

What is that state of things? It is on the one side a House elected on almost the most popular possible basis, representing with freedom and directness the wishes of an aspiring and educated people, and on the other side a House almost entirely composed of hereditary Peers—and of hereditary Peers opposed to popular aspirations. That House so composed claims a right to control and to veto in all respects, except finance, the proposals of the House of Commons. See how it stands according to figures. The House of Commons consists of 670 members, of whom 350 or thereabouts support the Government—the Government of the day. The House of Lords consists of some 570 members, of whom about 30 support the Government of the day. Nor can there be any possible change in these conditions. No Liberal Government, however liberal or however little liberal it may be, can ever hope to possess much more than 5 per cent. of the whole House of Lords in its support, and any Tory Government would be disgraced if it possessed much less than the remaining 95 per cent. And you must remember that this House, which contains 5 per cent. of Liberals and 95 per cent. of another party, which I will not now define, rules Scotland, which sympathizes with the 5 per cent.; rules Wales, which sympathizes with the 5 per cent.; rules Ireland, which sympathizes with the 5 per cent.; and rules England, which, except on the question of Home Rule, does, I believe, in fact and in general practice sympathize with the 5 per cent. also. Now, gentlemen, suppose at the next election you were to send back only 100 Liberals to the House of Commons. There would be 30 Liberal Peers. Suppose you were to send 200 Liberals back to the House of Commons. There would be 30 Liberal Peers. Suppose you were to send back 300 Liberals to the House of Commons. There

would be 30 Liberal Peers. Suppose you were to send 500¹ Liberals back to the House of Commons. There would be 30 Liberal Peers. Suppose you sent 600 Liberals back—(A Voice: "We'll do that.")—I am sure the gentleman would do it if he could, but still then, even if he succeeded, there would be only 30 Liberal Peers. Gentlemen, what a mockery is this!

We boast of our free institutions. We swell as we walk abroad and see other countries—we make broad the phylacteries of freedom on our foreheads. We thank God that we are not as other less favoured men; and all the time we endure the mockery of this freedom. You are bound hand and foot. You may vote and vote until you are black in the face. It will not change the face of matters at all. The House of Lords still will control at its will the measures of your representatives. You will have to go hat in hand to the House of Lords, and ask them to pass your measures in however mutilated a shape. It has practically come to this. We know the House of Lords is a party body of one complexion. We cannot any longer introduce the bills we think fit unless we want to waste the time of the House of Commons in an absolutely bootless and fruitless process, or else we can only introduce bills which we may think will have some possible chance of passing the Tory party in the House of Lords. Now, of course, you may think that it is some pique, and blighted and mortified ambition at not leading a majority in the House of Lords that induces me to take so gloomy a view of that body. But I think I could show you by a very simple illustration that it is a grave constitutional question, which does not depend merely on the party to which you belong. Suppose we were to reverse the case, and suppose the House of Lords were to consist permanently of

520 Liberals and some 30 or 40 Conservatives. Don't you think, then, that the Conservatives would find that there was a great constitutional question involved? How long do you think the Conservative party would stand up for the House of Lords as an essential part of the Constitution if it found out that it only carried its measures through Parliament on the sufferance of a permanent Liberal majority against them?

I confess quite freely that I am a Second Chamber man in principle. I am all for a Second Chamber. I am not for the uncontrolled government of a single Chamber any more than I am for the uncontrolled government of a single man. The temptation of absolute power is too great for any man or any body of men, and I believe—though I am speaking from recollection—that so keen and ardent a Radical as John Stuart Mill held that opinion, too. I am also strongly of opinion that all experience points to having a Second Chamber of some sort. That, however, does not imply an admiration for the House of Lords. The American constitution-makers, who made the constitution under the inspiration of their fresh breath of freedom and independence, created a much stronger Second Chamber than we shall ever see in this country, and what is more, the feeling of the country on the whole coincides with my principle in that respect. There may be differences of opinion on that point, and I am aware there are; but I am bound to tell you what is my conviction. I should not be worthy of your confidence if I did not. But I am bound to say that if I am asked to choose between no Second Chamber at all and a Second Chamber constituted as the House of Lords is—I will not make my choice before this assembly—but I will say that there is ground for hesitation with regard to my

principle. The fact is that to my mind it is an absolute danger, an invitation to revolution, that there should be an assembly of this kind in this position; and therefore it is as a lover of the Constitution as well as a lover of freedom that I implore you to take this question into your immediate consideration. If I hesitate between no Second Chamber and the House of Lords—between my dislike for a single Chamber and the doubt as to whether the House of Lords is better than none—it is for this reason, that, in my judgment, the House of Lords is not a Second Chamber at all. I will not say it is a Tory caucus, because that might be considered an offensive expression, and, moreover, a caucus is a temporary body. But I will say this, that it is a permanent party organisation, controlled for party purposes and by party managers.

