

Fireworks of the Past.

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CONSIDERING the great developments that have taken place in almost all branches of scientific and chemical knowledge and discovery during the present century, we cannot help feeling that the advancement in pyrotechny has not been so rapid as it has been in other fields of science. In the present article we propose to describe and illustrate some of the public displays which, in bygone times, have served to demonstrate the popular sentiment on occasions of national rejoicing; and for spectacular effect these achievements of the past will be found to compare favourably with those of even our own day.

It will not surprise us to be told that the use of fireworks for the purposes of display was common in China in "very ancient times"; but we will confine our attention to English fireworks, and will begin with the later years of the seventeenth century.

The illustration No. 1 portrays the fireworks that were given on the Thames in honour of the coronation of James II., in April, 1685. The river was frequently

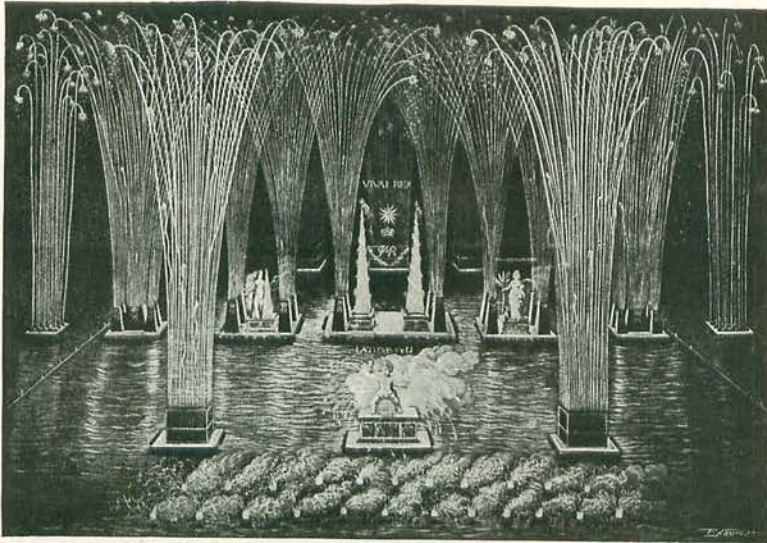
chosen for these national displays, and the position could boast two distinct advantages: great crowds were able to obtain an uninterrupted view of the spectacle from the banks, and the reflection in the water considerably enhanced the effect. The contemporary records give very meagre descriptions of the fireworks on this occasion, but it would seem that at the coronation banquet, the guests or servers were not without exception of unimpeachable integrity; for when the cloth was removed, it was found that some of His Majesty's plate—including forks, spoons, and salt-cellars—was missing; and an advertisement in the *London Gazette* of April 27th finishes: "Whoever have found the aforesaid or any part of it, are desired to bring it to His Majesty's Pantry at Whitehall, and they shall be rewarded for their pains."

Three years later we have another "Firework on the Thames" to mark the rejoicings at the birth of a son to James II., known to fame first as the Prince of Wales and afterwards as the Old Pretender. The general thanksgiving lasted a fortnight, and on the evening of June 17th, 1688, "The publick Joy was expressed by the Conduits running with Wine, by Bonfires, Ringing of Bells, and all other ways by which the People could demonstrate their Dutiful Affection to their Majesties." The illustration No. 2 depicts one of the "other ways" in which duty found expression, and the scheme of the fireworks consisted chiefly in the discharge of volleys of rockets from rafts moored in a regular order.

But "dutiful affection" was destined quickly to wane; and before the year was out James II. had abdicated, and William Prince of Orange was reigning in his stead. Having accepted the invitation to come over to England and, with his wife, occupy the throne, William embarked for this country, and, appropriately enough for our article, landed at



NO. 1.—THE CORONATION OF JAMES II.—1685.

