

Great-Britain.

HOUSE OF COMMONS, MARCH 5.

This being the day fixed for the introduction of the measure favourable to the Catholics, after some preliminary business had been attended to, Mr. PEEL rose, and addressed the House in a Speech that consumed four hours in the delivery. As our limits do not permit us to give it entire, we have extracted that part of it, which embraces the views of Government and the principles of the Bill.—*Free Press.*

Mr. PEEL then proceeded to explain the details of the measure. He proposed to repeal the penal laws in Ireland and in England, as far as they related to real property enjoyed by Roman Catholics, and that they should be entitled to enjoy landed property on the same terms with other Dissenters, in case of any omission on their part to take the oaths appointed by the penal laws. The next question is, as to the admission of Roman Catholics to political power. "My opinion is, that unless you admit Roman Catholics into Parliament, all your other concessions of political power to them will avail you nothing. [Cheers.] They will only serve as instruments by which they will assist themselves to maintain the struggle against you. Therefore I propose by my bill, that the Roman Catholic gentlemen shall be eligible to take their places as members both in this and the other House of Parliament. I also think that it is desirable to place them entirely on the same footing with the Protestant members of the Legislature. [Hear.] I doubt the policy of placing any restriction on the number of Roman Catholics to be returned to this House, and for this reason—that practically it will be difficult upon any just principles to carry such a restriction into effect. Supposing that the law were, that not more than forty Roman Catholics should be eligible to Parliament at the same time, nothing would be so difficult as to apply the restriction after more than forty members were returned to this house, and to say which of them ought to be sitting members. Nothing would be more difficult than to apply it at the time of a general election—to decide, supposing more than forty Roman Catholic candidates were proposed, which of them should be considered eligible, which not. I object upon still higher grounds to any restriction being placed upon the number. I think that if we say that you shall return thirty or forty Roman Catholics members, as the especial number of those who are to be charged with the care of Roman Catholic interests, we shall do that which we ought above all things to avoid—we shall make them combine—[hear, hear]—we shall hold them up to the country and to their constituents, as a sacred band, who are charged with the interests of the Roman Catholics—and so far from letting party interests and party motives act upon them, we shall separate them from the Protestant members of the House, and shall constitute them into a distinct body, which will have at heart the promotion of the Roman Catholic interests, and perhaps the subversion of the Protestant Church. I therefore propose to let the Roman Catholics enter this House on the same principle as the Protestants of the Established Church, and as the Dissenters from it, there being no distinction whatever made between them. I have also considered with great attention a recent proposal of a right honorable friend of mine, to limit the questions on which Roman Catholic members are to vote. Notwithstanding the ingenious plan of my right honorable friend, I think that it would be difficult to determine the questions which relate exclusively to the interests of the Established Church, and it might be that questions which nominally relate to the Established Church might not be those in which its interests are really involved. If the Roman Catholics were inclined to speak, and precluded from voting on such questions, injury might be inflicted, as effectually by an able man, with party ties and connexions, making an inflammatory speech, and then leaving his party to support it by their votes—yes, as much mischief might be inflicted by such a man, if he spoke, as if he were entitled to vote. [Hear.] On the whole, I am of opinion that such a restriction would be a departure from the principle of the bill, which I have before said is the abolition of all distinctions and the equality of political rights." He was sure that it would be a great relief to the Roman Catholic, and a great satisfaction, he believed he might say, to many Protestant members—[loud cries of "Hear"]—to hear that he proposed to repeal the declaration against transubstantiation—reserving that declaration for certain cases of necessity, which he should hereafter describe. He proposed, he repeated, to repeal that declaration as far as regarded the admission to office.

That declaration against transubstantiation never was intended by its framers as a religious test. It was invented in the reign of Charles the Second, and was merely used as an instrument of exclusion against the Roman Catholics. When that exclusion was to be removed from the Roman Catholics, there could be no reason for allowing the test of exclusion to remain unrepealed; for it would be extremely painful to any man of feeling to declare the religion of the Roman Catholic members who followed him to the table impious and idolatrous. [Hear, hear.] He proposed also to relieve the Roman Catholics from the oath of supremacy, leaving the ancient oath of supremacy to be still taken by Protestants. He hoped that the time would shortly come, in which Roman Catholic members would consent to take the oath of supremacy as it was taken by their ancestors in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. At present they might perhaps object to it, and therefore, to ease tender consciences, he intended to substitute another in lieu of it. He should propose that Roman Catholics should take an oath which would relieve them from the necessity of taking the oath of allegiance, and the bath of abjuration, because they would both be incorporated in it. The Roman Catholics would still remain subject to those oaths, because they would form part of the new oath which he proposed to have administered to them. The oath was thus worded:—

[Here follows the oath, which we published in our last.]

