



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

JEFFREY

Corrected Report of the Speech of the Right  
Honourable the Lord Advocate of Scotland  
Upon the Motion of Lord John Russell in  
the House of Commons

JN  
215  
1831  
J4

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

**CORRECTED REPORT**

**OF THE**

**S P E E C H**

**OF THE**

**RIGHT HONOURABLE THE**

**LORD ADVOCATE OF SCOTLAND,**

**UPON THE MOTION OF**

**LORD JOHN RUSSELL,**

**IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,**

**ON THE FIRST OF MARCH, 1831,**

**FOR**

**REFORM OF PARLIAMENT.**

**LONDON :**

**JAMES RIDGWAY, 169, PICCADILLY.**

---

**M.DCCC.XXXI.**

TILLING, PRINTER, CHELSEA.

CORRECTED REPORT  
OF THE  
SPEECH  
OF THE  
RIGHT HONOURABLE  
THE LORD ADVOCATE OF SCOTLAND.

---

I BELIEVE, Sir, that I need scarcely state that the part of the great measure introduced to the House by the Noble Lord, which first attracted my attention, was that which related to the representation of Scotland,—a part of the subject which has hardly been noticed in the course of the debate, and which, from the general silence of the Members for Scotland, I must presume meets with their approbation. The Noble Lord who explained the measure of Reform to the House, stated in a speech, unusually distinct and luminous, and, considering its brevity, surprisingly complete, that Government proposed to bring in successively three bills, with the intention of reforming England, Scotland, and Ireland. If I do

not greatly misapprehend the rules and forms of this House, the question relating to the representation of Scotland is now as much within the consideration of the House, as if it had been specifically brought before its notice. The duty of drawing up the bill, relating to that part of the subject, has been officially entrusted to me; but I certainly have no wish to enter into what might now be considered by the House as an uncalled-for defence of that proposition. Two Noble Lords on the opposite side of the House have indeed introduced the name of Scotland; but beyond a general statement of the sufficiency of the present system of representation, or rather the undoubted prosperity of the country under that system, I am not aware of their having made any impeachment of the proposed alterations, or any distinct vindication of the existing system. (Hear, hear.)

In so far as relates to the great measure itself which has so long engaged the attention of the House, I cannot but feel, that some of the topics which in the early part of the debate occupied a great share of the attention, and not a little of the interest of honourable Members, have been already finally disposed of in the judgment of both sides of the House. I believe that the grounds on which the opposition to the measure now rest are these—the undoubted prosperity of both parts of the island under that form of representation, which the proposed measure im-

peaches as imperfect;—the want of specification of any positive or direct evils, which can be traced to alleged defects in the present system, and the want of any specification of particular benefits which the proposed alteration would produce. To these grounds of opposition I might add,—for I shall say nothing of corporation robberies, or even of the more favoured, though not less extravagant imputation, that the measure is revolutionary,—that it was calculated to infuse too democratic a spirit into the Constitution; and was likely to lead, by gradual progression, to other alterations, which would ultimately destroy the Monarchy and the hereditary branch of the Legislature. (Hear, hear.) It was further urged, that no reason had been presented on the part of those who proposed these very extensive changes, except, that the country not only desired, but clamoured for them, and that with such determination of purpose, and such undisguised menaces, that the House must concede to the cry of the people what it would not to the arguments of those who proposed changes; while that cry had actually been raised by those persons who had introduced the proposed measure of Reform into the House. (Hear, hear.)

Now, with respect to the argument which appears to me to have produced the greatest effect in that House—namely, that the country had prospered eminently under the present form of representation, for a long course of years, and

that it was rash, therefore, and unnecessary to venture on a change, I must be permitted to say, that nothing can be more fallacious than this argument, or more extravagant than the conclusions to which it necessarily led. When, I would ask, when was the time, for many hundred years back, that England was not distinguished for glory, wealth, and splendour? Is it not true, that in the days of the Tudors and the Stuarts, England had already achieved a high place among the nations of the world, for wealth, splendour, and cultivation, and even for a great degree of domestic liberty? But, would it be alleged, that the people of England ought now to be satisfied with the political institutions, or the measure of political liberty which satisfied their ancestors then? The fact to which all history bore witness, and independent of that testimony, a principle offered to the consideration of every reflecting person, was, that for nations to attain a great measure of prosperity, and an infinite measure of wealth, very little political freedom was necessary. The truth is, that it is most generally under such defective political institutions, that nations first obtain eminence in arts, manufactures, commerce, and wealth,—and the fruit of that prosperity is liberty. (Hear.)

The first step to regeneration was, the moderate degree of freedom granted to commercial towns, which had made some advances in civilization and wealth. (Hear.) The other day, the Honourable and Learned Member for Newport, (Mr. H.



Twiss,) had indeed expressed great apprehension at such places being admitted within the pale of the Constitution. The Honourable and Learned Member, to support his own views, had quoted from a very able commentator on the British Constitution—the author of *Ecclesiasticus* (laughter)—the following passage:—“ They are wise in the work to which they have committed their minds.” They might work very well, he admitted, in metal, and in wood, but were not fit to come into Council. And this might be true enough of the first generations of the industrious : but another spirit arose in the race to whom their wealth was transmitted ; and to whom it imparted leisure to reflect, and to cultivate their faculties ; and a sense of dignity and independence, which led at once to the assertion of political power and importance. This, in truth, was the natural history and genuine genealogy of freedom ; and, in the first instance at least, though the order might be afterwards reversed, liberty was the daughter, not the mother of riches. (Cheers.)

