

part of the session, split the Whig ministry into fragments, and rendered their future existence altogether precarious. On the 27th of May Mr. Ward, the member for St. Albans, having previously given notice of his intention to propose certain resolutions on the subject of the Irish Church, moved a resolution, "That the Protestant Episcopal Establishment in Ireland exceeds the spiritual wants of the Protestant population; and that, it being the right of the State to regulate the distribution of Church property in such manner as Parliament may determine, it is the opinion of this House, that the temporal possessions of the Church of Ireland, as now established by law, ought to be reduced." Mr. Ward's motion having been seconded by Mr. Grote, lord Althorp rose and said, that during Mr. Grote's address circumstances had come to his knowledge which induced him to move that the further debate on the subject should be adjourned till the following Monday. Lord Althorp on that Monday explained his reasons for adjourning the debate, which were, that four of his colleagues had differed from the rest of the Cabinet upon the question of appropriating the temporal possessions of the Church of Ireland; that consequently the Cabinet could not agree upon the mode in which the resolution of Mr. Ward was to be met; and that during the speech of the seconder of the motion of the 27th, he had learnt that Mr. Stanley, Secretary for the Colonies, sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty, the duke of Richmond, Postmaster-General, and the earl of Ripon, Lord Privy Seal, had resigned their offices. Lord Althorp added, that the course his Majesty had been advised to adopt, had been to issue a Commission of Inquiry. Mr. Ward expressed his willingness to agree to an address to the Crown which affirmed the principle of his proposition, but declined withdrawing his resolution in want of such affirmation. Upon this lord Althorp moved the previous question, which was carried by a majority of two hundred and seventy-six, thus negating Mr. Ward's resolution. The four vacancies in the ministry were filled up by Mr. Spring Rice being appointed Secretary for the Colonies, lord Auckland First Lord of the Admiralty, the marquis of Conyngham Postmaster-General (without a seat in the Cabinet), and the earl of Carlisle Lord Privy Seal.

In the House of Lords, on the 6th of June, the proposed Commission of Inquiry into the state of the Irish Church was denounced by some peers as an "illegal and sacrilegious measure of prospective spoliation." Earl Grey, in a speech worthy of his high character and position, denied that the measure looked to anything that deserved the name of spoliation. The object of the Com-

mission was to collect facts, and he and his colleagues were prepared to act upon the commission so far as this— that when it produces such a body of information as we expect, we will take it into consideration, and be prepared to act upon it honestly and conscientiously, with a view to the general interests of the country." In the course of his speech the Prime Minister pretty clearly intimated that he was tired of his position—he was tired of a systematic opposition of their lordships to salutary improvements in conformity with the spirit of the age—opposition conducted in a feeling of bitterness calculated to excite throughout the country a factious spirit of discontent.

Earl Grey disclaimed the imputation as most unjust, that the ministry would take the revenues of the Protestant Church, and give them to the Catholic. Lord Brougham declared that he would as strenuously oppose as any noble lord on the other side of the House a proposition to give one single fraction of the fund to the Catholic Church. These ministers said this, well knowing the violent prejudices existing against any recognition of the church of the majority in Ireland. Dr. Arnold, a liberal thinker, but not a responsible politician, thought that the surplus of the Protestant Church ought to furnish the Christian people of Ireland with Catholic clergymen.* So thought the promoters of the Union.

On the 9th of July the House of Lords exhibited the unusual spectacle of a great Minister, overpowered by his feelings, wholly losing his presence of mind. The Report of the Committee on the Bill for the Suppression of Disturbances in Ireland having been brought up, earl Grey said, "I rise, my lords,—he could proceed no further. Again he said, "I rise, my lords."—The House cheered, as they had cheered before, but the Prime Minister could not proceed, and he sat down. The duke of Wellington then considerably presented petitions, to afford earl Grey time to recover himself. He at last rose, and tremulously said, "My lords, I feel quite ashamed of the sort of weakness I show on this occasion, a weakness which arises from my deep sense of the personal kindness which, during my having been in his service, I have received from my Sovereign. However, my lords, I have a duty to perform which, painful as it may be, I must discharge; and in rising to propose to your lordships to agree to the Report which has just been read, I have to state that I no longer do so as a Minister of the Crown, but as an individual member of parliament, strongly impressed with the necessity of passing this Act to invest the government, in whatever hands the government may be placed,

