

(Leader comment).

LONDON, THURSDAY, AUGUST 19, 1819

We insert in our columns of this day, such details as have reached us since our last publication, relative to the deplorable transactions which took place during Monday's Manchester meeting. Whatever may have been the preliminary or accessory circumstances connected with that assembly—whatever may be our sense of the merits of those who promoted and presided at it—of their principles political and moral—of the predominant feelings and temper of their followers—of the unfitness of the season at which 50,000 people, half employed and half starved, were congregated to a single spot, there to be puffed up by prodigious notions of their strength, and inflamed by artful pictures of their grievances—whatever, again, an observant mind may suspect as to the real projects of the few who thus played upon the passions and misfortunes of a suffering multitude,—all such considerations, all such suspicions, sink to nothing before the dreadful fact, that nearly a hundred of the King's unarmed subjects have been sabred by a body of cavalry in the streets of a town of which most of them were inhabitants, and in the presence of those Magistrates whose sworn duty it is to protect and preserve the life of the meanest Englishman. In *The Times* of Monday we concluded an article which severely blamed HUNT as a moral agent, by expressing an anxious hope that no persons (thereby meaning the magistracy) would so conduct themselves as to *share* with that brawler the reproach of any evil consequences which might follow the assemblage of so large a body of discontented labourers, at a period teeming, like the present, with solicitude and alarm. The hope we expressed was an indirect, though sufficient intimation of the fears of which we could not divest ourselves on that subject; and our readers are now as well qualified as ourselves to form an opinion to what extent those melancholy forebodings have been justified. It appears by every account that has yet reached London, that, in the midst of the Chairman's speech, within *less than twenty minutes* from the commencement of the meeting, the Yeomanry Cavalry of the town of Manchester charged the populace sword in hand, cut their way to the platform, and with the police at their head, made prisoners of HUNT and several of those who surrounded him—seized the flags of the Reformers—trampled down and cut down a number of the people, who, after throwing some stones and brickbats at the cavalry in its advance towards the hustings, fled on all sides in the utmost confusion and dismay. Of the crowd, *as we stated yesterday*, a large portion consisted of women. About 8 or 10 persons were killed, and, besides those whom their own friends carried off, above 50 wounded were taken to the hospitals; but the gross number is not supposed to have fallen short of 80 or 100, more or less, grievously wounded. Such are the facts: we do not absolutely affirm that they cannot be defended, but we are still to seek their justification, not indeed in the newspaper descriptions of certain mottos inscribed on flags. (however foolish and inflammatory)—nor in the display of a cap of liberty, the model of which is borne before the sovereign of Great Britain, when he meets his Parliament. No, the advocate of the *measures resorted to* at Manchester, by the assembled magistrates and the armed force, must rest their defence on some *legal* principle; for if the justification should fail in law, we suppose it will not be attempted on grounds of good feeling or humanity.

A word on this part of the question, which concerns the capture of HUNT and those about him. Our readers will find amongst the names of the prisoners, that of a gentleman of the name

of TYAS. Mr. TYAS went down from London to take notes of whatever he should see and hear, and report it for The Times. He is a gentleman of talent and education; nephew to an individual of great respectability in the town of Manchester, and, so far as we can judge from his preceding conduct towards this journal, about as much a Jacobin, or friend of Jacobins, as is Lord LIVERPOOL himself. Mr. TYAS had been very seriously indisposed from the day of his arrival at Manchester. Anxious, however, to discharge, in the most satisfactory manner, his duty to us and to the public, he determined to procure, if possible, a place near HUNT on the day of the meeting, for the sake of sparing his own infirm health, and for the greater facility of sending us a complete report. By what means he so unluckily succeeded in this purpose, as to be considered one of HUNT'S party, we have yet no materials for conjecturing; but, greatly as we have been grieved for his sake by this accident, and severely as it has disappointed our hopes of affording more ample and perfect information to our readers, we mention the circumstance less as a subject of complaint with regard to our personal feelings, than as a mode of illustrating the manner in which those who acted for the magistrates thought fit to exercise the power, and to discharge the functions, assigned to them. Mr. TYAS, we have reason to know, was absolutely unacquainted with HUNT, at the moment of his entering Manchester: of what has since happened, we are as ignorant as the public at large.

But we revert to the more solemn question of the legal and constitutional basis on which this seizure of persons and spilling of blood is to be justified by those who directed them. We speak not of the moral, but of the *legal* justification, and desire at present to be considered as referring to the latter alone.

