CHAPTER LXXI

TALK AND TROOPS

"The whole world," wrote Greville, on July 5, 1848, "is influenced by all that is done in Paris." There were revolutions everywhere:

March 25, 1848: Nothing is more extraordinary than to look back at my last date and see what has happened in the course of *five days*. A tenth part of any one of the events would have lasted us for as many months, with sentiments of wonder and deep interest; but now we are perplexed, overwhelmed, and carried away with excitement, and the most stupendous events are become like matters of everyday occurrence. Within these last four or five days there has been a desperate battle in the streets of Berlin between the soldiers and the mob; the flight of the Prince of Prussia; the King's convocation of his States; concessions to and reconciliation with his people; and his invitation to all Germany to form a Federal State; and his notification of what is tantamount to removing the Imperial Crown from the head of the wretched *crétin* at Vienna, and placing it on his own.

Next, a revolution in Austria; an *émeute* at Vienna; downfall and flight of Metternich, and announcement of a constitutional *régime; émeutes* at Milan; expulsion of Austrians, and Milanese independence; Hungary up and doing, and the whole empire in a state of dissolution. Throughout Germany all the people stirring; all the sovereigns yielding to the popular demands; the King of Hanover submitting to the terms demanded of him; the King of Bavaria abdicating; many minor occurrences, any one of which in ordinary times would have been full of interest and importance, passing almost unheeded.

Metternich himself met his fate:

April 2, 1848: There is nothing to record but odds and ends; no new revolution, no fresh deposition. Madame de Lieven told

me yesterday what she had heard from Flahault of the outbreak at Vienna and the downfall of Metternich. When the people rose and demanded liberal measures, they were informed that the Council would convened and deliberate, and an answer should be given them in two hours. The Council assembled, consisting of the Ministers and the Archdukes. The question was stated, when Metternich rose and harangued them for an hour and a half without their appearing nearly to approach a close. On this the Archduke John pulled out his watch and said, "Prince, in half an hour we must give an answer to the people, and we have not yet begun to consider what we shall say to them." On this Kolowrath said, "Sir, I have sat in Council with Prince Metternich for twenty-five years, and it has always been his habit to speak thus without coming to the point." "But," said the Archduke, "we must come to the point, and that without delay. Are you aware, Prince," turning to Metternich, "that the first of the people's demands is that you should resign?" Metternich said that he had promised Emperor Francis on his deathbed never to desert his son, the present Emperor, nor would he. They intimated that his remaining would be difficult. Oh, he said, if the Imperial Family wished him to resign, he should feel that he was released from his engagement, and he was ready to yield to their wishes. They said they did wish it, and he instantly acquiesced. Then the Emperor himself interposed and said, "But, after all, I am the Emperor, and it is for me to decide; and I yield everything. Tell the people I consent to all their demands." And thus *the Crétin* settled it all; and the great Minister, who was in his own person considered as *the Empire*, and had governed despotically for forty years, slunk away, and to this hour nobody knows where he is concealed. But in this general break-up of the Austrian Monarchy there seems still some vitality left in it, and we hear that those provinces which demand liberal governments do not want to get rid of the dynasty; and in the midst of the confusion there is no small jealousy of the King of Prussia, and disgust at his attempt to make himself *Sovereign of Germany*. The condition of Prussia is disquieting; and the King, who has acted a part at once wavering and selfish, has raised up a host of enemies against his pretensions.

Only Britain seemed to be placid:

March 25, 1848: . . . In the midst of the roar of the revolutionary waters that are deluging the whole earth, it is grand to see how we stand erect and unscathed. It is the finest tribute that ever has been paid to our Constitution, the greatest test that ever has been applied to it.

April 2, 1848: . . . There has been, however, something of a pause on the Continent for some days, which gives us leisure to look inwards and consider our own situation. We are undisturbed in the midst of the universal hubbub, and the surface of society looks smooth and safe: nevertheless there is plenty of cause for serious reflection and apprehension. It is the fashion to say that this country is sound; that the newfangled theories which are turning Continental brains find no acceptance here; but the outward manifestations are not entirely to be relied upon.

