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WHAT HAVE THE LORDS DONE?

AND

WHAT WILL THEY DO NEXT?

. Ubique
Luctus, ubique pavor.

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WHAT HAVE THE LORDS DONE?

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WHAT WILL THEY DO NEXT?

FROM the moment the late Reform Bill had passed the House of Commons, an intense anxiety was felt for its discussion in the House of Peers. There was some variety of conjecture as to the result. In well-informed circles, symptoms of distrust and apprehension were discernible; but these did not extend to the mass of the community, among whom a cheering anticipation of success prevailed to the last.

The extent of public opinion in its favour had been plainly ascertained by the number of its parliamentary supporters. Their numerical strength was alone sufficient to give extraordinary weight to their decision. Yet it was entitled to far higher consideration when it appeared that this strength also expressed the sentiments of the *great body of the people*. It was clear, from an analysis of the votes, an overwhelming majority of the *national representatives* approved of the Bill. The minority chiefly consisted of members for close boroughs

proposed to be disfranchised. Such a demonstration of opinion, combined with the cordial concurrence of his Majesty in the measure, seemed to carry irresistible recommendations for its favourable reception to the House of Peers. That House had been often known to act in concert with the Crown against the Commons. It had rarely, if ever, been opposed to the united wishes of the Sovereign and the People. Its instant acquiescence in them on the Catholic question, afforded a happy omen as to the result of its deliberations in the present case. The settlement of *that* question had long been resisted on religious as well as political grounds. The fears of papal superstition and tyranny repeatedly obstructed all efforts in its favour. Reason, experience, eloquence, pleaded for it—but in vain. At length a message from the Throne effected what every thing else had failed to accomplish. The King and Commons concurred in a desire to relieve his Roman Catholic subjects, and the Lords, guided by true policy, waived all farther opposition to their relief. Even the Right Reverend Prelates of the Church surrendered up their long-cherished apprehensions for its safety, in deference to the Sovereign's will. This proceeding, so fresh in the memory of all, gave the strongest possible encouragement to the hopes of the Reformers. There were now no terrors of Romish craft and supremacy to contend with.

There were the prayers of a united empire to be listened to, when in the former case the claims of a small and remote portion of it had prevailed. Every thing conspired to animate the confidence of the people. The Monarch had generously embraced their cause. Their Representatives had honourably fulfilled their duty. It was not to be expected that the Peers would spurn the demands of the nation acknowledged as legitimate by the authority of the Crown.—In the memory of no man living had its authority been disputed by that right honourable House!

Such was the state of public feeling previous to the discussion of the Lords on the Bill. The King was popular beyond all former example—the Prelates of the Established Church were venerated for their piety—the Nobility of the land were held in respect. All promised well for the future peace and prosperity of the kingdom. The Reform question once at rest, industry and quiet would have resumed their sway among the people; the aristocracy would have reaped a rich harvest of gratitude from their concession to popular feeling; the church, though evidently destined to undergo some modification of its temporalities, would have exalted itself as a religious body in the esteem and confidence of the nation. These were the expectations of sober-minded men, well-wishers to their country, some weeks ago.

What have the Lords done ?

They have for the present blighted, and for the future endangered, all these fair prospects of national happiness and tranquillity. They have thrown the country into unexampled disorder and confusion. They have rendered many of themselves objects of general contempt and aversion, to which their whole body may hereafter be exposed, unless their Lordships should timely avert such a misfortune. One source of satisfaction, indeed, remains for us, and it is invaluable—they happily had not the power to deprive the nation of *their* unbounded attachment to the King, nor of *his* magnanimous adherence to their cause. But the evils they have entailed on the country are deplorable. An excited state of society is utterly destructive to the peaceful pursuits of the people;—the longer it is procrastinated, the difficulty of returning to their usual habits becomes greater, and the danger of insurrectionary movements increased. Trade stagnates—industry is paralyzed—confidence is overthrown. The ferment spreads wider and wider, and, instead of wasting itself, gains strength, by the diffusion. No man can foresee how or where it is to explode into open violence. No man can predict who or how many may fall victims to its effects. Such is the precarious condition of things at present, arising from the unfortunate decision of the Lords.

All is one scene of anxiety, suspense and trepidation. Nothing seems fixed, but the calm, resolute, unconquerable determination of the multitude to obtain their rights.