I remember Lord Salisbury's defence of the House of Lords in 1888. It was a very ingenious defence, and tickled my fancy immensely; for, admitting that the House of Lords were not always wise or experienced, he said there seemed to him to be a considerable advantage in having a House composed of persons not particularly versed in political affairs, who brought a fresh, and innocent, and unbiased judgment to the consideration of the topics presented to their notice. And I confess I think that there is something rather attractive in that idea. But you must remember, gentlemen, these innocent political sheep require a shepherd, and Lord Salisbury is that shepherd; and when he commends them for this very process of innocence and readiness to accept conviction, we know whose conviction it is that they are ready to accept. And when they are so led, and when they are so guided, it very little matters to those who wish for Liberal measures to pass whether they are as innocent and

unbiased as Lord Salisbury represents, or whether they are a collection of political hacks.

To show how little of a Second Chamber is the House of Lords, I will recall to you Lord Salisbury's speeches before the election of 1892, in which, if I am not mistaken, he appealed more than once to the almost certainty of the House of Lords reversing any verdict that might be returned by the people in favour of Home Rule. Well that could not be said of any unbiased or proper Second Chamber, and I think we may say, without dispute, that on that occasion the Tory leader recognised that he had the House of Lords in his pocket. I will give you another testimony of the same kind. You all know Mr. Chamberlain. There was a time when Mr. Chamberlain was a strong Liberal, and in those days there were no words too corrosive, too bitter, and too contemptuous for him to address to the Second Chamber. But the other day, having become closely allied—to put it no further—with another political party, he described the House of Lords as an institution that might no doubt be reformed, but certainly as one on which he places considerable value. Surely that illustrates clearly enough the party aspect and quality of the House of Lords. Of course, the Senate of the United States, which is, perhaps, the first Second Chamber in the world, is also guided by political feeling, but is guided first by one party and then by another. It is constantly refreshed by contact with election; but the House of Lords is stereotyped—fixed—and as I have already pointed out to you, no change whatever in the opinion of the country can affect its composition. Even if there is a change in the House of Lords, it is all in one direction.

Now and then a Liberal peer leaves us with a great flourish of trumpets, and the daily papers of the Unionist per-

suation, and the weekly papers of the same kind, devote articles of so much agonising interest to this important defection that you would think another Cardinal Newman had left the English Church. Indeed, the other day one of these left us, and issued the usual encyclical giving his motives for leaving and his advice. His encyclical, in the words of my friend the chairman, *urbi et orbi*, advised the world in general; and his advice to the Government was that, as he could not follow them, they had better retire into obscurity. Why, surely that is a strange piece of advice—because he cannot follow us to invite us to join him.

Now, then, gentlemen, I say this—I will not go further into the different attributes of the House of Lords—you know them well enough, and I cannot go into them at great length to-night—I say that this is a great national question, and a great national danger. If the other party, which professes to have a monopoly of statesmanship had had any statesmanship at all, they would have settled it long ago by bringing the House of Lords into some sort of relation to the feelings of the people. But they have preferred to keep it, like a sort of Tory Old Guard, to bring up when the necessities of the case required. But an Old Guard is a dangerous weapon, because when you have brought up your last reserve all goes with it. Napoleon had an Old Guard, and he brought it up at Waterloo, and when the Old Guard was done with, not merely the battle was done with, but Napoleon and all concerned with him. But we are told the Peers never definitely resist the will of the people. I want to know how the wishes of the people can be better expressed than through the representatives of the people. Who gave the Peers the right or the instinct to decide as to what are, or are not, the wishes of the people when these wishes are ex-

pressed through their elected representatives? I suppose that this contention implies that the Peers give their assent to any reform which is passed, as the Reform Bill of 1832 was passed, under the threat of an immediate revolution—when Birmingham was arming, and Glasgow was arming, and Bristol was in flames. Are we always to wait for demonstrations of popular feeling of that kind? To assert this, gentlemen, is to go far. It is laying down the proposition that Liberal legislation is always to be carried by the menace of revolution. Tory legislation is to descend like the blessed rain from heaven. Ours is only to come in wind, and rain, and snow, and vapour. Theirs is to be the fertilising overflow of the Nile. Ours is to come as a tornado or a hurricane. Theirs is to be the benign effect, ours the catastrophe and convulsion of Nature. So the result must be that if we are never to be allowed to carry any measure without threat of thunder and lightning, or evoking the fell spirits of the storm to convince the Lords that the nation is in earnest, then our legislation will always be troublous and unpeaceful, and the only way to get legislation quietly passed is to confide it to the Tory and Unionist party. I only allude to this to show what the real danger is of the House of Lords from a constitutional point of view. It invites unrest; it invites agitation; and in certain cases the cup may boil over; and it might invite revolution. And I repeat this is a great national question, and it is a great national danger. It is a great question, not merely from its enormous importance, but from the difficulty of dealing with it.

