

RELIEF OF THE CATHOLICS.

Perhaps a more interesting speech was never delivered in the British Parliament, than the late Address of the Ministers, Mr. Peel, on the proposition for removing the disabilities under which the Catholics of the United Kingdom have long labored, and which had well nigh produced a civil war in Ireland. The speech fills thirteen close columns in a London paper. We cannot therefore give it at length; but thinking it would be gratifying to our readers to see an abridgment of it, which should contain its most material parts, we present them with the following:

Mr. Peel, after some preliminary remarks, in which as Minister of the King, and sustained by the authority belonging to that character, he wished to vindicate the advice given to his Majesty by an united Cabinet, and to submit the measures which were proposed to be carried into effect for the adjustment of the Roman Catholic Question—that question which has so long and so painfully occupied the attention of Parliament, and which has distracted the councils of the King for the last 30 years. I approach this subject almost overwhelmed by the magnitude of the interests it involves, and by the difficulties with which it is surrounded. Of these difficulties I am unconscious of the extent. I know they are great and many, and they are increased by the peculiar situation of him on whom the lot has been cast to propose this measure, and explain the expediency of its adoption. But, Sir, through all these personal difficulties, however galling to my feelings and afflicting to my heart, I am supported by the consciousness that I have done my duty towards my Sovereign, and my country. According to my heart and conscience, Sir, I believe that the time is come when less danger is to be apprehended to the general interests of the empire, and to the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Protestant establishment, in attempting to adjust the Catholic question, than in allowing it to remain any longer in its present state. I have been called upon to give the reasons which have swayed me in the adoption of the course I now advocate, & which is in opposition to that I have so long upheld. And for the satisfaction of those who have made this appeal to me—I should not say for their satisfaction, but from a desire to attempt bringing conviction to their minds in favor of my view of those points on which we differ, and for the satisfaction of the people of this country—I will endeavor to make out the case—I have been challenged to make out. I am well aware, Sir, I feel that I speak in the presence of a House of Commons, the majority of which are prepared to vote in favor of an adjustment of this question. I feel that I address a majority of those who have for years argued in favor of a settlement of the question upon higher grounds than those which I would press upon the attentive consideration of others who advocate a contrary opinion. It is wholly unnecessary for me to address any arguments to those who are already convinced of the advantages of a settlement of those claims, as the only means of averting from us the embarrassments and evils by which we are surrounded. But I trust that in what I shall think necessary to say, less with the personal object of self-vindication than with a view to attempt to satisfy the great body of the people of this empire, be their opinion of the question what it may, that more evil than advantage would result from leaving it in its present state, I hope, that those who require no argument to convince them of this fact, will bear with me while I go through the details of an argument which possesses all the force of demonstration.—I have for years attempted to maintain the exclusion of Roman Catholics from political power in Ireland. I do not think it was an unnatural or unreasonable struggle. I have desisted from it in consequence of the conviction that it could be no longer advantageously maintained; and from finding that I was not furnished with adequate materials or sufficient instruments. Others seem disposed to push certain principles to an extent, that would so endanger the very establishment they are anxious to defend. His Majesty's Government does not yield to them in a zealous desire to preserve the Constitution and support that establishment. It therefore rests to explain the apparent contradiction between this assertion and the measure we have advised.

Mr. P. then went into a statement of facts to prove the danger that would be run by the Government from a continued resistance of the claims of the Catholics for a redress of their grievances. He said the condition of the Country was such that something must be done. His first position was, that there is an evil in divided Cabinets and distracted Councils which cannot be longer tolerated. This being conceded and that a united Government must be formed—in the next place, that Government must choose one of two courses—they must advance, or they must recede; they must grant further political privileges to the Roman Catholics, or they must retract those already given to them. I am told, it is not now the first time the two Houses of Parliament have differed, and that therefore matters remain unchanged; and that accordingly, the same system should be pursued. But are events exactly the same? Do not the same events, frequently coming to pass, bring about other events? If the two Houses of Parliament have been divided against each other for the last five years, is that a reason they are to be divided, in like manner, for ten years, or for ever? So far as my own course in this question is concerned, it is the same with that which suggested itself to my mind in 1825 when I was His Majesty's Principal Minister for the Home Department, and found myself in a minority of this House upon the division on this question. When I then saw the numbers arrayed against me in this House I felt that, at least, my position as a Minister was untenable. The moment, Sir, that I, the Minister for Irish

