

THE GLEANER:

AND

NORTHUMBERLAND SCHEDIASMA.

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"Nec araneorum sane texus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignunt nec noster vilior quia ex alienis libamus ut apes."

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HALL OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

BY AN AMERICAN GENTLEMAN.

THE pile of buildings appropriated to the sittings and business of the British Parliament, is directly opposite Westminster Abbey, and on the bank of the Thames; itself ancient, irregular, unsymmetrical, and unsightly—being apparently one addition heaped upon another, from age to age, without much regard to taste, or relative fitness. Its principal halls, court, and committee rooms, its offices, its windings and passages, &c. are altogether, in their relations to each other, a jumbled up heap, as if thrown together by chance. The chamber appropriated to the sittings of the House of Lords, is perhaps seventy feet by fifty, a modest apartment, without galleries, with lofty ceilings; the windows of which being mere sky-lights, stuck in the upper margin of the walls. The walls present different views of the famous naval battle, the issue of which was the destruction of the Spanish Armada—all done by the needle—being so many immense pieces of embroidery, extended on such a scale. What a piece of work! the proud topic, in a national view, worthy, if possible, of such expense, and to be a permanent fixture of the walls of such a chamber. It is to be understood that these views are attached, like paper, and make parts of the room. The hall, like that of the House of Commons, is lighted by plain brass chandeliers, such as may be found in any old church—except that those attached to the walls in the House of Lords, are of bronze. The throne is fenced by two brass railings, braced by somewhat elegant gilt columns, twenty feet high, the flutes of which are black, to increase the effect; and these columns supporting a suitable canopy hung with becoming drapery, under which are richly embroidered the kings arms, on a ground of crimson velvet—the drapery being all of the same material, fringed modestly with gold. The chair of the throne, in figure, is like a common grandfather's chair, with arms, &c. which may be seen in any patriarchal house; said to exhibit a richness of gilding, when the covering commonly resting upon it is removed. The floor of the House exhibits ranges of common, plain benches, with a plain back rail—all very ordinary in their structure, for the sittings of the Lordships. The Speaker's Chair no larger than a parlour chair, his desk, and those of the clerks, occupy the centre of the hall. Behind the Speaker's Chair, and before the throne, is the wool-sack, unlike, and about as large as a bag of cotton—being, however, more rectangular in its shape—from which all authoritative decisions of the House, as a Court, or as a Legislative body, are pronounced. The entire furniture of the apartment, and the walls, to the elevation of a man's head, are stuffed and covered with scarlet cloth, an agreeable and light variation from the deep and rich crimson of the drapery and general ground work of the throne. The bar of the House is a simple iron railing, separating the assemblage of Peers from the crowd, and leaving a small space for spectators across the chamber, and extending from the wall about fifteen feet, of course sufficient only for the accommodation of a favoured few, in a standing posture, there being no seats. Out of this space is also taken, by a like railing, an enclosure for advocates of causes pending before the House, when sitting as a Court, every part of the room being upon the same level. When both houses are together on this floor, they can only stand, crowding the apartment in the most compact condition. The chamber of the House of Lords therefore, is a very ordinary room.

SKETCH

OF A DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, ON THE LATE REFORM BILL, BY AN AMERICAN GENTLEMAN.

I HAD never appreciated, till my eyes saw, and my ears heard, during the space of eleven hours last night, the true and proper character of a British House of Commons. I had heard much, read much, conceived much. But my conceptions had been all a dream. Last night I awoke, and wondered—not, indeed, that in all things it exceeded my expectations—but that in

all things it was so diverse, and in many, so much more a LITTLE thing, than what I had imagined. It was composed of men!—mere men—many of them youth—some boys—all men of like endowments and like passions, as a Legislator body in my own country; very like our national house of Representatives; still more like a Virginia Legislative Assembly. An Assembly of the best sons and the most dignified patriarchs of Virginia are, perhaps, a very fair specimen of a British House of Commons. But one is most of all surprised to find 'a noble Lord' a mere boy, as is often the fact, and sometimes stunted both in body and intellect. The majority of the British House of Commons are young men, generally of cultivated and vigorous character.

I had never appreciated, even slightly, the true character of the audible expressions of approbation and disapprobation which Parliament are accustomed to render to their orators, as they stand reported to the eye, under the forms of [Hear! hear! Cheers, laughter, &c.] And I doubt, whether it is commonly appreciated by those, who have never had ocular and auricular demonstration. In this thing I was astonished, and sometimes absolutely astounded. The strongest expressions of this sort are clamorous and overpowering, as the confused din and the loudest simultaneous shout of ten thousand voices, mad with joy or rage. And what is remarkable, the silly orator; [silly in this particular,] generally continues his speech, in the midst of, and through the shout, although entirely drowned. The effect of this, however, is rarely very fine, when the first thought, becoming palpable after the cessation of the roar, happens to suggest something of doubtful importance and interest, which has been drowned in the shout, then instantly commences another augmented and tremendous roar, the passions being already excited and ready for action. And still the orator goes on, as is manifest from his lips and gestures, uttering full periods, not a word of which is heard. As well might the faint voice of the unfledged bird be heard in the tempestuous roar of the agitated deep. Whether the orator takes care to repeat what has thus been lost, himself alone can say. Probably he does, if he thinks it would do him credit. Often, however, he refuses to do it, and we find him, when first his voice begins to fall upon the ear again, much ahead of where he was, as we saw him when the storm came over him. And if he is an interesting speaker, such a loss is exceedingly vexatious.