Now, the difficulty of dealing with it is this—first, that there is a great constitutional issue involved; and secondly, that the method of dealing with that constitutional issue is extremely complex and difficult. As to the issue, it is tre-

mendous. If I knew any stronger word by which I could describe it, I would use that stronger word. It is the greatest issue that has been put to this country since your fathers resisted the tyranny of Charles I. and of James II. You had a great measure passed in 1832, but that was a much less measure than this, because you were only enlarging constituencies already existing. But now you have to deal with a question of the revision of the entire constitution. You have to deal with two out of the three estates of the realm. You have to deal with a council which has survived many centuries and many storms, and which has existed up till now partly from the disinclination of the English people to constitutional change, and partly also owing perhaps to the personal popularity and ability of some of its members. You will have against you all those causes which see in the House of Lords their strongest bulwark and their last rampart. All those who are opposed to any form of Irish Home Rule will be amongst the most stalwart defenders of the House of Lords. All those who think that churches are benefited by establishment will be found to have their citadel in the House of Lords. Those who are supporters of the liquor interest will be found behind the fortifications of the House of Lords. In fact, some of the princes of that interest will be found seated on its benches.

But I take another question. There is a question which interests everybody here. It is a question of registration. We have great difficulties to contend with in regard to registration, and we have great difficulties to contend with in regard to labour representation. Well, I believe if you could put the expenses of elections upon the public funds, local or imperial, and if you could have a second ballot, so as to control the application of that expenditure, you would have

largely got rid of the allegation of undue or unworthy representation, which is at the bottom of our labour difficulty. But what chance have you got of inducing the House of Lords to pass a measure like that? And, therefore, I say that it is those who wish for that reform who will find, in the crusade against the House of Lords, their principal enemies in its defenders. Why, gentlemen, do I recapitulate all this? It is to impress upon you that you are entering upon a great campaign; that if you give the seal of your consent to an entrance upon that campaign, it will not be an affair of rose water. You must be prepared to take off your waistcoats—not merely your coats. You must be prepared to gird up your loins; and if you once put your hands to the plough, you must take a solemn resolution that you will not look back. Now, to some great issues like this—to some grievances—there is an obvious remedy.

The misfortune of this grievance and this issue is that the remedy is not obvious within the limits of the constitution. You can only deal with the House of Lords, with the powers of the House of Lords, by a bill passed through both Houses. Anything but that is, constitutionally speaking, a revolution—is overriding one of the Chambers of Parliament against its own will, without legislation passed by its own consent. Well, apply that principle—which is a principle which unfortunately no one can controvert—apply that principle to the remedies offered for the constitution of the House of Lords. In the first place, no such bill as a bill for the abolition of the House of Lords, or the limitation of the veto of the House of Lords, which are the two remedies suggested, would ever pass the House of Lords. Unless you overawe the House of Lords, or make it perfectly clear that the country is determined that its requirements shall take

effect, no such bill can ever be made to pass the House of Lords. Well, of course, you may get the House of Lords to surrender, as you get a fortress to surrender—by making it clear that it is encompassed and besieged without hope of deliverance. But that itself is not an easy task with the garrison that, as I have described, is sure to defend it. We now come to a question which seems a much simpler one, that of the abolition of the veto of the House of Lords. Now, abolition of the veto is greeted with great applause, and I should not be disposed to withhold my applause, but that, unfortunately, as a direct plan the abolition of the veto by a bill is a subject of the same difficulties as a bill for the abolition. You cannot get the House of Lords to pass a bill for the abolition of their veto, because they would say there was no use then in there being a House of Lords at all. But there is this further difficulty.

What do you mean by the Veto? Do you mean that the House of Lords is to be obliged under certain circumstances to pass the second reading and the third reading of a bill sent up by the House of Commons? Do you allow it, in fact, any power of revision in Committee? If you allow it any power of dealing with a bill of the House of Commons in Committee, your abolition of the veto would be absolutely fruitless. The House of Lords could give a bill a second reading. It could knock the bottom out of a bill in Committee; and it could send it back for third reading, saying, "We have not exercised our veto. Here is your bill." Look at the Employers' Liability Bill. The House of Lords read it a second and a third time. It introduced however one apparently small amendment in Committee, and yet when the bill came back from the House of Lords it stank in the nostrils of the House of Commons. Well, then I sup-