

THE CORN BILL.

House of Lords, June 12.

On the motion of Viscount Goderich that the order of the day be read for receiving the report on the Corn Laws Amendment Bill,

Lord Colchester rose to submit his reasons to their Lordships against the Bill as it stood, before it went into the Committee. He objected to the Bill because the policy of it was to render the country more dependent on foreign aid for subsistence than it ought to be...as prejudicial to the agricultural population at home—and in consideration of its effects on Ireland, where it would discourage an increasing growth of bread corn, and at a time when the people were in a state of great suffering from privation.

The Report was then brought up, and it was agreed that the clauses should be read successively. Upon the clause which had been introduced for raising the price at which Bonded Corn might be brought into the market from 6s to 66s.

Viscount Goderich addressed their Lordships. After a long explanation addressed to the Duke of Wellington, on a misconception which appeared to exist, he proceeded: The amendment of the Noble Duke is intended to secure two purposes—the first of which is, “to prevent the warehousing system from being abused, by the facility it gave to frauds in the averages,” and the second, to prevent those frauds from being mischievous, by causing a glut of foreign corn when there was no demand for it in this country. With regard to the first object, viz., to prevent the warehousing system giving facility to fraud, I am at a loss to conceive how corn in bond can have the slightest effect upon the averages, which are made by the sales of corn in bond; for, although that passes from hand to hand, it yet remains in the warehouse, and does not come into the calculations of the averages. Besides, supposing it did, what would be the effect of that? The effect would be to lower the price, raise the duty, and yet not make the supply a bit greater. That being the case, I cannot imagine how my Noble Friend thinks foreign corn would pour in upon us in such an overwhelming flow. If this clause was adopted, it would give the holder of corn in bond the strongest motives to exert himself to get it out of bond. I can easily imagine that, between the passing of this Bill and any given time, a certain quantity of corn may be accumulated in the warehouses, say a million of quarters; and there it will remain till the price reaches 66s. What stronger inducement can be held out for the holders to release it? If this clause be carried, a door will be opened at once to the whole of the corn in the warehouses; and that, not because it would be wanted, but because an improper system had been adopted. Let my noble friend remember, too, that it would come in upon the payment of a duty of 10s. only, and thus effect all the evils he so much wishes to avoid. If this measure be passed, those who have corn locked up in the warehouses will, as I have said, exert their uttermost to get it out—they will spend a part of their capital in buying up English corn in order to influence the averages, and raise them to such a height as would liberate what they may have in bond. It is true, that they will do this at a loss; but it will be better for them to suffer a loss on a part of their capital, than lose the whole of it. But there is another view of this subject which it is material should not be lost sight of. If this clause be passed, it will put an end to the warehousing system altogether. [Hear.] That certainly would be its effect; and, as my Noble Friend professes that he does not wish to put an end to the warehousing system, he must, in con-

sistency, vote against his own clause. That such would be the effect, I think must be evident to any man who chooses to examine into the subject. I will suppose that a foreign merchant, thinking he might safely warehouse corn in this country, had accordingly warehoused 500,000 quarters. At certain periods of the year it is likely that the markets will rise to 61s., 62s., and 63s., or any price approaching to 66s., but not reaching it. This would, of course, excite a stimulus among the foreign merchants on the other side of the water, who would take advantage of the demand to bring in their corn, and that long before the price shall have reached 66s., thereby depriving their rivals, who were in bond in this country, of the advantage of the market. Does the House think that any body would again get into such a limbo? Would not those who were already in bond rather export their Corn to Antwerp, and then bring it back here before the prices reached 66s., and thus be on a par with those who before had had the advantage over them? No man would ever again be fool enough to lock up Corn in a warehouse, whence he could not get it out till the price rose to a certain point? Would not, then, the effect be, to annihilate the warehousing system, as far as corn was concerned? Yet, upon what great authorities was not this system established? We are not the innovators who have introduced it. We have the authority of the Noble Duke himself in its favour... the support of antecedent laws...and the high approval of the Earl of Liverpool, who, in 1791, urged to the King the importance of the system of bonding Corn, for it was first established so far back as 1773, and enforced merely by the law of 1791. It is not we who are the innovators and reformers, who have introduced this system; we have merely followed up the plan of the best authorities on the subject, viz: the authority of individuals whose talents and experience made them well aware of the great importance the system was to the interests of the country; but I have no doubt that many of the Noble Lords opposite me would not care if they never heard of the name or existence of warehousing again. [A laugh] ...in which case it is not to be wondered at, if they wish to get rid of it, which would be the effect of the clause. Nothing that I have hitherto said can, in the slightest degree, touch a very large class, who will be affected by this Bill...I mean the consumers; but that is a delicate question, and your Lordships must feel, that much as we may wish to promote the agriculture of the country, and that is a point on which I yield to none of the Noble Lords that talk so warmly on the subject, yet, in spite of that, we ought to reflect deeply upon the delicate question of the subsistence of the people. I think, therefore, we ought to pause before consenting to a measure which would, in times of scarcity, have such a ruinous effect upon the mass of the population. I say, that those who think that the protection of agriculture depends upon putting an end to this system of warehousing, are greatly mistaken in the practical effect which such a measure would have. A Noble Lord, the other night, expressed himself rather in terms of scorn and sarcasm when I said the warehousing system would, if chased from here, be more firmly established on the other side of the water, where all its benefits would be felt. What I stated was, that the corn being bonded abroad, they would, whenever they could get it admitted, send it into the ports of this country, without any reference as to the quantity we might require. If the corn were warehoused in this country, it would be drawn out gradually, as it might suit the views of those who held it, which would prevent the glut which must

