

tent, the powers which were granted to them. The advice tendered by sir Herbert Taylor was at once adopted. The duke of Wellington withdrew after his explanation on the 17th, and did not return to the House of Lords till the night after the passing of the Reform Bill. His wise and patriotic example was followed by a sufficient number of Peers to afford a decided majority for the ministers. On the 21st of May the discussion of the Bill was resumed. The duke of Newcastle, after several of the clauses had been passed, said, with bitter irony, that he would recommend to the Committee to vote all the details of the Bill at once, and send it up to a third reading. The business in Committee was finished on the last day of May. On the 4th of June the Bill was passed by a majority of eighty-four. The Commons next day agreed to the unimportant amendments proposed by the Lords, and on the 7th of June the English Reform Bill received the royal assent. The Reform Act for Scotland and the Reform Act for Ireland were also quickly passed—the Scotch Bill on the 13th of July; the Irish on the 18th. After the experience of thirty years this measure has been described by one perfectly well acquainted with the theory and practice of Parliament, as “a measure at once bold, comprehensive, moderate and constitutional; popular but not democratic, it extended liberty without hazarding revolution. . . . That it was theoretically complete, and left nothing for future statesmen to effect, its authors never affirmed; but it was a masterly settlement of a perilous question.”\*

\* May, “Constitutional History,” p. 357.

## CHAPTER V.

Dissolution of Parliament.—Proceedings for Elections under the Reform Act.—Effect of Changes in the system of Representation.—Condition of the Nomination Boroughs.—Electoral changes in close Corporations.—The new Representation.—Metropolitan Boroughs.—Manufacturing Towns.—Scotland.—Ireland.—Approaching meeting of the Reformed Parliament.—Fears of Anti-Reformers.—Extension of Popular Literature during the Crisis.

PARLIAMENT, having been prorogued on the 16th of August, was dissolved by proclamation on the 3rd of December. A new parliament was then summoned. During the autumn and early winter the entire population had been engaged in preparing for that reconstruction of the entire framework of the representative system with which, according to some, a new and more glorious temple of liberty should be built up. According to others, this disoriented and dangerous scaffolding of modern experiment would perish in that whirlwind of anarchy which was soon to sweep over the land. The preparations for a general election were altogether so new,—so entirely different from the rough and ready license long associated with the exercise of the suffrage—that many in England began to think with regret of the good old times when the oath at the election-booth, amidst the bluster of counsel and the cheers or hisses of the mob, was the sole test of the freeholder's or occupier's right to vote. What formalities were now to be gone through. On the 20th of June there was affixed on the door of every church and chapel a notice, requiring all persons who might be entitled to vote for Knights of the Shire in respect of property situate in that parish or township, to send the particulars of their claims to the overseers. On the claims thus made the overseers were to prepare a list, and publish it in the same manner before the last day of July. A similar process, with some slight variation, was to be pursued in boroughs. The overseers were to prepare the list, and parties who had been omitted were to demand the insertion of their names. But now arises a second process which, whether in village or in town, is for a fortnight to be a perpetual source of discussion and dispute, at every market dinner-table and in every club-room. Objectors to the names in the lists are to send their objections to certain authorities. The cavillings are hushed for awhile. The

