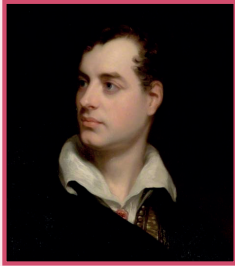


# Lord Byron's maiden speech in the House of Lords



**Extracts from a speech given by Lord Byron in the debate in the House of Lords on the 1812 Frame Breaking Act.**

*"...As a person in some degree connected with the suffering county, though a stranger, not only to this House in general ...I offer a few observations on a question in which I confess myself deeply interested.*

*... During the short time I recently passed in Notts, not twelve hours elapsed without some fresh act of violence; and, on the day I left the county, I was informed that forty frames had been broken the preceding evening as usual, without resistance and without detection.*

*Such was then the state of that county, and such I have reason to believe it to be at this moment. But whilst these outrages must be admitted to exist to an alarming extent, it cannot be denied that they have arisen from circumstances of the most unparalleled distress. The perseverance of these miserable men in their proceedings, tends to prove that nothing but absolute want could have driven a large and once honest and industrious body of the people into the commission of excesses so hazardous to themselves, their families, and the community...*

*These men never destroyed their looms till they were become useless, worse than useless; till they were become actual impediments to their exertions in obtaining their daily bread... Their own means of subsistence were cut off; all other employments pre-occupied; and their excesses, however to be deplored and condemned, can hardly be the subject of surprise...*

*At present the county suffers from the double infliction of an idle military and a starving population.*

*But all the cities you have taken, all the armies which have retreated before your leaders, are but paltry subjects of self-congratulation, if your land divides against itself, and your dragoons and executioners must be let loose against your fellow-citizens...*

*Are we aware of our obligations to a mob! It is the mob that labour in your fields, and serve in your houses — that man your navy, and recruit your army— that have enabled you to defy all the world,— and can also defy you, when neglect and calamity have driven them to despair ...I have traversed the seat of war in the peninsula; I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces of Turkey; but never, under the most despotic of infidel governments, did' I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return, in the very heart of a Christian country. ...*

*... But suppose it past [the Act making it a capital offence to break frames],—suppose one of these men, as I have seen them meagre with famine, sullen with despair, careless of a life which your lordships are perhaps about to value at something less than the price of a stocking-frame; suppose this man surrounded by those children for whom he is unable to procure bread at the hazard of his existence, about to be torn for ever from a family which he lately supported in peaceful industry, and which it is not his fault than he can no longer so support; suppose this man - and there are ten thousand such from whom you may select your victims,- dragged into court to be tried for this new offence, by this new law,-still there are two things wanting to convict and condemn him, and these are, in my opinion, twelve butchers for a jury, and a Jefferies\* for a judge!"*

*\*This could be a reference to Sir George Jeffreys, a renowned 17th century judge who took great pleasure in condemning criminals to be hung, drawn and quartered.*