Thus, and thus only, arose the Italian Republics, the free Towns of Germany, and the acknowledged germs and seeds of our own liberty, the trading Towns and Corporations which were the first to be emancipated from the oppressions of feudal tyranny. As wealth accumulated, men became anxious to have protection from vexatious and illegal interferences with their concerns ; and, soon after, the increase of cultivation, and the diffused intelligence which wealth had created, required, from time to time, more and

more intelligence, and skill, and concern for the general good, on the part of the Legislature, and a more minute acquaintance with the wants of the community. The fact was deducible from principles which admitted of no question, that as long as nations continue crescent and progressive in wealth, they constantly and successively outgrow the dimensions of their political institutions ; and it becomes necessary to alter, adapt, and enlarge those institutions, in order to accommodate the continually increasing number of intelligent and independent citizens who are entitled to share in their benefits, and to meet the great and accumulating difficulties which grow out of such complicated interests. (Hear, hear.) Accordingly, what had been the progress in England? We were prosperous and splendid, while we were saddled with the Star Chamber, with the prerogative, with purveyance, and with ship money. At that time there were Merchants of great opulence, men of spirit and intelligence in public affairs, and authors of unequalled talent, and immortal glory. England, in fact, then bore as proud a name among the nations as at any after period ; but as wealth multiplied, intelligence spread among the population ; and in the same proportion it was found necessary to widen the basis on which the Constitution rested, in order to provide room for the multiplied children of freedom. (Cheers.) The question, then, was, whether that basis was wide enough at this moment, or whether more room must not still be made for those who had now become entitled to better accommodation? The great question

is, whether it can be seriously doubted, that within the last 25 or 30 years, there has been generated and developed among the people of this country, a vast mass, not of intelligence and independence only, but of political capacity and interest; a power to understand, and a desire to possess their constitutional rights, compared with which, all which I have spoken of as existing in the most glorious periods of our older history, was proportionably insignificant. We all knew how, in feudal times, the Barons extorted Charters from tyrannical Sovereigns; and how towns were taken under the protecting wings of the Barons, or the Sovereign, in order to give strength to one or other of those parties. Then the serfs and villains were emancipated; and, last of all, the Burghesses rose into wealth and importance. (Hear, hear.) But, where was the man who would say that at any of those periods the improvement and enlargement of our political institutions should have finally stopped? Or, can any man, who looks at the present condition of these institutions, aver that they are actually such as no improvement in the wealth, numbers, and intelligence of the community, could justify us in enlarging? By what criterion is a judgment to be formed as to the point beyond which it would be impossible to go with advantage? This is truly a matter of feeling and observation, rather than of reasoning. Wherever there is lasting and reasonable discontent, there is, probably, need for reformation. I know no limits to such improvements, but the limits to the desires of intelligent men, who crave, and

render reasons for their craving, or some plain unsoundness in the arguments by which their desires must be defended. (Hear, hear.) But I shall now come to the fact; for it really seems to be little else than a matter of fact that is in dispute between the two sides of the House. I wish, in the first place, to look for a moment, exclusively, to the great number of persons of wealth, respectability, intelligence, and loyalty, belonging to the middle ranks, in London and Manchester, who are now unrepresented. Is it true, in point of fact, that that great body of persons are discontented and dissatisfied, soured and alienated by their exclusion? ("No, no," and cheers.) I think I may venture to answer the question. I think I may assume, without much presumption, that it is generally known in the country, that Petitions in favour of Reform have been laid on the table of this House, uncountable in number, ("No, no,") signed, not by tens, or twenties, but by fifties, and hundreds of thousands. Now, if it was, indeed, true, that these Petitions did not speak the desires of the wealthy, intelligent, and industrious persons, whose names they assume, if it was true that the great body of respectable people in the districts I have mentioned, did not share the sentiments of the Petitioners, how was it they had not sent other Petitions to that House expressive of their opinions, and denying the statement of their dissatisfaction? The Petitions were not got up in a corner, nor were they looked upon, either in this House, or without it, as so notoriously false and absurd, as to be deserving of no

answer. On the contrary, they had shaken the country from border to border, and had sent forth the boldest defiances and challenges to any one to dispute the truth of their allegations; yet these challenges had not been accepted; and those who were now said to be contented, had been silent under the defiance. So far as I can recollect, I have heard in this House but of one Petition which has been presented against Reform, and that came from Bristol, and contained a sort of mimicry of the language of the Iron Barons of Merton;—"We do not wish the laws of England to be changed."

