ministers, however, and statesmen are alike in all countries; they alone are precluded from telling you anything about the country in whose service they are, and emigrants are too insecure to indulge any freedom in conversation. Romilly's account, therefore, as one might suppose, makes his society of Paris the most gloomy possible. He says at Talleyrand's table, where you have such magnificence as was never seen before in France, the Master of the House, who as an exile in England without a guinea was the pleasantest of Men, in France and in the midst of his prosperity sits the most melancholy picture apparently of sorrow and despair. Romilly sat next to Fox at Talleyrand's dinner, and had all his conversation to himself; but not a word of public affairs—all *vertu* and French *belles lettres*. Romilly would not grace the court of Buonaparte, but left Paris with as much detestation of him and his Government as Whishaw, and with much more reason.

"But the great lion of all upon the subject of Paris is Mackintosh.† He has really seen most entertaining things and people. He, too, dined with Ministers, and has held a long consultation with the Consul‡

* Samuel Romilly, K.C., entered Parliament in 1806, appointed Solicitor-General, and was knighted. An ardent Reformer, and father of the first Lord Romilly, he committed suicide in 1818.

† Sir James Mackintosh [1765–1832], barrister, philosopher, and politician.

‡ Bonaparte.

upon the Norman and English laws; but his means of living with the active people of France has far exceeded that of any other English. I think his most valuable acquaintance must have been Madame de Souza. She is a Frenchwoman, was a widow, and is now the wife of the Portuguese ambassador. She is the friend and companion and confidante of Madame Buonaparte, and satisfied all Mackintosh's enquiries respecting her friend and her husband the Consul. Her history to Mackintosh (confirmed by Madame Cabarenne, late Madame Tallien) of Madame Buonaparte and her husband is this.—Madame Buonaparte is a woman nearly fifty, of singular good temper, and without a little of intrigue. She is a Creole, and has large West India possessions. On these last accounts it was that she was married by the Viscount Beauharnois—a lively nobleman about the old Court; and both in his life and since his death his wife remained a great favorite in Paris.

"Immediately previous to the directorial power being established in 1795, the Sections all rose upon the Convention or Assembly, whatever it was, in consequence of an odious vote or decree they had made. At this period, no general would incur the risque of an unsuccessful attack upon the Sections; Buonaparte alone, who was known only from having served at the siege of Toulon, being then in Paris, said if any General would lend him a coat, he would fight the Sections. He put his coat on; he peppered the Sections with grape shot; the establishment of the Directory was the consequence to them, and to him in return they gave the command of the army of Italy.* He became, therefore, the fashion, and was asked to meet good company, and he was asked to Tallien's to put him next the widow Beauharnois, that he might vex Hoche, who was then after her and her fortune. Madame Tallien did so, and the new lovers were

* Napoleon's own report upon the suppression of the Sections places the responsibility of the act upon Barras, who employed him merely as a good artillery officer. Before being appointed to the command of the army in Italy, in 1796, Bonaparte was rewarded, in 1795, for his action against the Sections by succeeding Barras in command of the army of the Interior.

married in ten days. She never was Barras' mistress; Madame Cabarenne (Tallien that was) told Mackintosh that was calumny, for that she herself was his mistress at that very time.* Madame de Souza says no one but Madame Buonaparte could live with the Consul; he is subject to fits of passion, bordering upon derangement, and upon the appearance of one of these distempered freaks of his, he is left by all about him to his fate and to the effects of time. It is a service of great danger, even in his milder moments, to propose anything to him, and it is from his wife's forbearance in both ways that she can possibly contrive to have the respect she meets with from him.

"Every wreck of the different parties in France for the last ten years that is now to be found in Paris, Mackintosh met and lived familiarly with—La Fayette, [*illegible*], Jean Bon Saint-André, Barthelemy, Camille Jourdan, Abbé Morelaix, Fouché, Boissy Danglas, &c., &c. Tallien† no one visits of his countrymen; his conversations with Mackintosh, if one had not his authority, surpass belief. His only lamentation over the revolution was its want of success, and that it should be on account of only *half* measures having been adopted. He almost shed tears at the mention of Danton, whom he styled *bon enfant*, and as a man of great promise.

"Mackintosh dined at Barthelemy's the banker—the brother of the ex-director—with a pleasant party. The ex-director was there, and next to him sat Fouché—now a senator—but who formerly, as Minister of Police, actually *deported* the ex-director to Cayenne. There was likewise a person there who told M. he had seen Fouché ride full gallop to preside at some celebrated massacre, with a pair of *human ears* stuck one on each side of his hat.‡ The conversation of

* The beautiful Madame de Tallien, previously Comtesse de Fontenay, was as fickle as she was frail, for she was also the mistress of the rich banker Ouvrard. Tallien obtained a divorce in 1802, and she married the Prince de Chimay.