objections are made; but these are no more than the pleas for a judicial investigation. A new and strange machinery is to come into operation between the 15th of September and the 25th of October, to separate the wheat from the chaff. The great winnow is the revising-barrister. A day or two of dispute in every county town and in every borough, and then the object is accomplished which is set forth in the Act—"it is expedient to form a Register." The lists are duly attested and copied into proper books. All the work of swearing and cross-examination, and decision of the returning-officer, —who, if he were the mayor of a borough, had as little legal knowledge as mayors commonly possessed,—was at an end. The marginal note to the statute describes in a few words what would be the result of this preliminary investigation—"no inquiry at the time of election, except as to the identity of the voter, the continuance of his qualification, and whether he has voted before at the same election." The proclamation summoning a new parliament has gone forth. But what a change has taken place in the arrangements for the approaching hour of battle. For county elections the polling was to continue for two days, and to last during seven hours of the first day, and eight hours of the second. To accomplish this the counties were to be divided into convenient districts for polling. In the same way the elections for boroughs were to occupy only two days, and if necessary, polling-booths were to be erected at separate places of the same borough. Not altogether would the immemorial election-row, the speeches, the fun and the fight below the hustings, be discontinued. There would be a nomination-day, on which protestations and pledges might be duly given, and the troublesome querist bowed off or hooted down. After the nomination the humours of an election were pretty nearly over. There was much real business to be done in committee-rooms, and zealous partisans hurried to and fro, and whispered magical words of encouragement to voters whose consciences were too scrupulous for a sudden resolve. Eight-and-forty hours saw the end of all this. The day of payment was to come for the unhappy candidate; probably the petition to the House of Commons against an undue return; the determination of a committee to put down bribery; the ranker growth of the weed after the scratching over of the ground on which it flourished. If the modes of election were altered in this most revolutionary fashion, in places which had retained their old, or acquired their new, privilege of sending members to parliament, how much more revolutionary was the change which took away this right from fifty-six English boroughs returning collectively a hundred and

eleven members: and which reduced the number of representatives in other boroughs so as to take a hundred and forty-three members out of the old scheme of representation.

The history of our ancient system of summoning to Parliament for cities and boroughs is full of obscurity. It is difficult at first to understand how places which could never have been very populous or wealthy should have been selected, in common with towns which in very early times were great marts of commerce, possessing as they did all the organization of municipal government which was so marked a characteristic of the life of England in the days of feudality. These seats of industry were fitted for electoral rights. Gradually many of the municipal authorities usurped the rights of the freemen, and became themselves the sole possessors of the franchise. The earliest record of the regular existence of the House of Commons is from the reign of Edward the First. The list up to the time of Henry the Eighth of cities and boroughs sending representatives is strikingly illustrative of the stability as well as the mutability of human affairs. Of the hundred and sixty-three places of this early period which had not intermitted their privilege at the time of the Reform Bill,—returning collectively three hundred and thirteen members,—there were only twenty-nine wholly disqualified, and twenty-five partially disqualified, for want of a sufficient population in 1832. Mr. Hallam was of opinion that it would be difficult to name any town of the least consideration in the 14th or 15th centuries which did not at some time or other return members to parliament; and he concluded that if we found any inland town or seaport which had never enjoyed the elective franchise, we must suppose that it had since emerged from obscurity. He subsequently qualified this opinion, although true in the main, by recollecting exceptions in the northern part of England, such as Sheffield and Manchester.\* Of the petty boroughs of the 15th and 16th centuries that passed into schedule A, we can scarcely understand why the number should have been so few, except by referring to the undoubted fact that representation was often regarded by the burgesses as a burden rather than a privilege. Their old custom of returning members to parliament often dropped into disuse. John Paston, in 1472, writes to his brother Sir John, "If ye miss to be burgess of Maldon, and my lord Chamberlain will, ye may be in another place. There be a dozen towns in England that choose no burgess which ought to do it. Ye may be set in for one of those towns, if ye be

\* "Constitutional History," chap. xiii.

friended.\* In the reigns of Edward VI., Mary, and Elizabeth, there were forty-six new writs addressed to comparatively petty places with the exception of the City of Westminster. Few of these were derived from a popular principle, such as had influenced the early constitution of the House of Commons. They were called into Parliamentary existence for the purpose of strengthening the government, whether Protestant or Popish, in the revolutions of religion. Of the boroughs of Edward the Sixth, seven passed into Schedule A; of those of Mary, five were thus disfranchised; and of those of Elizabeth sixteen. Of these comparatively modern seats of venality twelve were in Cornwall.