This is not the whole of the evil.—Popular commotion, however violent, must subside with time; as surely as order sprang out of chaos, so will the wildest tempest of insurrection be succeeded by a national calm. But though the vessel of the state should survive the rage of the waters, her strength and beauty and durability may be most materially impaired. The Church and Aristocracy of England are considered among the proudest ornaments of her boasted constitution. Like every other branch of that constitution they derive existence from, and are indebted for their preservation to, *public opinion*. If there ever was a period when it was dangerous to trifle with this opinion, it is *now*. The moral energies of men throughout Europe are excited. Every where may be observed some irrepressible heavings of the spirit to shake off the cumbrous weight of ancient systems—to separate the dross from the gold. The progress of the human understanding, the “march of intellect,” has become a bye-word with the ignorant, who cannot discern, and the imbecile, who cannot comprehend it. But how shall we controul the mind in its progress, or what shall we gain by attempting to impede or to divert it? We must bear her company, and steer

under her pilotage, and trim our sails as she directs our course; otherwise we shall infallibly be wrecked on the shoals and quicksands thrown up by our own bigotry and infatuation.

Public opinion can only become formidable and dangerous by resistance. Opposition tends to expand its growth and increase its strength till at last it is invincible. Were its influence acknowledged when it had once acquired sufficient force to make itself be heard, how rarely would it lose its reverence for existing institutions. By gradually moulding these as the wants or wishes of society required, the distrust in their efficacy would be averted, and a respect for their value preserved. By refusing to do so, time and opportunity are given to swell the mass of popular dissatisfaction to a bulk which must inevitably crush them beneath it. To such a destiny every human system is exposed, by the obstinate denial of seasonable reforms. Nothing can be more certain than the danger the Church and Aristocracy at this moment incur by placing themselves in hostility to the People. History has been read to little purpose by the venerable Prelates who voted against Reform, if the interests of the Established Religion and of their own order were the objects of their consideration. What swept away the Romish hierarchy from the proud station it once possessed within these realms? What abolished Episcopacy in Scot-

land, in defiance of all the efforts of the English Crown to maintain it? What, but the force of public opinion, indignantly flinging off its reverence for long cherished objects? Could the Right Reverend Bench learn from these examples no caution to guide them in their course? In the ecclesiastical history of Scotland they might have seen a clergy richly endowed—deeply engaged in political intrigues—and constantly leagued with a crafty aristocracy against the rights and liberties of the people—often sowing dissension and caballing against the Crown—seldom contributing to promote “peace and good-will among men.”—Always the confederates and confidants of the oppressor. Rarely the friends and protectors of the oppressed.—They lived their little hour in unprofitable splendour and vain security—their downfall was doomed!—The cry of “the Church in danger” has been often raised in modern times for political purposes—it never was nor ever will be in danger except from the materials of evil generated within itself. In Scotland the patience of the people was at length exhausted. They rose with irresistible resolution and drove their once proud but servile prelates from the land. Yet religion did not decline, nor did the country suffer. For a time the irrational efforts made to restore the fallen church, rendered Scotland the scene of conflict and commotion.

But having surmounted these, and established her right to choose her own form of worship, she entered on a course of peace and prosperity, and now affords a striking example of the benefits she has reaped. Is there nothing in all this to furnish food for reflection to the venerable fathers of the English Church? Some may perhaps deem such cases of too extreme a nature to merit attention. Let them look to the annals of their own Church during the seventeenth century. Can they find nothing *there* to warn them against rendering the guardians of its peace and purity obnoxious to the people? Did Parliament at that time, in depriving them of their privileges, heed the solemnity with which they protested against the unconstitutional violation of their presumed rights?

Will it be argued that such warning should be disregarded by men acting under a sense of duty?

What are the obligations imposed upon a British Legislator? To preserve the stability of the Constitution in Church and State: to maintain a reverence for religion and a respect for the laws: to promote the happiness and welfare of the people.

Every man, desirous of conscientiously fulfilling these obligations, must take reason and experience to guide him. In tranquil times and on ordinary occasions, a moderate share of fore-

thought and precaution may be all that is required. But in periods of great political excitement it is otherwise: legislators are then bound to bring the whole force of their acquired knowledge and deliberative power to bear on measures proposed for its assuagement. If they merely regard what appears to them the obvious tendency of these measures, they may be the means of frustrating the very purposes they are sworn to promote. At such periods, it often happens that nothing is left for men but a choice of evils. Every one will, of course, select that which he considers to be the least. But no wise or conscientious man will form his decision without accurately weighing the nature of the several evils. As these are generally latent and prospective, he must acquire the necessary information from the sources of history—from the analogies in human conduct under similar circumstances at different periods of time—from the testimonies of observation and experience. To these he must anxiously look for instruction, if he wish to discharge his duties faithfully. Now history would have informed the Right Reverend Prelates of the danger of exasperating a People against the rulers of a Church. Common experience might have taught them that these were not times to trifle with the passions of the community. The Church of England at the present moment requires the nicest care and

