

Great-Britain.

ROMAN CATHOLIC ASSOCIATION.

HOUSE OF LORDS.

The order of the day on the 19th of February, being for the second reading of the Bill for the Suppression of Dangerous Associations, the Duke of Wellington spoke as follows:

It now becomes my duty to move the second reading of the Bill for suppressing Illegal and Dangerous Associations; in doing so, it is my intention to refer as little as possible to the question so much discussed for the last two hours, and I must say so very irregularly—[Hear, hear.] In adverting to the Catholic Association, it is not my purpose to exaggerate its power, or to exaggerate its evils; its description is, in my opinion, accurately stated in the speech delivered by His Majesty's Commissioners on the first day of the session. I am warranted in stating, that in the original constitution and form of this society there was nothing illegal; its illegality arises from its acts, and the language of its members. Its acts consist principally of the levy of a revenue upon His Majesty's subjects, called a rent, procured, I am afraid, in some instances, by extreme violence, and occasioning many heart-burnings and jealousies among the people. Other acts of the same character are, appointing persons to collect that revenue or rent—nominating others to be treasurers of the sums thus procured—organizing the people, certainly for no good purpose—selecting individuals to superintend such organization, and assuming, in many cases, the government of the country—and, what is more, affecting to assume that government. They have, besides, expended the rent in a manner inconsistent with law and order, and with the Constitution of the Empire.—Part of the money was appropriated to election purposes: and here I beg to draw the attention of some of my noble friends, and particularly of my noble friend heretofore on the Woolsack, to the fact established by the proceedings of this body, of the existence in Parliament, of a Roman Catholic influence, and even of the influence of the Association. [Hear, hear.] I do not mean to discuss the subject further at present, but I beg Noble Lords not to forget that fact when they come to the consideration of the measures I shall propose hereafter, and when they are required to arrive at a decision on those measures. Besides the money spent for the purpose of procuring voters at elections, other sums were expended in endeavours to control the administration of justice in Ireland. I admit the right, and not only the right, but the duty, of every man to watch narrowly and vigilantly the administration of law and justice; but that right and that duty cannot be conveniently or adequately performed by a self-elected, self-created association, having large sums for the purpose of exciting litigation—for the purpose of defending some, of prosecuting others—for the purpose of introducing agents among coronors' juries, and influencing and corrupting the first inquiries into criminal proceedings when information is laid before the Ministers. It is quite obvious that proceedings of this description must tend to the tainting of the very fountain of justice. [Hear, hear.] The proceedings of such a body, so constituted and so organized, might have the effect of giving party spirit in every judicial discussion—of introducing faction among juries, and shaking the public confidence in that tribunal which is the foundation of private rights and the safeguard of personal liberty.

I will not now detain your Lordships by explaining to you the effects which the existence and operations of this Association had upon Ireland; in my opinion these facts belong more properly to a future discussion, when I shall be required to detail the measures the Government will have to propose, after the Bill now on your table shall have passed. This, however, I must say, that from all I have seen and read of Ireland, for the last two years, I do not believe there is on the face of the globe a country claiming the character of civilization in so perilous a condition—[Hear, hear.] In the discussions that have already taken place on the subject of this Association, several of your Lordships have expressed the opinion that the Bill I am about to propose is not necessary, because the ulterior measure announced in the speech from the Throne is calculated, of itself, to put an end to the Catholic Association. That opinion must be founded upon this notion—that the Association speaks the language and entertains the sentiments of the greatest body of the Roman Catholics of Ireland. Now, my Lords, I am afraid, from the numbers that have attended the Association—from the nature of the speeches there delivered, and to which no objection was made, from the patient submission of those who have contributed the rent, that the notion to

which I have alluded is well founded. That any Noble Lords should attempt to justify such conduct seems to me very extraordinary, and that justification can rest upon one ground only, viz., that the claim of the Roman Catholics to the repeal of the disabilities of which they complain is founded upon right. Now, I recollect the many discussions upon the question, both in this and in the other House of Parliament, and I believe not one instance can be pointed out in which what has been required by the Roman Catholics had been rested on the ground of abstract right. It has been invariably argued as a question solely of political expediency, and never as a right: and as a question of political expediency I submit to your Lordships that the Roman Catholics are not justified in having established this Association—in being parties to the proceedings of the Association, and in submitting to the payment of rent, in order to create a revenue to be employed by the Association. Under these circumstances, therefore, I think your Lordships will be fully justified in carrying into effect that part of His Majesty's Speech which recommends the suppression of the Association, before you proceed to the consideration of the ulterior measures also referred to in the Address from the Throne.