Of the fifty-six English boroughs which had been scheduled into a political death, the representative history would be exceedingly curious if it could be traced not merely from the dry rolls of parliament, but from the secret records of great peers, who held not only these very obscure places to do what they would with their own, but dominated over others which had their mark upon them in schedule B., and even over others which had no mark at all. "What right," exclaimed Sydney Smith, during the discussions on the Reform Bill, "has this lord or that marquis to buy ten seats in Parliament in the shape of boroughs, and then to make laws to govern me?" † This was not a rhetorical flourish; the question was founded upon a well-known fact. "The duke of Norfolk was represented by eleven members; lord Lonsdale by nine; lord Darlington by seven; the duke of Rutland, the marquis of Buckingham, and lord Carrington, each by six. Seats were held, in both Houses alike, by hereditary right." ‡ Marvellous is it to look back upon the condition of some of the nomination boroughs, which my lord handed over to his son just come from Eton, or to Vellum the Steward, or to Mr. Plumpkin, a neighbouring country gentleman, or to the distant relation in the County Militia who calls up the carriage at the Opera, or to the barrister who has written an article in the "Quarterly,"—as these nominees are described by the reverend humorist. Foremost is old Sarum, which, in 1831, returned two members, absolutely with a population that stands in the census thus, —, as too small to be enumerated. Nevertheless, a ceremony of choosing two burgesses who should interpret his patriotic wishes in Parliament was gone through by the one elector of the borough, who kept the ale-house at the foot of the venerable mound. Bramber borough, also returning two members, was in schedule A—borough and parish having twenty-

\* "Paston Letters," Ramsay's edition, vol. ii. p. 71. † Speech at Taunton.

‡ May, "Constitutional History," p. 227.

one inhabited houses and six uninhabited, with a male population of fifty-six. The railway traveller approaching the Redhill station may look upon the picturesque woods and beautiful mansion of Gatton. Its glory is departed, for no longer come out upon the lawn the seven electors enjoying household suffrage to return the two right honourables who were nominated by the owner of that great house. Dunwich, once the seat of the first East-Anglian bishop, was washed away by the sea; but it had not lost all its splendour, for, out of its forty-four hovels came the half-dozen voters who returned the earl of Brecknock and a Commoner to represent them in Parliament. The changes in the coast line had made Winchelsea desolate, but no changes of society could deprive Winchelsea of its glorious privilege of having as potent a voice in the legislature as Liverpool. Most valuable were such places as property, for the nomination to them was notoriously sold. The nomination for Gatton, without the estate, was held to be worth a hundred thousand pounds as an investment. There is a passage in Locke's famous "Treatise on Civil Government" which sufficiently shows that such anomalies of English representation existed at the time of the Revolution, as they would continue to exist for nearly a century and a half later. "Things not always changing equally, and private interest often keeping up customs and privileges when the reasons of them are ceased, it often comes to pass, that in governments, where part of the legislature consists of representatives chosen by the people, in tract of time this representation becomes very unequal and disproportionate to the reasons it was at first established upon. To what gross absurdities the following of a custom, when reason has left, may lead, we may be satisfied when we see the bare name of a town, of which there remains not so much as the ruins, where scarce so much housing as a sheep-cote, or more inhabitants than a shepherd is to be found, sends as many representatives to the grand assembly of law-makers as a whole county, numerous in people and powerful in riches. This strangers stand amazed at, and every one must confess needs a remedy."

The electors of the favoured Nomination Boroughs, whether voters by scot and lot, or potwallopers, or holding by burgage tenure, had little cause to weep over what some parliamentary orators called the extinction of ancient rights. They had a very small share in the division of the spoil. A leg of mutton and trimmings at the Chequers was their general reward for the discreet exercise of their noble privileges. The borough patrons, Whigs or Tories, —for each party had a tolerably equal share in this species of