affairs, found that I was left in a minority on that question, which was, above all others, of paramount interest and importance to the country, that moment I sought to be relieved from the duties and responsibility of office. I stated to the Earl of Liverpool, who was then at the head of the Administration, that it was my anxious wish to be relieved from office. It was, however, notified to me that my retirement would occasion the retirement of the Earl of Liverpool; and that such an event would of course, at once produce a dissolution of the Administration, the responsibility of which would rest with me. I held my hand. If I had acted simply in obedience to my own wishes, as an individual, I should have resigned. I was induced, however, to retain my office, and make another experiment upon the feelings of the country. I have stated the motives which induced me. In 1826 there was a new Parliament, and in 1827 a majority in this House of twenty-three against the Catholic question. In 1828, however, the House took a different view of the matter, and though it did not pass a bill, it agreed to a resolution favorable to the principle of adjustment. That resolution being passed, I felt satisfied that the sense of the country had been fairly taken for it was the decision of a new House. I then determined that nothing should induce me to remain longer in office to obstruct this measure. In the last year, for the first time in this Parliament, disunion between the two Houses was revived. I then saw there was only one course open to me, and that was a most painful one—it was painful to act in opposition to pre-conceived impressions, and to esteemed friends, and in short to hold a course inconsistent with that which I once felt and advocated. The events of last year pressed upon me with that full force which belonged to their importance, and I was determined to sacrifice all private feeling for the public weal. I was determined—but it was no easy task. To use the beautiful words of Dryden—

"Tis said with ease, but oh! how hardly tried
By haughty souls, to human humor tied:
Oh! deep convulsive pangs of agonising pride."

When I felt last year, that the case was as I have stated it to be, I determined to take the course which I wished to take in 1825; but with this difference, that I intimated to the Noble Duke at the head of his Majesty's Government, not only that I was anxious to retire from office, but that I felt so strongly the current of public opinion was setting in favor of the Catholic Claims, that in whatsoever situation I might find myself, I should not consider myself justified in making any further opposition to those claims; adding, that whatever private and personal sacrifice it might inflict upon me, I was prepared, after the events of the last year, to submit to it, in the support of any measure which I might consider compatible with the safety of the Protestant Establishment. I detailed on a former occasion, that a dreadful commotion had distracted the public mind in Ireland—that a feverish agitation and unnatural excitement prevailed, to a degree scarcely credible, throughout the entire country. I attempted to show that the social intercourse was poisoned there, in its very springs—that family was divided against family, and man against his neighbor—that, in a word, the bonds of social life were altogether disordered—that the fountains of public justice were corrupted—that the spirit of discord walked openly abroad—and that an array of physical force was marshalled against the law, and to the imminent danger of the public peace. But, perhaps I shall be told, as I was on a former occasion, in forcible though familiar language, that "this is the old story"—that all this has been so for the last twenty years, and therefore there is no reason for a change." To this I reply, Sir, there is reason for a change, and the reason is, because it is the old story. It is, because this state of things has so long existed, and we have been so long unable to find a remedy. It is for this, Sir, that I am tired of maintaining the present system. It is obvious it cannot exist; it must be changed. We cannot determine upon remaining idle spectators of the sufferings of Ireland. The universal cry of the country declares that something must be done. Some of my Hon. Friends may come to an opposite conclusion; but I know I am only echoing the sentiments of all reasonable men, when I say that something must be done. I ask you to examine the state of His Majesty's Government for the last thirty-five years, and to mark the bearing of the Catholic Question upon the Government—the divisions it has created among the Statesmen—the distraction it has occasioned in our Councils, and the weakness it has consequently produced.

Mr. P. called on gentlemen to reflect on the disunion that had prevailed in the Administration on Irish affairs for the last 35 years, and then say whether the course now proposed is not the only one that will do any good. Mr. P. then took a brief history of the Catholic question from Mr. Pitt's Administration to the present time, shewing that the Cabinet had always been much divided on this subject, and that Parliament had also been in the same situation. The consequence has been that differences have arisen between honorable men, and that the public mind in Ireland had been provoked into a dangerous and exaggerated sensitiveness, has been created in it with respect to all passing events.

With respect to the present House of Commons, is it an unfair representation of the public opinion upon this great question? Was it not elected at a period when the public mind was sufficiently alive to the Catholic question? Was it not sufficiently acquainted with the efforts made to pass Catholic Relief Bills through Parliament, and with the state of Ireland? Sir, this House was elected after the direction of the public attention had been given to the proceedings of the Catholic Association.