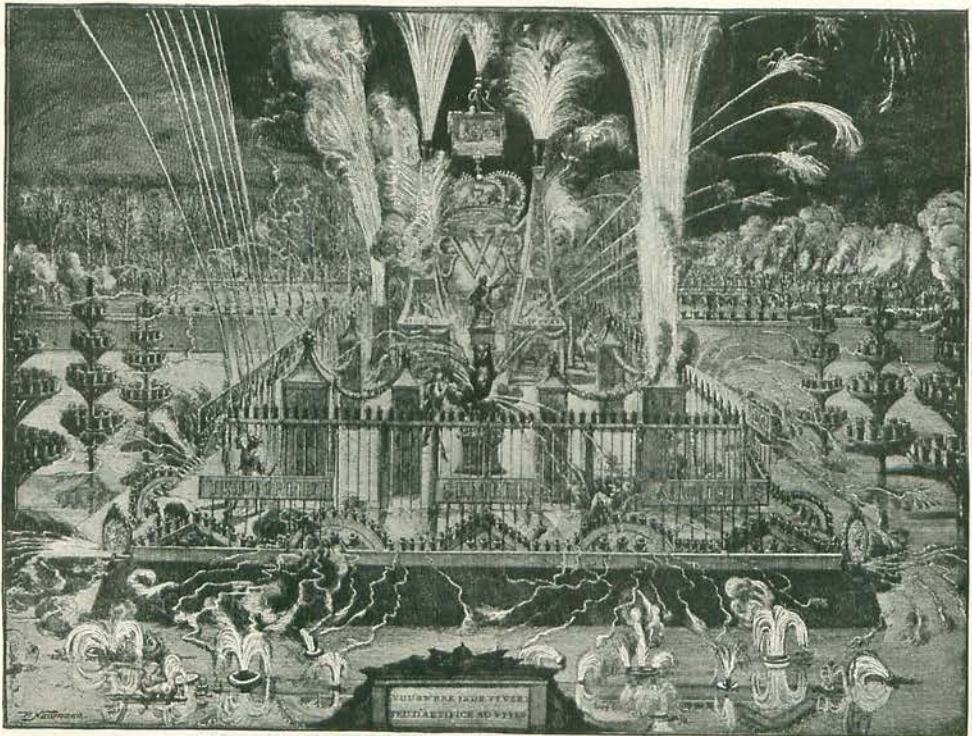


NO. 2.—THE BIRTH OF THE OLD PRÉTENDER IN 1688.

Torbay on Guy Fawkes Day. The Prince himself was anxious to set foot on British soil on November 4th, as that day was the anniversary of both his birth and marriage, but the elements were against him. The weather was so boisterous that all hope of landing at Torbay was given up, and even fears were entertained for the safety of the vessel;

of Joy for his Welcome Home." The *London Mercury* informs us that "the Bells were Wringing [*sic*] in divers places, and at the Court end of the Town were several Bonefires"; while on the river was to be seen the magnificent display of fireworks which we illustrate in No. 3.

William III. was not a man to stay at



NO. 3.—THE RECEPTION OF THE PRINCE OF ORANGE IN LONDON, 1688.

home and pass his days in luxurious ease; and in less than two years we find he had subdued Ireland and shattered the power of his predecessor. In illustration No. 4 we give "A Perfect Description of the Firework in Covent Garden that was perform'd at the Charge of the Gentry and other inhabitants of that Parish for y^e Joyfull return of His Ma^{tie} from His Conquest in Ireland, Sept^r. 10, 1690." Although

the "Gentry and inhabitants" are credited with supplying the fireworks, some funds were provided for the occasion by the "local vestry," as will be seen by the following extracts from the parish books:—