property,—put the purchase-money into their pockets at every election, without caring to oil the machinery which worked the mine. When Romilly bought his seat for Horsham of the duke of Norfolk, the “free and independent electors” had little advantage of the cash. When George the Third, in 1779, wrote to lord North, “If the duke of Northumberland requires some gold pills for the election, it would be wrong not to satisfy him,”\* his grace of Northumberland’s electors were necessarily content with a bread pill or two without the gilding. There was no insurrection in the decayed boroughs; no threatened march to London, when their electoral privileges were quietly buried, never again to be exhumed. Not so noiseless was the grief of the close corporations, who, in some ancient cities and manufacturing towns, returned the representatives of populous communities. Sad was the day of December when the mayor, ten aldermen, and twenty-four common-council men of the city of Bath found that their power of choosing the representatives of fifty thousand persons was come to an end. Dire was the grief when the bailiff and twelve burgesses of Buckingham could no longer do the bidding of the lord of Stowe. With dejected looks the corporators of no very small number of boroughs had to go forth into the market-place to proclaim the writ that would cease to be a symbol of their exclusive power. And yet, in such case, what was called the respectability of a town was not wholly swamped in the flood of democracy. With singular inconsistency it was maintained, in the case of Bath, that “the first member elected by the new constituency was the very same gentleman whom the corrupt and jobbing corporators had returned for six or seven parliaments, as they had done his father for three parliaments before.”† The grief was, that the second member, whom the corporation generally chose from the families of the marquis of Bath or the marquis Camden, was one of those “extraordinary missionaries whom Mr. Hume despatched by the several stage-coaches, labelled and ticketed, and, for ought we know, specified in the way-bill, as members to be chosen for such and such a place.” What has Bath gained by the change? asks the reviewer. It gained John Arthur Roebuck instead of the nominee of lord Bath or lord Camden.

Let us turn from what the Reform Bill destroyed in England to what it created or restored. Mr. May has pointed out that in 1776 John Wilkes proposed a scheme comprising “all the leading

\* Letters of Lord North, appended to Lord Brougham’s “Sketches of Statesmen,” vol. i. p. 137, edition 1855.

† “Quarterly Review,” vol. xlix. p. 267.

principles of Parliamentary Reform which were advocated for the next fifty years without success, and have been sanctioned within our own time.” We refer to the “Parliamentary History,” and find that the proposition of the famous demagogue, who then triumphantly sat in Parliament for Middlesex, was to give an increased representation to the metropolis; to lop off the mean, venal, and dependent boroughs; and to permit “the rich, populous, trading towns Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, and others, to send deputies to the great council of the nation.” The motion of Wilkes was of course negatived without a division. The terms in which lord North told him this would happen supply an amusing contrast to the political hypocrisy of half a century later, which maintained that “the rotten part of our constitution” was “a thing of beauty”—the ornament and safety of the State. The member for Middlesex, said the frank and good-humoured minister, “would find it no easy task to prevail on those who had an interest in the boroughs, on which he bestowed so many hard names, to sacrifice to ideal schemes of reformation so beneficial a species of property.”\* The increased representation of the metropolis was effected by the Reform Bill in the creation of four new boroughs—Marylebone, Finsbury, the Tower Hamlets, and Lambeth. The increase of Marylebone had been going on for more than a century. After the building of Cavendish Square in the reign of George the First, Marylebone became the most aristocratic district of London. There were five hundred and seventy-seven houses in the parish in 1739, and the number of persons who kept coaches was thirty-five. In 1831 the number of houses was eleven thousand six hundred and eight. The statistics of the nineteenth century would have little regard to the number of coaches as an index of the wealth of the people. The returns of assessed taxes afford a surer criterion. In 1831 the aggregate amount so paid for each one hundred persons was 168*l.* in the City, 150*l.* in Westminster, 120*l.* in Marylebone. Finsbury exhibited only three-fourths of the wealth thus indicated by direct taxation, though its population was greater than that of Marylebone. The Tower Hamlets contained the poorest population, with the greatest commercial wealth. It was the seat of the docks and of ship-building yards. It was a vast maritime city, with all the inequalities of condition that belong to such a population. The Tower Hamlets paid only a fourth of the amount of assessed taxes collected in Marylebone. Lambeth was the seat of the principal manufacturing industries of London. Its population was considerably less than that of the other new

\* “Parliamentary History,” vol. xviii. cols. 1295—1297.

metropolitan boroughs. Its large number of the smallest houses was balanced by its larger number of moderate-sized private houses; especially in its pleasant southern districts, which might then be called rural. Such were the populations of the metropolitan north that had succeeded "the archers of Finsbury and the citizens that come a-ducking to Islington ponds."\* Such were the populations of the metropolitan south that had trodden out the memories of the bishop of Winchester's palace, of the Liberty of the Clink, of the Bear-garden, and of the Globe.

