

declared that in what he stated he intended to throw the responsibility of his measures upon the right honourable baronet as the head of the government, and in using the word individually he used it as the minister himself used the first pronoun when he said "I passed the tariff, and you supported me." The construction which Mr. Cobden had put upon the language he employed was accepted by sir Robert Peel. But, says his biographer, "he accepted the explanation coldly, and still maintained an air of reserved distrust." M. Guizot adds, "Who can tell how much fatal poison may be contained in words uttered without any evil design?" He repeats a sentiment which was expressed in a speech by Mr. Roebuck: "I ask the honourable member if he did not see the danger of such language? Passion does sometimes destroy people's judgment." The motion of lord Howick was finally rejected by a majority of a hundred and fifteen.

If the Corn-Laws were not on the point of being repealed, it was not for the want of perseverance in their parliamentary opposers. The general subject was directly and indirectly brought forward again and again; but on each occasion a large majority asserted the principle of protection. At the close of one debate, which had lasted five nights upon a motion by Mr. Villiers, Mr. Cobden declared that whatever might be the fate of the motion it would not have the slightest effect upon the progress of public opinion on this subject. The League would go on as it had hitherto done, and if there were any force in truth and justice, it would go on to an ultimate and not distant triumph. The landed and agricultural interests were so much alarmed by what they considered the coquettings of the government with free-trade, that when lord Stanley, as Secretary of the Colonies, proposed to impose a duty only of three shillings per quarter upon wheat imported from Canada, the more sensitive of the party shrieked out their horror of the Canadian Corn-bill as a free-trade measure. They were not soothed when they were told by Mr. T. Duncombe that "between their pledges to their constituents, their attachment to the government, and their antipathy to the Whigs, they were in a most unpleasant predicament. They smelt a rat; it was in the Canadian Corn-bill."* Skirmishes such as these occupied much of the time of the House during this Session. The Canadian Corn-bill passed—the one practical move towards a great change of policy, although its supporters did not clearly see where their steps were tending.

Important as was the question of the repeal of the Corn-Laws with reference to the condition of the great bulk of the people,

* Hansard, vol. xlix. col. 945.

there were legislators who could take a wider view of the circumstances of the country than was implied in the one prevailing cry of Cheap Bread. On the 6th of April Mr. Charles Buller moved an Address to the Queen on the subject of Systematic Colonization. His speech was a most able and comprehensive exposition of his belief that there was a permanent cause of the depression of industry, and the suffering of the people, in the constant accumulation of capital and the constant increase of population within the same restricted field of employment. He proposed Colonization as a means of remedying the competition both of Capital and Labour in this restricted field. He stated that Emigration had promised to be of little service until Mr. Wakefield propounded the theory of Colonization that goes by his name. The great principles of that theory were, the sale of colonial land, and the expenditure of the proceeds in carrying out labourers. The government opposed Mr. Buller's motion, upon the plea that it would raise false hopes in the public mind. Mr. Buller withdrew his proposal, but it was clear that, with or without an official inquiry, new principles of colonization would gradually take root and finally produce, in concurrence with the rapid development of the resources of a vast colonial empire, that refuge for a surplus population which has been attended with such beneficial results upon our domestic condition in the present generation.

At the beginning of May the agitation in Ireland for the Repeal of the Union had become sufficiently formidable to make a declaration of the intentions of the government a matter of imperative necessity. In the House of Lords the duke of Wellington, and in the House of Commons sir Robert Peel, expressed a determination to abide by the principle of the joint Address of both Houses in 1834—"to maintain unimpaired and undisturbed the legislative union between Great Britain and Ireland." Sir Robert Peel said that the executive government would rely as long as possible on the ordinary powers which the law and constitution gave them; but that if the necessity for increased authority should arise, they would not hesitate for a moment to appeal to Parliamentary powers. He added, "I am also prepared to make, in my place here, the declaration which was made, and nobly made, by lord Althorp, that deprecating as I do all war, but above all civil war, yet there is no alternative which I do not think preferable to the dismemberment of this empire."* It was certainly time that the government should speak out. In January, at the weekly meeting of the Repeal Association, Mr. O'Connell announced that "1843