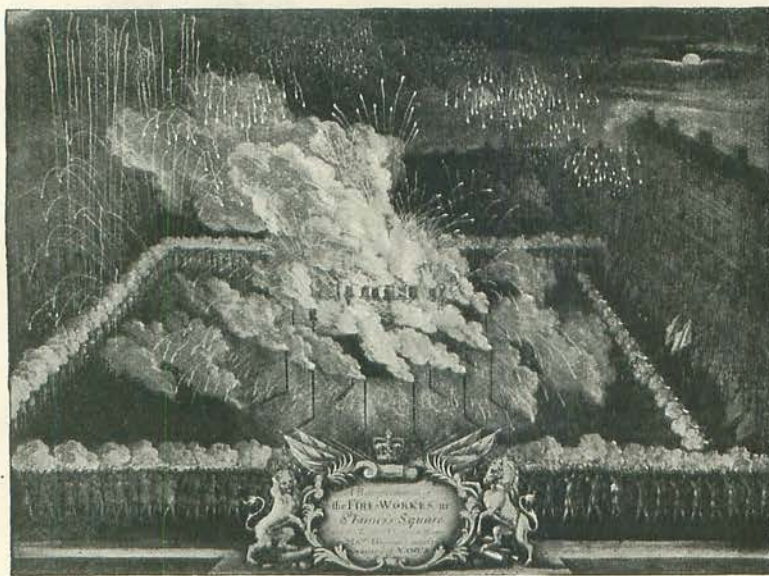
1690, Sept ^r . 23. Paid to Mr. Brown, for 200 of ffagotts and 30 Brushes for Bonefire for the parish.....	01. 12. 06.
1690, Sept ^r . 25. Paid Mr. Stokes for a Barrell of Ale for the Bonefire.....	01. 00. 00.
1691. Given to Stokes and y ^e Watchmen to drinke att the Bonefire and fireworks at the King's return from Ireland	00. 10. 00.
1691, Octor. 12. Pd ^d the Labourers and Carters for 4 Dayes Worke, in Laying and Spreading the Gravell	01. 06. 00.



NO. 4.—THE CONQUEST OF IRELAND—1690.

The next firework (No. 5) commemorates another of William's military achievements—the taking of Namur, in 1695. There was widespread satisfaction at "the glorious success of His Majesty's Arms in reducing a place of such strength," and Sunday, September 8th, was proclaimed a thanksgiving day. The next night—as we learn from the *Post Boy* of September 10th—"there were Fireworks in St. James's Square, and in the Stocks Market, and there were Bone-fires and Illuminations, with other Demonstrations of Joy for the taking of Namur, in all parts of the City."

The *London Gazette* of the same day informs us that "the Earl of Romney, Master-General of the Ordnance, having ordered a firework to be made in St. James's Square, it was accordingly prepared, and fired to the great satisfaction of all that saw it. At the same time divers Triumph Chambers were discharged, and His Majesty's Foot Guards being drawn up in the square, gave three volleys of running Fire,



NO. 5.—THE TAKING OF NAMUR—1695.

the whole being performed in very good Order." This latter item is very accurately given in our illustration.

We now pass to the year 1713, when after that glorious but long and expensive campaign under Marlborough, which included the battles of Blenheim, Ramilies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet, the peace of Utrecht brought rest to exhausted Europe. In illustration No. 6 we see the design for the firework "that was perform'd on the River Thames, July 7th, 1713, the Thanksgiving Day for the Peace obtained by the best of Queens." The structure was designed by Sir James Thornhill (the father-in-law of Hogarth), and in the display were included "100 Balloons of 7in. Mortars, 2,300 Sky Rockets, 1,500 Water Rockets," and very many other items.

