

REFORM IN PARLIAMENT.

On the 26th of May, Mr. Grey brought forward a motion in the English house of commons for a reform in the representation. The motion was for the appointment of a committee to bring in a bill, with the intention that the modifications of the principle should be settled when the bill was brought in. The ideas of the favourites of this motion appeared to go to extending the right of suffrage to house-holders only. The speech of Mr. Fox on this occasion is of extreme length; we have therefore thought that extracts of the most striking passages would be more acceptable to the generality of our readers, than the publication of the whole.

MR. FOX.

For myself, and according to my view of our circumstances, all that part of the argument against reform which relates to the danger of innovation, is strangely misplaced: so far from procuring the mere chance of practical benefits by a reform, it is only by a reform that we can have a chance of rescuing ourselves from a state of extreme peril and distress. Such is my view of our situation. I think it is so perilous, so imminent, that though I do not feel conscious of despair, an emotion which the heart ought not to admit, yet it comes nearer to that state of hazard when the sentiment of despair, rather than of hope, may be supposed to take possession of the mind. I feel myself to be in a community in which the boldest man, without any imputation of cowardice, may dread that we are not merely approaching to a state of extreme peril, but of absolute dissolution.

With the ideas that I entertain, I cannot listen for a moment to suggestions that are applicable only to other situations and to other times; for unless we are resolved, in a helpless pusillanimity, or in a stupid torpor, to succumb, and to wait with resignation the approach of our doom, to lie down and die, we must take bold and decisive measures for our deliverance. We must not be deterred by meaner apprehensions. We must combine all our strength, fortify one another by the communion of our courage, and by a seasonable exertion of national wisdom, patriotism, and vigor, take measures for the chance of salvation, and encounter with unappalled hearts all the enemies, foreign and internal, all the dangers, and calamities of every kind which press so heavily upon us.

What is the lesson to be derived from the example of the Irish, but that the comparatively small societies of 1791, became strong and formidable by the accession of the many who had nothing in common with them in the outset. I wish it were possible for us to draw the line more accurately between the small number that the report describes to have had mischievous objects originally in view, and the numerous bodies who were made converts by the neglect of their petitions for constitutional rights. It is improbable that the original few were more than ten or twenty thousand in number. What then do I learn from this? That the unwise, unpolitic, and unjust refusal of government, to attend to the application of the moderate, made eighty or ninety thousand profelytes from moderation to violence. This is the lesson which the book of Ireland exhibits. Can you refuse your assent to the moral? Will any man argue, that if reform had been conceded to the eighty or ninety thousand moderate petitioners, you would have this day to deplore the union of one hundred thousand men, bent on objects so extensive, so alarming, so calamitous; I wish to warn you by this example: every argument that you have used to-day was used in Dublin. In the short sighted pride and oblativity of government, they turned a deaf ear to the supplicant; they have now, perhaps, in the open field to brave the assessor. Unwarned, untutored by example, are you still to go on with the same contemptuous and stubborn pride? I by no means think that the discontents of this country have risen to a height as to make us fear for the general peace of the country; but I deprecate the course which was pursued in Ireland. What England is now, Ireland was in 1791. What was said of the few, they have now applied to the many; and as there are discontents in this country which we can neither dissemble nor conceal, let us not, by an unwise and minal disdain, irritate and fret them into violence and disorder. The discontents may happily subside, but a man must be either sanguine indeed in his temper, or dull in his intellect, if he would leave to the operation of chance, what he might more certainly obtain by the exercise of reason. Every thing that is dear and near to the minds of Englishmen presses upon us; in the critical moment at which I now address you, a day, an hour, ought