The bill to suppress that Association had been passed, and the discussion on the question was not brought to a close in less than five nights. Then, Sir, was the time for public opinion to have declared itself, and afforded us the materials for a successful contest. But, having suffered this proper occasion to pass by, it is now too hard that we should be blamed for not carrying on a bootless resistance. It is a hard thing to call upon the responsible ministers of the Crown to carry on resistance, without furnishing us with those instruments by which alone the battle can be fought. For, Sir, I ask you, when we are told of the feeling of the country against the Catholic question, to look to the returns. If any discontent pervades the people, it is but of a short date. It is a recent disquietude—(great cheering)—and I say, Sir, it ought to have been shown, not by public meetings, but by the public exercise of the elective franchise. It is not fair to throw upon Ministers the whole responsibility of resigning a long continued resistance when that resistance was paralysed by the way in which the people had exercised the elective franchise.

Mr. P. then referred to the members returned to the present Parliament, shewing, that in many of the counties they were equally divided on the Catholic question, and in a greater number of counties and towns there was a majority in favor of granting relief.

These things, then, I say, prove to me, that the voice of the people was not deliberately pronounced against the consideration of this great question, at that period when it might have been pronounced with most effect. I therefore conclude that it does not exist. Be this so, or be it not so, I do say, that it is hard upon those who have fought the battle against making further concessions to the Catholics, for the last ten years, with Houses so nearly divided, with forces so nearly equal, now to charge them with want of zeal, because they consider it would be useless to consider the struggle longer. I maintain, that when the course of the question is looked at, during the period which I have named, it is not fair to throw upon me all the responsibility for making it what it has become. With respect to the inferences which may be drawn as to the state of public opinion, from the debates in this House, I should like to know to what conclusion any man must come who has watched the progress of our discussions. Who, I would ask, are they who have taken the most prominent part in them? On whom has the brunt of the battle fallen? Sir, I hold in my hand a list of the speakers in the several debates which have taken place on this subject. It would be invidious to go into details, and I am the last man who would wish to do so, as many of my Hon. Friends, who feel the utmost zeal in the cause, have been, by various circumstances, precluded from taking a part in debate. It might, therefore, be unfair to draw any inference from that to which I have alluded. I will not assume any deficiency of zeal from the paucity of numbers; but I do think it hard that an individual, after fighting the battle for ten years, should be accused, as I have been, by those who, during that long period have witnessed the struggle without once opening their mouths in support of that cause for which they now manifest such extraordinary anxiety.

Now, Sir, having described to the House what has been the state of the Government, and what the situation of the two Houses of Parliament, during the last five and thirty years, I come next to the consideration of a subject not less important—what has been the state of Ireland during that period?

Mr. P. then took a view of all the difficulties and disturbances that have taken place in Ireland for the last twenty-five years. After which he added, couple this with the differences which have existed between the two Houses of Parliament on this question, and with the divided state of the Government, and then, I will ask, is not the position which I advanced at the outset perfectly made good, namely, that this state of things cannot continue—that some effort must be made to enable Parliament and the Government to unite with one common feeling in the administration of the affairs of Ireland? I now, Sir, approach the consideration of the important question, what that course ought to be.

Mr. P. here took a view of the different projects entertained on this subject, and shewed, in forcible terms, that nothing short of a relaxation of the laws at present in existence would be of any avail. It appears that the population of Ireland is estimated at seven millions, and that five millions are Catholics and but two millions Protestants. And these are very unequally divided in different parts of the country. In the counties of Antrim and Down there are few Catholics; but in the county of Clare, there are ten contiguous parishes in which there is not a single Protestant.—Mr. P. also observed that it was well known many of the influential Protestants were in favor of taking off the present restraints from the Catholics.

For these reasons, said Mr. P. I have thought it my duty to endeavor to satisfy the people of England, that the time is come when those claims must be settled—to prove to them that we cannot remain as we are, and that of the two alternatives offered to us, the safer choice will be to attempt an adjustment. Under the influence of such feelings I now approach the most important part of the subject, namely, the propositions which His Majesty has authorized his Ministers to lay before you for remedying the evils under which Ireland at present labors, and for laying the foundation of a better system of administration in that country for the time to come. In coming to this part of the subject, I will not attempt to disguise the difficulties by which it is surrounded. Amongst them is the prevalent opinion that the settlement

