

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

It was early in November 1834, and a large shooting party was assembled at Beaumanoir, the seat of that great nobleman, who was the father of Henry Sydney. England is unrivalled for two things, sporting and politics. They were combined at Beaumanoir; for the guests came not merely to slaughter the Duke's pheasants, but to hold council on the prospects of the party, which, it was supposed by the initiated, began at this time to indicate some symptoms of brightening.

The success of the Reform Ministry on their first appeal to the new constituency which they had created, had been fatally complete. But the triumph was as destructive to the victors as to the vanquished.

'We are too strong,' prophetically exclaimed one of the fortunate cabinet, which found itself supported by an inconceivable majority of three hundred. It is to be hoped that some future publisher of private memoirs may have preserved some of the traits of that crude and short-lived parliament, when old Cobbett insolently thrust Sir Robert from the prescriptive seat of the chief of opposition, and treasury understrappers sneered at the 'queer lot' that had arrived from Ireland, little foreseeing what a high bidding that 'queer lot' would eventually command. Gratitude to Lord Grey was the hustings-cry at the end of 1832, the pretext that was to return to the new-modelled House of Commons none but men devoted to the Whig cause. The successful simulation, like everything that is false, carried within it the seeds of its own dissolution. Ingratitude to Lord Grey was more the fashion at the commencement of 1834, and before the close of that eventful year, the once

popular Reform Ministry was upset, and the eagerly-sought Reformed Parliament dissolved!

It can scarcely be alleged that the public was altogether unprepared for this catastrophe. Many deemed it inevitable; few thought it imminent. The career of the Ministry, and the existence of the Parliament, had indeed from the first been turbulent and fitful. It was known, from authority, that there were dissensions in the cabinet, while a House of Commons which passed votes on subjects not less important than the repeal of a tax, or the impeachment of a judge, on one night, and rescinded its resolutions on the following, certainly established no increased claims to the confidence of its constituents in its discretion. Nevertheless, there existed at this period a prevalent conviction that the Whig party, by a great stroke of state, similar in magnitude and effect to that which in the preceding century had changed the dynasty, had secured to themselves the government of this country for, at least, the lives of the present generation. And even the well-informed in such matters were inclined to look upon the perplexing circumstances to which we have alluded rather as symptoms of a want of discipline in a new system of tactics, than as evidences of any essential and deeply-rooted disorder.

The startling rapidity, however, of the strange incidents of 1834; the indignant, soon to become vituperative, secession of a considerable section of the cabinet, some of them esteemed too at that time among its most efficient members; the piteous deprecation of 'pressure from without,' from lips hitherto deemed too stately for entreaty, followed by the 'Trades' Union, thirty thousand strong, parading in procession to Downing-street; the Irish negotiations of Lord Hatherton, strange blending of complex intrigue and almost infantile ingenuousness; the still inexplicable resignation of Lord Althorp, hurriedly followed by his still more mysterious resumption of power, the only result of his precipitate movements being the fall of Lord Grey himself, attended by circumstances which even a friendly

historian could scarcely describe as honourable to his party or dignified to himself; latterly, the extemporaneous address of King William to the Bishops; the vagrant and grotesque apocalypse of the Lord Chancellor; and the fierce recrimination and memorable defiance of the Edinburgh banquet, all these impressive instances of public affairs and public conduct had combined to create a predominant opinion that, whatever might be the consequences, the prolonged continuance of the present party in power was a clear impossibility.

It is evident that the suicidal career of what was then styled the Liberal party had been occasioned and stimulated by its unnatural excess of strength. The apoplectic plethora of 1834 was not less fatal than the paralytic tenuity of 1841. It was not feasible to gratify so many ambitions, or to satisfy so many expectations. Every man had his double; the heels of every placeman were dogged by friendly rivals ready to trip them up. There were even two cabinets; the one that met in council, and the one that met in cabal. The consequence of destroying the legitimate Opposition of the country was, that a moiety of the supporters of Government had to discharge the duties of Opposition.

Herein, then, we detect the real cause of all that irregular and unsettled carriage of public men which so perplexed the nation after the passing of the Reform Act. No government can be long secure without a formidable Opposition. It reduces their supporters to that tractable number which can be managed by the joint influences of fruition and of hope. It offers vengeance to the discontented, and distinction to the ambitious; and employs the energies of aspiring spirits, who otherwise may prove traitors in a division or assassins in a debate.