discretion, the most enlarged wisdom and liberality on the part of all her ministers, to preserve that public reverence to which she is justly entitled, but which she has unfortunately lost to a considerable extent. These are not the high and palmy days of her prosperity, when she might play with the temper and affections of the people in the consciousness of her strength. The period has passed, when the terrors of Papal superstition spread a rampart around her, which no hostile arm dared to assail. Time has given birth to another race of enemies, fully as inveterate towards her as her ancient and once solitary rival. Under such circumstances, what is her obvious policy? To conciliate, assuredly, rather than to irritate the public mind. To strengthen the attachment of her friends, and mitigate the jealousy of her enemies, instead of alienating the one, and inflaming the other. It is deeply to be lamented that her Right Reverend guardians did not see the wisdom of this policy on the late occasion. In the case of the Catholic Question, they were, though tardily and reluctantly, at length guided by it. They acknowledged the force of circumstances, and yielded to necessity what they had long withheld on principle. How could they contrive to blind themselves to the possible occurrence of such a necessity in the case of the Reform Question? Is it because our Saviour's fine reproof was directed against the

hypocrisy of the Pharisees, that good men so often overlook its application to themselves? “Ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times?”

There has been a tendency in the minds of the people of late years to withdraw their accustomed respect and confidence from the Aristocracy. As the lower classes advanced in intelligence, the haughty demeanour of the higher ranks naturally became galling. They witnessed with dissatisfaction the reluctance of the rich to part with the smallest fraction of their pleasures or privileges, however incompatible with the rights or the morals of the poor. They saw more clearly the inequality with which the laws often deal out justice to the wealthy and the humble. They obtained a deeper insight to the practices, which had transferred a great constitutional privilege from *their* hands to a few favoured individuals. A growing spirit of jealousy has been the unavoidable consequence of this rapidly extending knowledge. With an instinctive dread of its effects, a clamour was once raised against the education of the people. But it was soon overborne by the philanthropy of the middle classes; instead of viewing it as a source of *injury*, they justly looked to it as a means of *security* to the State. But let education be for good or for evil, to restore the *golden age* of ignorance is no longer practicable. To accommo-

date themselves to the change is the only thing left for the Aristocracy. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ!* Men naturally cling to the possession of all they have long enjoyed. But it is wisdom to relinquish as a favour what must cease to be retained as a right. The traffic in boroughs is doomed without mercy to extinction. The money changers must be driven from the temple. It is painful to witness the impotent and vindictive struggles of some noble Lords on this occasion. They are writhing in all the agonies of rage and disappointment. They have reached the last paroxysm of their hopeless case. But why this humiliating forgetfulness of habitual dignity? Why this gratuitous excitement of popular derision? Do they really imagine themselves able to frustrate the measure of Reform? They might as reasonably expect to turn the courses of the tide, as to stem the torrent of opinion now bursting its way through all the channels of society. The power of the Peers is great, and great it ought to remain. But what can they do against the might of a nation enrolled under the banner of a King, to whom all, except themselves, are enthusiastically devoted?

The Lords have not only plunged the country into unparalleled embarrassment, but have exposed the privileged orders to unjust odium, the innocent being equally confounded with the guilty. They have, for a season at least, violently severed

the bond of union between themselves and the affections of the people. They unfortunately possess not the power, or they take not the pains, to ascertain the nature of the public feeling towards them. Their whole stock of information on the subject seems to be acquired from the shouts or hisses of the mob. As long as they are moved by a sense of duty, they may, and doubtless do, feel equally indifferent to these. But what sense of duty can require them to despise the opinion of the intelligent multitude, graduating through all the intermediate stages of society from themselves to the lowest in the scale? The voice of this multitude, it is to be apprehended, does not reach their ears. They hear not the sound of its indignant condemnation, though poured forth from countless tongues throughout the kingdom. They, perchance, read the invectives of angry speeches at Reform Meetings, published in the daily journals. But these convey no notion of the bitter scorn, the contemptuous mockery, the deep disgust, with which their name is daily coupled in the table-talk of millions. They convey no notion of the "curses, not loud, but deep," muttered in the homes of multitudes, where there is no pen to report nor press to record them. Such indications of popular feeling must be utterly unknown to their Lordships. They cannot penetrate the halls where pomp and luxury preside—flatterers *will* not, and dependants *dare* not reveal