The most important of the manufacturing towns which attained to the dignity of sending two members to Parliament under the Reform Act were Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Sunderland, Wolverhampton, Bolton, Bradford, Blackburn, Halifax, Macclesfield, Oldham, Stockport, Stoke-upon-Trent, and Stroud. Brighton, a wealthy and fashionable watering-place, was included in this catalogue. Of the twenty-one less important new boroughs which were to return one member, the chief commercial towns were Ashton-under-Lyne, Bury, Dudley, Frome, Gateshead, Huddersfield, Kidderminster, Kendal, Rochdale, Salford, South Shields, Tynemouth, Wakefield, Warrington, Whitby, Whitehaven, and Merthyr-Tydvil. To this catalogue were added Chatham and Cheltenham. What vast changes in the whole structure of society are indicated by this bare enumeration! With this list is associated all the history of the wondrous rise of the textile manufactures, dating from the time of Arkwright and Crompton; of the first rotatory steam-engine of Watt, erected at Warrington in 1787; of the power-loom of Cartwright. How suggestive it is of the vast changes in the smelting of iron from the time of the improved processes of Roebuck; of the opening of vast beds of coal that lay useless beneath the surface, and of the workings of copper and tin mines, whose treasures were drowned till the new power of mechanics had made them dry; of the numberless beautiful arts that had been called into life in the working of metals; of the discoveries of chemistry, which had done as much for the triumphs of industry as the inventions of machinery. If the opposers of the Reform of 1832 could have put back the dial of a nation's progress for three more decades, we may ask how the population of Manchester and Salford, which in 1831 was two hundred and twenty-seven thousand, would have endured their position in 1861, when their population was four hundred and sixty thousand; how Birmingham, which in 1831 was a hundred and forty-two thousand, would have felt in 1861 with two hundred and ninety-five thousand; how

\* Ben Jonson—"Every Man in his humour."

Leeds, with its hundred and twenty-three thousand would have been content when it had reached two hundred and seven thousand; how Sheffield, with its hundred and twenty-six thousand would have remained quiet when it had reached a hundred and eighty-five thousand; how Bradford, with forty-three thousand, would have rested without representation with a hundred and six thousand. Since the era of the Reform Bill there have been other changes in the relative importance of industrial communities, but not so great as those we have glanced at. Macaulay, in his speech on the second reading of the Reform Bill, exclaimed against the doctrine of finality—"Who can say that a hundred years hence there may not be, on the shore of some desolate and silent bay in the Hebrides, another Liverpool, with its docks and warehouses and endless forests of masts? Who can say that the huge chimneys of another Manchester may not rise in the wilds of Connemara?"\* This is the poetry of eloquence. But it is a significant fact, illustrative of the same principle, that "another Liverpool" should have arisen on the sparsely populated south-western shore of the Mersey since Macaulay talked of industry and trade finding out new seats; that Birkenhead should have been by the statute of the 25th of Victoria constituted a parliamentary borough,—the first borough obtaining the right of representation by the energy that in twenty years produced a port that might rival those of famous cities that had been growing for centuries.

We may add to this imperfect notice a few words about the Reform Act for Scotland. The number of its representatives had been determined by the Act of Union. Wilkes shrewdly said, in 1776, "I am almost afraid the forty-five Scottish gentlemen among us represent themselves." In 1831 the total number of county voters was about two thousand five hundred: the sixty-six burghs had an aggregate constituency of one thousand four hundred and forty. Edinburgh, with its population of a hundred and sixty-two thousand, had a constituency of thirty-three persons; Glasgow, with its two hundred and two thousand, rejoiced in the same number of capable men to save its inhabitants from the troublesome choice of a fit and proper person to represent them in Parliament. The great authorities who domineered over the total Scotch electoral body of four thousand were under the dominion of the minister of the day who distributed patronage for the government, and of the succession of such ministers none was more active and adroit than the second lord Melville. Those who went to Parliament acted upon the sound principle of the Scotch county member,

\* "Speeches," p. 32.