* Hansard, vol. lxix. col. 25.

is and shall be the great Repeal year." He abstained from attendance in Parliament to devote himself to that system of political agitation which continued to arrest the removal of social evils till their overwhelming magnitude was fully manifested in the great collapse of the existing relations of landlord and tenant. The abuse of the right of property in land had long rendered the condition of the Irish peasantry inferior to that of any other peasantry in Europe. The organization for Repeal which Mr. O'Connell had accomplished was to be supported and extended by the means of a universal subscription. The members of the Repeal Association were to subscribe twenty shillings a year, but throughout the country there were to be associate subscribers of a shilling each, with a machinery of inspectors, wardens, and collectors. This great sinew of war thus compelled from a starving population was known as the "Rent." With most Englishmen there was not an utter forgetfulness of some benefits for his countrymen which O'Connell had worked out by his eloquence and his perseverance. But much of their respect had passed into a profound contempt for the unscrupulous agitator, which those who could pretty accurately read the public sentiment embodied in such graphic representations as that of "The Irish Ogre fattening on the finest pisantry"* Vast assemblies of the people were exultingly called by the great demagogue, "Monster Meetings." He addressed thirty thousand people at Trim on the 16th of March, and referred to the physical force by which he was surrounded as something much more effectual than idle petitioning of Parliament. Through the summer meetings of this nature were held in various parts of Ireland, where the same inflammatory language was repeated by laymen and priests with increasing vehemence. Father Mathew had been working a vast change in the habits of many of the Irish by the great Temperance movement, of which he was an honest and zealous leader. But O'Connell adroitly adopted the Teetotalers as the Repealers upon whom rested the hope of sweeping away Saxon domination. On the 15th of August there was an assembly of which the lowest estimate of the number was half a million of people. During the previous night, and from the break of day, the people had been marching from all points to the Hill of Tara, where the ancient kings of Ireland had been elected. A sort of crown was prepared which the Liberator was there to put on, and to declare to his people that the day was come when they should no longer be slaves,—when the land should overflow with plenty, and every one should hold his half-acre with fixity of tenure, and out

† "Punch," vol. v. p. 15.

of its produce maintain his portion of a constantly increasing population. When the Parliament was prorogued on the 24th of August, the Queen in her Speech noticed these persevering efforts to stir up discontent and disaffection; and expressed her earnest desire to administer the government of Ireland in a spirit of strict justice and impartiality, and to effect such amendments in the existing laws as might improve the social condition and develop the resources of that legislative union. Relying on the good sense and patriotism of the people, the Queen called upon those who had influence and authority in Ireland to discourage a system of pernicious agitation. This moderate declaration of the government was pronounced by O'Connell to be "an excess of impudence and stupidity combined." His dangerous career was coming to an end. A meeting had been announced for the 8th of October at Clontarf, near Dublin. On the 7th a proclamation was agreed to by the Privy Council at Dublin, which, referring to the seditious language used at the monster meetings, declared the proposed assembly to be illegal. The demagogue was at once tamed. He called the Repeal Association together; and it was agreed that no meeting at Clontarf should take place. On the 14th Mr. O'Connell and his principal associates were arrested on charges of conspiracy, sedition, and unlawful assembling. The accused were admitted to bail; and after various pretexts for legal delays of which they availed themselves, it was finally determined their trial should take place on the 15th of January, 1844.

At the prorogation of Parliament the Speaker addressed these words to her Majesty, upon a subject of great and permanent interest: "We have witnessed, with deep concern, the unhappy divisions which have occurred in the Church of Scotland, and which have led to the secession of many of her most valued ministers. We have endeavoured, we trust successfully, to heal those divisions, and to restore peace to an establishment which is fraught with such inestimable blessings to the inhabitants of that part of the United Kingdom." The "unhappy divisions" of the Scotch Church had been maturing for nine years, till, in 1843, the event occurred which is known as "The Disruption." In 1834 the differences which had existed for more than a century between the supporters of lay patronage, long known as the "Moderates," and the opposers of lay patronage, then recently termed "Non-Intrusionists," assumed a more important character than that of a war of pamphlets, by the Anti-patronage party obtaining a majority in the General Assembly, and passing a measure known as the Veto Act. The object of this Act was to make it a law of the Church