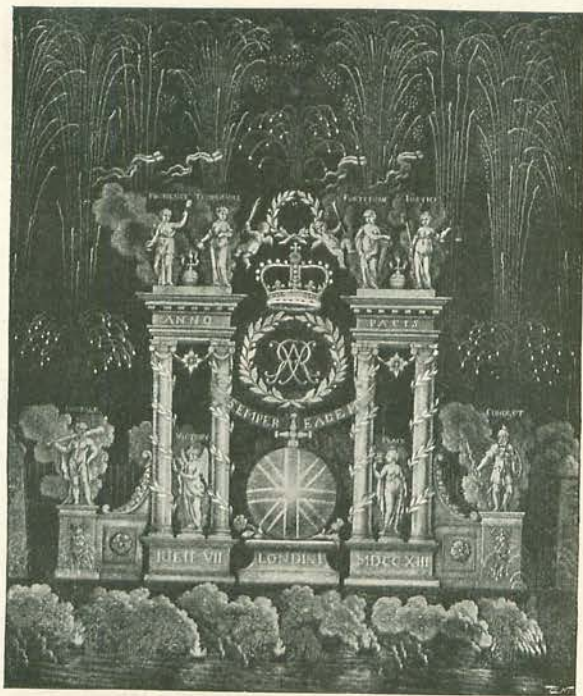
Our illustration shows the central portion of the structure, at the time when the display was at its height. "The crowds of spectators," quoting again from the *Post Boy*, "were prodigiously great to see the Playing Off of the Fireworks over against Whitehall, which began about eleven, and lasted till after midnight. They were excellent in their kind, and were played off with the utmost Regularity and Good Order. The Night concluded with ringing of Bells, Bonfires, Illuminations, drinking Loyal Healths, etc." Party feeling in regard to this treaty of peace was very prominent, but fortunately we have not to discuss that here. We need only say that by the treaty Louis XIV. ceased to aid the Pretender, and he recognised the Protestant succession of the House of Brunswick.

We come next to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, which was celebrated in London, April 27th, 1749, when the fireworks were on an exceptionally grand scale. The two

principal displays took place in the Green Park, and opposite the Duke of Richmond's house on the river at Whitehall; but probably to avoid a clashing of the events, the Duke of Richmond postponed his celebration until May 15th. We will deal with the displays in the order of date.

That in the Green Park was conducted on a scale of great magnificence, as will be seen from illustration No. 7. On the left of the picture can be seen a portion of Buckingham House, which occupied the site where Buckingham Palace now stands. The firework edifice was designed by an Italian artist named Lenuandoni, its length being over 400ft., while its height was 114ft. It was adorned with twenty-three statues and

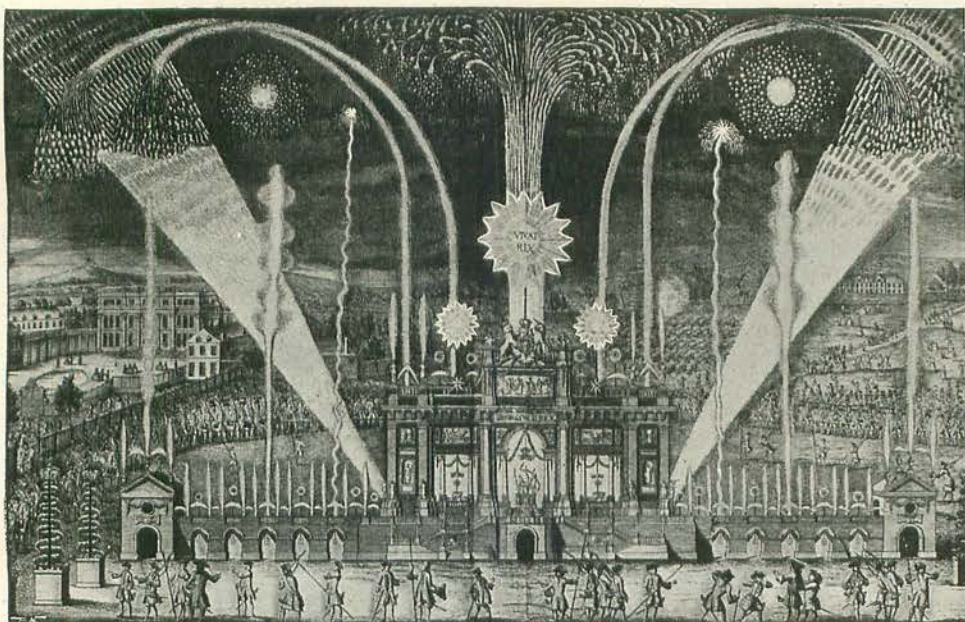
twenty-eight pictures of colossal proportions, which in the day-time appeared as bas-reliefs, and at night as coloured transparencies. In the area before the middle arch was stationed a band of a hundred musicians, who performed warlike music, composed by "Mr. Handel," before the fireworks began. Then followed a salute of 101 brass ordnance, and after that came "a splendid display of all the varieties of the pyrotechnic art." From each side of the central portion