who said, "that his invariable rule was never to be present at a debate or absent at a division, and that he had only once in his long political life ventured to vote according to his conscience, and that he found that on that occasion he had voted wrong."\* Without entering minutely into a description of the wonderful local machinery by which this extraordinary system of representation was managed, and of which system Jeffrey, as Lord Advocate, justly boasted that he had "left not a shred or patch," it may be sufficient to say that the elective franchise in counties being enveloped in feudal and technical absurdities, and thus costing a heavy price to attain, it was beyond the reach, not only of the lower class, but even of the majority of the middle and many of the higher classes. Of the town members Edinburgh returned only one; fourteen were returned by groups of burghs, each electing a delegate, and the four or five delegates so associated electing the representative. "Whatever this system may have been originally, it had grown, in reference to the people, into as complete a mockery as if it had been invented for their degradation. The people had nothing to do with it. It was all managed by town councils, of never more than thirty-three members, and every town council was self-elected, and consequently perpetuated its own interests. The election of either the town or the county member was a matter of such utter indifference to the people, that they often only knew of it by the ringing of a bell, or by seeing it mentioned next day in a newspaper; for the farce was generally performed in an apartment from which, if convenient, the public could be excluded, and never in the open air. †

The Reform Bill for Ireland, although contributing to the general improvement of the representation of the United Kingdom, was a much milder change of system than either the English or the Scotch bills. There was the same influence of great patrons in counties and boroughs; but the mode in which that influence was principally exercised, through the right of election in many places being vested in the corporations, was taken away by the Reform Act and vested in ten pound householders. There were no disfranchising clauses in the Act. The number of members was increased from one hundred to one hundred and five. The franchise, however, was comparatively very restricted. It was somewhat extended by a statute of the 13 & 14 Victoria, 1850.

The Elections were over before the close of the year. Accord-

\* Hansard, Third Series, vol. vii. col. 543, from a speech of Mr. Gillon, member for Selkirk.

† Cockburn, "Life of Lord Jeffrey," vol. i. p. 75.

ing to the estimate of a journalist of that time, who was long famous for his scrupulous attention to the accuracy of minute details, there were two hundred and fifteen gentlemen who occupied seats for England in the last Parliament who were not returned to the new one. Of these, one hundred and forty-eight were anti-reformers. In Scotland, eighteen who were formerly in Parliament were also not returned. In Ireland, forty-two of the old members ceased to sit. Thirty of those who had thus lost their seats were Reformers; but they were principally driven out by Repealers. Altogether it was estimated that five hundred and eleven ministerial reformers were returned; and a hundred and forty-seven who, now designated as Conservatives, were anti-ministerialists.\*

And now the dreaded Reform Parliament was to assemble at the end of January, 1833. In 1835 a sensible traveller in England wrote to his friend in Germany, "Those who compared the Reform Parliament to the French National Assemblies have happily been greatly mistaken in their calculations; otherwise, instead of the tranquillity and satisfaction in which England lives, the guillotine would be already at work." † The crisis of terror through which many of the rich and fashionable classes had passed, and from which they had not yet emerged after six months' experience had shown them that chaos was not come again, is described by one who lived in the exclusive circles. Five days after the passing of the Reform Bill, Mr. Raikes thus writes in his Diary:—"I do not think that in all my experience I ever remember such a season in London as this has been; so little gaiety, so few dinners, balls, and fêtes. The political dissensions have undermined society, and produced coolnesses between so many of the highest families, and between even near relations, who have taken opposite views of the question. Independent of this feeling, the Tory party,—whose apprehensions for the future are most desponding, who think that a complete revolution is near at hand, and that property must every day become less secure,—are glad to retrench their usual expenses, and are beginning by economy to lay by a *poire pour la soif*. ‡ Those who have money at command are buying funds in America, or in Denmark, which they think least exposed to political changes." One of the chief terrors of the landed aristocracy, whether Whig or Tory, was that the Corn-laws would perish under the Reform

\* "Spectator," January 12, 1833.

† Von Raumer—"England in 1835," vol. iii. p.

‡ "*Garder une poire pour la soif*"—"to keep a pear in case of thirst"—is equivalent to laying up something in case of want.