not to escape without giving to ourselves the chance of this recovery. When government is daily presenting itself in the shape of weakness that borders on dissolution, unequal to all the functions of useful strength, and formidable only in pernicious corruption, weak in power and strong only in influence, am I to be told that such a state of things can go on with safety to any branch of the constitution? If men think that under the impression of such a system we can go on without a material recurrence to first principles, they argue in direct opposition to all theory and to all practice. These discontents cannot, in their nature, subside under detected weakness and exposed incapacity. In that progress and increase, as increase they must, who shall say that direction can be given to the torrent, or that having broken the bounds it can be kept from overwhelming the country? Sir, it is not the part of statesmen it is not the part of rational beings to amuse themselves with such fallacious dreams? We must not sit down and lament over a helpless situation; we must not deliver ourselves up to an incredible despondency that would animate the approach of danger; but by a seasonable, alert and vigorous measure of wisdom, meet it with what we think, a sufficient and seasonable remedy. We may be disappointed; we may fail in the application; for no man can be certain of a footing that is unexplored; but we shall at least have a chance for success; we shall at least do what belongs to legislators and to rational beings, on the occasion; and I have confidence that our efforts would not be in vain. I say that we should give ourselves a chance, and I may add, the best chance, for deliverance; since it would exhibit to the country a proof, that we had conquered the first great difficulty that stood in the way of bettering our condition--we had conquered ourselves. We had given a generous triumph to reason over prejudice; we had given the death blow to those miserable distinctions of whig and tory under which the warfare had been maintained between pride and privilege, and through the contention of our rival jealousies the genuine rights of the many had been gradually undermined and frittered away. I say, that this would be giving the best chance, because, seeing every thing go on from bad to worse, seeing the progress of the most scandalous waste countenanced by the most criminal confidence, and that the effrontery of corruption no longer required the mask of concealment, seeing liberty daily infringed, and the vital springs of the nation insufficient for the extravagance of a dissipating government, I must believe that unless the people are mad or stupid, they will suspect that there is something fundamentally false and vicious in our system, and which no reform would be equal to correct. Then, to prevent all this, and to try if we can possible effect a reform without touching the main pillars of the constitution, without changing its forms, or disturbing the harmony of its parts, without putting any thing out of its place, or affecting the securities which we justly hold to be so sacred, I say, that it is the only chance which we have for retrieving our misfortunes by the road of quiet and tranquility, and by which national strength may be recovered without disturbing the property of a single individual.

We assert that under the present form and practice of elections, we cannot expect to see any remarkable change produced by a general election. We must argue from experience. Let us look back to the period of the American war. It will not be contended by the right honorable gentleman, but that towards the end of that war, it became extremely unpopular, and the king's ministers lost the confidence of the nation. In the year 1780, a dissolution took place, and then it was naturally imagined by superficial observers, who did not examine the real state of representation, that the people would have returned a parliament that would have unequivocally spoken their sentiments on the occasion. What was the case? I am able to speak with considerable precision. At that time I was much more than I am at present in the way of knowing personally the individuals returned, and of making an accurate estimate of the accession gained to the popular side by that election. I can take upon me to say, that the change was very small indeed; not more than three or four persons were added to the number of those who had from the beginning opposed the disastrous career of the ministers in that war. I remember that upon that occasion Lord North made use of precisely the same argument as is now brought forward. "What," said he, "can you contend the war is unpopular after the declaration in its favor that the people have made by their choice

of representatives? The general election is the proof that the war continues to be the war of the people of England." Such was the argument of Lord North, and yet it was notoriously otherwise. So notoriously otherwise, that the right honorable gentleman, the present chancellor of the exchequer, made a just and striking use of it, to demonstrate the necessity of a parliamentary reform. He referred to this event as to a demonstration of this doctrine: "You see," said he, "that so defective, so inadequate, is the present practice, at least of the elective franchise, that no impression of national calamity, no conviction of ministerial error, no abhorrence of a disastrous war, are sufficient to stand against that corrupt influence which has mixed itself with election, and which drowns and stifles the popular voice." Upon this statement, and upon this unanswerable argument, the right honorable gentleman acted in 1782. When he proposed a parliamentary reform, he did it expressly on the ground of the experience of 1780, and he made an explicit declaration, that we had no other security by which to guard ourselves against the reform of the same evils. He repeated this warning in 1783 and 1785. It was the leading principle of his conduct, "Without a reform," said he, "the nation cannot be safe: this war may be put an end to, but what will protect you against another? As certainly as the spirit which engendered the present war actuates the secret councils of the crown, will you, under the influence of a defective representation, be involved again in new wars, and in similar calamities." This was his argument, this was his prophecy, and the right honorable gentleman was a true prophet. Precisely as he pronounced it, the event happened; another war took place, and I am sure it will not be considered as an aggravation of its character, that it is at least equal in disaster to the war of which the right honorable gentleman complained. The defect of representation," he said, "is the national disease, and unless you apply a remedy directly to that disease you must inevitably take the consequences with which it is pregnant." With such an authority, can any man deny that I reason right? Did not the right honorable gentleman demonstrate his case? Good God! what a fate is that of the right honorable gentleman, and in what a state of whimsical contradiction does he stand! During the whole course of his administration, and particularly during the course of the present war, every prediction that he has made, every hope that he has held out, every prophecy that he has hazarded, have failed; he has disappointed the expectations he has raised; and every promise that he has held out has proved to be a fallacy and a phantom. Yet for these very declarations, and notwithstanding these failures, we have called him a wise minister. We have given him our confidence on account of his predictions, & have continued it upon their failure. There is no one event which he foretold has been verified, we have continued to behold him as the oracle of Wisdom; but in the only instance in which he really predicted, as it by divine inspiration, what has come to pass in that we have treated him with stubborn incredulity. In 1785, he pronounced the awful prophecy, "without a parliamentary reform the nation will be plunged into new wars; without a parliamentary reform you cannot be safe against bad ministers, nor can good ministers be of use to you." Such was his prediction, and it has come upon us. It would seem as if the whole life of the right honorable gentleman, from that period, had been delivied by Providence for the illustration of his warning. If I were disposed to consider him as a real enthusiast, and a bigot in divination, we might be apt to think that he had himself taken measures for the verification of his prophecy. He might now exclaim to us, with the proud fervour of success, "you see the consequence of not listening to your oracle? I told you what would happen; it is true that your destruction is complete. I have plunged you into a new war; I have exhausted you as a people; I have brought you to the brink of ruin, but I told you beforehand what would happen; I told you that without a reform in the representation of the people, no minister, however wise, could save you; you denied my means, and you take the consequence." I say, Sir, that if I were to consider him as a bigot to his doctrine, of that his mind was tainted with superstition, as we have heard of enthusiasts whose lives have been devoted to the fulfillment of their own predictions, the right honorable gentleman's administration has been shaped, and his measures framed for bringing into a terrible demonstration the political doctrine with which he commenced his career.