The Chartists were vocal. Five million of them had signed a petition and Feargus O'Connor proposed that a procession should assemble on Kennington Common and march to the House of Commons.

April 5, 1848: . . . Lord John Russell, in reply to a question put by Jocelyn to him in the House of Commons, said the Government would come to Parliament for powers as soon as they deemed it necessary, and gave him to understand that they were preparing measures, but declined to say what. His answer did not give satisfaction. Everybody here wants something to be done to stop this torrent of sedition. I saw Graham this morning for a short time; he is greatly alarmed at the aspect of affairs both at home and abroad; he thinks the temper of the masses here very serious. The Chartist meeting on Monday next makes him uneasy, and he has talked much to George Grey and the Speaker about precautions. The state of the law is very doubtful, and it is a nice question whether to prevent a procession to the House of Commons or not. The expressions of the Act about seditious assemblies are ambiguous. Then he strongly deprecates the Queen's going out of town on Saturday, which he thinks will look like cowardice in her personally, and as indicative of a sense of danger which ought not to be mani-

fested. I advised him (and Peel, who thinks so likewise) to tell the Government this; he said Peel would tell the Prince.

April 6, 1848: . . . It has not yet been determined whether they should stop the Chartists from entering London or not, but a Cabinet was to be held to decide the matter to-day. He thought they should prevent their crossing the bridges. I saw the Duke in the morning at Apsley House in a prodigious state of excitement, said he had plenty of troops, and would answer for keeping everything quiet if the Government would only be firm and vigorous, and announce by a proclamation that the mob should not be permitted to occupy the town. He wanted to prevent *groups* from going into the Park and assembling there, but this would be impossible.

April 9, 1848: . . . All London is making preparations to encounter a Chartist row to-morrow: so much that it is either very sublime or very ridiculous. All the clerks and others in the different offices are ordered to be sworn in special constables, and to constitute themselves into garrisons. I went to the police office with all my clerks, messengers, &c., and we were all sworn. We are to pass the whole day at the office to-morrow, and I am to send down all my guns; in short, we are to take a warlike attitude. Colonel Harness, of the Railway Department, is our commander in chief; every gentleman in London is become a constable, and there is an organization of some sort in every district.

Newmarket, April 13, 1848: Monday passed off with surprising quiet, and it was considered a most satisfactory demonstration on the part of the Government, and the peaceable and loyal part of the community. Enormous preparations were made; and a host of military, police, and special constables were ready if wanted; every gentleman in London was sworn, and during a great part of the day, while the police were reposing, they did duty. The Chartist movement was contemptible; but everybody rejoices that the defensive demonstration was made, for it has given a great and memorable lesson which will not be thrown away, either on the disaffected and mischievous, or the loyal and peaceful; and it will produce a vast effect in all foreign countries, and show how solid is the foundation on which we are resting. We have displayed a great resolution and a great strength, and given unmistakable proofs, that if sedition and

ridicule and disgrace. It turns out to be signed by less than two millions, instead of by six as Feargus stated; and of those, there were no end of fictitious names, together with the insertion of every species of ribaldry, indecency, and impertinence. The Chartists are very crestfallen, and evidently conscious of the contemptible figure they cut; but they have endeavoured to bluster and lie as well as they can in their subsequent gatherings, and talk of other petitions and meetings, which nobody cares about.

But the trouble was not over:

June 3, 1848: . . . The Government are now getting seriously uneasy about the Chartist manifestations in various parts of the country, especially in London, and at the repeated assemblings and marchings of great bodies of men. Le Marchant told me that two or three months ago, when he was at the Home Office, he received accounts he thought very alarming of the wide-spreading disaffection of the people, and particularly of the enormous increase of cheap publications of the most mischievous and inflammatory character, which were disseminated among the masses and eagerly read; and lately accounts have been received from well-informed persons, whose occupations lead them to mix with the people, clergymen—particularly Roman Catholic—and medical men, who report that they find a great change for the worse amongst them, an increasing spirit of discontent and disaffection, and that many who on the 10th of April went out as special constables declare they would not do so again if another manifestation required it. The speeches which are made at the different meetings are remarkable for the coarse language and savage spirit they display. It is quite new to hear any Englishman coolly recommend assassination, and the other day a police superintendent was wounded in the leg by some sharp instrument. These are new and very bad symptoms.

