

George New Equine

THE GLEANER

AND

NORTHUMBERLAND SCHEDIASMA.

VOLUME III.]

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

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THE GLEANER.

FROM THE NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE FOR NOVEMBER.

HOW WILL THE PEERS BE GAINED?

"Pleasant lounging," said the soldier of Toulouse, as he stretched himself to sleep, after a hard day's work, upon a barrel of gunpowder. We enjoy the same luxurious repose as the soldier of Toulouse. We have shut up our Parliament—we have signed a truce—we have suspended hostilities: and after a severe battle and prolonged hardship we have stretched ourselves to sleep upon a barrel of gunpowder.

Seriously, the state of the country is fraught with grounds for solemn and deep alarm.—Look around!—Winter is fast approaching—it is at hand, in the calmest times winter produces distress, and therefore discontent—You have the experience of last year fresh in your memories: an experience fraught with the desperation of men, ignorant and therefore fierce—struggling for bread, and therefore deaf to reason;—an experience fraught with conflagration and riot—with excesses in which the least danger was in the present, the greatest in the threats of future offence, and the whole dark and shadowy assembly of evils and menace subsiding at last, but suddenly and scarcely for a permanence, into commissions of punishment and death—the treacherous security of the gaol and hulks—the dread expedient of a gibbet, erected for the purpose of terror rather than justice, and striking in the heart of those it was to warn—a silence that has, indeed, something of fear,—and—something also of revenge. You cannot imagine that the state of the agricultural districts is one of quiet. You have not yet removed from the peasants a single one of the true causes of disaffection. Are wages higher? Are tithes lower? Are the poor rates better administered? Are the minds of the labourer better cultivated? Not at all, you have then the seeds of the same violence that you encountered last;—they may be hidden in most parts—they are crushed in none.

Do not flatter yourself, you who live in London, in the midst of indolent and aristocratic traders, that you know any thing of the unallayed and angry spirit that is abroad among the rural population—abroad in Kent, in Sussex, in Norfolk. Mount your horse—go down among that population—talk to yon grim and sturdy laborer who has got his notions of politics from some itinerant demagogue hot with strange mixtures of Owen and Paine—he, once a follower of others, is now perhaps the leader of men—who, however, originally honest, are necessarily soon misguided. How can it be otherwise with men to whom the Parish is the chief support, and discontent is the only tutor? Men of this sort do not greatly want a Parliamentary Reform. Their hatred is not to property in boroughs so much as to property in general. But these poor and misguided creatures are not yet dangerous in the aggregate;—the aggregate, thank Heaven! wants a head an organization, a single and developed purpose.—Tremble—yes, Lords and Commons, high and low, rich and poor, one with another—let us tremble lest so large a mass of men, easily led and easily inflamed, ever obtain that head—that organization—that purpose. How can they obtain these? Look at Birmingham—at Sheffield. The answer is clear;—By an union with the greater enlightenment, the more systemized brotherhood of the manufacturing towns. How could that union be brought to pass? By Reform despaired of. How would its possibility be averted at once? By Reform obtained! The agricultural laborer, I mean he who is ill of and discontented—the laborer of Norfolk and Kent—does not zealously require reform;

—the manufacturer does. But the agricultural laborer of that tribe wants disturbance—and the manufacturer will brave disturbance if he can get reform by no other means. Here, then, is the chain of alliance. Had the Lords passed the Bill, that chain would have been broken,—silently, but not less strongly, have its links been now rivetted. The sole evil to the manufacturer is, not that the bill should be lost—it is an evil to him that the bill should be delayed. He may stifle now—can he stifle long his discontent at the increasing and fearful stagnation of trade which that delay produces?—will there not to other stimulants soon be added the stimulus of want? The worse men's present condition the greater their desire of change. You may compound matters safely with stern politicians, but not with a despairing poor.

This, then, is the state of the country.—Public business arrested—trade stagnant—the manufacturing towns silent—intent—disciplined—prepared;—the agricultural districts, burthened with a population of fierce paupers to whom we cannot give the work that would occupy their minds, and whom we have denied the education that might soften;—the two Houses of Parliament in a real and hostile collision;—a vague and unsatisfied apprehension as to the result in the minds of both parties;—the eyes of the nation fixed on the Ministers—trusting their intentions, and suspicious of their power.

Forty one Peers make the majority in the House of Lords, say the people to the government: "You must gain that majority in order to pass the bill; have you made one step towards it? Whereas the Peers you created—where the Bishops you have neutralized—is a particle of that balance that was against us, transferred as yet to our account?"