NO. 6.—THE PEACE OF UTRECHT—1713.

500 rockets were discharged, and then the entire front of the building displayed firewheels, etc., which continued for three hours.

Upon the conclusion of this portion of the programme, 6,000 rockets were fired simultaneously from behind the King's arms at the summit of the edifice, after which "the whole building was illuminated and continued so for five hours more." To give some idea of the grandeur of the display, we quote a few items from the bill:—



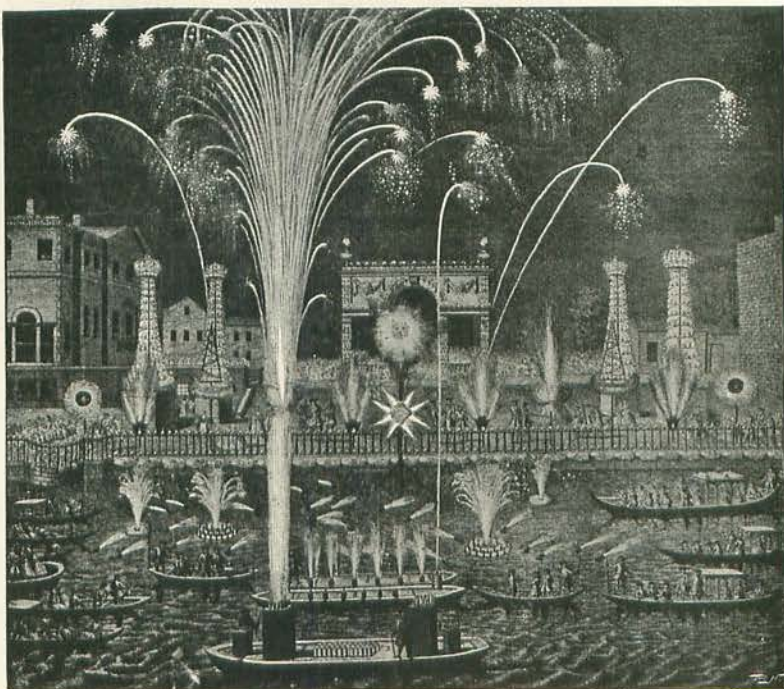
NO. 7.—THE PEACE OF AIX-LA-CHAPELLE, 1749—THE DISPLAY IN THE GREEN PARK.

Sky rockets, 4oz. to 6lb.	10,650
Pots de Brin.....	12,200
Serpents	130,000
Grand Girandole of $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. Sky Rockets ...	6,000
Maroons in Battery.....	5,000
Lances	3,700