But it is more peculiarly my province, as it is my pride, to call the attention of the House to the vast number of Petitions which have been presented in favour of Reform from different parts of Scotland; and as to the greater part of which, I think I may say, with confidence, that not the slightest influence had been exercised to get them up. I must advert particularly to the Petitions, not merely from the Merchants, Bankers, and Manufacturers, but from the Magistrates, and Town Councils of Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen, and from the Citizens of Edinburgh; the latter of which I know to be signed, from my own personal knowledge, by four-fifths, if not five-fifths, of all the persons of wealth and respectability in that city: and also, that a large proportion of the 180 persons who signed the requisition for the Meeting at which it was carried, had been converted from a feeling of distrust towards Reform, to a sense of the propriety of its concession.

There are two points upon which objections have been taken to the measure; one, the giving of the elective franchise to those who had it not, the other, the taking it away from some of those who had it. At present, I wish to speak only to the first of these points; and with regard to it, would any man say that a body of unrepresented persons, equal in numbers, and far superior in wealth, to double the population of some of the capitals of Europe, should not have a Member to represent them? Was not this, then, a great advantage in this Bill? It was not easy indeed to comprehend the grounds upon which this part of the measure are objected to; and even the luminous statements of the Honourable Member for Callington have left it in utter darkness. Why should the men of wealth, intelligence, and industry, in certain parts of London and in Leeds, not have Representatives, as well as men in the same, or a lower condition, in other parts of London or in Nottingham? The Member for Callington had made *no answer* to that question; but had gone off in a fine spun and hypothetical dissertation on the advantages attending the present system, under which the hereditary aristocracy and the democracy were so harmoniously mingled in the House of Commons! and he said, "If you change this system, you lose these advantages." But how would this part of the Bill interfere with these imaginary advantages? The advantages flowed, it seems, from the close and rotten Borough part of the system; and were not diminished by the franchise in old London or in Nottingham. How

then should they be diminished by the creation of similar franchises in newer parts of London, or in Manchester or Birmingham? But the truth was, that these supposed advantages were purely ideal and imaginary; and that the Honourable Member's whole exposition and deduction of them, was a conspicuous example of the strange, fantastical, and unsound speculations by which ingenious men will cover the palpable unsoundness of tenets which it is their interest or inclination at all events to maintain. There was, in truth, no advantage in the Peerage or the Crown having an influence in the Commons House of Parliament; and if there were, it was manifest that the present system of election did *not* secure that advantage. The matter is settled every where, except in this House; and I should like nothing better than to see the Honourable Member for Callington proposing his fanciful theory to the merchants of Leeds or Manchester—not in the streets or market places, to an inflamed or ignorant multitude—but there, where merchants most do congregate, in the counting houses and wealthy dwellings of men, as cultivated and intelligent as himself. Let him see how such men would deal with his theory. Let him consider how the press already treats it out of doors. Every body knows what strange tricks interest will play with a man's faculties, and how unconsciously we are duped by our own prejudices and partialities. (Hear).

Let the House consider, but for an instant, what is the amount of the Honourable Member's argument about Peers possessing their native authority, and privileges,

and prerogatives in the House of Commons. I must take leave to say, in the first place, that I am not aware that Members of the House of Lords, in their individual capacity, do now possess any prerogatives or privilege at all, except that of being hereditary legislators; which privilege they could not possibly exercise any where but in their own House. It is not therefore *as Peers*, but only as rich proprietors, that they could ever enjoy this extraordinary privilege—and there was an end, therefore, at once, to the dream of these two branches of the Legislature, blending their functions, in some inexpressibly benignant manner, in this House. But, in the next place, it is not true that the privilege belongs to *rich* proprietors—or is a beneficial way of bringing the legitimate influence of Property to bear on public concerns. The richest proprietor in the land has no such privilege, unless he is proprietor of a borough:—and many men own boroughs, who have little other property. Take the average wealth of all the borough holders in the country, and I will undertake to shew that, for every one of them, there are fifty men of equal wealth, who have no boroughs—and thus there is an end also of the other dream, of this arrangement being a desirable means of giving weight to property! In fact, it is not the influence of large property at all; and it is not a *fair* influence of any property. Many poor men invest their capital in boroughs, in hopes to enrich themselves by the illicit sale of them; and many rich men grow poor by the unskilful management of the same illegal traffic. If it were right that rich men



or Peers should have this strange privilege, why is it not given to them openly? Upon the theory of the Honourable Gentleman opposite, every Peer, with an income of £10,000. a year, should have a Member to sit in that House to represent him; and every Commoner with £20,000. should have his Member too; then there would be ensured a proper appendage to rank and opulence, instead of there being, as at present, a narrow and unjust monopoly of the privilege.

There is no doubt, I believe, in any quarter, that property ought to have a large influence in the election of Members of Parliament. But is it really pretended, either that the proposed Bill will destroy that influence, or that the present system gives a fair or secure scope to it? That it would not destroy or exclude that influence, seemed to be conceded by the Honourable Member for Callington, when he referred to the influence of the Bedford Family, in Tavistock, and said, "that, after the proposed measure had done its worst, he would still ensure the present Member's Seat for that Borough, for half-a-crown." I think the Honourable Member would very probably be safe with that cheap insurance. But could there be a more conclusive proof that the fair and legitimate influence of rank and property will not be diminished by this Bill? In my opinion, indeed, it will be very much increased; for, as things now stand, a very large proportion of boroughs are withdrawn from the natural and benignant influence of property bestowed in acts of kindness and judicious charity; and, instead of being cheered by the undebasing bounty of a munificent and hospitable neighbour, are degraded