The general election of 1832 abrogated the Parliamentary Opposition of England, which had practically existed for more than a century and a half. And what a series of equivocal transactions and mortifying adventures did the withdrawal of this salutary restraint entail on the party

which then so loudly congratulated themselves and the country that they were at length relieved from its odious repression! In the hurry of existence one is apt too generally to pass over the political history of the times in which we ourselves live. The two years that followed the Reform of the House of Commons are full of instruction, on which a young man would do well to ponder. It is hardly possible that he could rise from the study of these annals without a confirmed disgust for political intrigue; a dazzling practice, apt at first to fascinate youth, for it appeals at once to our invention and our courage, but one which really should only be the resource of the second-rate. Great minds must trust to great truths and great talents for their rise, and nothing else.

While, however, as the autumn of 1834 advanced, the people of this country became gradually sensible of the necessity of some change in the councils of their Sovereign, no man felt capable of predicting by what means it was to be accomplished, or from what quarry the new materials were to be extracted. The Tory party, according to those perverted views of Toryism unhappily too long prevalent in this country, was held to be literary defunct, except by a few old battered crones of office, crouched round the embers of faction which they were fanning, and muttering 'reaction' in mystic whispers. It cannot be supposed indeed for a moment, that the distinguished personage who had led that party in the House of Commons previously to the passing of the act of 1832, ever despaired in consequence of his own career. His then time of life, the perfection, almost the prime, of manhood; his parliamentary practice, doubly estimable in an inexperienced assembly; his political knowledge; his fair character and reputable position; his talents and tone as a public speaker, which he had always aimed to adapt to the habits and culture of that middle class from which it was concluded the benches of the new Parliament were mainly to be recruited, all these were qualities the possession of which must have assured a mind not apt to be disturbed in its calculations by any intem-

perate heats, that with time and patience the game was yet for him.

Unquestionably, whatever may have been insinuated, this distinguished person had no inkling that his services in 1834 might be claimed by his Sovereign. At the close of the session of that year he had quitted England with his family, and had arrived at Rome, where it was his intention to pass the winter. The party charges that have imputed to him a previous and sinister knowledge of the intentions of the Court, appear to have been made not only in ignorance of the personal character, but of the real position, of the future minister.

It had been the misfortune of this eminent gentleman when he first entered public life, to become identified with a political connection which, having arrogated to itself the name of an illustrious historical party, pursued a policy which was either founded on no principle whatever, or on principles exactly contrary to those which had always guided the conduct of the great Tory leaders. The chief members of this official confederacy were men distinguished by none of the conspicuous qualities of statesmen. They had none of the divine gifts that govern senates and guide councils. They were not orators; they were not men of deep thought or happy resource, or of penetrative and sagacious minds. Their political ken was essentially dull and contracted. They expended some energy in obtaining a defective, blundering acquaintance with foreign affairs; they knew as little of the real state of their own country as savages of an approaching eclipse. This factious league had shuffled themselves into power by clinging to the skirts of a great minister, the last of Tory statesmen, but who, in the unparalleled and confounding emergencies of his latter years, had been forced, unfortunately for England, to relinquish Toryism. His successors inherited all his errors without the latent genius, which in him might have still rallied and extricated him from the consequences of his disasters. His successors did not merely inherit his errors; they exaggerated, they caricatured them. They rode into

power on a spring-tide of all the rampant prejudices and rancorous passions of their time. From the King to the boor their policy was a mere pandering to public ignorance. Impudently usurping the name of that party of which nationality, and therefore universality, is the essence, these pseudo-Tories made Exclusion the principle of their political constitution, and Restriction the genius of their commercial code.

The blind goddess that plays with human fortunes has mixed up the memory of these men with traditions of national glory. They conducted to a prosperous conclusion the most renowned war in which England has ever been engaged. Yet every military conception that emanated from their cabinet was branded by their characteristic want of grandeur. Chance, however, sent them a great military genius, whom they treated for a long time with indifference, and whom they never heartily supported until his career had made him their master. His transcendent exploits, and European events even greater than his achievements, placed in the manikin grasp of the English ministry, the settlement of Europe.

