

time to the prevailing popular opinion, it was in many essentials so intimately allied with the body of the people that they could never be in a long continued state of isolation or antagonism. This debate was opened by earl Grey. There was a calmness and solemnity in his words and manner which well befitted the statesman who now, in his sixty-eighth year, stood prominently forward as the advocate of a measure which he had proposed in the House of Commons forty years before; and, more than advocate, as the responsible author of a Reform Bill of far greater scope and of more practical importance than any plan which he had supported during his long parliamentary career. But it was not enough, he said, for a public man, pretending to the character of a Statesman, to show that what he has to propose is in conformity with opinions long established in his mind; he is bound to feel the conviction that in proposing a measure affecting the mighty interests of the State, the course he takes is called for by justice and necessity. He has further to prove that he has not brought right opinions into notice rashly, precipitately, or at a dangerous season. Having explained the general character of the proposed Bill, he thus vindicated its extent and comprehensiveness.* "I felt that the most prudent and the safest measure of Reform would be a bold one, because, when I looked at the condition of the country—when I considered how just the claims of the people were—and when, above all, I reflected upon the absolute necessity of satisfying the respectable and reasonable part of the community, in order that thereby the Government and Legislature might be furnished with a ground on which a firm and safe stand might be made in defence of the principles of the constitution, if ever they should be really assailed—from all these considerations, I say, I was satisfied that nothing but a bold and decisive measure would give such general satisfaction and content as would set the question at rest."† Earl Grey was followed by lord Wharnccliffe, who moved an amendment to the effect that the Bill be rejected altogether.

On the second night of the debate the duke of Wellington spoke at much greater length than he usually spake. He maintained that this country having enjoyed a larger share of happiness, comfort, and prosperity than were ever enjoyed by any nation, could any man believe that these advantages would remain if such a democratic assembly as that proposed should once be established in England? "A democracy has never been established in any part of the world that it has not immediately declared war against property, against the payment of the public debt, and against all the

* Hansard, vol. iii. col. 935.

† *Ibid.*, col. 1342.

principles of conservation which are secured by, and are in fact the principal objects of, the British Constitution as it now exists." The duke of Wellington's speech gave a very significant anticipation of the rejection of the Bill by the Lords, and of the probability that, the government being defeated, there would be another ministry who would propose a reform that might not be dreaded as "a bold and decisive measure." "I recommend to you to keep yourselves free to adopt any measure upon this subject which should secure to this country the blessings of a government."* The duke, after the passing of the Bill, always asked, How is the King's government to be carried on? The long continued Tory belief was that lord Grey's vital change—"that sweeping Bill which prevented him, and will prevent any other government from ruling the country again,"†—would render any government impossible but that which was dictated by the will of a turbulent democracy. The great soldier's notion of "ruling," which was the one idea of his party, was something different from that which we entertain at this day, when the best rule which England has ever lived under is the most in harmony with the sober desires of the great middle class, and most careful of the rights and liberties of the universal people.

Lord Dudley, upon the third night of debate, delivered an elegant and classical speech opposing the Bill, which lord Brougham subsequently characterized as "an exercise or essay of the highest merit, on change, on democracies, on republicanism,—an essay or exercitation on some other thesis, but not on this Bill."‡ One part of the speech of lord Dudley was however anything but irrelevant to the measure before the House. In a very few words it comprehended volumes of declamation that had been already spoken, of the well working of nomination boroughs and of all the other anomalies of the representative system. "It was only by the abuses of the Constitution, as they were called, that the due balance was maintained, and the evils which would arise from the superiority of the popular branch of the Legislature prevented, or at least mitigated. It was only because the Crown and the House of Lords had an influence in that of the Commons, which was wholly unacknowledged by the theory of the Constitution, that the Constitution had been maintained."§ The fourth night of the debate was chiefly occupied by the able speeches of lord Carnarvon and lord Plunkett.

On the fifth and last night the speech of lord Eldon was affect-

* Hansard, vol. vii. col. 1205.

† Raikes's "Diary," vol. iii. p. 7.

‡ Speech on Reform, October 7th.

§ Hansard, vol. vii. col. 1342.

ing, from his allusions to his great age, and to his early education upon cheap terms in the Corporation school of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He appeared to think that the school would be destroyed by lessening the influence of the Corporation and that of freemen of the borough; and that thus a hope which he had cherished would not be realized. "I had hoped that when my ashes were laid in the grave, where they probably soon will be, that I might have given some memorandum that boys there, situated as I was, might rise to be Chancellors of England." On that night the great lawyers had almost exclusive possession of the House,—two ex-chancellors, and he who now sat on the Woolsack. Lord Brougham rose to speak before his friend and rival, lord Lyndhurst. To attempt a selection of passages from this speech—from what lord Lyndhurst described as "a splendid declamation which had never been surpassed on any occasion even by the noble and learned lord himself"—would be to carry us beyond our proper limits. One passage however in the peroration may be fitly given: "Hear the parable of the Sibyl; for it conveys a wise and wholesome moral. She now appears at your gate, and offers you mildly the volumes—the precious volumes of wisdom and peace. The price she asks is reasonable; to restore the franchise, which, without any bargain, you ought voluntarily to give: you refuse her terms—her moderate terms,—she darkens the porch no longer. But soon, for you cannot do without her wares, you call her back;—again she comes, but with diminished treasures; the leaves of the book are in part torn away by lawless hands,—in part defaced with characters of blood. But the prophetic maid has risen in her demands—it is Parliament by the Year—it is Vote by the Ballot—it is Suffrage by the Million! From this you turn away indignant, and for the second time she departs. Beware of her third coming; for the treasure you must have; and what price she may next demand, who shall tell? It may even be the mace which rests upon that woolsack. What may follow your course of obstinacy, if persisted in, I cannot take upon me to predict, nor do I wish to conjecture. But this I know full well, that, as sure as man is mortal, and to err is human, justice deferred enhances the price at which you must purchase safety and peace;—nor can you expect to gather in another crop than they did who went before you, if you persevere in their utterly abominable husbandry, of sowing injustice and reaping rebellion."* Lord Lyndhurst followed. The debate was concluded by a reply of earl Grey to the principal arguments