and enslaved by a sordid and tyrannical dependency on a sordid and tyrannical master. (Hear.) The objectors to the measure were singularly contradictory; some objected to it as too popular and democratic; and then they also objected that it excluded the lowest classes. (Hear.) How were these objections to be reconciled? It was said that tradesmen, and attornies, and petty householders, would be admitted to the elective franchise, under the qualification of £10., and that therefore the qualification was too low. Now, the fact happens to be, that, in 99 cases out of 100, the qualification, whenever it is altered, is *raised*. In the counties, where it had always stood at 40s., it is now £10. In Boroughs, again, the Corporators, if resident, are left as they were; and instead of Scot and Lot, or Pot-walloppers, a £10. qualification is again required. Gentlemen argued, too, as if the qualification was not to include those above £10., whereas it was £10. and upwards, and that might be 100 or 1,000 fold. Was that to inundate the land with a democracy? Really, if the 40s. freeholders and the pot-walloppers of the present system did not produce that effect, it was not easy to see how it was to be produced by raising the qualification.

But even if the qualification had been lowered, it seems to me a strange mistake to suppose that it would be likely to produce dissatisfaction or disloyalty, or an indisposition to acknowledge the authority of the law. Would it be said that a comparatively poor man was less interested in the security of his little property, than the rich man who was dying of *ennui* in the midst of his useless

hoards? On the contrary, a man who had acquired a certain degree of competency, looked with the greatest anxiety on what affected the security of his property, and was of all others the most likely to rally round the only authority by which that property would be defended. (Hear.) He felt himself lifted above that want which he once endured; and though he felt pride in contemplating his own elevation in the scale of society, he looked down with sympathy and affection upon those who were still struggling with adversity. He was the person, therefore, whom it most behoved the Government to attach to itself by kindness, and by conceding his rights, and the firmest reliance might then be placed on his fidelity. And if it be, indeed, true, that there are individuals, or associations, in this country, who meditate an attack on property, and set lawful authority at defiance, such persons as he would be ready to join hand and heart in resistance to them. (Hear.) No thinking man, who reflected upon the subject, would contend that the safety of the country rested upon any other basis than a regard for the security of property; and when society was founded upon that basis, the coronet was in no danger of being touched, nor a jewel of the diadem of being soiled. I have, therefore, no distrust of this £10. qualification; nor, indeed, am I able to imagine by what process of reasoning a contrary conclusion has been formed. Had the Bill done the reverse, and proposed to reduce the qualification, there might have been some reason in the objection.

How this inconsistency is to be explained, I con-

fess I am unable to conjecture ; but I think I have found a key to some of the mysteries of the opposite side of the House, in their wilful blindness to a distinction, the full perception of which I humbly conceive to be essential to any just views of the great measure before us. To me, Sir, it seems evident, that there are at this moment, *two* entirely separate classes of discontented persons in this country, whom it is most important not to confound in our deliberations, but incomparably more important not to identify and drive together by our proceedings. The one—by far the most numerous and important, consists of those loyal, orderly, and industrious persons, who are unjustly excluded from their share in the representation, and are, on that account, offended, alienated, and dissatisfied with those who have so long persisted in rejecting their earnest and humble petitions. The other consists of far more desperate, and dangerous individuals—persons, not many I trust in number, but multiplied of late years, by I know not what causes, who utterly distrust and despise all the institutions of the country ; who hate law and authority, and aim directly, and, with little disguise or equivocation, at the destruction of all property, and the abolition of all dignities. It is painful to think, that there should be such a faction in such a country ; but, I am persuaded, that no man who moves about in society, with his eyes and his ears open, can fail to be convinced of the fact. It is, perhaps, but an aggravated form of the old feud, which has always

subsisted between those who have nothing, and those who have something; but frightfully embittered of late years among us, partly, perhaps, by the long continued pressure of distress; and, partly, by the increased intelligence and easier means of concert among the lower orders: but, no doubt, in a still greater degree, by the effect of infamous publications and harangues, proceeding from wicked and designing, or most misled and deluded individuals. But, be that as it may, the point I wish chiefly to impress on the House, is, that those men are not to be confounded with the former; that *their* discontent does not proceed from their exclusion from elective franchises, and that they neither petition for Reform, nor would be in any degree gratified by its largest concession. Their views go far beyond the sphere of Parliamentary Reform: they care nothing for laws or law-givers, or those by whom law-givers are appointed; and make a mockery, quite as much of Commons, as of Lords, or of King. Their object is the invasion of all property, the cessation of all authority, the levelling of all ranks and degrees, every man for himself, and God—or some other personage—for all!

No blunder then could be so great, no injustice so flagrant, as to confound these men with those who petition for a better system of representation; or to draw inferences as to the consequences of yielding to the prayers of the latter, which might be applicable to capitulating

with the demands of the former. But, there is something far worse, and more practically dangerous, in confounding those two distinct kinds of discontent, than the mere blunder in reasoning, or injustice in moral judgment. Your Petitioners, though naturally, and actually, loyal and orderly, are not all, of course, philosophically patient, or religiously meek. If, then, their just claims are disregarded, they will all be offended, and many will be excessive in their resentment, and their feelings and expressions of anger and dislike. They will join, therefore, in the language at least, of the apostles of disorder and anarchy, and plainly be in danger of imbibing a share of their passions and opinions. They will join with them to the extent of distrusting, and perhaps despising this House ; of believing that the Government is corrupt and oppressive, and that their ineffectual petitions must be reinforced by something more energetic and irresistible.