them. But such things *are*, as their Lordships may learn to the cost of themselves and the country, should they persist in opposing the just desires of the people. There is a natural tendency in the human mind to identify the abuses of a system with the system itself, and, however unjustly, to hold it responsible for the conduct of those who abuse it. To avert the possible effects of such a tendency, is fortunately within the power of their Lordships. Let them respond favourably and reasonably to the importunate demands of the nation, and they will quickly regain all the respect they have lost. The angry passions of men will be soothed by the peaceful consummation of their wishes. No longer left to brood over their wrongs, the generous hearts of Britons will relent at an unequivocal, though late, concession to their feelings. To frustrate the measure is utterly beyond the power of the Lords; to restore themselves to the confidence and goodwill of the public, ought to be the sole object of their consideration. On their next decision everything depends!—the peace, unanimity and happiness of the empire,—the stability of the constitution,—the permanency of the privileged orders, and the preservation of the Church. A decision involving such momentous consequences, naturally becomes a matter of the most anxious speculation. Every mind, at this moment, seems agitated and perplexed. The wishes of nine-tenths of the

community are the same. But among some their fears outweigh their hopes, when it is asked—
What will the Lords do next?

In general, the country entertains a strong belief that their Lordships will retrace their steps, and terminate the evils occasioned by their late decision. The personal characters of many, and the circumstances attending that decision, afford every reasonable ground for such a belief.

Had the Peers succeeded in overthrowing the ministry, the battle of Reform must have been renewed at the outposts, and the field have been fairly fought for again. But the victory may be said to be virtually won, by the failure of the attempt to dislodge them.

The position of the Lords differs most materially from what it was previous to their rejection of the Bill. The hope of defeating it might, ere that event, have been reasonably entertained. Subsequent circumstances have removed every prospect of doing so. The King remains steadfast to the ministry and the nation. The people have triumphantly refuted the charge of being indifferent to the measure. Any further opposition on the part of the Lords, then, would seem little else than a wanton and reckless perseverance in wrong,—an unprecedented defiance of the other estates of the kingdom,—a direct contravention to the wishes of the nation and the authority of the

Crown, that might substantiate every thing, at present unwarrantably, attributed to them.

No man is entitled, from any evidence now before him, to suppose a majority of the Peers capable of acting from unworthy motives:—from a desire to maintain a mere *nominal* consistency, or to conquer their political antagonists at *any* expense. On the contrary, every one imbued with the slightest tincture of charity will refuse to entertain such an opinion, unless he should hereafter have satisfactory proofs of its truth.

The Lords may be fairly charged with having grievously erred from the course of true policy and wisdom. But their conduct hitherto, though utterly indefensible in a *political*, may be perfectly excusable in a *moral* view. The motives of some, no doubt, were too obviously factious and interested to escape detection; but it is not to be presumed that the conduct of all sprung from the same source. The best men are often thrown by circumstances into co-operation with the worst. Similar views of the expediency or in expediency of a measure, may be adopted by various members of a party with very different designs. Political questions are of so complicated a nature, and furnish matter for such diversity of thought and speculation, that the purest minds may act in concert with the basest respecting them, free from alloy. It is not at once that evil communications corrupt.

That the House of Lords was entitled to reject the Bill sent to them from the Commons, no one of common understanding denies. When the constitution invested it with the right of doing so, it was in contemplation of the uses for which it might be employed. The case in question, on a *prima facie* view of it, afforded justifiable grounds for employing it. The power of using a right or privilege, alone bestows a value on it; that it must cease to be valuable, when the liberty of exercising it is withheld, is perfectly clear. Hence the natural and allowable jealousy of all men at any seeming attempt to controul the exercise of the rights, privileges or prerogatives they enjoy. But the Peers had been treated for some time past as if they were inaccessible to any such jealousy; as if they were not endued with the common feelings of human nature, for the defence and protection of their rights. These rights were challenged as opposed to those of the people, though all rights are distributed by the constitution equally for the benefit of *all*. The conduct of many noble Lords on the late occasion, there is every reason to believe, might be traced to displeasure at such rash attempts to interfere with their prerogative. It cannot be imagined, indeed, that any of the majority were favourable to the Bill; on the contrary, all were more or less, and many irreconcilably adverse to it. Some,

however, hesitated as to the policy of voting against it, and powerful motives concurred to overcome the hostility of its less violent and less interested opponents. Had these been allowed to operate, the result might have been different. The unfortunate attempts alluded to, raised up a counteracting influence, and turned the balance against the Bill.