The act of the Congress of Vienna remains the eternal monument of their diplomatic knowledge and political sagacity. Their capital feats were the creation of two kingdoms, both of which are already erased from the map of Europe. They made no single preparation for the inevitable, almost impending, conjunctures of the East. All that remains of the pragmatic arrangements of the mighty Congress of Vienna is the mediatisation of the petty German princes.

But the settlement of Europe by the pseudo-Tories was the dictate of inspiration compared with their settlement of England. The peace of Paris found the government of this country in the hands of a body of men of whom it is no exaggeration to say that they were ignorant of every principle of every branch of political science. So long as our domestic administration was confined merely to the raising of a revenue, they levied taxes with gross

facility from the industry of a country too busy to criticise or complain. But when the excitement and distraction of war had ceased, and they were forced to survey the social elements that surrounded them, they seemed, for the first time, to have become conscious of their own incapacity. These men, indeed, were the mere children of routine. They prided themselves on being practical men. In the language of this defunct school of statesmen, a practical man is a man who practises the blunders of his predecessors.

Now commenced that Condition-of-England Question of which our generation hears so much. During five-and-twenty years every influence that can develop the energies and resources of a nation had been acting with concentrated stimulation on the British Isles. National peril and national glory; the perpetual menace of invasion, the continual triumph of conquest; the most extensive foreign commerce that was ever conducted by a single nation; an illimitable currency; an internal trade supported by swarming millions, whom manufactures and inclosure-bills summoned into existence; above all, the supreme control obtained by man over mechanic power, these are some of the causes of that rapid advance of material civilisation in England, to which the annals of the world can afford no parallel. But there was no proportionate advance in our moral civilisation. In the hurry-scurry of money-making, men-making, and machine-making, we had altogether outgrown, not the spirit, but the organisation, of our institutions.

The peace came; the stimulating influences suddenly ceased; the people, in a novel and painful position, found themselves without guides. They went to the ministry; they asked to be guided; they asked to be governed. Commerce requested a code; trade required a currency; the unfranchised subject solicited his equal privilege; suffering labour clamoured for its rights; a new race demanded education. What did the ministry do?

They fell into a panic. Having fulfilled during their

lives the duties of administration, they were frightened because they were called upon, for the first time, to perform the functions of government. Like all weak men, they had recourse to what they called strong measures. They determined to put down the multitude. They thought they were imitating Mr. Pitt, because they mistook disorganisation for sedition.

Their projects of relief were as ridiculous as their system of coercion was ruthless; both were alike founded in intense ignorance. When we recall Mr. Vansittart with his currency resolutions; Lord Castlereagh with his plans for the employment of labour; and Lord Sidmouth with his plots for ensnaring the laborious; we are tempted to imagine that the present epoch has been one of peculiar advances in political ability, and marvel how England could have attained her present pitch under a series of such governors.

We should, however, be labouring under a very erroneous impression. Run over the statesmen that have figured in England since the accession of the present family, and we may doubt whether there be one, with the exception perhaps of the Duke of Newcastle, who would have been a worthy colleague of the council of Mr. Perceval, or the early cabinet of Lord Liverpool. Assuredly the genius of Bolingbroke and the sagacity of Walpole would have alike recoiled from such men and such measures. And if we take the individuals who were governing England immediately before the French Revolution, one need only refer to the speeches of Mr. Pitt, and especially to those of that profound statesman and most instructed man, Lord Shelburne, to find that we can boast no remarkable superiority either in political justice or in political economy. One must attribute this degeneracy, therefore, to the long war and our insular position, acting upon men naturally of inferior abilities, and unfortunately, in addition, of illiterate habits.

In the meantime, notwithstanding all the efforts of the political Panglosses who, in evening Journals and Quarterly Reviews were continually proving that this was the best

of all possible governments, it was evident to the ministry itself that the machine must stop. The class of Rigbys indeed at this period, one eminently favourable to that fungous tribe, greatly distinguished themselves. They demonstrated in a manner absolutely convincing, that it was impossible for any person to possess any ability, knowledge, or virtue, any capacity of reasoning, any ray of fancy or faculty of imagination, who was not a supporter of the existing administration. If any one impeached the management of a department, the public was assured that the accuser had embezzled; if any one complained of the conduct of a colonial governor, the complainant was announced as a returned convict. An amelioration of the criminal code was discountenanced because a search in the parish register of an obscure village proved that the proposer had not been born in wedlock. A relaxation of the commercial system was denounced because one of its principal advocates was a Socinian. The inutility of Parliamentary Reform was ever obvious since Mr. Rigby was a member of the House of Commons.