that no presentee to a benefice was to be held fit to be ordained as minister of a parish unless he were acceptable to a majority of the parishioners. The mode of collecting the opinions of a congregation was this: The Presbytery, when a presentee laid his presentation before them, appointed him to preach twice in the church, and they also appointed a day for "moderating in a call," or, in other words, for receiving dissents. If a majority of the male heads of families in communion with the church dissented, the presentee was rejected as an unfit person. In 1839 the question of a presentation to the parish of Auchterarder, in Perthshire, which had been agitated in the ecclesiastical courts, where the decision of the Presbytery against the presentation was confirmed, was finally decided on appeal in the House of Lords against the Presbytery. There was another case, that of Strathbogie, in which this important question was agitated under somewhat different circumstances, but in which the decisions of the ecclesiastical and civil courts were also at variance. The formal disruption of the Scotch Church took place at the meeting of the General Assembly on the 18th of May, 1843, when, before the roll of members was made up, Dr. Welsh, who had been Moderator of the preceding Assembly, read a protest against the constitution of the Assembly signed by 120 ministers and 73 lay elders. Those who had signed the protest and their adherents then left the Assembly in a body, and constituted in another place "The General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland." Of this Assembly Dr. Chalmers was chosen as Moderator. On the 23rd of May the disruption was completed, by the seceders and many other clergymen who were members of the Assembly signing "An Act of Separation and Deed of Demission," which completely cut them off from the benefits as well as burdens of the Establishment. "Whatever previous differences of opinion existed, and whatever objections there were to a body such as the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, entitled to legislate and adjudicate for its own interest and according to its own feelings, being exempt from the control of the courts of law, the sacrifice of emolument and station thus made elicited general respect and sympathy, and was creditable to the sincerity of those who made it."* The intervention of the legislature by passing "An Act to remove doubts respecting the admission of Ministers to benefices" presents one of many examples of the difficulty of legislating for unity in ecclesiastical establishments when conscientious scruples lead to separation. The Free Church pursued its course perfectly indifferent to the operation of a measure which

* English Cyclopædia; article, "Free Church of Scotland."

was expected "to restore religious peace in Scotland." That peace was best promoted by leaving a people keenly alive to all questions of religious liberty to follow the impulses of their own feelings, in making an adequate provision throughout the land for a zealous and able body of ministers chosen and supported upon the voluntary principle. It may be mentioned that there was a secession from the Church of Scotland a century before the great difference which resulted in the Veto of 1834. This seceding body was called the "United Secession Church." There was a smaller body of seceders in the middle of the last century who formed the "Relief Church." In 1847 these two bodies coalesced and became the "United Presbyterian Church." They now constitute a most extensive organization, comprising nearly a fourth of the congregations of Scotland.

An important statute affecting the Church of England was passed in the session of 1843. It was an Act for increasing the means of spiritual instruction in populous parishes, by making a portion of the revenues of the Church available for the endowment of additional ministers. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England were empowered to borrow 600,000*l.* from the governors of Queen Anne's Bounty for the purpose of forming districts for spiritual purposes in populous parishes with the consent of the bishop of the diocese, each such district to be permanently endowed and to become a new parish upon a new church being consecrated. The patronage of such new districts or parishes might be conferred, either in perpetuity or for one or more nominations, on any person or persons contributing to the permanent endowment of the minister or toward providing a church or chapel for the use of the inhabitants. The vast extension of church-building in this country, beyond the precedent of any former time, may to a considerable extent be attributed to this brief but important enactment.