of this question involves something inconsistent with the Protestant religion, and is not confined exclusively to the removal of political disabilities. Sir, I maintain that this is an erroneous opinion—I contend that it is a purely political question—involving nothing inconsistent with the maintenance of the Protestant religion.—As a political question I maintain that it is to be decided on political, I will not say constitutional grounds, but on grounds of political expediency. And, with the view of avoiding the evils which must result from its non-adjustment, I would ask those who say this adjustment must be unfavorable to the Protestant religion, what good effects have resulted from remaining as we are? Has the existing state of things contributed to the propagation or increase of Protestantism? Has it not, on the contrary, retarded its growth, and will not the removal of civil disabilities from the Roman Catholics have this good effect, that it will incline them to listen with greater kindness to any discussion upon the subject? Amongst the higher ranks of Roman Catholics many are influenced, no doubt, by religious feelings; but all are wedded to their creed by a sense of honor and the fear of degradation by a departure from it. Is it not, therefore, reasonable to conclude that by the removal of Catholic disabilities the Protestant religion will have a fairer chance? In the propositions which it will be my duty to submit to the House, I can safely say, that no man, however he may be devoted to the security of the Protestant Church, and the preservation & spread of the Protestant religion (to which no man is more devoted than myself) can find any thing in these propositions which can, in the remotest degree, interfere with the safety and integrity of that Church and that Religion. I now come to another objection—the Coronation Oath. Having for eighteen years strenuously opposed the Catholic Question, and during that period having diligently sought for every legitimate argument, and ground of objection by which to oppose it, I cannot give a better proof of my sincerity in now denying the validity of this objection drawn from the terms of the Coronation Oath, than the fact that during the whole of these eighteen years I have uniformly denied its validity. I have always acknowledged it impossible to read the terms of that Oath and contend that the removal of civil disabilities is inconsistent with these terms. Such a proposition cannot be for one moment maintained, and in this opinion I agreed with Mr. Pitt and Lord Liverpool. That there are other difficulties, however, which will accompany the settlement of the question, I am not prepared to deny. That there should be difficulties in the way of adjustment, and that an unwillingness to part with what may be called vested political rights should be felt, cannot be a matter of surprise, but I would conjure the House to come to the consideration of the question in the spirit of conciliation and mutual good will. I implore them to put out of view trivial objections, and to consider duly how they may best secure the advantages which a concession will give us, and avert the dangers which must result from the refusal. Let us consider whether the basis on which I propose to put these measures be just—whether the measures themselves be well founded. Let us look to their ultimate object: and if that object be not in itself vain, let us not for any slight objection forego the advantages which every sensible man must reasonably expect although the result may be somewhat over-rated by some of the most sanguine among us; and let us not refuse to do what we can to avert those dangers which every man must foresee if this attempt at conciliation should fail to be adopted. There have before been great occasions in which minor objects have been set aside. Mr. P. here referred to the union of Scotland, to the Septennial Act, the Regency and the Union of Ireland, as occasions of this kind.

I shall now proceed, said Mr. P. to explain the principle on which the measures of Government I am now about to propose are founded; and I shall then proceed to explain the details, and that principle, in a word, is the abolition of civil disabilities and the equalization of political rights. Exceptions and restrictions there are, which will be vindicated on special grounds.—These are, however, only exceptions from the rule. The rule, I repeat, is the equalization of civil rights; and this being the rule, the Government have a right to demand the assent of the Roman Catholics to the other enactments which I shall feel it essential to propose in the way of securities.—Another principle of these measures is, the maintenance inviolable of the Protestant religion, its doctrine, discipline and government. After the discussion which for so many years this question has undergone, it is unnecessary that I should go into a description of the laws which affect Roman Catholics. It is known that those laws differ as applicable to English and Irish Roman Catholics. The former have not the same privileges as the latter. The Irish Catholics can, for example, hold offices to which English Catholics do not enjoy the same franchise. But if it be right to restore the Irish Catholics to the possession of civil rights, it is but reasonable that the same privileges should be conferred on the English Catholics. An opinion, I believe, is very generally prevalent that the Penal Laws affecting the Catholics are no longer in existence. This is however an erroneous opinion. There are still some of the Penal Laws unrepealed, and the bill which is about to be introduced will have the effect of repealing all such laws. These chiefly relate to the possession of property. By the law as at present, a Roman Catholic cannot possess landed property until he takes three separate oaths. In the proposed bill a clause will be introduced for the admission of

the Roman Catholic Peers, and Roman Catholic Commoners, who may hereafter be returned to the respective Houses of Parliament. As I should wish, when this bill has passed, that Roman Catholics should, with respect to Parliament, be altogether in the same situation as Protestants, I am adverse to any restriction with regard to the numbers of Catholics who may be qualified or entitled to sit.

The following is the oath proposed for the Catholics:

"I, A. B. do declare that I profess the Roman Catholic Religion."