I am persuaded, I need not dwell on a topic so painful. If the fact be admitted, that a great part of the petitioners are not to be confounded with the desperate and wicked individuals to whom I have alluded, can any thing be so plain, as that it is the first and foremost of our duties, to prevent the one from graduating into the other, or from being exposed to the infection, even of a partial or nominal alliance ? to snatch them from the tremendous dangers of such a communication, and at once to

deprive the mischievous of the encouragement and credit of *their* apparent support, and to detach them, by merely doing them justice, from that perilous community of discontent, in which, by its refusal, they are now unhappily involved.

To the question, therefore, of What are the actual evils of the present system, and what the actual benefits you expect from its reform, I now answer, boldly, that the evil is the grievous discontent, gradually passing into disaffection, which it produces in those who suffer from it, and that the inestimable benefit to be derived from its reformation, is the cure of that discontent—the redemption of great bodies of meritorious citizens from the hazard of being seduced into fatal disorders and excesses; the visible separation of those who mean mischief, and seek pillage, from those who insist only for right and justice, and the final embodying of all the latter, in support of property and lawful authority, against the implacable enemies of both.

I grant, at once, that no Reform will satisfy those whose real object is, not Reform, but confusion. I not only grant, but I maintain, as the very basis of my argument, that no reasonable improvements will satisfy those who are unreasonable. But it is implied, in the very terms of this proposition, that they *will* satisfy the reasonable; and when the reasonable are once satisfied, can any man doubt or deny that we shall be better able, with their aid, to deal with the unreasonable

who remain? The mischief is, that by refusing just requests, we not only alienate those who desire nothing but justice, but give a colour to the malignant imputations of those who say, that we love injustice for itself, or for the peculations and oppressions for the sake of which it is committed. The catholic remedy for the evil, in all its aspects, the true cure for the actual sufferer, the infallible exposure of the turbulent pretender, is, to do justice fearlessly, and fearlessly to resist all unjust encroachments.

From the very first time my attention has been directed to this subject, it was in this aspect that it has presented itself to me. The great object is to allay reasonable discontent, and to win back alienated confidence and affection, on the one hand, and, on the other, to disarm sedition and mischief of its most powerful means of seduction, by separating from it, and, finally, arraying against it, all that is fundamentally sound in the great mass of the population, all, that is to say, who, by the possession of property, and political rights, can be made to feel that they have an interest in the protection of property and the maintenance of lawful authority. In the present agitated state of the country, when the flood is growing on the land, I would fain draw a *firmament*, and impassable barrier, between the pure and wholesome waters that are above, and the noisome and polluted contents of the dark abysses below: and this is the first good effect I venture to anticipate from the Bill now proposed.



It will not only pacify and appease multitudes who are now discontented, and likely to be ranged in hostility to Government, and authority generally; but it will array them into a great phalanx for the protection of property, and the maintenance of the Constitution and the law. They are all persons of property, generally speaking, of larger property than the body of English electors have heretofore been required to possess; and if those electors have hitherto been found true to their country and their trust, I confess my inability to understand how merely multiplying their numbers, and raising their rank, can be supposed to debase their characters, or pervert their views.

I have, perhaps, said enough already on the value I attach to property, as a qualification for electors. It is not the property, certainly, not the acres, or the pounds sterling, that are to be directly represented; but the will and intelligence of the men to whom they belong. If property were the sole and ultimate qualification, I do not see how we could avoid recurring to the scheme of a famous Reformer in his day, the late Mr. Horne Tooke, who seriously proposed, that votes should be multiplied according as property increased; and that a rich man should be allowed to vote seven times at an election, when a poor man voted but once. That theory, however, has been long discarded; and I rather think men of all parties are now agreed, that the only reasons for requiring electors to have property, are, first,

as a sort of test or presumption, that they have rather more intelligence and information than are usually found in persons of the very lowest condition, and, secondly, as a pledge of their interest and disposition to maintain that respect for property in general, which all thinking men must feel to be at the bottom of all civil institutions, and the true foundation, not only of law and good order, but of liberty and of society itself. I have already endeavoured to shew, that a very moderate share of property is as likely to give this disposition as a greater share; and I cannot but think, in opposition to the Honourable Member for Preston, that the standard taken in the proposed Bill is not on the other hand too high. If I understand that Honourable Member rightly, he, too, is for *some* qualification of property. But, wherever the line is drawn, it must necessarily appear to bear hard upon those who are *immediatety* below it. The Honourable Member said, that there are many persons, who occupy houses worth from £4. to £9. a year, who would make as good electors as those who were up to £10. I have no doubt it may be so. But, if the standard were let down to £4., the same thing might no doubt be said as to renters at £3. 10s. By a little further effort of industry and frugality, the £9. renter might surely, in most cases, raise himself to £10.; and the motive—no longer a sordid or base motive—that this Bill holds out for such efforts, is not the least of its recommendations. But in the mean time, and on the whole,

I cannot persuade myself, that the occupancy of a house, worth £10. a year, is too high a qualification; and if it brings in 500,000 new voters, who are now excluded from all representation, it is impossible not to feel, that while it enlarges to this great extent, the basis on which the Constitution reposes, it binds at the same time, to the better protection of that Constitution, a prodigious mass of actual property, and does all that can now be done to secure the confidence and affection of this great body of proprietors.