June 10, 1848: . . . The Government have at last taken strong measures against the Chartists; but in spite of the arrest of some of their leaders, another demonstration is expected on Monday, for which great preparations are to be made. These demonstrations are getting a great bore, besides being very mischievous. The townspeople, who are thus perpetually

alarmed, are growing very angry, and the military are so savage that Lord Londonderry told the Duke of Wellington he was sure, if a collision took place, the officers of his regiment would not be able to restrain their men. Many people think that a severe chastisement of these mobs will alone put a stop to their proceedings, and that it will be better the troops should be allowed to act and open fire upon them. This is an extremity which must be avoided if possible, but anything is better than allowing such an evil as this to go on increasing. But if these multitudes of discontented men can be daunted into submission, fearful considerations remain behind. We have an enormous overgrown population, a vast proportion of which are in undeniable misery and distress, and are soured and exasperated by their sufferings. To expect such beings to be reasonable, and still more to be logical, is to expect a moral impossibility. . . . The suffering people are prompt to believe that that cannot be a sound and just condition of society in which they are abandoned to starvation and destitution, while other classes are revelling in luxury and enjoyment. They have confused notions that this is all wrong, and that under some different political dispensation their interests would be better cared for, and according to their necessities they would be comforted and relieved. They are neither able to comprehend nor disposed to listen to the long processes of argument by which it might be demonstrated to them that all the prevailing misery and distress are attributable to causes over which Government has no control, and which no legislation can counteract: the unhappy state of the world, the confusion which prevails everywhere, the interruption of regular industry, the disturbance of the ordinary course of social life. . . . We seem to have got into another stage of existence, our world is almost suddenly altered, we deal with new questions, men seem to be animated with fresh objects; what are called politics, international questions and the strife of parties, sink into insignificance; society is stirred up from its lowest depths.

Happily, Britain was saved by her weather:

June 13, 1848: . . . The expected Chartist demonstration yesterday ended in smoke, both here and in the provinces; nevertheless, great preparations were made of military, police,

and special constables. It rained torrents the whole day, which probably would have been enough to prevent any assemblages of people; but the determined attitude of the Government and the arrests that have taken place intimidated the leaders. Everybody had got bored and provoked to death with these continued alarms, but it is now thought that we shall not have any more of them. The Chartists themselves must get tired of meeting and walking about for nothing, and they can hardly fail to lose all confidence in their leaders, whose actions so ill correspond with their promises and professions. A man of the name of MacDougal, who appears to be the chief of the London Chartists, harangued his rabble a few days ago, declared the meeting should take place in spite of Government, and announced the most heroic intentions. He went to the ground (at one of the *rendezvous*), and finding a magistrate there, asked him if the meeting was illegal, and if the Government really intended to prevent it. The magistrate referred him to the printed placard, by which he would see that it was illegal, and that the Government did intend to prevent it; on which he made a bow, said he did not mean to oppose the law, would go away, and advise his friends to do the same; and off he went. The failures have been complete everywhere, and nobody feels any alarm.

August 8, 1848: . . . Lady Wriothesley told me that there is not far off a Chartist establishment; a society of Chartists located and living on land bought by Chartist subscriptions; a sort of Communist society. It has existed some years, but is now falling into decay. Feargus O'Connor spoke to Charles Russell, and said he wished his brother would take some notice of them, *for they liked to be noticed by people of rank;* and, he added, "Collectively they are with me, but individually they are with you." In these words a great lesson and significant fact are contained, well worth attention.