

Great-Britain.

HOUSE OF LORDS, April, 2.

SPEECH OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

During the time I have had the honor of holding a seat in this house, I have always opposed the granting of political power to the Roman Catholics. I must allow, my Lords, I have opposed concessions on some occasions with a feeling of regret; and never was that regret so strong as at present, when the measure is brought forward by His Majesty's Government, and supported by so many distinguished characters. But, my Lords, I have a duty to perform paramount to the feeling of respect for individuals. I owe a duty to the Church to which I belong, and that Protestant Constitution of which the Church forms a part (Hear.) I have always thought, and I think so still, that the interests of that Church would be injured by the concessions proposed in this Bill. If political power be conceded to the Roman Catholics, the Protestant Church must in my opinion be seriously injured. [Hear, hear.] I have heard it said, at different times in this House, that the principles of the Roman Catholic Religion are changed. It is said those principles have undergone a material change. Surely that assertion will be no longer insisted upon when we hear those who stand high in Ecclesiastical situations—the Roman Catholic Clergy—declare that they will never depart from the principles on which they hold their Church to be founded. I have also heard it said they will no longer abuse their spiritual power; but we have lately seen that power made a most dangerous engine. It has been said, if the Roman Catholics receive all their political rights they will give security for the preservation of peace and tranquility. I am sorry to say, my Lords, I believe that will not be the case. [Hear.] With respect to the repeal of the laws which this Bill is to repeal, I am also induced to believe it would be impolitic to make such repeal. When I see Roman Catholics act in defiance of government, and excite the passions of the people by harangues of a seditious character, and levying taxes on the people for the purpose of promoting faction, I must confess I cannot see any ground to entertain sanguine hopes of a better feeling in Ireland. I cannot expect a better state of things in Ireland. I certainly cannot take on myself to answer for facts, not having information on the affairs of Ireland, but if I give credit to the existence of a better spirit and bow to the necessity, I am bound to consider the very great sacrifices we are called upon to make for temporary tranquility—I cannot contemplate without terror the change which is now proposed in the Constitution of this Country. I can never forget that our Constitution is essentially Protestant, and this measure will entirely deprive it of that character. I hope your Lordships will indulge me in shewing the grounds on which I form my opinion. It cannot be unknown to your Lordships, who are well acquainted with the history of the country, that disputes between the Sovereigns of England and the Pope were of long continuance. I believe the disputes began before the reign of Henry II. I may call your attention to the claims of the Pope in the reign of King John, and prior to the reign of Edward the III. I say nothing of the character and motives of Henry the VIII, whether it was the violence of his passions, or dislike to the Roman sway, but Henry the VIII certainly broke the political and spiritual bond of Rome, and from that reign they might date the Reformation. The attachment of the people of England to the Reformation had continued, and notwithstanding the reign of the House of Stuart, during which attempts were made to restore Popery, the reformed Religion kept its ground. At the passing of these Acts, which they were called upon to repeal, there might have been a feeling occasioned by the disclosures of Titus Oates, but certainly at the Revolution of 1688, those Acts occupied the serious attention of the then government. They found that these Acts were necessary, and that they were proper for the protection of the Monarch on the Throne. By the principles of the Revolution of 1688 no person who professed the Roman Catholic religion could be King of these Realms, nor could the King marry a Roman Catholic Queen. The King was bound by his Coronation oath, on taking which he swears that he will see the laws of the Country executed with justice and mercy, and he further swears that he will maintain the laws of God to the utmost of his power, and the Protestant religion as established by law. How, said the Rev. Prelate was he to do this—was it by his actions? No? but by his Councils, and by his Ministers, who were responsible for the course

which they might think proper to advise him to adopt. He would put to their lordships a case, as it was for the purpose of illustrating. He would suppose that the King were to be surrounded by none but Roman Catholics. He begged their Lordships to remember that he was putting an extreme case. If the King were thus surrounded he would be placed in a situation in which he would be incapable of fulfilling the obligations of his oath. Now then, how could any advisers, who could not enter into his views of the true professions of the Gospel, and who did not believe in the Protestant religion as by law established, assist the King in that capacity? The King governed the country by means of his ministers—by means of his officers of the army and navy—and by means of the civil authorities. They were the parties through whom he was to maintain the Protestant Church inviolate. The King also as Sovereign transacted the concerns of the Country through the State Secretary, and how could he act with foreign Protestant Governments, if the Secretary through whom he communicated were a Catholic? He begged them for a moment to consider what the consequence would be if a Catholic were to be made Secretary for the Colonies. It was through his agency the power of the King would be made known to the Colonies, and if he was a Catholic those Colonies might be deprived of his instruction, as far as regarded the Protestant religion. In the Home Department also the King was represented by his Secretary of State. The Rev. Prelate here spoke in so low a tone, that he was for a few minutes inaudible. When we again caught his voice he proceeded as follows:—It is, my Lords, of vast importance that the Secretary for the Colonies should be well affected towards the Protestant Church. I may speak from experience of a noble Lord whom I now see in his place, and who presided for many years over that department to the benefit of his country, and with credit and honor to himself—of whom indeed, I may say, that while filling this arduous office, he maintained a character which has never been exceeded. I had the honor of being in the confidence of that noble Lord, and of being often consulted by him with reference to the concerns of his department, and I speak from what I know, when I say that he discharged his duties with temperance and zeal, with a firm desire for the maintenance of religion, with the most considerate kindness towards the Clergy, and with the most scrupulous care to prevent dissensions in the Colonies of this kingdom over whose interests it was his destiny to preside. His conduct was in fact, such as to produce towards him in my mind a deep and sincere respect, which I shall preserve to my dying day. Now, I will ask this noble Earl, if he be not fully and entirely aware that no Roman Catholic Secretary for the Colonies could have done for the Churches of those Colonies that which the noble Earl was upon so many occasions enabled to do? Nay, I will go further, and contend that, if a Roman Catholic Secretary were desirous to do as much for the Colonial Church as the noble Earl had ever done, he would not have the power to carry his wishes into effect—that he would not, in short, be as effective a Minister as he who was a Protestant—and that he could not effectually discharge his duty as a representative of the King. With respect, then, to the power lodged in the hands of the Colonial Secretary, it is sufficient for my argument to state that he has at his disposal extensive ecclesiastical patronage...that he must have great influence over the appointments of bishops, archdeacons, and chaplains...and that, if all such appointments be not at his disposal, a great portion of such patronage must, unquestionably remain in his hands. But my Lords, this is not all. The Colonial Secretary possesses absolute power over the comforts of the Colonial Clergy. It has often happened that in consequence of dissensions arising in our Colonies, although the Clergy have been in no way to blame for such dissensions, that they have been under the necessity of applying to the Mother Country to protect their interests and to preserve their rights. I assert then, my Lords, that those interests and rights would not be safe in the hands of a Roman Catholic Colonial Secretary of State, and I contend that, if the Colonial Secretary of State be not actuated by a Protestant spirit, he may possess influence to discourage, almost to extinguish, the Church of England in many of the Colonies of Great Britain. My Lords, it is impossible, I conceive, for any person of a religious mind to look to England without considering her to be, and to have long been a chosen instrument in the hands of Providence for carrying religion to the uttermost ends of the earth, and spreading its influence over all parts of the habitable globe. Under the sanction and by the aid of the Protestant Established Church their large missionary societies have been formed, and their efforts have been successful in many distant regions, and the effects