It is curious to observe, how extremes meet, in the arguments of disputants who are reduced to extremities, and what contradictions are hazarded by those who can dispense with no auxiliaries. The same persons, who rest their chief objection to this measure, on the ground of its throwing too large an infusion of popular or democratic influence into the Legislature, are also the loudest to clamour against its tyrannical and aristocratic rejection of the pot-wallopers, and scot and lot electors of Preston and Honiton. Nay, the Honourable Member for Callington does not scruple to say, that the best way to give property its due effect in the representation, is to give almost the whole of that representation to those who have either very large fortunes, or no fortunes at all—to take special care of the rights of pot-wallopers, and of opulent peers and boroughmongers, but to look with jealousy on the claims of the middling and upper classes! He is for a circu-

lation of £100. notes, and of farthings, and from which shillings and sovereigns are to be, in a great measure, excluded! I confess I do not know how to deal with such an argument. But it should always be remembered, that the existing pot-wallopers are to retain their franchise for their lives; and that as it is but in a few places that this right now exists, it is absurd to represent its ultimate cessation in those places, as the disfranchisement of a great class of electors, long known to the Constitution, and acting an important part in its structure. If this extreme element of Democracy could ever have been defended in such a Government as our's, it could only have been as a counterbalance to the extreme, and equally indefensible element of Aristocracy, arising from the nomination borough in the hands of Peers, and other persons of great wealth; and if it is right to exclude the latter, as alike contrary to the letter and spirit of the Constitution, there can no longer be any good reason for retaining the former. To represent the franchise of a few bands of pot-wallopers, in certain towns, scattered thinly over the face of the country, as the vital link by which the great body of the labouring classes are connected with the Constitution, does appear to me, I confess, a very notable extravagance. The great body of the labouring classes have, in fact, no participation in this franchise; and can derive no comfort or benefit from its occasional exercise, probably utterly unknown or unheard of by them,

in Preston or Honiton, or a few other insulated places. The extension of the franchise to 500,000 new voters, occupying houses of £10. and upwards, is a far more substantial opening of the Constitution to the labouring classes in general. It will reach, indeed, directly to a considerable proportion of those classes; and it admits, at all events, an immense multitude of those who have recently risen from those classes, whose relations and sympathies are all still in that circle, and whose mere elevation will excite a most beneficial ambition in the whole body, to acquire, by increased industry and economy, the very moderate qualification which will entitle them also to its full participation.

I think, Sir, I have already sufficiently answered the demand for some specification of the ill effects of the present system, and of the benefits we expect from its reform. But it would be easy to extend that answer. One benefit, which I rather think has not yet been suggested to the House, I will, with their indulgence, now venture to explain: I mean the great advantage which I have no doubt a reformed Parliament would have in insuring the more prompt, steady, and effectual operation of Public Opinion on the legislature, and the measures of the Government. I do not deny, that, even as things now are, public opinion is, in the long run, irresistible. But infinite evils and dangers have constantly resulted from the tardiness with which it operates, the dissatisfaction

which is generated by long opposition to it, and the contempt which but too often follows the reluctant triumph it obtains. I shall not be understood, I trust, as if I thought that this House, and much less the legislature at large, ought to yield or respond to every casual and transient impulse of popular feeling or excitement. It is its first duty, on the other hand, to watch such impulses with jealousy, and wherever it truly appears that they are but casual and transient, to resist them with firmness and dignity. But I think it can scarcely be denied, that, from want of a due sympathy, or sufficient means of communication, this resistance has been too often, and, I would almost say, systematically, continued far longer than was justifiable, and extended to cases where it should never for a moment have existed. I would say, generally, that most *Wars* have been inexorably protracted, for years after the public voice had justly condemned them. I would say the same thing of the abomination of the Slave Trade, of the sanguinary parts of our Criminal Law, of the Game Laws, and generally of that system of wasteful expenditure, and scandalous abuse of Patronage, for purposes of selfishness or corruption, from which the Government was only driven, after incurable distaste and resentment had been excited by nearly half a century of resistance. The mere needless continuance of the folly and abuse, is but a small part of the mischief of this habitual rejection of public opinion—this obstinate cling-

ing to discredited and detected iniquities. The fatal evil is, the distrust and dislike of which the legislature, and this House, especially, necessarily become the objects—which alienates from the Government the confidence and affections of the people, and produces that unhappy state of public feeling, which is truly aggravated, rather than allayed, by the tardy and compulsive compliance which is at last ungracefully yielded, and thanklessly and scornfully received. In a reformed Parliament, I think it is obvious that no such thing could occur.