In the course of these attempts, the House of Lords was treated with far too little consideration—in some instances with determined disrespect. It is natural that men, imbued with a high sense of honour and personal courage, should shrink from a suspicion of being intimidated in the discharge of a great public duty;—that, filling the most exalted station as the hereditary judges and legislators of the land, they should recoil from the thought of becoming mere instruments of the popular will;—that, proud of having a sacred trust committed to them by the Constitution, they should revolt at the efforts to render it nugatory in their hands. Such feelings could have no weight with noble Lords confirmed in their approbation of the measure, and resolved to support it; but they may have had considerable effect on many who were undecided.

It may be asked, how men, with conscientious intentions, could incur the responsibility of resisting a measure so loudly called for by the people?

Let it be remembered that the prejudices of many, combined with the feelings just described, may have incapacitated them from seeing this responsibility. The danger most clearly revealed and deeply impressed on *their* minds, was that of being awed into a surrender of their just prerogative;—that of compromising for ever the safety of their rights and privileges, by a prompt submission to what they considered the *dictation* of the people. Apprehensions such as these may have determined the opposition of many, otherwise prepared to grant what the country desired. Nor can men, sincerely averse to the measure, be morally culpable for overlooking, under such apprehensions, the pressing exigencies of the occasion. Blameable they were (with all respect it must be confessed), for not exercising their faculties—for not inquiring—for not acquainting themselves with the true state of public feeling—for not opening their eyes to the “signs of the times;”—but certainly not blameable, as far as can be seen, for obliquity of purpose or baseness of design.

Besides this, some might conscientiously assist in endeavouring to overthrow a ministry capable of making so rash an experiment as they deemed the measure to be. They might also have anticipated a change in the current of public opinion, as the natural accompaniment of such a result.

While we can reasonably ascribe honourable

motives to men, we must refrain from charging them with others. Many noble Lords may have voted in the majority without meriting the odium so unjustly and indiscriminately lavished upon all. To believe this, is not only an act of duty to them, but it is a strong ground of hope and confidence for the country. Honest men are ever prompt to acknowledge an error and to repair a wrong. To persist in either, is unworthy of a manly or virtuous mind.

The whole state of things is now changed. The Lords have maintained their rights. They have asserted their authority and prerogative. They have upheld the dignity of their House. Can they require any thing more to satisfy their sense of what is due to themselves? Can any extenuating motives be urged in defence of those who are prepared for further resistance?

The nature of the public feeling and the circumstances of the country are such as no man can conscientiously overlook. They speak trumpet-tongued for a speedy and peaceful settlement of the question. They peremptorily require a wise, temperate and conciliating course of conduct on the part of their Lordships. They had been told, and many of them believed, a reaction had taken place in public opinion on the subject. The currency given to this delusion has produced a sensation sufficient to dispossess the most tenacious mind of such a belief. Noble Lords *may*

blind themselves to the danger of a general insurrection; but they *cannot* close their eyes against the multifarious mischiefs inflicted on society. No man can wilfully contribute to protract such evils with credit to himself, if it be in his power, without a sacrifice of integrity, to allay them. There is no one ostensible reason why their Lordships should persist in their opposition to the measure. There are the most obvious and urgent motives for their forbearance. The safety of the constitution—the interests of the country—the peace of society, are all involved in their proceedings. The first, they are placing in a state of imminent peril; the others, they are actually destroying.

But can they persevere on any ground of prudence or policy, considered merely with reference to themselves?

Their first step has been one of so much rashness and precipitation, and the position they have taken is so encumbered with difficulty, that their only safe course seems to be that of retreat.

They have already exercised their prerogative for what they considered an attainable as well as a justifiable object, namely, the overthrow of the Ministry and the defeat of the Bill. So far they may have satisfied their own minds with the consciousness of discharging a duty. They may not have foreseen the embarrassing circumstances to

which they were reducing both the country and themselves. But these are now clearly revealed to them. Had their Lordships accepted the Bill from the Commons, and allowed it to pass even in an abortive condition, they might have thrown the odium as well as the onus of exercising their prerogative on one or other of the remaining estates: or, had they succeeded in overturning the Ministry, they would have placed themselves in collision *only* with the Lower House. As it is, they stand in a most unenviable predicament. In the first place, they have entangled themselves in a contest with the Crown and the Commons *combined*: secondly, they have exhausted all their power against the popular measure without effect; and thirdly, they have afforded ample justification for the fullest exercise of *their powers*, on the part of the other estates.