Let us not, Sir, be deterred from this act of prudence by the false representations that are made to us, or the false deductions that are made from the recent occurrences of the world. I do not care for misrepresentation, and I do not scruple to give my opinion of those occurrences with freedom. France is the phantom that is constantly held out to terrify us from our purpose. Look at France; it will not be denied but that she stands on the broad basis of free representation. Whatever other views the government of France may exhibit, and which may afford just alarm to other nations; it cannot be denied that the representative system has proved itself capable of vigorous exertion. It cannot be denied but that it has given her in truth gigantic strength. We feel it too sensibly, Europe feels it too sensibly for denial. Now, Sir, though I do not wish you to imitate France, and though I am persuaded you have no necessity for any terror of such imitation being forced upon you, yet I say that you ought to take example of what is good in it. I say that you ought to be as ready to adopt the virtues, as you are steady in averting from the country the vices of France. I say, that it is demonstrated beyond the power of subterfuge to question, that genuine representation alone can give solid power, and that people must make the government. I say that you ought to act on this grand maxim of political wisdom thus demonstrated, and call in the people according to the original principles of your system to give strength and energy to your government. I say that in doing this you will not innovate, you will only recur to the true path of the constitution of England. In making the people a constituent part of the government of England, you do no more than restore the genuine edifice, designed and framed by our ancestors.

An honorable baronet spoke of the instability of democracies, and says that history does not give us the example of one that has lasted eighty years. Sir, I am not speaking of pure democracies, and therefore his allusion does not apply to my argument. Eighty years, however, of peace and repose would be pretty well for any people to enjoy, and would be no bad representation of a pure democracy. I am very ready, however, to agree with the honorable baronet, that according to the experience of history, the ancient democracies of the world were vicious and objectionable on many accounts; their instability, their injustice and many other vices, cannot be overlooked; but surely, when we look back to the ancient democracies of Greece, when we see them in all the splendor of the arts and of arms, when we see how they aroused and invigorated genius, and to what an elevation they carried the powers of man, it cannot be denied, that however vicious on the score of ingratitude, of injustice, they were at least the pregnant and never failing source of national strength, and that in particular they bring forth and afford this strength in a peculiar manner in the moment of difficulty and distress. When we look at the democracies of the ancient world, we are compelled to acknowledge their oppressions, their horrible acts of injustice and ingratitude; but they compel also admiration by their vigor, their constancy, their spirit, and their exertions in every great emergency in which they are called upon to act. We are compelled to own that it gives a power of which no other form of government is capable. Why? Because it incorporates every man with the state; because it arouses every thing that belongs to the soul as well as to the body of man; because it makes every individual creature feel that he is fighting for himself and not for another; that it is his own cause, his own safety, his own concern, his own dignity on the face of the earth, and his own interest in the identical soil which he has to maintain; and accordingly we find that whatever may be ascribed, that whatever may be objected to them on account of the turbulence of the passions which they engender, their short duration and their disgusting vices, they have exacted from the common suffrage of mankind the palm of strength and vigor. Who that reads the history of the Persian war, what boy, whose heart is warmed by the grand and sublime actions which the democratic spirit produced, does not find in this principle a key to all the wonders which were achieved, and of which the recent and marvellous acts of the French people are pregnant examples? He sees that the principle of liberty only would create the sublime and irresistible emotion, and it is in vain to contend, from the striking illustration that our own times have given, that the principle is not in the heart of man. Shall we then refuse to take the benefit of this invigorating principle? Shall we refuse to take the benefit which the