So far as oaths can give security, this oath gives us all the security we can expect. To call upon Catholics to state that they disclaimed the doctrine, that faith was not to be kept with heretics—to oblige them to disavow the doctrine that persons could be relieved by the Pope from the solemn obligations of an oath, and to make other disclaimers of a similar character, was in his opinion, an unnecessary piece of legislation. At the same time, if it should be the opinion of the majority of the Members of that House that such terms ought to be introduced into the oath, he should have no objection to insert them. (Cries of "No, no.") The Roman Catholics could have no objection to take the oath with such insertions, for they had made such disclaimers upon oath at present; but as he proposed this measure in the unaffected spirit of peace; he was therefore desirous that it should not be clogged with any unnecessary restrictions. [Cheers.] The oath which he had read to them differed slightly from that which had been proposed in the various bills brought in by Mr. Grattan, Mr. Plunkett, and the honourable member from Westminster. He thought it desirable that this should be the only oath administered to persons who professed the Roman Catholic Religion. In conformity with the principle he had already declared, the bill proceeded to render Roman Catholics admissible to all corporate offices in Ireland. He had always thought that admissibility to every office connected with the administration of justice, was one of the most valuable privileges which could be conferred upon the general body of the Roman Catholics. At present, the Roman Catholic was excluded by law from the office of high sheriff, and indeed of every office, in the high courts of justice; but by the bill he proposed, they would be equally eligible with the Protestant to every office connected with the criminal justice of the Country. With respect to military offices, the Roman Catholic was at present practically capable of taking any employment which might be assigned him in a military capacity, with the solitary exception of that of Commander-in-Chief. He now came to consider the propriety of admitting them to the higher civil offices of the state; and he thought that no harm could arise from yielding to the Roman Catholics this admission. He doubted the wisdom of qualifying the Roman Catholic to receive a favour from the popular branch of the Constitution, and of leaving him disqualified to receive a favour from the Crown—of allowing him to acquire distinction by flattering the prejudices and courting the applause of the people, and of depriving the Crown of the power to reward him for any exertions which he might make in support of its honour and dignity. In order to leave the avenues of ambition in Parliament open to the Roman Catholic, he was of opinion that we ought to render him capable of being employed in the civil service of his country. He proceeded in the next place, to consider the exceptions with which he proposed to accompany the bill. The leading principle on which the exceptions should be founded, should be their connexion with duties or offices connected with the established Church. The only offices from which he proposed to exclude the Roman Catholics, were those of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and of the Lord Chancellor of Great Britain. He also meant to exclude Catholics from the appointments to any of the Universities or Colleges therein, or institutions upon Pro-

testant foundations, such as Eton, Westminster, Winchester, or any ecclesiastical schools of the same kind. The privileges and nominations to these establishments it was intended to maintain inviolate; in addition to which he meant to retain the law against even presentations by Catholics to places of this kind; and he proposed farther, that in case a Catholic held by virtue of his situation or property any office of church patronage, that such influence should be exclusively vested in the crown. He further proposed that it should not be lawful for any Catholic to advise the crown in the investiture or distribution of any ecclesiastical dignity in the Established Church of England or Ireland.

"These, Sir," continued Mr. Peel, "are the reservations which I make in behalf of the rights, privileges, and immunities of the Established Church. These are the exceptions which the intended bill will give to satisfy the just expectations of the Protestant mind—but be it remembered, that they rest upon specific grounds, and do not in the slightest degree invade the great principle upon which the bill proceeds to an equalization of civil rights. I believe I have now stated enough of the outline of the proposed measure to enable the House to judge of its import. I ought to mention that I intended the proposed oath to apply equally to the Irish and Scotch Catholic. I would now ask, can it be denied by any impartial man that we have gone far towards satisfying the just wishes of the Catholics? Can it be denied that this adjustment is proposed in a spirit which ought to give the most ardent advocate of the Catholic content and satisfaction? This being the case, I say then we have a right to require from him and his adherents, that our measure shall be met on his part and on theirs with a corresponding disposition to afford fair satisfaction to the Protestant mind. We give him the fair eligibility to which he asserts a claim the Catholic in his turn is bound to give us whatever fair concession is not inconsistent with his religious principles. Upon general grounds of expediency, I admit he may cavil or complain of certain conditions; but as a Catholic, I contend he has no right to make such a complaint; for we have conceded to him the removal of the barrier which separates him from his Protestant fellow subjects."

The right honorable secretary concluded by moving the following resolution:—"That the House resolve itself into a committee of the whole House, to consider of the laws imposing civil disabilities on his Majesty's Roman Catholic subjects." [Loud and protracted cheering followed the conclusion of the speech of the honorable gentleman, who towards the close of his address appeared to suffer from exhaustion. His speech occupied nearly four hours and a quarter in the delivery. Throughout he was listened to with the most profound attention, and at times the cheers of applause from an immense majority of the House were so loud and continued, as to be heard in Westminster-hall, and the passages leading to the lobby.]

[FROM THE COURIER.]

The Catholic question has at length triumphed. It were idle and unnecessary to deny or disguise the fact. When you say to a man, who complains of a grievance, that you will take his case into consideration with the view of affording him relief, you acknowledge the existence of the grievance, and pledge yourself to afford a remedy. Whether the measure of that relief will equal his expectation (in the present instance, judging from what passed yesterday in both Houses, we think it will) is another question.

By what mighty magic has this miracle been wrought? Whence come these new lights that have broken in upon some minds? How happens it that we have been the slaves of bigotry and misapprehension for a century and a half? How comes it that we have been so mistaken as to the real features of the Catholic religion? Defection, we are told, is all round us. One Church-man is said to have recanted the errors of the Protestant Constitution. Another also has recanted the errors of the Protestant Constitution—and he who, we should have thought, would have remained true to the last—he who, we had hoped, would have been "among the faithless, only faithful found," Dr. Philpotts, is said, in the language of Parliament, to have—rattled. Is this true? Can this be true? If it be, we can only say in the words used by that ill-advised Monarch, James the Second, in speaking of his son-in-law's defection. "What, is *est il possible* gone too?" If we whom he had impressed with the sincerity of his principles, and the strength of his arguments, cannot desert with him to the hostile camp, it is because we have not yet seen the error of those principles, and the weakness of those arguments. We must be content to remain in the ranks of the Protestant force, though it be mouldering away fast, in which we have so long served.