† Jean Lambert Tallien, one of the chief organisers and bloodiest agents of the Terror, leader in the overthrow of Robespierre.

‡ Joseph Fouché, afterwards Duc d'Otranto, had as yet but accomplished half his cycle of cynical tergiversation, which brought him to

this notable assembly was as charming as the performers themselves; it turned principally upon the blessings of peace and humanity,

"All the others whom I have mentioned above have no connection with Fouché or Tallien, and are reasonable men, perfectly unrestrained in their conversation, quite anti-Buonapartian, and as much devoted to England. To such men Fox has given great surprise by his conversation, as he has given offence to his friends here. He talks publicly of Liberty being *asleep* in France, but *dead* in England. He will be attacked in the House of Commons certainly, and I think will find it difficult to justify himself. He has been damned imprudent."

At the time of Creevey's entrance to the House of Commons, Pitt was in seclusion. He had retired from office in March, 1801, putting up the former Speaker, Mr. Addington, as Prime Minister and Leader of the House of Commons. George III. heartily approved of this arrangement, although on the face of it were all the signs of instability. Taking Pitt and Addington aside at the Palace one day—"If we three keep together," said he, "all will go well." But as the months went on, Pitt chafed at his own inactivity and fretted at the incapacity of his nominee. Pitt's friends were importunate for his return; he himself was burning to take the reins again, but was too proud, perhaps too loyal to Addington, to adopt overt action to effect it. Moreover, Addington, who had been an excellent Speaker, had no suspicion of the poor figure he cut as head of the Government. It never occurred to him to take any of the numerous hints offered by Canning and other Tories, until the necessity for some change was forced upon him by

office under Louis XVIII. after the fall of Napoleon. He died in 1820, a naturalised Austrian subject, having amassed enormous wealth.

the imminence of disaster from the disaffection of his followers. He offered to resign the Treasury in favour of a peer, Pitt and he to share the administration of affairs as Secretary of State. This proposal Pitt brushed contemptuously, almost derisively, aside; matters went on as before, except that the former friendship of Pitt and Addington was at an end. When Parliament met on 24th November, Pitt did not appear in the House.

Mr. Creevey to Dr. Currie.

"25th Nov., 1802.

"I went yesterday to the opening of our campaign, with some apprehension, I confess, as I knew Fox was to be there, least his sentiments upon the subject of France and England should diminish my esteem for him. His conduct, however, and his speech were, in my mind, in every respect *perfect;* and if he will let them be the models for his future imitation, he will keep in the Doctor and preserve the peace. God continue Fox's prudence and Pitt's gout! The infamous malignity and misrepresentation of that scoundrel Windham did injury only to himself: never creature less deserved it than poor Fox. You cannot imagine the pleasure I feel in having this noble animal still to look up to as my champion. Nothing can be so whimsical as the state of the House of Commons. The Ministers, feeble beyond all powers of caricaturing, are unsupported—at least by the acclamations—of that great mass of persons who always support all Ministers, but who are ashamed *publicly* to applaud them. They are insulted by the indignant, mercenary Canning, who wants again to be in place, and they are openly pelted by the sanguinary faction of Windham and the Grenvillites as dastardly poltroons, for not rushing instantly into war. Under these circumstances their only ally is the old Opposition. . . . If they are so supported, I see distinctly that Fox will at least have arrived at this situation that, tho' unable to be Minister himself, he may in fact

prevent one from being turned out. . . . God send Pitt and Dundas anywhere but to the House of Commons, and much might, I think, be done by a judicious *dandling* of the Doctor.

"Lord Henry Petty and I dined together yesterday. He is as good as ever. We both took our seats behind old Charley."

The treaty of Amiens had been concluded in March, 1802, but Bonaparte's restless ambition, and especially his desire to re-establish the colonial power of France, menaced the maritime ascendancy of Great Britain, and Addington watched uneasily the war-clouds gathering again upon the horizon.

In February, 1803, M. Talleyrand demanded from Lord Whitworth, British Ambassador in Paris, an assurance of the speedy evacuation of Malta by King George's Government, in compliance with the tenth article of the Treaty of Amiens, which provided for the restoration of that island to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. In reply to this, Lord Whitworth was instructed to point to the aggrandisement of France subsequent to and in contravention of the terms of the said treaty as justifying the British Government in delaying the evacuation. On 18th February Lord Whitworth had a personal interview with the First Consul, when he failed to obtain from him any admission of the violation by the French of the treaty, or any assurance that the redress claimed for certain British subjects would receive consideration. Negotiations dragged on till, on 13th March, Whitworth had a stormy interview with Bonaparte, who charged the British Government with being determined to drag him into war. Finally, on 12th May the rupture was complete; Lord Whitworth requested his passport, and the two countries were at war.