with the powers given by this Bill, and which I believe to be necessary to the maintenance of the peace of Ireland.* In the course of his speech earl Grey stated that on the previous day he had received the resignation of lord Althorp, which he had transmitted to the King. Former breaches had considerably weakened the government; he felt that in losing the assistance of his friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom he considered as his right arm, he saw no alternative, but was compelled, by irresistible necessity, to tender his own resignation. He had desired to resign previous to the commencement of the session. He had completed his seventieth year, and although he might have been able to discharge the duties of the office which he held under ordinary and easy circumstances, considering the present condition of affairs the duties imposed upon him were too much for his strength. The circumstances which immediately led to this decision of earl Grey, as well as to that of lord Althorp, although of great interest at the time, are now unnecessary to detail with minuteness. They were connected with the proposed renewal for one year of the Irish Coercion Bill, which had been moved by earl Grey on the 1st of July. The only difference between that measure and the one which was about to expire was the omission of clauses by which certain offences might be tried by Court Martial. There was a warm debate in the House of Commons on the 3rd, in which it appeared that Mr. Littleton, the Irish Secretary, had confidentially communicated to Mr. O'Connell, that the Irish government had not demanded the insertion of the clauses prohibiting meetings. In the Bill introduced by earl Grey those clauses appeared. Lord Althorp had also intimated to Mr. O'Connell that they would not be inserted in the Coercion Bill. A majority of the Cabinet had determined to introduce the Bill in the form in which it was offered to the House of Lords by earl Grey. Upon this decision the Chancellor of the Exchequer resigned. On the 10th of July the House of Commons adjourned for four days. On the 14th viscount Melbourne stated in the House of Lords that his Majesty had honoured him with his commands to lay before him a plan for the formation of a new Ministry. He had undertaken the task, but it was not yet completed.

The task which his Majesty had first imposed upon lord Melbourne was one of insurmountable difficulty. It was to effect "an union in the service of the state of all those who stand at the head of the respective parties in the country" †. The King in desiring

* Hansard, vol. xxiv. col. 1305-6.

† Letter from lord Melbourne to the King, July 20, 1844, enclosed in a letter from Lord Melbourne to Sir Robert Peel.

lord Melbourne "to enter into communication with the leading individuals of parties," specially mentioned the duke of Wellington, sir Robert Peel, and Mr. Stanley. In an audience upon the 9th viscount Melbourne had laid before his Majesty some of those general objections which pressed forcibly upon his mind to unions and coalitions of opposing parties. He wrote to the King on the 10th that he considered the successful termination of such an attempt utterly hopeless. He had no personal dislikes or objections; on the contrary, for all the individuals in question he entertained great respect. In consequence of the communication to sir Robert Peel, on the 13th of July, he wrote to the King that such an union as that proposed could not, in the present state of parties and the present position of public affairs, hold out the prospect of an efficient and vigorous administration. The King admitted on the 14th that the opinions which had been stated by sir Robert Peel and by others, of the impracticability of his proposal, had appeared to him to be conclusive. The King had evidently imagined that if he could effect such a union of parties, the question of the Irish church, upon which he had recently expressed himself very strongly, in answer to an address from dignitaries of the Establishment, might be set at rest. The duke of Wellington and sir Robert Peel were prepared to take office, if they had been invited to do so "without conditions as to union with others of different political principles and party connections."* The King was not prepared at that time for so bold a step, necessarily involving a dissolution of parliament. On the 17th July lord Althorp stated in the House of Commons that lord Melbourne had completed his arrangements for the new administration, under which lord Duncannon would occupy the place vacated by the Premier, sir J. C. Hobhouse would be Commissioner of the Woods and Forests, with a seat in the Cabinet, and himself (lord Althorp) would, at the desire of his Majesty, resume his former office. The third reading in the House of Lords of the Coercion Bill was not proposed. In the Commons lord Althorp brought forward a less restrictive measure, which was carried by a majority of a hundred and forty, and was finally passed on the 26th of July.

