

CHAPTER III.

(Honley in 1800.—Factory Act of 1802.—Local Defence.—Threatened Invasion of the French.—Diary Extract.—An Old-time Election of 1807.—Census in 1811.—Staple Trade of the District.—Lud-riots.—Suspension of Local Banks.—Folly Hall Fight.—Factory Act of 1833.—Chartism.—Plug Riots).

HONLEY IN 1800.

THIS century was writ large with achievement which must of necessity have only bare mention in these pages. The marvellous changes in machinery, wonderful progress in ships, opening of railways, introduction of penny postage, telegraphs, free press, expansion of trade due to these outlets and means of transit, passing of numerous Acts of Parliament for the general welfare of the people, and that striving for the recognition of the brotherhood of man were all features of this century. At the opening of 1800, however, the distress was terrible.

1812 About the year 1812 the state of affairs in England was almost beyond description. The pastimes of the people were still brutal, executions took place in public, body snatching was common, roads infested by robbers, and education for the people depending upon voluntary effort. On account of the wars of Napoleon having stopped European industries, there was great demand for English productions. Side by side with the spread of the Factory system were great developments in machinery favourable to more rapid output. Yet food was at famine price, due to the duty upon corn, hours of labour long, work scarce, wages low—the most industrious weaver only able to earn 7/- or 8/- per week. Children of tender years worked as long hours as adults, and if exhausted nature gave way, they were cruelly beaten.

There are people yet living who are familiar with the history of this period, by hearing parents and grandparents speak of the time when the great struggle for religious and political

freedom was being fought out with such anguish of conflict and fiery ordeal. Being thus brought into intimacy with this century of endeavour and achievement by such oral communications and other connecting links, the features of the religious, civil, lawless, and distressed state of the country can be better understood. Flour at the opening of 1800 was 6/- and 7/- per stone, tea 8/- per lb., and sugar 1/- per lb. Oatmeal porridge was still the staple food of the workers, and often of the class above them ; the change from the old to the new in the woollen industry not being accomplished without suffering both for master and man. If the export of cloth at this time amounted to one-half of all other exports sent out of the kingdom, harsh measures and iniquitous restrictions were imposed upon trade and commerce ; so that the struggles of the master were often tragic and desperate in character. At this period also, many Banks suspended payment, causing such a feeling of cautious dread that there was no money in circulation.

Honley fared badly during this evolution of her local trade. We shall see however that she also took great leaps in religious, social and political progress during 1800.

FACTORY ACT OF 1802.

1802 By the influence of Sir Robert Peel a Factory Act was passed in this year regarding the working of pauper children of tender years in mills. This Act could be evaded, and did not cure the evils then existing.

LOCAL DEFENCE.

1805 The state of the neighbourhood was so lawless, that the leading inhabitants of Honley met in 1805 and formed themselves into a Society for purposes of self-protection ; and also to help to bring to justice those who committed illegal acts.

THREATENED INVASION OF THE FRENCH.

1805 In 1805 the dwellers in Honley were greatly alarmed by rumours of the landing of the French. The lighting of a beacon-fire upon Castle Hill was to be the signal that

Buonaparte and his army had actually arrived upon British ground. People kept watch in terror day and night upon elevated grounds for the lighting of the beacon. This anticipated landing was fortunately averted.

1807

An extract copied from a diary, written in 1807 by a local lady, throws light upon the fashion of feminine attire at this date. She gives a list of her "cloathes," amongst which are "1 black silk gown (vastly fine); 1 bombazine gown and 1 brown lustre gown." There are also details of nightcaps, pockets, silk hose, square silk-handkerchiefs, and lace caps. In addition, there is mention of Norwich crape and silk shawls, black silk pelices, etc. The description of these materials and fashions which sound strange in our ears, seem to speak in silence of the gracious personalities and modest graces of those women of a by-gone day who laid away such garments in lavender.

AN OLD TIME ELECTION OF 1807.

At the time when two members of Parliament represented the whole County of Yorkshire, to make use of a local saying, "elections were elections." Like unto the Hallelujah Chorus sung by Yorkshire voices, there was abundance of "fire and go" in connection with an election. The coming of the Candidates in a carriage drawn by four spanking grey horses with mounted postilions, and accompanied by a cavalcade of horsemen was an enlivening sight. (Men could ride in those days). I can vividly recall such an arrival, when Messrs. Stanhope and Starkey, the Conservative Candidates for the Southern Division of the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1874, came to Honley. In an old-time election perhaps there was much bribery, treating and undue influence, but the retinues of men, horses and carriages passing to and fro were more animating to look upon than the present prosaic ballot-box into which papers marked with a X are quietly dropped, as if paying a last tribute to a departed relative. I fancy that free-fights, broken heads, cheers, counter cheers, abundant supply of coloured liquids, and the general hurly-burly taking place around the hustings held more attraction for an old-time voter than the present lifeless proceedings.

Perhaps the most important Parliamentary Election in Yorkshire took place in 1807 at York, which city was the polling place for the whole County at that time. When people had to travel from all parts of Yorkshire to York to record their votes, an ordinary election, must of necessity, have been costly, especially in the matter of reluctant voters. One election for Yorkshire in 1722 cost one candidate £12,000 0s. 0d. This sum, however, was small in comparison to the vast sums expended in the 1807 struggle. This election also was famous for the first breaking down of exclusive County family representation in Parliament. The three candidates were Lord Milton, of the House of Fitzwilliam, Whig, Mr. Lascelles, of the House of Harewood, Tory, and Mr. William Wilberforce, the advocate for the abolition of slavery. These three great champions were representatives of measures which were then the burning questions of the day. The Poll lasted 15 days at York, Wilberforce being returned at the head, Lord Milton next, and Mr. Lascelles at the bottom of the Poll. It is recorded that Lord Milton and Mr. Lascelles spent between them £200,000 0s. 0d., and that the expenses of Wilberforce amounted to £28,600 0s. 0d. The cost of Wilberforce's expenses was defrayed by public subscription.

So far reaching were the results of this noted and expensive contest, that the names of the voters, and the persons for whom they voted, were published in a Poll-book under the direction of the Under Sheriff of York. The following are the names of Honley freeholders who voted, and the persons they voted for, copied from this Poll-book. It will be seen that the majority voted for the representative of those principles of religious and political liberty which had formed the bone of contention in the civil wars. W. means Wilberforce, L. Lascelles, and M. Milton.

			W.	L.	M.
Mr. George Armitage	.. ..	..	1	1	—
„ Jas. Armitage, Clothier	.. ..	..	—	—	1
„ Tom Armitage, Husbandman	.. ..	..	—	—	1
„ Jas. Bottomley, Millwright	.. ..	..	1	1	—