The prerogatives separately entrusted to the three estates of the realm, were designed for the security of the Constitution and the general welfare of the kingdom. They may, like everything else, be *used*, but cannot be *abused*, with impunity. If they are rashly or repeatedly exerted in opposition to each other, the Constitution must materially suffer, and would probably be destroyed. Each estate possesses its respective power for the purpose of preserving *the balance essential to their joint existence*. Unless they all conspire,

then, to use it with the utmost forbearance and the soundest discretion, this purpose must be defeated; the balance will be overthrown. In the present instance, the first estate, with admirable tact and wisdom, testified its reluctance to proceed beyond the ordinary forms of the Constitution. The example, it may be felt, was well worthy of imitation by the Peers. But their Lordships thought differently; and in their zeal to defeat a measure, obnoxious *only* to themselves, resorted to an expedient of the *last extremity*. Having adopted this course without success, can they pursue it farther under the plea of protecting their own estate or the Constitution at large? Can they venture to incur the responsibility of the consequences that may ensue, and that they alone must sustain? After refusing to take example from the forbearance of the Crown—after declining to use the more temperate forms known to them for an adjustment with the Commons—after seizing on the strongest means afforded them for obstructing the wishes of the People, sanctioned by the authority of the King—and after having failed in their design,—what can they hope to gain by, or what justification could be offered for, a repetition of the proceeding? By the course they recently took, they have, in fact, deprived themselves of all grounds of self confidence and support. In every point of view,

physical, moral, and political, their Lordships have placed themselves in the wrong.

They are *physically* wrong, inasmuch as the chances are incalculably against the House of Peers sustaining a struggle with the two other estates at the same moment of time. Though their strength was far superior to what it is, the united power of their antagonists must ultimately defeat them.

They are *morally* wrong, inasmuch as they are endeavouring to uphold the interests of a few to the prejudice of those of the community. In the measure they rejected, the Commons were chiefly, if not solely, concerned. The concurrence of the Crown for the accomplishment of such a measure, afforded the strongest presumption in favour of its propriety. Hence the suspicions very generally entertained, that the opposition of the Lords was influenced by selfish motives.

They are *politically* wrong, inasmuch as they have unnecessarily arrayed themselves in hostility to the two other estates. They compel the Crown by their perseverance to adopt a course, from which, in deference to them and the future welfare of the country, it has hitherto abstained. They have only the alternative of acquiescing in the proposed measure, or submitting to an infusion of members into their house.

Now, when men have taken a false position, common prudence and discretion, if nothing else,

require them to withdraw from it as quietly and speedily as possible. Every noble Lord, whose object is the welfare of his country, will readily acknowledge the obligation of doing so on the present occasion. The popular measure of Reform *may* be productive of evils. But they are only obscurely shadowed out even to the most acute comprehension of those who predict them. Whereas the evils of resisting it are visible to all men, are in actual operation, and are ominous of the most disastrous events. The Constitution *may* be endangered by the passing of the Bill; but the danger is not urgent—it must be the work of time, be it more or less. Whereas the Constitution *is* this moment endangered by its rejection. *The estates of the realm are in direct collision with each other!* Can there be conceived a case of greater hazard to the Constitution, short of actual revolt? If it be prolonged, the whole frame of the Government must quickly be dissolved. Is this a position of things where noble Lords can continue to struggle, not about the *principle* of Reform, *but the degree in which it is safest to concede it?*

The only cause of difference between the parties on the question at present is, the kind or measure of Reform fittest to be granted. Will posterity believe, that it is solely for this *the peace and safety of the empire have been endangered?*

No man any longer declares Reform to be in itself absolutely wrong—no man avows himself ready to perish with the existing system, rather than see it altered in any of its details. On the contrary, *all* express their conviction that Reform is necessary. Even they who some months ago maintained this system to be absolutely perfect, now confess themselves ready to despoil it of its perfection, *in compliance with the exigency of the time*. Whence this universal admission of the necessity of Reform? It is not voluntary on the part of its once uncompromising opponents. It has been extorted from them by the voice of a united people, compacted together for the attainment of a common end. There is no instance in British history where so vast a multitude was ever before in so close a bond of sympathy and accordance for a political purpose. No instance where the three great divisions of the empire were leagued together under one tie of interest and feeling for an object equally valuable to all. Ages have passed since the union of the *Crowns*—till now, there never was witnessed the union of the *people*,—and what has effected this mighty union? *The ministerial measure of Reform!* This alone has given strength, solidity, consistency, and cohesion to the great body of the people, hitherto divided and separated by conflicting theories on the subject. To no other measure it was possible

to frame, would the voice of the nation have responded so unanimously. Before this unanimity the boldest heart among the anti-reformers has quailed.