"I, A. B. do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fourth, and defend him to the utmost of my power against all conspiracies and all attempts whatever that shall be made against his Person, Crown, and Dignity; and I will do my utmost endeavor to disclose and make known to his Majesty, his heirs and successors, all Treasons, and traitorous Conspiracies which may be formed against him or them. And I do faithfully promise to maintain, support, and defend to the utmost of my power, the Succession of the Crown, which is and stands limited to the Princess Sophia, Electress of Hanover, and the Heirs of her Body, being Protestants; hereby utterly renouncing and abjuring any obedience or allegiance unto any other Person claiming or pretending a right to the Crown of the realms. And I do further declare, that it is not an article of my faith, and that I do renounce, reject and abjure, the opinion, that Princes excommunicated or deposed by the Pope, or any other authority of the See of Rome, may be deposed or murdered by the subjects, or any person whatsoever. And I do declare, that I do not believe that the Pope of Rome, or any other foreign Prince, Prelate, Person, State, or Potentate, hath, or ought to have any temporal or civil jurisdiction, power, superiority, or pre-eminence, directly or indirectly within this realm. I do swear that I will defend to the utmost of my power, the settlement of property within this realm, as established by the Laws. And I do hereby disclaim, disavow, and solemnly abjure any intention to subvert the present Church Establishment, as settled by law within this realm. And I do solemnly swear that I never will exercise any privilege, to which I am or may become entitled, to disturb or weaken the Protestant Religion or Protestant Government in this kingdom: And I do solemnly in the presence of God, profess, testify, and declare that I do make this Declaration, and every part thereof, in the plain and ordinary sense of the words of this Oath, without any evasion, equivocation, or mental reservation whatsoever."

The bill proposes no incorporation of the Roman Catholic Religion. It is to be left to the management of the Pope and his Clergy as heretofore. Episcopal titles of the United Church of England and Ireland are not to be assumed by the Roman Catholic Bishops. Bishops they are to be called and to have the right of exercising their own powers in their own Church; but they are not to assume the titles of the Established Church.

It is proposed to raise the freehold qualification from forty shillings to ten pounds.

Provision is also made for registering the Religious order of the Jesuits, that their number may be ascertained.

I proceed now to consider the exceptions with which I propose to accompany the general rule which I have already stated as the basis of this measure. I propose that the leading principle upon which these exceptions shall be founded shall be the connection which such duties and offices have with the Established Church. The only offices I propose specifically to except are, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, or other Chief Governor having the Church patronage in his hands, and the Lord Chancellor, and Lord Keeper or Commissioner of the Great Seal in Great Britain.

Mr. P. concluded his luminous speech as follows:

Thus, Sir, I have disclosed the principle of this measure, and I approach the end of the task I have undertaken in introducing and explaining its provisions to the House. I trust it will be calmly and dispassionately considered, and in the spirit in which we ought to proceed, namely, with a desire to put a safe and satisfactory end to this question. Let us all bear in mind what the consequences will be, if this bill is rejected. This measure applies equally and impartially to all. I will not pretend that specious or even solid objection may not be made to it, as they may be made to any measure of an extensive or complicated nature; but, depend on it, we never should settle the Catholic Question, if every member be determined it shall be settled according to his view. I ask whether there is a chance, by uniting the Protestant mind, that we shall find new and efficient securities against any dangers that can arise? I ask the Roman Catholics themselves whether the concessions which are rendered necessary on their part are to be compared with the sacrifices made by those who are unwilling to consent to a departure from laws which have given—it is in vain to deny it—an exclusive character to our Legislature and Government? God grant that the sanguine expectations of those who for years have advocated the question, may be fulfilled! God grant that the removal of the disabilities of the Roman Catholics may assuage the free contentions of the country; and that by a free intercourse their mutual jealousies may be removed; and instead of looking on each other as adversaries and opponents, they may, by mixing in competition and mutually enjoying the privilege of a free state, learn to respect and value each other, and find out qualities which yet are actually unknown to either. Perhaps I am not so sanguine as others in my expectations as to the future; but I have no hesitation in saying, that I do believe, that the adjustment of this question in the manner I propose, will give better securities to the Protestant interests and the Protestant Establishments, than the present state of things, and avert the dangers which are impending and immediate. Cheers. What motive can I have for expressing the opinion I do, but my honest conviction of their truth? With the information of which I am officially in possession I have, after daily watching the progress of events—wholly, as was said by Mr. Grattan, "like the mist at the heels of the countryman, gradually envelops one object after another"—I do believe, that one of an honest and legitimate nature? I know I could have taken a more popular and palatable course—more popular among the friends with whom I have long been associated and acted for the best for Protestant interests and Protestant establishments. This is my defence to the accusation brought against me; this is my consolation for the sacrifices I have made, and this shall be my revenge. I trust that the turbid waters of strife will be composed and subside; but if these expectations should be disappointed, if the differences between us do not arise out of artificial distinctions and equal privileges; but if there be something