The Annalist of 1843 says that his narrative of public events would be very imperfect if he did not include some particular notice of three popular movements in three different quarters of the United Kingdom. In one chapter of the "Annual Register," we find, therefore, the history of the Repeal agitation in Ireland, of the Secession from the Church of Scotland, and of the Rebecca riots in South Wales. There is no parity of interest in the abortive efforts to destroy the legislative union of two nations; in the great schism in an established church; and in what is dignified by the name of an insurrection for the removal of turnpike-gates. Yet if the historian were to consult only his own fancy in recording what is picturesque, the riots in Wales would furnish a much more

spirit-stirring record than the most elaborate description of the popular ceremonials of the Hill of Tara, or of the procession of seceding ministers from St. Andrew's Church through the streets of Edinburgh to Canonmills Hall, four abreast. We must tell the story of Rebecca and her daughters as briefly as we can under the temptation it affords for graphic details. It is recorded that when the first turnpike upon "the ancient highway and post-road leading from London to York and so into Scotland" was established in 1663, the toll was so unpopular that "the mob" broke the toll-gates. "The mob" is rather a loose term to apply to the drovers, swineherds, pack-horse carriers, and waggoners, of the days of Charles II., who would rather have floundered through roads described in the first Turnpike Act as "almost impassable and very dangerous to his majesty's liege people," than pay the somewhat heavy toll which the Act prescribed. But even in those very insecure times, when the parish constable was the chief instrument for preserving the peace of the realm, we hear of no general insurrection in Middlesex, or Hertford, or Cambridge, or Huntingdon, to pull down the toll-gates and injure the toll-keepers. At the beginning of 1843, in the counties of Pembroke and Caermarthen, there suddenly appeared at nightfall a body of horsemen under the command of a leader who wore a female dress, and who was generally surrounded with a body-guard in similar costume. These were Rebecca and her daughters, and their commission was derived from the following verse in the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis: "And they blessed Rebecca, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the *gate* of those which hate them." Rebecca was ubiquitous; for wherever there was a gathering for the purpose of a nocturnal assemblage, there was a Rebecca. Amidst the blowing of horns and the firing of guns such a body of men would arrive at a turnpike gate, and immediately proceed to break the gate into fragments, saw off the posts close to the ground, and pull down the toll-house. This remarkable combination soon extended to all the South Welsh counties, with the exception of Brecknockshire. The disturbances were not confined to any peculiarly obnoxious locality. There was one indiscriminate onslaught upon the turnpike system, and so successful were these operations during the spring and summer that nearly all the roads in the autumn were practically toll free. When bodies of ignorant and lawless men feel their physical strength, they are easily induced to believe that this power is sufficient to bid defiance to the law, for the removal of every supposed

grievance. The local magistrates were unable to contend with Rebecca; and Rebecca was very soon set up as an authority to provide summary redress against Poor Laws, and Tithes, and heavy rents, and all other evils which small occupiers of land, little elevated above the condition of common labourers, believed themselves peculiarly subjected to. On the 10th of June a large body marched into Caermarthen, consisting of some thousands on foot and three hundred on horseback. Their purpose was to pull down the work-house. Their excesses were stopped in the middle of their career of destruction by the arrival of a troop of cavalry who had ridden thirty miles without drawing bit. The whole province was gradually falling into the condition of the worst parts of Ireland. Intimidation by threatening letters had become general; landowners, clergymen, and magistrates were kept in terror of the vengeance of Rebecca; the law was so utterly suspended that when an old woman who kept a turnpike gate was deliberately shot by one of the rioters, and the fact of her murder was distinctly made out to a coroner's jury, they returned a verdict that she died from suffusion of blood which produced suffocation. The government at last sent down a large body of troops into Wales, and, what was equally serviceable, they also sent a detachment of that active and intelligent body, the London Police, who were everywhere engaged in tracing the secret agencies by which this extraordinary conspiracy had been conducted. A Special Commission was appointed for the trial of the offenders, and three of the leaders were sentenced to transportation. The Turnpike Acts in force in Wales were in many instances oppressive and unequal. A government Commission of Inquiry was appointed to examine into the operation of these laws, and into the other causes of disturbance. Ignorance and poverty were at the root of the matter; but the especial object of the Rebecca organization ceased to be a cause of complaint and agitation, after the passing of an Act in the next Session of Parliament for the Consolidation and Amendment of the laws relating to Turnpike Trusts in South Wales.