But there is another advantage which I think this Reform can scarcely fail to secure, which appears to me of still greater importance, with regard both to the contentment and the permanent prosperity of the people. I am aware, that no Reform will give them absolute prosperity. No man can be more deeply convinced, that the greater part of their distresses arise from causes over which Government has no controul; and I think that those who would teach them otherwise, act a very weak or a very wicked part. But such, unhappily, is not their general opinion; they think, naturally enough, perhaps, in most cases certainly excusably, that most of their sufferings are owing to our misgovernment; and that if it was not for the selfishness and hard-hearted indifference of the Legislature, they might all be comfortable and happy. Nothing, I admit, can be more absurd and extravagant. But, as long as they see the Legislature

composed entirely of persons, nominated almost exclusively by the higher Aristocracy, and find themselves, very generally, excluded from all share in the election of their Representatives, you may be assured, that they will continue to be of that opinion ; and to indulge in all those feelings of animosity and distrust, that now prevail to so unfortunate an extent among them. But the Reform we now propose, will disabuse them, I think, of these errors,—and is the only thing that will disabuse them. They will not take *our* word, when we tell them, that we feel deeply for their sufferings, and are doing all we can for their relief, although for much of their miseries there is no relief in our power. They will not take our word for this,—for we are strangers to them, and are sent here, apparently at least, for other interests than theirs. But when at last they have Representatives of their own choosing—when they have deputed to Parliament individuals, on whose thorough knowledge of their situation, and whose sincere anxiety to befriend them, they place entire reliance, they will, and they must believe the testimony which is brought back to them by these Representatives. And if they report, as they must necessarily do, that this House is not deaf to their prayers, nor insensible to their sufferings ; but that, while measures are actually taking for their partial relief, it appears to be really impossible to eradicate poverty, or to create beneficial employment, I do not think I am too sanguine, when I conclude, that they may, at last, be taught that there are evils, in every human lot, for which



Governments are no way responsible, and for which laws can provide no effectual remedy; and that, instead of indulging in idle resentments, or deluding themselves with the hopes of impossible relief, they should co-operate, by their own providence, with the beneficent intentions of Government, and wait, in patience, for that fortunate change in their relations, which cannot be accelerated, though it may be retarded, by turbulence and abuse.

For this reason, as well as for many others, I hail the appearance of the Honourable Member for Preston in this House. I flatter myself, he has already learned to think more favourably, than when he first entered it, of the disposition of this House towards those classes, whom he considers as more peculiarly his constituents; that he now believes in their sincere sympathy with their sufferings, and even that there are far greater difficulties in the way of their relief than he had formerly imagined; and I trust, that he will not fail to report his altered opinion to those over whom he has so much influence; and so begin the good work, which, I trust, this great measure will complete. [Here the Honourable Member for Preston intimated his dissent in some points from the speaker, who went on.] I am sorry the Honourable Member does not quite agree with me; but he is yet but in his noviciate; and when we have had him a little longer among us, I doubt not that we shall convert him entirely.

In the mean time, allow me to say a word on the subject of that cry or clamour, which Honourable Gentle-

men, on the other side, will have it, is all that the advocates for this Reform can produce to justify or support it, and on the strange allegation of their having themselves been the raisers of that cry! There has been a cry certainly; and, certainly, it has not only been raised in former times, but it has also, apparently, subsided, or been intermitted; from which they would infer, that its causes are merely temporary, that it may now be resisted as safely as it has been resisted before; and that if we merely do nothing, we shall speedily see it subside, and die away. I cannot persuade myself, that those read either the past or the present with intelligence, who so interpret the signs of the times before us. True, the cry for Reform has formerly subsided; but has it not always revived; and, at every revival, been echoed from a wider circle, and in a louder tone?

Is not the very fact, that all national excitements, of whatever kind,—the pressure of internal distress, the sympathy with foreign triumphs, uniformly receive this passion for Reform—a proof that it is not an accidental symptom, but a constitutional affection—the indication of a deep rooted disease, which every excitement calls into action, and at every recurrence in an aggravated form? It has slept, indeed, by fits, but has never been dead; and it wakes, at last, like a giant refreshed, to bid defiance to all attempts at opposition. Occasional causes there have been, no doubt; but the great exciting cause has been the spread of intelligence, and the actual increase of the grievance, from the increasing numbers

of those who suffer by its continuance. When the Right Honourable Secretary for Foreign Affairs said, that but for the proceedings as to East Retford, this Bill might not have been necessary, he did not mean that a better issue of those proceedings would have finally satisfied the wishes of English Reformers, but only that it might have, for a while, postponed the crisis, which an opposite issue no doubt contributed to bring on. There were occasional causes, no doubt, at work, along with the great internal agencies, which determined, perhaps, the moment of that consummation, which, of themselves, they could neither produce, nor prevent. The manner and the moment of all great events, are ever determined by such causes; but the events themselves have always a deeper principle, and depend on a higher fate. Mr. Fox has recorded, that the year before the revolution, 1688, the tyranny of the Stuarts seemed more secure, and the cause of liberty more hopeless, than at any other period. Some authors ascribe the immediate cause of that great event to the trial of the Bishops, and some to the proceedings at Oxford; but no men of common sense will, therefore, contend that the event itself was casual, or that it had any other real cause than the gradual accumulation of just discontent and apprehension, arising from a systematic persistence in injustice, and an obstinate refusal of redress. There were occasional causes here, too; the mortifying issue of the proceedings as to East Retford, and the fatal determination which the people read in those proceedings, to resist any measure, and any degree of