While I am upon this subject, I must make an observation upon what just now fell from my Noble and Learned Friend (Lord Eldon) upon the supposed bargain that is to be made upon this subject. I can assure him, that when I came to the consideration of the whole question, it appeared to me absolutely impossible either for the Government or for the Parliament to take it under its observation, with a view to the repeal of the disabilities (on which my opinion was formed on the state of the case itself,) without, in the first instance, and as the first step, putting an end to the existence of this Association. I have not only made no bargain, but I have not even held a conversation with any man in which it was contemplated to purchase concession of the claims by suppression of the Association. [Hear, hear.] I propose the bill before you as a measure necessarily preliminary even to entering upon the discussion of the claims. In fact, in my opinion, any other mode of proceeding would be inconsistent with the dignity of the Crown, and with the honor and character of Parliament. Moreover, I conceive this mode of proceeding absolutely necessary in order to reconcile the subsequent measure I shall propose to many good men in this country, who have viewed, not only with distrust, but with dismay, the violence of the proceedings of the Catholic Association. I also entreat your Lordships to reflect, that we have the eyes of all Europe upon us, and that we must do nothing that can give any man the slightest ground to believe that we are making any sacrifice, excepting on the ground of policy and expediency. [Hear, hear, hear.] Before I proposed to detail to your Lordships, as far as lies in my power, the nature of the measure I propose for your adoption, for the suppression of the Catholic Association, I will call your attention for a few moments to what has been hitherto done, in order to effect the same object both with respect to this and other Associations. I believe, as far back as the year 1787, it was usual for what was called a Catholic Committee to be in existence in Ireland, but the practice seems to have fallen so much into disuse, that, in 1791, there is reason to believe, from a historical document recently discovered, that the names of the members of this Committee were not known. It seldom consisted of more than six members, and, as I have said, in 1791 their names were not known either to the Government or to other persons. This Committee has certainly grown to a size of much more importance since that date, and various attempts, at different periods, were made, both by prosecutions at common law, and by incidental Acts of Parliament, to prevent the meeting of what is now called the Association. In 1794, as well as in 1824, it was not the opinion of the best authorities that the Association was illegal, either in its form or its constitution. The Government, however, was fully sensible of the inconvenience of its existence, and in 1825 a law was passed by Parliament for its suppression. This Act, I believe, was drawn up by some of the ablest men and most eminent lawyers that had appeared for a great number of years, two of whom have now seats in this House: my Noble Friend on the cross-bench was also then on the Woolsack. It proved totally inefficient for any purpose for which it was designed; and, looking at the law as an unlearned individual, it seems to me extraordinary how it ever could have been expected to be effectual. It permitted fourteen meetings of the Association; and besides these fourteen meetings, there were six subjects which they might discuss:—1. religious worship; 2. education; 3. science; 4. manufactures; 5. commerce; 6. agriculture. Upon these topics a meeting might at any time

be held without a violation of the provisions of the Statute. Under these circumstances, as it appears to me, it would be impossible to carry the law into execution in any one instance, notwithstanding the persons intended to be dispersed repeatedly and openly declared their determination to evade it. His Grace exonerated the Government of Ireland for not carrying the provisions of that bill into effect, which in fact could not be done under a Cabinet divided on the subject of the Catholic Claims, and concluded by a description of the objects of the bill (which is already before the public,) hoping that if it were at present defective, it would receive the benefit of his Noble Friend's assistance, in order to render it as efficacious as possible.

LONDON, MARCH 22.

DUEL BETWEEN THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON AND THE EARL OF WINCHILSEA.

In consequence of a letter written by Lord Winchilsea to Mr. Coleridge, Secretary to the Committee for establishing the King's College, in which his Lordship reflected strongly on the conduct of the Duke of Wellington, the latter wrote to Lord Winchilsea, requiring him to make 'reparation' for 'having thus insulted a man who had never injured or offended him.' This being declined by his Lordship, the Duke, after various letters between the parties, finally called upon Lord Winchilsea 'to give him that satisfaction for his conduct which a Gentleman has a right to require, and which a Gentleman never refuses to give.' It was finally arranged that a meeting should take place.

The parties accordingly met at Battersea fields on Saturday morning at 8 o'clock. The Duke was attended by Sir Henry Hardinge as his second. They proceeded on horseback to the appointed place.

The Earl of Winchilsea, attended by the Earl of Falkmouth, arrived in a carriage and four in a few minutes afterwards.

After the necessary preliminaries had been settled, the parties took their ground, at twelve paces. The Duke of Wellington fired first, but without effect. The Earl of Winchilsea then discharged his pistol in the air.

We hear that the Duke of Wellington immediately after the duel proceeded to Windsor.

We have given the substance of Lord Winchilsea's letter to Mr. Coleridge in another page. The correspondence between the parties consisted of sixteen notes. The following contains the substance of them:—

FROM THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON TO THE EARL OF WINCHILSEA.

London, March 19, 1829.

"MY LORD,—I have had the honor of receiving your Lordship's letter of the 18th instant.

"Your Lordship is certainly the best judge of the mode to be adopted of withdrawing your name from the list of subscribers to the King's College. In doing so, however, it does not appear necessary to impute to me, in no unmeasured terms, disgraceful and criminal motives for my conduct in the part which I took in the establishment of the College. No man has a right, whether in public or in private, by speech or in writing, or in print, to insult another by attributing to him motives for his conduct, public or private, which disgrace or criminate him.

"If a Gentleman commits such an act indiscreetly, in the heat of debate, or in a moment of party violence, he is always ready to make reparation to him whom he may thus have injured.

"I am convinced that your Lordship, will, upon reflection, be anxious to relieve yourself from the pain of having thus insulted a man who never injured or offended you.

I have, &c.

"WELLINGTON."

(Signed,)

"The Earl of Winchilsea and Nottingham."

MEMORANDUM OF EARL WINCHILSEA.

March 19.

"Whether I may determine to give an explanation of my letter published in the Standard of Monday last, will depend upon the correctness of my belief that I had grounds for the opinions complained of by the noble Duke as therein expressed.

"I am ready to allow that I was mistaken in my view of the Noble Duke's conduct, as expressed in my public letter to Mr. Coleridge, on the 14th instant, and to state my regret at having so expressed it, provided the Noble Duke will state on his part, that at the time he came forward to preside at the meeting for the establishment of the King's College, London, he did not contemplate the measures which are now in progress for Roman Catholic Emancipation."