The Riot Act, and the act against seditious meetings, both limit the magistrate's right of interference, to "unlawful assemblies," and no other. Was that at Manchester an "unlawful assembly?" Was the notice of it unlawful? We believe not. Was the subject proposed for discussion (a reform in ' the House of Commons) an unlawful subject? Assuredly not. Was anything done at this meeting before the cavalry rode in upon it, either contrary to law or in breach of the peace? No such circumstance is recorded in any of the statements which have yet reached our hands. The *Courier*, indeed, la-hours hard to prove, that this was an adjourned, and therefore, by the Act of 1817, an unlawful meeting. But the fallacy of such an argument is clear from this— that the former meeting was wholly given up, because it had been *summoned for an illegal purpose*; namely, for a usurpation of the elective franchise, and of the right of representation: whereas this was called for a professedly lawful purpose; and could not, therefore, be identified by those who administer the laws, with one which set those laws at defiance, HUNT'S *dictum*, in his speech to die mob, has no influence on the question in a legal sense. Having said so much as to the legality of the cause of interfering, let us proceed, to the legality of the *mode*. The Riot Act, some say, was read; some say otherwise—but all are agreed, that before an hour had elapsed from the reading of it, the soldiers attacked and the people were cut down. Yet we pronounce not a final opinion upon this momentous proceeding. We have begged for information rather than uttered a decision; and happy shall we be to find, that white one party is charged with violating the laws of England, the opposite party may be able to prove that they have respected them.

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Accounts from Manchester, up to 2 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon, reached us last night. At that hour nothing occurred of a nature sufficiently serious to disturb the peace of the town. Compared with the tumultuous proceedings of Monday, tranquillity might be said to

prevail; but indications of a forced submission on the part of the populace, of vindictive feelings suspended, but not suppressed, were too apparent not to cause alarm in those who carefully observed their motions, and listened to their discourse. The military who had patrolled the streets during the whole of Monday night, were equally vigilant on Tuesday morning; they were judiciously employed in checking, before they could become formidable, the first symptoms of riot and disorder. Small parties of cavalry rode through the principal streets; and if any of the populace were collected into a group, they were immediately dispersed. The shops and the lower part of the houses continued shut the whole morning. The temper of the Reformers, though thus prevented from displaying itself in action, was strongly manifested by an unbounded license of expression; and threats of revenge, directed more particularly against those members of the Manchester Yeomanry who were most active in the affair of Monday, and who, by residing in the town and being well known to the disaffected persons, became distinctly marked out as objects of their hatred. The female part of the multitude were not less conspicuous than on Monday for the share they took in what was going on, and were even more bitter and malignant in their invectives than their male associates. New-Cross, the place where the most dangerous rioting had occurred on Monday evening, was taken possession of during the morning of Tuesday, by companies of the 31st regiment of foot, who relieved each *other* in succession. An attempt was made by the very lowest of the populace to assemble there at the early hour of seven, but they were soon put to flight, and by nine o'clock every thing was tranquil in that quarter. A report (which appears to have been spread with the view of diverting the attention of the military) was circulated early in the morning, that a large body of the disaffected, armed with pikes, amounting in number to 15,000, were advancing to Manchester by the Oldham road. A party of the 15th Light Dragoons, with two pieces of artillery, were immediately stationed in Oldham-street; and the Cheshire Yeomanry, who were previously on duty at St. Peter's-green, were ordered to advance on the road to Oldham. This alarm proving to be unfounded, the troops and artillery were withdrawn by two o'clock. The exertions of the soldiery, though fully effectual in preventing any tumultuary assemblages, could not, however, *so* completely guard against individual out-rage. A butcher in Oldham-street is stated to have been attacked and desperately wounded in the head by a small party of the mob, and carried to the Infirmary, with little hope of recovery. One of the special constables, a watchmaker, was marked out for a similar species of revenge. The latter was fired at by a pistol, and wounded, but not dangerously. Mr. J. Hulme, the gentleman who fell in the first attack by the Manchester Yeomanry, was still alive when the accounts left the town; but the fracture of the skull which he had sustained was so severe, as *to* leave little hope of his recovery. HUNT, together with JOHNSON, and MOREHOUSE of Stockport, are said to have been brought up for examination on Tuesday, but *none of them were admitted to bail*; and it was even circulated, though on what grounds we are unable to state, that these three leading Reformers were under commitment to Lancaster Gaol on a charge of high treason. At all events they still remained in confinement. The proceedings of Monday have been already so minutely detailed, that little remains to be added to them; we cannot, however, forbear noticing an act of indiscretion committed by a member of the Yeomanry, and which, if correctly stated, will scarcely admit of palliation. This person was peculiarly active in the attack of Monday, and succeeded in personally seizing one of the insurrectionary flags, displayed by the Reformers on the hustings at St. Peter's green. Not contented with the mere possession of this trophy, he thought proper to exhibit it from the window of his house, which stands in one of the

most frequented streets and outlets of the town, in full view of the populace then retiring, indignant, though discomfited from the scene of action. They took fire at this insult, and watching their opportunity, when the attention of the military was called off from that particular spot, completely demolished every window by a volley of stones and other missiles, and would probably have proceeded to more serious acts of outrage, but for the arrival of prompt assistance. The individual has himself alone to blame for the consequences of his indiscretion. In the existing temper of the mob, which we I have described, it will create no surprise that threats have been unsparingly used, and that both the houses and factories of the more active members of the Yeomanry, have been marked out for destruction; but we are happy to state, that no instance of so formidable a species of revenge has hitherto occurred, and confidently hope that any calamity of such a nature may still be prevented.

[Tyas's report follows – see file 'Times 2 Tyas']