To us, with our *Times* newspaper every morning on our breakfast-table, bringing, on every subject which can interest the public mind, a degree of information and intelligence which must form a security against any prolonged public misconception, it seems incredible that only five-and-twenty years ago the English mind could have been so ridden and hoodwinked, and that, too, by men of mean attainments and moderate abilities. But the war had directed the energies of the English people into channels by no means favourable to political education. Conquerors of the world, with their ports filled with the shipping of every clime, and their manufactories supplying the European continent, in the art of self-government, that art in which their fathers excelled, they had become literally children; and Rigby and his brother hirelings were the nurses that frightened them with hideous fables and ugly words.

Notwithstanding, however, all this successful mystification, the Arch-Mediocrity who presided, rather than ruled,

over this Cabinet of Mediocrities, became hourly more conscious that the inevitable transition from fulfilling the duties of an administration to performing the functions of a government could not be conducted without talents and knowledge. The Arch-Mediocrity had himself some glimmering traditions of political science. He was sprung from a laborious stock, had received some training, and though not a statesman, might be classed among those whom the Lord Keeper Williams used to call 'state-mongers.' In a subordinate position his meagre diligence and his frigid method might not have been without value; but the qualities that he possessed were misplaced; nor can any character be conceived less invested with the happy properties of a leader. In the conduct of public affairs his disposition was exactly the reverse of that which is the characteristic of great men. He was pre-emptory in little questions, and great ones he left open.

In the natural course of events, in 1819 there ought to have been a change of government, and another party in the state should have entered into office; but the Whigs, though they counted in their ranks at that period an unusual number of men of great ability, and formed, indeed, a compact and spirited opposition, were unable to contend against the new adjustment of borough influence which had occurred during the war, and under the protracted administration by which that war had been conducted. New families had arisen on the Tory side that almost rivalled old Newcastle himself in their electioneering management; and it was evident that, unless some reconstruction of the House of Commons could be effected, the Whig party could never obtain a permanent hold of official power. Hence, from that period, the Whigs became Parliamentary Reformers.

It was inevitable, therefore, that the country should be governed by the same party; indispensable that the ministry should be renovated by new brains and blood. Accordingly, a Mediocrity, not without repugnance, was induced to withdraw, and the great name of Wellington

supplied his place in council. The talents of the Duke, as they were then understood, were not exactly of the kind most required by the cabinet, and his colleagues were careful that he should not occupy too prominent a post; but still it was an impressive acquisition, and imparted to the ministry a semblance of renown.

There was an individual who had not long entered public life, but who had already filled considerable, though still subordinatt, offices. Having acquired a certain experience of the duties of administration, and distinction for his mode of fulfilling them, he had withdrawn from his public charge; perhaps because he found it a barrier to the attainment of that parliamentary reputation for which he had already shown both a desire and a capacity; perhaps, because being young and independent, he was not over-anxious irremediably to identify his career with a school of politics of the infallibility of which his experience might have already made him a little sceptical. But he possessed the talents that were absolutely wanted, and the terms were at his own dictation. Another, and a very distinguished Mediocrity, who would not resign, was thrust out, and Mr. Peel became Secretary of State.

From this moment dates that intimate connection between the Duke of Wellington and the present First Minister, which has exercised a considerable influence over the career of individuals and the course of affairs. It was the sympathetic result of superior minds placed among inferior intelligences, and was, doubtless, assisted by a then mutual conviction, that the difference of age, the circumstance of sitting in different houses, and the general contrast of their previous pursuits and accomplishments, rendered personal rivalry out of the question. From this moment, too, the domestic government of the country assumed a new character, and one universally admitted to have been distinguished by a spirit of enlightened progress and comprehensive amelioration.

A short time after this, a third and most distinguished Mediocrity died; and Canning, whom they had twice

worried out of the cabinet, where they had tolerated him some time in an obscure and ambiguous position, was recalled just in time from his impending banishment, installed in the first post in the Lower House, and intrusted with the seals of the Foreign Office. The Duke of Wellington had coveted them, nor could Lord Liverpool have been insensible to his Grace's peculiar fitness for such duties; but strength was required in the House of Commons, where they had only one Secretary of State, a young man already distinguished, yet untried as a leader, and surrounded by colleagues notoriously incapable to assist him in debate.