inevitably ensue from the other plan. A number thing which I consider worthy of the gravest consideration is, that if the corn be warehoused abroad, not one quarter of it will come to this country in British ships. It would all necessarily come in Dutch, Russian, or Danish ships, according to the place whence it was brought. The ship-owner abroad, who knows his own interest as well, if not better, than we do ours, would have the corn shipped for this country before we could have time to send vessels to bring it. This is a circumstance which I think may be adduced as a strong additional reason for questioning the policy of any measure which would have any of the effects I have been describing. If I believed this clause could produce any but the most pernicious results, if it could be shewn to me that it would be attended with any advantage whatever...no personal consideration of being attacked for inconsistency...no fear of the storm which would be raised against me...should make me hesitate in agreeing to the proposition, but such, I am convinced, is not the fact, and I, therefore, feel it my duty to call upon your Lordships to reject it.

The House divided on the Amendment of the Duke of Wellington, when the numbers appeared...Contents 133. Non Contents 122. Majority in favour of the Duke of Wellington's Amendment, 11.

House of Lords June 13.

Viscount Goderich had been asked last night what course it was the intention of His Majesty's Government to pursue with respect to the Corn Bill...whether he should propose, on any future stage, to rescind the amendment which had been carried, and what day he should fix for its third reading. Under the circumstances of the case, he did not feel at liberty to answer either question, but it was now fit that he should do so, in order that their Lordships should be aware of the sentiments of His Majesty's Government on that subject. After the decision to which the House had come, for the second time, yesterday, it would be quite out of the question for him to make any further attempt to change its determination. He considered that the Bill had been finally sanctioned by their Lordships with the amendment, as a part of it. He had felt it his duty to state the grounds, conceiving that he had a strong case, on which he thought the amendment not only objectionable, but fatal to the principles of the Bill, and inconsistent with its being carried into effect. He could not depart from that conviction, and, consequently, it was not possible for him to undertake to propose the third reading of the Bill. He, therefore, did not intend to proceed on the Order of the Day for the third reading on Friday.

(From the London Times.)

We have now to announce to the British nation the overthrow of its favourite measure, the Corn Bill!...that act of disaster and well weighed humanity to the people of this realm, which received the sighing adieu and last approbation of the expiring mind of Lord Liverpool! We have to announce its overthrow, too, by a trick...by chicane...by an affected amendment, which was calculated to turn its sweetness into bitterness, its honey into gall. Does any one ask us, whether we grieve that the bill has been withdrawn, as the public will perceive that it was withdrawn last night, by its benevolent authors, rather than that it should have been carried, with a clause curdling its very blood? We answer (and we are sure that we answer in the name of the British nation) No. It was an act of humanity, congenial with the spirit that first engendered that bill, to stop its farther progress, when it was seen that it must prove a

curse to the nation instead of a blessing. By the original bill, foreign corn was admitted upon paying duty, when the home price was 62s. per quarter. By the amendment, the same corn actually warehoused in this country was not suffered to be sent forth (its exit was prohibited) till the price mounted up to 66s. Is it credible that, under every circumstance of low wages, and of a contracted currency from the gradual disappearance of small notes, it should have been proposed that the labouring classes of this country should not be permitted to eat the grain that was actually among them, at a less price than sixty-six shillings per quarter? If a people be suffering from scarcity, there being no corn among them, they must so suffer till corn can be imported; but to allow a population to feel the utmost agony of want, (of which we have had but too many instances) and to guard, almost within the reach of their teeth, by bolts and bayonets, a hoard of corn which they may not touch or taste but at a price which they cannot pay, would exceed in tantalizing cruelty any thing recorded. Why, the pagan nations of antiquity, Rome, and even Carthage with all its barbarity, and the despotic and savage Governments of modern times, Algiers and Morocco, have themselves providentially established deposits of grain in their capitals, in order that in seasons of scarcity corn might be let out from thence, and sold to their suffering subjects at a price proportioned to their circumstances. But it would have been the effect of the bill in its deformed state, to render even the stores made up among us by private and commercial speculation impregnable to the wants of the people. We should have had granaries that could not be opened for the emission of their contents, but at a price which, during a season of slack employment and low wages, the toiling man who must still eat bread could not pay...granaries appertaining to private individuals, but converted by the unhappy arts of legislation into the graves of their sacred contents. Not only, therefore, is the people of this country, but even humanity itself, obliged to the Ministers, for shrinking from all contact with a bill which had assumed so revolting a nature. And now let the people of England consider who are their friends. It was the immediate effect of the rejection of the bill...for so it must be called...proposed by His Majesty's Ministers, to raise corn five shillings a quarter upon the Corn Exchange in the course of yesterday! Was it an act of benevolence or humanity that produced such a result? Is there any writer on political economy who has said that it is advantageous to a state that bread should be dear? Oh, but the landed interest must be upheld...must be maintained in fluency. What is the landed interest? Will the labourer on the land, whose class is the most numerous, find his wages at the end of this week, in the proportion just stated? And if corn goes on increasing in price, which is not unlikely from the rejection of that bill which was so humane in its provisions and so agreeable to all parties, will the money-earnings of the poor peasant mount up simultaneously? Will they even follow the enhanced prices, except at a great distance? For our own parts, we are no friends of the present Ministers, except in so far as we believe and see them to be the friends of humanity in general, and of the people of this nation in particular. They are called a Coalition Ministry, and so they are...a coalition between the expert and practised men of office, and those who have recently approved of their policy. And what is the Opposition? A coalition likewise...a coalition between the refuse of office and the contemned aspirants to it. And by such an Opposition, with the casual access of