

had originally given in its favour. He should give the same confidence to Sir R. Peel, which he had formerly given to Lord J. Russell, when that noble lord had introduced, upon the responsibility of the Government, a measure similar to or even stronger than the present. He could not justify the long and inexplicable delay of the Government, in deferring to this period of the session the second reading of a bill which they deemed of such vital importance; he would, therefore, tell them, that though he was prepared to support this measure, provided it remained unaltered, he would be ready to oppose it should they consent to allow it to be mutilated like the bill they abandoned on the 16th of February.

Colonel Verner also regretted the delay which had taken place in forwarding this bill through the house, but declared his intention of supporting the second reading of it, because he was convinced that it was necessary to the preservation of life and property in Ireland.

Mr. Horsman could not support the second reading of this measure, because he could not conscientiously support the old sanguinary and detestable system out of which it originated.

Mr. Colquhoun said, that if at the close of the debate he should vote for the second reading of this bill, he should not do so upon the grounds urged by Sir R. Inglis. He could not throw off his own shoulders the responsibility for this measure, and repose it entirely on those of the Ministry; neither could he, like Lord G. Bentinck, refuse to grant unconstitutional powers to it, because he did not place the most unreserved confidence in its members. If Lord J. Russell had asked for the powers of this bill, he should say, "first prove your case, and then press your bill as quickly as possible through Parliament;" and he should use the same language to Sir R. Peel. Now he frankly admitted that Ministers had made out an impregnable case, and that the proofs which had convinced the House of Lords were sufficient to convince the House of Commons. He thought, however, that Ministers had not pressed their bill afterwards as rapidly as they ought to have done. The bill, as it stood, was scarcely adequate to the emergency, and yet Lord J. Russell had objected to two of its most valuable clauses—the curfew clause and the transportation clause. He had noted some extraordinary words which fell from Sir R. Peel on Friday night, and which filled him with alarm, lest they were employed to provide him with a loop-hole through which he might creep to the abandonment of those clauses in committee. If those clauses were abandoned, then the bill would not be worth the paper on which it was written, for the repression of crime. He therefore called upon Sir J. Graham to inform him distinctly, when he addressed the house, whether the Government intended to stand by those clauses or not. If Sir J. Graham declined to afford him that information, and refused to give him an explicit assurance as to those two clauses, he (Mr. Colquhoun,) should certainly not vote for the second reading of this bill; but if Sir J. Graham spoke out manfully, and declared that the Government would maintain those clauses, he would give it his strenuous support. He then discussed at considerable length the question, whether the Conservative party would be in a better situation by supporting Sir R. Peel as Minister, or by expelling him from power and placing Lord J. Russell in his place. He ultimately decided the question by declaring that it would be better for the Conservative party to have Lord J. Russell in office, whose projects they could defeat by meeting them with their forces undivided, than Sir R. Peel, who, by creating division in their ranks, was enabled to carry out all the schemes of their opponents.

Colonel Sibthorpe said, that even if he were to receive such a pledge as Mr. Colquhoun required from the Government, he should place no confidence in it, and therefore his vote would not depend on the answer of Sir J. Graham. He should vote against this bill.

Lord J. Russell declared that he could not concur in the doctrine of Sir R. Inglis, that the house ought to pass an act of restriction without examination, merely because it was introduced on the responsibility of the executive Government. In commencing an examination of this bill, he was almost tempted to take the same course which a Minister of the Crown sometimes took in proposing a measure of importance, and to propose that that paragraph of the Queen's speech should be read on which the present measure was founded. Now, giving Ministers every credit for their wish to secure property and life, he must say that the delay of five months after such an announcement could not have been of any advantage to them in securing confidence to the measure which they had brought forward, either on the grounds on which they had proposed it, or on the details which they had included within it. In reply to the argument, that Ministers had been prevented from bringing this measure forward sooner by the state of public business, he observed that two courses had been open to them. One would have been, seeing that life was in danger and that famine was impending over the country, to introduce a temporary measure for the preservation of life and a temporary measure for the supply of food, and to have left the great permanent measure for the adjustment of the corn laws for subsequent consideration; but it was clear that, as soon as they attempted to unite a temporary measure of restriction with a permanent system of corn laws, they must excite a formidable opposition. Another course would have been to advise Her Majesty not to allude to the subject of Irish outrages and murders in her speech; to have passed the corn laws and the custom laws, and then to have considered whether they would introduce such a measure as that which was then before the house. Referring to the question Lord Lincoln had asked him,