* "Brougham's Speeches," vol. ii. p. 384.

against the Bill which had been adduced during those five nights. He was exhausted, as were nearly all his listeners, but his intellectual vigour was never more signally manifested. Of the sincerity of his concluding words not even the bitterest of his political adversaries could doubt: "I have lived a long life of exclusion from office; I had no official habits; I possessed not the advantages which those official habits confer. I am fond of retirement and domestic life, and I lived happy and content in the bosom of my family; I was surrounded by those to whom I am attached by the warmest ties of affection. What, then, but a sense of duty could have induced me to plunge into all the difficulties, not unforeseen, of my present situation? What else, in my declining age,—

What else could tempt me on those stormy seas,
Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?"*

Between six and seven o'clock on the morning of Saturday the 8th of October, the House of Lords divided upon the second reading of the Reform Bill:

Non-contents, present 150, proxies 49 — 199
Contents, present 128, proxies 30 — 158

Majority against the Bill—41

Lord Eldon rejoices, in a letter of the next day, that the mob would not stay for the close of the debate. † Their patience during a cold and drizzling night of waiting in Palace Yard had been worn out; and when the Peers came forth there were none to salute them with cheers or hisses. The rolling of the carriages alone was heard, as Reformers or Conservatives, in the broad daylight, went to their homes as quietly as if a whole nation had not been anxiously awaking that morning to know how the great work was so far concluded.

The rejection of the Reform Bill by the House of Lords was not unforeseen. The disproportion of the two parties in that House was perfectly well known. During the reigns of George III. and George IV., the creation of peers had been almost exclusively confined to the Tory party;—the bishops had, with very few exceptions, been selected with no forgetfulness of their political opinions. To remedy, in some degree, this disproportion, sixteen new peers had been created before the second reading of the Bill. Lord Grey, in moving that reading, had addressed to the

* Hansard, vol. viii. col. 338. † "Life," vol. i. p. 329.

bishops a very significant warning "to put their house in order." Many of the peers had refrained from voting; but on the 7th of October the bishops were on their bench in strong numbers; and, of thirteen present, twelve voted against the bill, nine others sending their proxies for the same object of defeating the measure which had so triumphantly passed the House of Commons. The great contest was yet, however, to be fought out in another campaign. The Lords had gone from the house on the Saturday morning, after such a night of excitement and fatigue as few had before encountered. On the following Monday lord Ebrington, member for Devonshire, moved in the House of Commons a resolution to the effect that the House lamenting the present fate of the bill for amending the representation, feels itself called upon to re-assert its firm adherence to the principal and leading provisions of that great measure, and to express its unabated confidence in the integrity, perseverance, and ability of those ministers who, in introducing and conducting it, had so well consulted the best interests of the country. The resolution was carried by 329 votes to 198. The public enthusiasm gave a hearty assent to the principle urged on that occasion by Mr. Macaulay, when he asked, "ought we to abandon the bill merely because the Lords have rejected it? We ought to respect the lawful privileges of their House, but we ought also to assert our own." Riot and outrage at Derby; and at Nottingham the burning of the Castle by a frantic mob, clouded for a time the hope which all honest reformers entertained that reason and justice should alone prevail. The saddest, however, could relish the wit, which, however pungent, was like oil upon the waves. "Mrs. Partington" became famous throughout the land:—"As for the possibility of the House of Lords preventing ere long a reform of parliament, I hold it to be the most absurd notion that ever entered into human imagination. I do not mean to be disrespectful, but the attempt of the Lords to stop the progress of reform reminds me very forcibly of the great storm of Sidmouth, and of the conduct of the excellent Mrs. Partington on that occasion. In the winter of 1824, there set in a great flood upon that town—the tide rose to an incredible height—the waves rushed in upon the houses, and everything was threatened with destruction. In the midst of this sublime and terrible storm, Dame Partington, who lived upon the beach, was seen at the door of her house with mop and pattens, trundling her mop, squeezing out the sea-water, and vigorously pushing away the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic was roused. Mrs. Partington's spirit was up; but I need not tell you that the contest was un-

equal. The Atlantic Ocean beat Mrs. Partington. She was excellent at a sloop, or a puddle, but she should not have meddled with a tempest. Gentlemen, be at your ease—be quiet and steady. You will beat Mrs. Partington." *

The ministry stood firm, although they were taunted with their continuance in power after they had found themselves opposed by such a majority in the House of Lords as no minister had ever encountered a second time. There was no wavering in the king. He went to the House of Peers on the 20th of October; and having given the royal assent to lord Brougham's Bankruptcy Court Bill, amongst other bills, he prorogued the parliament, stating that its attention must necessarily be called upon at the opening of the ensuing session to the important question of a constitutional reform in the Commons House of Parliament.

* Sydney Smith: "Speech at Taunton," Oct. 12, 1831.