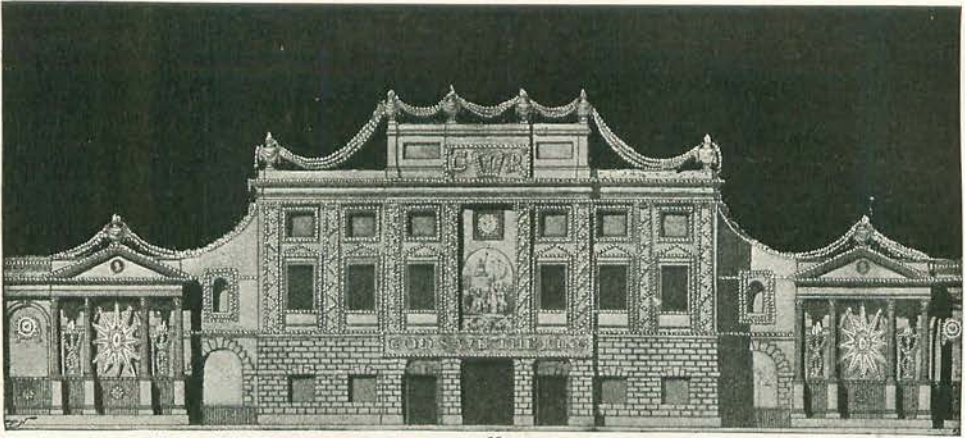
The display at the Duke of Richmond's, on

May 15th, if not on so lavish a scale as the one in the Green Park, was certainly very effective, as will be seen from No. 8. The set pieces were arranged along the courtyard by the edge of the river, and the rockets, etc., were discharged from boats and barges on the water; while as a background to the whole the pavilion was brilliantly illuminated. The Duke first entertained a distinguished company of Royalty, nobility, and Foreign Ministers to

supper, and afterwards the guests embarked in various craft, and, together with some hundreds of spectators, witnessed the display of fireworks. The vessel on the right of the picture nearest the shore is "His Majesty's barge."



NO. 8.—THE PEACE OF AIX-LA-CHAPELLE—THE DUKE OF RICHMOND'S DISPLAY.



NO. 9.—THE RECOVERY OF GEORGE III., 1788—DISPLAY AT THE BANK OF ENGLAND.

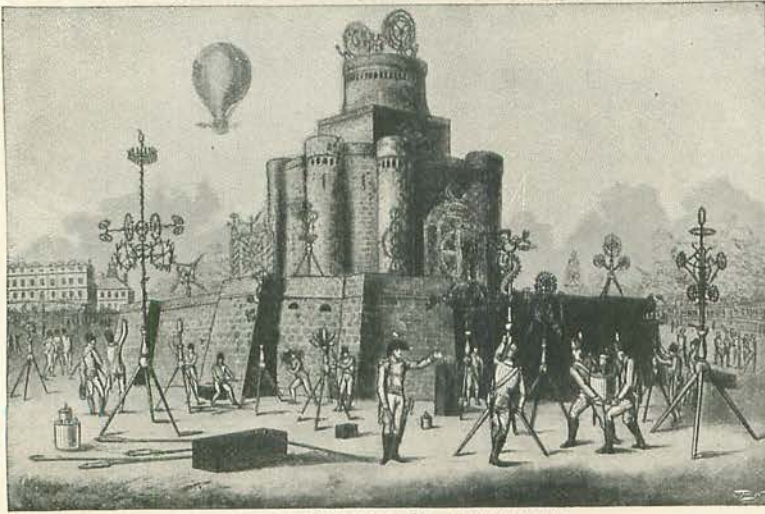
We now come to the year 1788, when George III. was seized with that violent illness from which at times the most serious results were feared. But, fortunately, the King became convalescent in the following spring, and on St. George's Day, April 23rd, a special thanksgiving service was held in St. Paul's Cathedral. It was a day of great and genuine rejoicing. Troops lined the streets from five o'clock in the morning, and many spectators took up their positions along the route of the procession the night before. Unfortunately "the rain was very offensive to the spectators and made a sad derangement in their dress; but they remained with patience, though wet to the skin, till the King came up." *Stuart's Star* devotes five columns to a description of the illuminations at night, and of No. 9, which represents the central portion of the façade of the Bank of England, says, "Above all transparencies of the night, that of the Bank merited principal praise.

The design was classic; and in point of composition and execution, it is to be lamented that so temporary a fate was annexed to so much talent and skill. In the centre was a transparency of Liberty seated on a triumphal car." We also learn that "Piccadilly, the Strand, Cheapside, and to the Bank had three or four ranks of carriages till near four o'clock in the morning."