Parliament had now a few weeks to sit before the usual time of prorogation. The financial statement of the government for the year ending July 5th, had to be made. The budget was a popular one. There was an estimated surplus of nearly two millions, and it was proposed to make various reductions in taxation. The

* See "Memoirs, by Sir Robert Peel," vol. ii. pp. 1 to 13.

repeal of the duty on Almanacs was a concession to the opinion that taxes upon knowledge were amongst the most objectionable. The repeal of the house-tax was an unstatesmanlike deference to popular clamour. The far more objectionable tax upon windows was allowed to remain. Legislators had a glimmering of light as to the impolicy of that taxation which interfered with the processes of industry. Mr. Poulett Thomson, President of the Board of Trade, admitted that the relief to be experienced from the reduction of the house-tax, or any other direct tax, was little in comparison to that which would have been derived from the reduction of the taxes on glass, paper, and cotton. Yet, as the house-tax had been a cause of general and loud complaint, it was right to take it off. Sir Robert Peel was not sure that those who clamoured most suffered most; the removal of the house-tax was merely a bonus to the landlord; the removal of the glass-tax would be a bonus to every class of the community. Before the prorogation the Irish Tithe Bill was carried in the Commons, not as proposed by the government, but with an amendment moved by Mr. O'Connell, which provided that two-fifths of the amount of tithes should be at once struck off, and the remaining three-fifths paid to the clergy by the landlord. The Peers wholly threw out the Tithe Bill four days before the prorogation of Parliament; and O'Connell went home to his congenial work of exciting the people to violent resistance. Parliament was prorogued on the 15th of August.

Whilst, during the vacation, Mr. O'Connell was publishing letters to lord Duncannon, in which he declared that "Ireland had nothing to expect from the Whigs but insolent contempt, and malignant and treacherous hostility," some of the leaders of the Reform movement were damaging the Whigs more materially by painfully exhibiting the worst symptom of the weakness of the government,—the hostile jealousy of two who had once formed the great strength of the Cabinet. Looking back upon the journalism of this period, it is difficult to arrive at an impartial estimate of the merits or defects of the two chief combatants who entered the lists at the "free and gentle passage of arms" of Edinburgh, at the banquet to lord Grey on the 15th of September. For some months lord Brougham had been a mark for the attacks of the ultra-liberal press. Harmless exhibitions of that vanity which occasionally peeped out through his real greatness had brought down upon the Chancellor a measure of indignation which is generally reserved for political crimes. In a tour through Scotland he made some oratorical displays, in which the reticence of the cautious statesman was abandoned in the excitement of popular applause.

At Inverness, the Chancellor, in telling the burgesses that during four years he had experienced from his Majesty only one series of gracious condescension, confidence, and favour, added words which were tossed about throughout the kingdom as "argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever." "To find that the king lived in the hearts of his loyal subjects in the ancient and important capital of the Highlands, as it had afforded him (lord Brougham) only pure and unmixed satisfaction, would, he was confident, be so received by his Majesty, when he (lord B.) told him, as he would do by that night's post, of the gratifying circumstance."* At the Grey banquet, earl Grey, in replying to his health, acknowledged the compliment of this great banquet in very dignified and touching words: "This most gratifying of all honours is not paid to a minister newly raised to power, in the vigour of his age, with a long career of active and useful services before him, and holding out an expectation to others of official benefits, not yet conferred: No, gentlemen, this proud mark of distinction has been given to a minister who has descended, I will not say has fallen, from power, whose official life has ended, whose long parliamentary career is hastening to a final close,—to one when the balance has been struck between his promises and his performances; to one when the past is before his country for its judgment; and the future, as far as he is concerned, presents no object either for hope or for fear."† Lord Brougham, in replying to the toast of the Lord Chancellor and his Majesty's other ministers, proclaimed the differences that existed between two classes of Reformers,—the hasty spirits who hurrying into the wished-for harbour by the nearest channel, and, not inquiring whether there was a compass on board, would run their vessel into the breakers,—and the more moderate, who would better provide for the safety of the voyage. "I wholly respect," he said, "the good intentions of these men, but when they ask me to sail in their vessel, I must insist on staying on shore." Lord Durham had his opportunity of reply: "My noble and learned friend (lord Brougham) has been pleased to give some advice, which I have no doubt he deems very sound, to some classes of persons,—I know none such,—who evince too strong a desire to get rid of ancient abuses, and fretful impatience in waiting the remedies of them. Now I frankly confess that I am one of those persons who see with regret every hour which passes over the existence of recognized and unreformed abuses."