of their exertions have been felt and appreciated to a very wide extent; but if such societies do not receive the countenance, the actual support of the Colonial Secretary, I affirm that their objects, if carried on at all, can produce but very little beneficial result. I contend, then, my Lords, that the King of Great Britain cannot be fairly represented by any Colonial Secretary of State who is not Protestant. Now, my Lords, with reference also to the Secretary of State for the home department, I should have much to say, but that I do not desire to trespass at much greater length on the attention of your Lordships. But I must observe that the Home Secretary possesses great power with regard to the Established Church, and that a considerable portion of Church patronage is placed in his hands, and at his disposal. I must also add, that his influence is almost unbounded over many of the institutions connected with the Church. I say so much with respect to the Church of England. I will now ask your Lordships to consider for a few moments the situation in which a Protestant Lord Lieutenant of that country would be placed with a Roman Catholic Secretary of State and a Roman Catholic Secretary for Ireland. I trust I shall not be considered as pressing my own views too far in contending that the Church of England will risk the loss of its Protestant character if this measure be passed at all; but to this observation I must also add, that I do not consider it absolutely necessary, that, even if we have a change in the Constitution of this country, there should be a change in the nature of the materials out of which the Government of the country is composed. If, then, this measure be carried, I will say that the heads of the present Administration must feel the heavy responsibility under which they labour by the consequences that may ensue; and, while I hope that they will look at every part of the measure now before the House as Protestant Statesmen ought to do, I hope their most earnest attention will be given to those features of it which cannot but materially affect the church of Ireland. My Lords, that branch of our Established Church demands the most deliberate consideration, and I say that you will not act fairly towards that country if you do not adopt every means consistent with justice to deliver the mass of its people from the tyranny exercised over them by their priests, to prevent them from being any longer kept by violence from scriptural instruction—that scriptural instruction which would in the end lead to a reformation there as well as here. There is another topic which I would press upon your Lordships. It is this—that no village in Ireland, that no spot throughout that country, shall be suffered to remain without its affording to Protestants the means of worshipping God according to the dictates of their conscience. With respect, my Lords, to securities, I must, in justice to His Majesty's Ministers, say that I should not have been satisfied with the securities which they have, I think, very wisely rejected—I mean the payment of the Roman Catholic Priesthood, which would form something like a Roman Catholic Church established under the protection of the State. I consider, then, that the Government had been more than justified in refusing to listen to such a proposition. My Lords, it affords me much pleasure to hear the Noble duke at the head of His Majesty's Government declare his intention to do all in his power for the carrying into effect the laws for preventing the admission of Jesuits into this country, because I had apprehended that those laws would not only be evaded, but would remain as little less than a dead letter upon the statute book. Thus, my Lords, I have raised my voice against the minor details and against the general principle of the bill now lying upon the table of this house, and which your Lordships have been called upon by the head of His Majesty's Government to read for a second time. To that bill I am fixedly and decidedly opposed. I trust that, in the opposition I give it, I am actuated by no spirit unbecoming a Christian Bishop, and that the course I have taken has been pursued without any undue warmth, without any uncharitable feeling, but solely and exclusively out of regard to a deep sense of duty to the interests committed to my charge. I will now trouble your Lordships no further, but move as an amendment to the motion of the Noble Duke, that this Bill be read a second time this day six months. [The Right Rev. Prelate resumed his seat amid continued cheers.]

APRIL 10.

Petitions were presented against the Catholic claims, among which was one from Liverpool, by the Earl of Eldon, so bulky that a porter could scarcely carry it.

Lord Goderich presented a counter petition from Liverpool, signed by 22,000 persons.

The Duke of Wellington moved the third reading of the Catholic relief bill.