These expressions, as to the number of voices uniting and as to their loudness, are always graduated exactly by the amount of feeling. Sometimes one voice, faint or loud, sometimes twenty, sometimes a hundred, and sometimes the whole house burst forth with all the power the lungs of each can afford, on their highest keys. If all approve, the shout is applause. If the ministerial side applaud a sentiment, which the opposition disapproves, the latter instantly raise a discordant shout of disapprobation, and vice versa; and the clamorous mingling of such voices expresses thoroughly all they intend. And these expressions, as will appear from the common reports of the press, are habitually occurring every five minutes and sometimes every minute. Laughter often explodes in tremendous peals.

Is this practice good or bad? It certainly possesses this advantage: it is an infallible measure of the exact temper of the house in every successive moment. No speaker can ever be ignorant of the effect he is producing; nor will he be permitted to make an unreasonable draft upon patience. For it is morally impossible he should encounter a general hint to be done. There is little courtesy in this business. The House of Commons last night, I suppose, were uncommonly lively in demonstrations of this sort. The feelings of all were wrought up to intensity by the mighty question in agitation.

The amendments brought in by the Committee on the second reading of the Reform Bill, were taken up, after the order of their consideration had been announced from the chair. They were recited EN MASSE, by the Chairman of the Committee, Lord John Russell, and the reasons stated. It was soon manifest, however, that the Bill, even after these modifications, was likely to meet with formidable obstacles, before it could clear

the Commons. The debates on different points, as they arose, grew more and more brisk, animated, and impassioned. Speeches were short, and talents of the brightest order were every few moments developed. Great minds came into collision with other great minds—arms clashed with arms—and the combat thickened. Shouts of applause, or of disapprobation, frequently rung through the house, and frequently mingled together. And every now and then a thundering peal of laughter. And if, unfortunately, any of the spectators caught the spirit, and could not be still, the officers of the House, stationed near, would cry out: "If you don't be still, the gallery will be cleared;"—a strong motive to repress feeling. What was a faint expression there in company with such a roar from below?

The combat deepened still. And it was difficult, in my brief task, to notice the many who distinguished themselves. The most knotty point of the evening was a clause, defining the boundaries and qualifications of the elective franchise—a vital principle to be sure. Sir Richard Vivian, a youthful and talented statesman, now in the opposition, made a bold and gallant descent upon this piece of the work of the present ministry, and withal, this clause being his text, began to prophecy over the fate of the bill. "This Bill will never pass into a law," he reiterated, and staked his reputation as a prophet of events on the declaration. "I call upon the House:—See where the King's Ministers have brought us! In the frenzy of their intoxication they have appealed to the people. And now we [the opposition] and compelled to concur in a Reform. And behold! what is the character of the Reform attempted to be imposed! Backward we cannot go, forward we dare not. Ye will bear me witness, that I told you what would come, when the King dissolved the Parliament."

Lord John Russell, who is understood to have had a principal hand in shaping the bill, took this youthful combatant into his hands, and treated him with tremendous rebuke, and then in a strain of the most cruel irony, commended him to the grace of the House for what he had done "in the very tide and summit of his indiscretion;" withal, and to be equal, prophesying on his part, that "the bill WILL pass. It will be seen that the noble Lord had pressed the youthful baronet hard, and put a most powerful weapon in his hand, by convicting him of "the sin of being a young man." Under a deep feeling of wounded pride, and as little daunted as his illustrious countryman, who on the same floor had been convicted of the same sin—not to have been born before—Sir Richard, having a sense of his right of reply, notwithstanding an attempt to rule him by a question of order, acquitted himself with great dignity, by a still bolder assault on the ministry, by a still more confident prediction of the fate of the bill, and in a strain of pure, fervid, most impassioned eloquence, returning with equal adroitness, bolts of irony on his adversary. And then sat down under the thundering applause of his side of the house. I do not speak of the merits of his argument. I mean only to say—that if he does not make a figure in the future history of his country, it will not be for the want of talent. This brief conflict swallowed up and concentrated the interest of the night's debate. Lord Russell did not notice him a second time, for what reasons I do not know unless, being conscious that he had used him severely, he was willing generously to let him go, with that sort of healing of his wounds, which the last word, so well said, might afford the young man.

Although there was nothing else during the evening of the same elevated character, of that thrilling and absorbing interest, of those pourings forth of soul, which assert the possible powers of the human mind, and set it forth in its majesty; which make us feel, that we are close in company with those mighty spirits which sway the senate of Ancient Rome, roused up Greece to march against Philip, and in later times held in rapt suspense and chained the soul of a British Parliament,—yet was there the frequent display of commanding talent. And even in the presence of Lord John Russell and Sir Richard Vivian, when arms to arms they stood, in fierce encounter, one was obliged to conclude, either that history is false, or else that we must wait yet longer for a Sheridan, a Fox, and a Pitt.

We had orator Hunt, to speak his opinion—and, re-