This is now the great question—the universal question—let us examine it. What are the Ministers about?—How will they gain their Majority?—nay, will they attempt to gain it? or will they once more suffer the Bill to go up to the Lords, and once more be rejected. There are many who think this may be their policy; they go upon false data,—they fancy, that because other Bills insisted upon by the Commons have been twice or thrice rejected by the Lords, (the Ministers neverless retaining office) and after such repeated rejection, passed at length,—they fancy that a similar course of patience—of iteration—of holding out to tire each other down, may be pursued in regard to this Bill.—Fools!—this is the true legislation of the Boudoir—this is the true politics of drawing-rooms and dinner tables. What had other Bills analogous to this?—another law rejected—was but a good deferred; the rejection of this bill is an evil prolonged; it is, in other words, the maintenance of distress, excitement, and dissatisfaction, the widening of a dark and soon, perhaps a lasting gulf between the Lords and the Commons, between the People and their Institutions. If the Ministers once more bring forward Reform, and once more suffer it knowingly to be rejected—then they can only excuse themselves from folly by pleading dishonesty; or from dishonesty by the apologies of folly—for not to know pretty nearly the numbers for and against the proposed measure in the House of Lords when that new measure is once made public, would be an ignorance of which no moderately shrewd and accurate calculator—no man to be trusted with the guidance of public affairs could be guilty. A great deal may be said for the first Rejection an exact calculation of haughty and independent men was not easily to be made, before that test which we now have, of opinion, a vote recorded on the subject. But what could be said, to convince the Country, if a second rejection occur, that the Ministers were not prepared for

it—viz: that they knew they were encouraging false hopes, and leading to dangerous disappointment, through a long and barren interval of interrupted commerce and unwholesome excitement. Resign, if a second rejection occur,—resign they must!—if anticipating resignation, then, how far better and wiser to resign now!—resign with the gratitude not the loathing—with the confidence, not the scorn of the Country;—resign—to be brought back on the shoulders, not trampled beneath the feet, of the People—resign as the baffled friends of a Country, not as the dupes of an Aristocracy—resign as a triumph, and as a disgrace. Of this they must be sensible;—they are men, (at least the more prominent,) who are proud of high character, and had given us the guarantee of long consistence. Lord Althorpe confesses, or rather boasts, with Cicero and with Fox, that he loves popularity. Lord Grey, not enamoured of popularity, is proverbially tenacious of honor. Either tendency in a statesman is like pride in a woman—the corroborative of virtue or the substitute. I confide, then in Ministers, I believe they have made up their minds that the next Reform Bill must be carried through the Lords—I believe they have made up their minds that all the necessary measures shall be taken. What, then, you cry again, will they make fifty or sixty Peers immediately? are they taking advantage of this recess to look out for them? are the patents preparing?—nay, prepared? No—I do not believe this at present will be the Ministerial measure:—What, then, will they be able to neutralize the Bishops,—and will they buy over, by the base lures of place and power, some of the Peers?—I do not think they will have great success here, either;—I think scarce one vote will be won from the Bishops, nor two votes silenced:—and I think that among all the lay Peers, mere sordid inducement will not at this moment, with the lynx-eye of the Public and the stern Inquisition of the Press directed to that body—obtain the barter of three votes;—what is more, the corruption they strive to efface from the Commons, I doubt greatly whether Ministers could gracefully or wisely exercise in the Lords. What, then, will be done?—How will the majority be gained?—To answer this question, let us glance for a moment at the spirit that distinguishes the House of Lords from the House of Commons.

In the former, a glaring truth strikes upon us at once—there is not the same strong demarcation of two parties. The habits of Members of the Upper House are essentially different from those of the Lower. They are not so constantly brought together—they are not animated by the same warm, daily, eager contests in which men grow attached to their leaders, and merge individual opinions in zeal for one general cause. They are more broken up into small knots and petty sects—they are more acted upon by separate opinions, or the influence of the few associates with whom they mix. Thus individuals are more easily detached from the mass than they are among the Commons; and as shades of political sentiment are among them more fine and more numerous, so, either small changes in a particular measure, or minute differences in the mode of treating it, or slight variations in the temper of the times, in which it is brought forward, act upon their conduct, and always have so acted—to a far greater degree than that with the Members of the Lower House; to a degree, indeed, that without remembering the above cause, we should be often at a loss to account for.—Keeping this fact in mind—glance for a moment over the spirit which prevailed the late discussions in the Upper House! Put aside natural resentment and natural prejudice, and you must confess that, for the main part, the opposition to the Reform Bill was conducted in a liberal and enlarged temper. The