

The Peel government did not take his agitation too seriously : he was arrested for treasonable language used at a monster meeting at Tara in 1843, but the House of Lords reversed his condemnation on a technical point, and no further proceedings were taken against him. But his following broke up, the majority sinking into apathy, while the minority resolved to appeal, in the old fashion of 1798, to armed insurrection—a method even more hopeless for gaining their end than monster meetings. But it was not till five years later that they made their attempt.

Meanwhile, Peel passed many admirable laws for the benefit of the working classes. His Mines Acts (1842) prohibited the labour of women and children underground ; his **The Factory Acts—** Factory Acts (1844) restricted the employment of **Financial** the young in factories, and appointed inspectors **legislation.** to see to their sanitation and safety. He also set right the finances of the kingdom, which Lord Melbourne had left in a very unsatisfactory state, and did much for the introduction of Free-trade in commerce. In one year he reduced the import duties on no less than 750 articles of daily use, ranging from live cattle and eggs to hemp and timber. The loss in revenue this caused he made up by imposing an Income Tax, which he promised to abolish at an early date. He lost office ere the time came, and his successors have never made very serious efforts to redeem his pledge.

In foreign affairs the Peel cabinet had many troubles to face, but came safely through most of them. The disastrous **Afghan and** Afghan war,* a legacy from Lord Melbourne's **Sikh wars—** time, was brought to a not inglorious end. The **Difficulties** first Sikh war, an even greater trial of our strength **with France.** in the East, finally ended in complete victory. Two quarrels with France seemed likely for a moment to end in hostilities ; both were provoked by the arrogant policy of the ministers of Louis Philippe. In 1844 the French laid

* See chapter on India and the Colonies.