namely, why he, who had voted in favour of a similar measure in 1835, refused to vote in favour of this measure in 1846? he replied, that each case must be judged by its own circumstances, and that it was no justification to say that because a peculiar course had been pursued at one time it ought therefore to be pursued at another. In the year 1819 several new and unconstitutional acts were brought in by the Government of that day for the purpose of putting down democratical outrages. Those outrages were repeated during the period of his administration. He did not, however, renew those unconstitutional measures, but called upon Parliament for a larger military and constabulary force, and succeeded in repressing them without applying for any extraordinary powers. The same course was subsequently pursued by Sir R. Peel under still more trying circumstances, and was pursued, he was happy to say, with the same success. Again, in the year 1833, an Irish Coercion Bill was introduced into Parliament more harsh and oppressive even than the present. In 1834, it was mitigated, and again in 1835, it was still further mitigated, until it met with the support of nearly every party in the house. He must, however, remind those who then heard him that in 1833, when Lord Althorpe introduced his measure of severity, he proposed several measures for the improvement and conciliation of Ireland, and that in 1835, when it was renewed, full confidence was placed by the people of Ireland in the Whig Administration that it would not abuse the power so entrusted to it. From 1835 to 1840, the act was in existence, but not in operation; and in 1840, the Whig Government determined to let it expire. He then proceeded to show that all the moral effect of this bill in repressing disorder had been lost by the delay which had occurred in forwarding it through Parliament; and to oppose it, on the ground that there were not in the state of crime in Ireland sufficient reasons for a measure so severe; that its provisions, whilst they were harsh towards the innocent, were ineffective in pointing out the criminal, and that they were not accompanied by such measures of remedy and conciliation as ought to accompany any measure of restriction. He had mentioned on a former occasion that he intended to offer to the clause shutting up men in their cottages from sunset to sunrise the strongest opposition, and that he should propose its omission in committee. He should not have refused his consent to this bill if he had deemed it necessary, on the ground stated by Lord G. Bentinck, that he had no confidence in the Government. Politically speaking, he had no confidence in the Government; and he was justified in having no confidence in it, by the measures which Ministers had introduced even during the present year. Those measures were a practical testimony that the Government now in power had been mistaken, and that the Government which it had supplanted was in the right. He called the attention of the house to the fact, that, slandered as the late Ministers had been, not by Sir R. Peel, but by some of his colleagues, for their scheme of religious education, for their wish to unite the Protestant and Roman Catholic population, in the bonds of love and amity, and for their relaxation of the protection laws, they had been followed, on all those measures—nay, more, Ministers boasted that on education and on the corn laws they had gone further even than their Whig masters. Giving them every credit for having acted on honorable motives, thinking that their present course was a wise and improved course, he did expect that some expression of regret would have fallen from them, that the late Ministers should have been so long the mark of slander and calumny. Sir J. Graham had accused them of being pirates who set fire to the ship as they left it. It now appeared, that having got possession of the ship, the present Ministers had lived on the stores which their predecessors had left behind, had guided themselves by the charts which they had left in the cabin, and had steered by the compass which they had left on the deck; and having done all this, it would not have been too much to have expressed some regret that the Whig Ministers had been so slandered. He had felt those slanders deeply, and if he had received satisfaction from seeing measures founded on such principles succeed in Parliament, still he should have received more, had his opponents had the justice to confess that he and his colleagues had not deserved those invectives by which they had been assailed, because they had seen earlier than the Government what was best for the country. After refuting several arguments urged by Mr. Colquhoun in the course of his speech, he proceeded to address himself to those gentlemen, who from the regard which they felt for the Government, owing to its liberal commercial feeling, were going to vote for a measure which in their consciences they disapproved. If the house passed this bill under the notion that a case was made out for it, and that it would tend to the security of life and property, they would be acquitted by their consciences; but he implored those who had no confidence in the bill itself, and thought it a bad and unconstitutional measure, and only to be supported because it was accompanied by other measures for the benefit of England, to consider what an argument they would be giving by their conduct, not only to those who sought repeal, but to those who went much further. He therefore called on the members, if they thought this measure right, to pass the second reading of it and to go into committee; but if they thought it wrong, to reject it altogether; for any trifling with it would produce a loss of confidence, which would not be reproduced in one or even in five years, but would be an irrecoverable loss now and for ever.

Mr. Disraeli said, that at any time he should be loth to pass a coercion bill for Ireland; but there were now circumstances which rendered him more loth than ever to pass such a measure. After