NO. 10.—PEACE WITH FRANCE, 1802—THE HOUSE OF THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Illustration No. 10 commemorates the rejoicings that took place on April 29th, 1802, upon the conclusion of peace between this country and France. The Metropolis was brilliantly and universally illuminated, and our illustration depicts the house of M. Otto, the French Ambassador, in Portman Square. *The Times* says: "The attraction of the evening was M. Otto's house, which presented a scene of extraordinary brilliancy. Soon after eight o'clock Portman Square was so completely jammed with people and carriages, that it was very difficult to get either in or out. Many carri-



NO. 11.—THE PEACE OF 1814—THE FORTRESS.

ages were stationary more than three hours, and all the avenues were blocked up. The effect of the illuminations was brilliant beyond conception, the whole of the front of the house being one blaze of light."

Illustration No. 11 portrays the building that was erected in the Green Park in 1814 to celebrate the peace of that year, when Europe was rejoicing over the fact that "in the insignificant Isle of Elba the Tyrant was securely deposited." The day of the celebration was August 1st, the centenary of the succession of the House of Brunswick, and the anniversary of the Battle of the Nile. It was a time of unusual festivity, and the services of the most eminent surveyors, architects, and artists were enlisted that full honour might be done to the occasion.

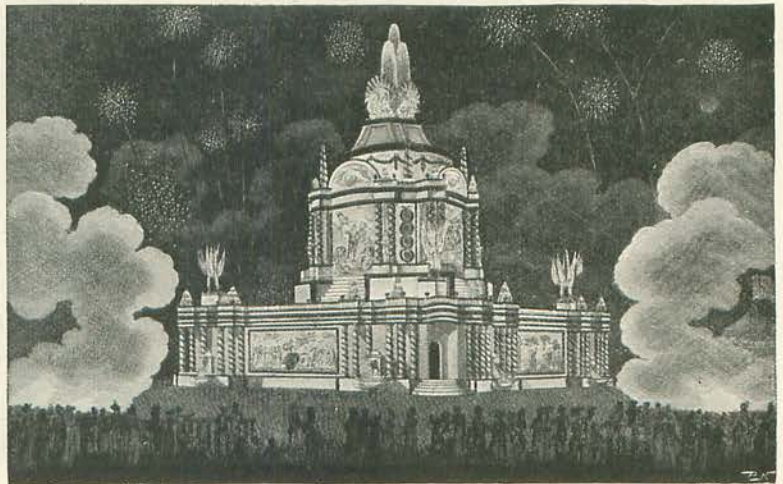
The festivity in which our illustration formed part took place in the Green Park. This "fortress" measured 500ft. in circumference and 80ft. in height, and, although so large, it was made to revolve, in order that the spectators might see the entire structure without moving. At a given signal, this fortress— which

symbolized War— was, by some system of quick change, transformed into an emblem of Peace, as depicted in our last illustration, the Temple of Concord. With the transformation came a grand display of fireworks, and the contemporary accounts make a feature of the rockets that were employed. "Each rocket contains a world of smaller rockets; it is discharged from a

gun, bursts and flings aloft innumerable parcels of flame; the smaller rockets burst, and a shower of fiery light descends to the earth."

At the coronation of Queen Victoria the joyful occasion was celebrated by a fair in Hyde Park; and although there was a grand display of fireworks at night, the artists of the time seem to have devoted their pencils exclusively to the events of the day.

And so we find that for centuries it has been the custom for people to express their happiness at times of national rejoicing by ingenious displays of fire; and one of the most striking features of the recent Diamond Jubilee celebrations was the remarkable spectacle the Metropolis presented when illuminated on the night of the ever-memorable 22nd of June.



NO. 12.—THE PEACE OF 1814—THE TEMPLE OF CONCORD.