But while they acknowledge the influence of the popular opinion in favour of Reform, they deny the necessity of the very measure to which it is alone indebted for its resistless force. They admit, that the Constitution can no longer be safe, unless some concession is made to the people: yet they absolutely endanger its existence by opposing the *only* concession likely to appease them!

Now if Reform be necessary *at all*, in consequence of the unanimous desire of the nation, it is obvious that no measure can meet that necessity, except the one which the nation desires. When the people coalesce in such numbers as to render resistance hopeless, nothing can be more extravagant than an attempt to pacify them by a mere nominal compliance with their demands. Supposing an insubstantial Reform to be granted, can it be imagined it would prove satisfactory to the great body of the community? Numbers, perhaps, wearied in the struggle, and anxious for quiet, would be *silenced*, without being *satisfied*. Disappointment, however, would inevitably accrue from the inadequacy of the measure to fulfil the wishes of the people. Sup-

pressed resentment would subsequently break forth with exasperated bitterness and aggravated discontent.

These would be the inevitable consequences of a nominal Reform, admitting the possibility of effecting such a measure in the present temper of the nation.

What then would the Aristocracy, now opposed to the wishes of the nation, gain by their conduct? A little *time*, no doubt—a brief *postponement* of what they consider the evil day;—but how fearfully would this advantage be counterbalanced by a constantly increasing inveteracy towards them and their order? How dearly might they have to purchase it by that sanguinary collision with the country, to which they would eventually be exposed?

Some noble Lords, it has been said, foresee such a collision as the result of the popular measure, and deem it advisable to try the strength of the parties in an immediate conflict, rather than yield. This argues a perversion of mind that ought not on light authority to be ascribed to any man. *Animus paratus ad periculum, si sua cupiditate, non utilitate communi, impellitur, audaciæ potius nomen habeat, quam fortitudinis.*

But it cannot be true. The conduct of the noble Lords is a sufficient refutation of the calumny. Were there any bold, thoroughgoing

Anti-Reformers among the Peers, such a course of policy would be in accordance with their principles. But there are none. The professed object of all their Lordships is *peace*. Every man hitherto hostile to Reform is prepared to concede something to the desires of the nation. With what view? Plainly, that of trying to assuage the popular discontent—of endeavouring to avert a greater evil than that of Reform, as it appears to them to be. This is the manifest purpose of all who once resisted, and have been latterly compelled to acknowledge its necessity. Instead of courting a contest, they are solicitous to avoid it. On any other supposition, their conduct is wholly unintelligible.

Two methods are proposed, then, for the attainment of the object of all parties, namely, the pacification of the country. The one, by a moderate measure of Reform, as yet unexplained,—the other, by an extensive measure, long since promulgated, and hailed with rapture by the people. All that the former can effect is to patch up things for the present—to stave off the alternative of granting every thing required, or of bringing matters to a violent issue. It must, at the *best*, leave the great mass of the community in a state of formidable discontent. The popular measure would assuage this discontent, while at the very *worst*, its consequences cannot be more

appalling than the evils incurred by its delay. Can the House of Lords, so long as it exists, be placed in a state of greater embarrassment than it stands in at present? Can it ever be driven to a more dangerous predicament than that of maintaining a struggle with the Crown and the Country? Be the consequences of Reform what they may, the very same choice of evils they are now exposed to, must always be within their power. They never can, by any possibility, be deprived of an opportunity of choosing between a *compromise* and a *conflict* with the people. This is their case at the present moment, and they declare their preference for a compromise by their readiness to concede Reform. Why, then, refuse to concede it in that precise shape desired by the people, when the worst to be apprehended from doing so is only an exposure hereafter to a similar choice of evils? Why not try the chance of matters proceeding smoothly after the popular clamour is appeased? The Commons claim nothing that trenches on the privileges or prerogatives constitutionally vested in their Lordships' House. No attempt whatever is made to curtail its legitimate power, nor usurp its lawful authority. Should they make such an attempt in a Reformed Parliament, *then* will be the time for their Lordships to stand on their vigorous and obstinate defence. Then will they be guided by

reason and shielded by right. Then will they be supported by a host of moderate and enlightened men now strongly opposed to them. Weaker they *never* can be, than they are, in all senses, at this moment. So that, by acquiescing at present in the popular measure, should the consequences they apprehend ever ensue, they will *lose nothing*, while they must *gain much*.