Reform ; the proceedings, and the tone and temper of the defence of the proceedings, at Newark, the shameful exposure of the state of our official pensions, and, generally, the disgusting spectacle of corruption and venality which was displayed at the general election ; these things naturally excited the impatience and the zeal of the people. To say that the passion for Reform originated with the present Ministers, or the present Ministry, is too palpably absurd, and contradictory to dates and transactions. It was a common topic at most of the elections, before the present Ministry had been imagined, or its Members communicated with each other ; and the absence of all reference to it in the King's Speech, at the opening of the Session, occasioned a general disappointment, as well as the omission of all mention of prevailing distress. Then came the fatal pledge of the head of the former Government against all reform, along with a repeated denial of the existence of general distress ; and in that moment, the cry of indignation and impatience went forth from all parts of the land ; and it was seen and felt that Reform was unavoidable, if the peace of the country was to be preserved ! The Ministry gave way before that cry ; and the very men who could not keep their places against it, while it was yet but a popular clamour, and unaccredited by official countenance, now hope to regain them by opposing it, when it has taken the shape of a grave and deliberate measure of the accredited Ministers of the Crown !

I have said more than enough, perhaps, on this

strange proposition ; but as a Member for Scotland, I cannot pass over the most important, perhaps, of the occasional causes by which the feelings of that part of the country have been excited on this occasion ; I mean the memorable declaration of the Right Honourable Member for Edinburgh, that he did not believe there was any desire for Reform in that city, or in the country in general. The reason assigned for that opinion is not less singular than the opinion itself. It was, that a Petition had been sent from Edinburgh, but a few years before, earnestly praying for Reform, and signed by 7000 or 8000 persons ; but that no new Petition had been since presented. The challenge thus given, was accepted ; the construction thus unfeelingly put on their forbearance was indignantly refuted ; and in a few weeks a new Petition, signed by upwards of 21,000 persons, was sent up from the citizens of Edinburgh. Glasgow followed with 33,000 ; and from every city, town, village, and parish, almost, of the country, similar Petitions have ever since poured in. And here, for the sake of my countrymen, I am bound to state, not only that those Petitions do not proceed from any persons entertaining designs against the Government, or in rebellion against the law ; but that so far as Scotland is concerned, there is really no room for such an imputation. The disorders that have afflicted portions of the South, have not penetrated to that country. It is my official duty to ascertain the condition of all its districts as to disorders, and tendency to crime ; and I am proud to say, that it never was in a more orderly or peaceful

condition. We have had no burnings, and no machine breaking. Some movements towards combinations about wages may have been traced near Glasgow, but even these attended with no violence or terror; and the minds even of the distressed operatives so generally informed, that I observe the Society for the promotion of useful Knowledge, in a most meritorious work they have recently published, have bottomed their argument in favour of the use of machinery, on the answers made on that subject by an unemployed Glasgow weaver, when examined before a Committee of that Society. I am not aware that the present Ministers are accused of having extended their agitations to Scotland; and yet from that peaceful, thoughtful, orderly, and loyal people, more Petitions for Reform have been sent up, than from any other equal portion of the population.

One word more, Sir, on the subject of intimidation, and I have done. I shall say nothing as to the intimidation which the advocates of this measure are accused of having practised upon their opponents—for that imputation really seems too absurd to deserve an answer—I shall speak only to that of which they are supposed to be themselves the victims. The Right Honourable Baronet opposite has told us, that instead of submitting their fears to their judgment, they seemed to have submitted their judgment to their fears. If to foresee and to provide against coming danger, be unworthy of a courageous Statesman, they probably deserve this heavy imputation. But I will not now trespass on the indulgence of the House by

pursuing that discussion. I wish only, in concluding, to point out the difference between the fears of these magnanimous gentlemen who reproach the authors of this measure with pusillanimity, and the fears by which it has been partly suggested. The main argument against the measure is founded on fear—a fear, I must say, the most exaggerated, and least likely to fall on a brave or constant man, of any I can well imagine—the fear that by yielding their just demands to the loyal, respectable, and intelligent proprietors of middle rank in this kingdom, such strength will be given to the disloyal, ignorant, and destitute persons who hate the Constitution, and defy the law, that it will be no longer possible to protect it against them. This, Sir, I do submit to the House, is a visionary and fantastic fear; and I think stands not very respectably contrasted with the fears which those who are actuated by it impute to their opponents. We fear, Sir, and do not scruple to confess that we fear, the consequences of refusing the *just requests* of a petitioning nation: but we do *not* fear the threats or the clamours of those who would invade the property, or insult the laws of the country; and the difference between us and our antagonists is shortly this—that *we fear to do injustice*, lest the right should be too strong for us; and that *they fear to do justice*, lest those who seek more than justice should profit by the example!

N

15

831

14



JN  
215  
1831  
J4

THE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE  
STAMPED BELOW.

Series 9482