* From "Inverness Courier," quoted in Fonblanque's "England under Seven Administrations," vol. iii. p. 99.

† "Annual Register for 1834," p. 142.

The dispute was not yet ended. At a meeting at Salisbury, lord Brougham made some strong remarks upon lord Durham. At another meeting at Glasgow, lord Durham said that the Chancellor had been pleased to challenge him to meet him in the House of Lords. "I fear him not; I will meet him there."

There were two most unexpected events which deranged the completion of these hostile purposes. First, the two peers could not meet on the old battle-ground. The Houses of Parliament were destroyed by fire on the 16th of October. It was between six and seven o'clock on that evening, that flames were seen bursting forth from the roof of the House of Lords, in that part of the building opposite to Henry the Seventh's Chapel, and in the corner next Westminster Hall. By nine o'clock all the apartments of that portion of the parliament buildings, including the Painted Chamber and the Library, were in flames, and the whole interior was in a few hours destroyed. The fire extended to the House of Commons, first destroying the large offices of the House, and next seizing upon the Chapel of St. Stephen. When all the interior fittings were destroyed, this building, which had been famous as the seat of English legislation from the time of Edward the Sixth, was a mere shell. It had stood in its strength and beauty like a rock amidst the sea of fire, and had arrested the force which had till then gone on conquering and overthrowing. The Speaker's official residence was also partially destroyed. There was one time when the destruction of Westminster Hall seemed almost inevitable. To those who mixed amongst the crowd in Palace Yard, and knew that the antiquities of a nation are amongst its best possessions, it was truly gratifying to witness the intense anxiety of all classes of people to preserve this building, associated with so many grand historical scenes. "Save the Hall!" "Save the Hall!" was the universal cry. There was a more efficient interposition than the destruction of the House of Lords to the purpose of the two peers to enter the lists where the Mowbray and Bolingbroke of modern times were to decide their quarrel.

"The king has thrown his warder down."

William the Fourth, without a word of preparation, intimated to lord Melbourne, on the 14th of November, that his ministry was at an end.

CHAPTER VIII.

The King's dismissal of the Melbourne Ministry.—Sir Robert Peel's Narrative of his appointment to the Premiership.—The Peel Administration formed.—Parliament dissolved.—The Tamworth Manifesto.—Strong Parliamentary Opposition.—Mr. Abercromby elected Speaker.—London University Charter.—Irish Church.—Repeated defeats of Ministers.—Resignation of Sir Robert Peel.—Lord Melbourne's New Ministry.—Exclusion of Lord Brougham.—His Resolutions on the subject of Education.—Reform of Municipal Corporations.—Report of the Commission of Inquiry.—Conflict between the two Houses.—The Bill passed.—Departing glories of Municipal Pomp.

MUCH that was obscure in the circumstances connected with the extraordinary act of the King in the removal of his ministers has been brought to light in the "Memoirs by Sir Robert Peel." In his "Memorandum as to my appointment to the office of First Lord of the Treasury in 1834, and to the administration over which I presided," he says: "The time will come when these records will be interesting, and may throw a light on the history of the period which they embrace." Sir Robert states that he left England for Italy on the 14th of October, 1834, little foreseeing the probability of his sudden recall, and having had no communication previously to his departure with the duke of Wellington, or any other person, respecting the position and prospects of the administration which existed at the time when he quitted England. He treats with contempt the report that there had been some previous concert or understanding with the king in contemplation of events that took place in November. Sir Robert Peel was in Rome when a letter reached him from the king, dated November the 15th, in which his Majesty says, that having had a most satisfactory and confidential communication with the duke of Wellington, on the formation of a new government, he called upon Sir Robert Peel to return without loss of time to England, to put himself at the head of the administration. The messenger at the same time brought a letter from the duke of Wellington, pressing his immediate return home, and announcing that his grace held for the present the offices of First Lord of the Treasury and Secretary of State for the Home Department, till Sir Robert should return. The copy of a letter