If any thing can add force to these remarks in favour of the popular measure of Reform, it is an argument set up against it by the moderate party themselves.

Though they bear involuntary testimony to the unanimity of the people on the subject, by their reluctant admission of the necessity of Reform, they openly profess to discredit this unanimity. They acknowledge the excitement that prevails, but they ascribe it to the expectations raised by the extensive propositions of Ministers, and to the clamour of the Press. These are the great engines, they allege, that have put the public mind in a ferment. Let it be granted. Where is the power to stop, or even to suspend their operation? Is it possible to crush the expectations of the People? Is it practicable to stifle the clamour of the Press? What man or body of men will be contented with a shadow of Reform, when the substance is within their view? Noble Lords may exclaim, indeed, against the *base* and *licentious* and *revolutionary* spirit of the Press.

These are hard, but they are harmless words. They have neither power to change its purpose nor controul its force. Every good man must lament the abuses of which it is susceptible; but none can suggest a safe or proportionate remedy while popular discontent prevails. If the Press possesses the influence ascribed to it, it may be a sound reason for restraining its exercise, but it is a sorry argument for defying its effects. It is either the cause of the present excitement in favour of the popular measure, or it is not. If it *is* the cause, what prospect can there be of abating its violence by yielding less than it is determined to obtain? If it is *not* the cause, the measure must have deeper root in the opinion of the people, to which the Press only ministers as the instrument of its will. In either case there is not a chance of restoring tranquillity to the country, except by the proposed concession to its demands.

All the arguments here advanced for the enlarged measure of Reform, have been founded on the necessity of adopting it under the present circumstances of the country, and in consideration of the state of popular feeling on the subject. Nothing has been urged on the ground of the benefits likely to accrue from it, when it becomes the law of the land. There may be some among the multitude of the people, who look forward through its means to the attainment of ultimate

ends. Their number is, without a doubt, comparatively small and insignificant. It comprizes a very inconsiderable portion of the worth, the wealth, or the talent of the community. The accomplishment of the proposed measure would rally round the Government such a host of virtue and intelligence, as utterly to confound the designs and to stifle the voice of *faction*. Blessings of incalculable value to these vast dominions would follow in its train. Excitement would necessarily and instantly subside — commerce would revive — trade would flourish — industry would spread — tranquillity would reign. In a short space of years, and under the influence of liberal and beneficent measures, there would ensue a scene of harmony and comfort which every generous mind has long ardently panted to witness. He is not to be envied who can forego the hope of promoting such a state of things, in order to gratify party resentments, or serve interested ends.

Parliament has again been summoned to assemble! The moment for deliberation has once more arrived! How pregnant with blessings or miseries to this mighty empire must be the next decision of the House of Peers! The contemplation of the alternative is painful in the extreme. Still, confiding in the integrity of the Lords, and in the altered circumstances under which they now stand, there is much more reason for hope

than apprehension. To call the attention of their Lordships respectfully to their own embarrassing position,—to the evils afflicting the country,—to the dangers threatening the Constitution in consequence of their former proceeding, has been the object of these pages. There is nothing extravagant nor imaginative in the picture they have drawn. No colouring has been given to facts nor deductions beyond what is warranted by truth. They are not written in the spirit of party, and least of all in hostility to the Peers. They speak the feelings and wishes of numbers not disposed to look with much favour on the popular measure of Reform. They unfold the sentiments and apprehensions of the reflecting and dispassionate part of the community:—of all who are anxious to see the privileged orders regain the esteem of the people,—to see true religion preserved and the pure Constitution restored;—to see rational freedom maintained,—licentiousness suppressed,—virtue increased, and peace and prosperity once more diffused over the face of the kingdom.

If their Lordships are actuated by similar wishes, (and every good man will believe so, till he is compelled to do otherwise,) they will pledge themselves to the settlement of this great and all-absorbing question. They will without delay announce their intention to acquiesce in the proposed measure, and avert the painful ne-

cessity of exercising the prerogative of the Crown. Thus will the Commons be satisfied, and harmony be happily restored between the three estates. The Peers will testify their loyal and dutiful respect for the Sovereign,—the People, recovering their wonted confidence in the Aristocracy, will co-operate with them in every measure for securing the stability of the Constitution and consolidating the interests of the empire,—and the King will reign (as no monarch ever more truly deserved to reign) in the hearts of all his grateful, faithful, and united subjects.

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