The accession of Mr. Canning to the cabinet, in a position, too, of surpassing influence, soon led to a further weeding of the Mediocrities, and, among other introductions, to the memorable entrance of Mr. Huskisson. In this wise did that cabinet, once notable only for the absence of all those qualities which authorise the possession of power, come to be generally esteemed as a body of men, who, for parliamentary eloquence, official practice, political information, sagacity in council, and a due understanding of their epoch, were inferior to none that had directed the policy of the empire since the Revolution.

If we survey the tenor of the policy of the Liverpool Cabinet during the latter moiety of its continuance, we shall find its characteristic to be a partial recurrence to those frank principles of government which Mr. Pitt had revived during the latter part of the last century from precedents that had been set us, either in practice or in dogma, during its earlier period, by statesmen who then not only bore the title, but professed the opinions, of Tories. Exclusive principles in the constitution, and restrictive principles in commerce, have grown up together; and have really nothing in common with the ancient character of our political settlement, or the manners and customs of the English people. Confidence in the loyalty of the nation, testified by munificent grants of rights and franchises, and favour to an expansive system of traffic, were distinctive qualities of the English sovereignty, until the House of

Commons usurped the better portion of its prerogatives. A widening of our electoral scheme, great facilities to commerce, and the rescue of our Roman Catholic fellow-subjects from the Puritanic yoke, from fetters which have been fastened on them by English Parliaments in spite of the protests and exertions of English Sovereigns; these were the three great elements and fundamental truths of the real Pitt system, a system founded on the traditions of our monarchy, and caught from the writings, the speeches, the councils of those who, for the sake of these and analogous benefits, had ever been anxious that the Sovereign of England should never be degraded into the position of a Venetian Doge.

It is in the plunder of the Church that we must seek for the primary cause of our political exclusion, and our commercial restraint. That unhallowed booty created a factitious aristocracy, ever fearful that they might be called upon to regorge their sacrilegious spoil. To prevent this they took refuge in political religionism, and paltering with the disturbed consciences, or the pious fantasies, of a portion of the people, they organised them into religious sects. These became the unconscious Prætorians of their ill-gotten domains. At the head of these religionists, they have continued ever since to govern, or powerfully to influence, this country. They have in that time pulled down thrones and churches, changed dynasties, abrogated and remodelled parliaments; they have disfranchised Scotland, and confiscated Ireland. One may admire the vigour and consistency of the Whig party, and recognise in their career that unity of purpose that can only spring from a great principle; but the Whigs introduced sectarian religion, sectarian religion led to political exclusion, and political exclusion was soon accompanied by commercial restraint.

It would be fanciful to assume that the Liverpool Cabinet, in their ameliorating career, was directed by any desire to recur to the primordial tenets of the Tory party. That was not an epoch when statesmen cared to prosecute the

investigation of principles. It was a period of happy and enlightened practice. A profounder policy is the offspring of a time like the present, when the original postulates of institutions are called in question. The Liverpool Cabinet unconsciously approximated to these opinions, because from careful experiment they were convinced of their beneficial tendency, and they thus bore an unintentional and impartial testimony to their truth. Like many men, who think they are inventors, they were only reproducing ancient wisdom.

But one must ever deplore that this ministry, with all their talents and generous ardour, did not advance to principles. It is always perilous to adopt expediency as a guide; but the choice may be sometimes imperative. These statesmen, however, took expediency for their director, when principle would have given them all that expediency ensured, and much more.

This ministry, strong in the confidence of the sovereign, the parliament, and the people, might, by the courageous promulgation of great historical truths, have gradually formed a public opinion, that would have permitted them to organise the Tory party on a broad, a permanent, and national basis. They might have nobly effected a complete settlement of Ireland, which a shattered section of this very cabinet was forced a few years after to do partially, and in an equivocating and equivocal manner. They might have concluded a satisfactory reconstruction of the third estate, without producing that convulsion with which, from its violent fabrication, our social system still vibrates. Lastly, they might have adjusted the rights and properties of our national industries in a manner which would have prevented that fierce and fatal rivalry that is now disturbing every hearth of the United Kingdom.

We may, therefore, visit on the *laches* of this ministry the introduction of that new principle and power into our constitution which ultimately may absorb all, AGITATION. This cabinet, then, with so much brilliancy on its surface, is the real parent of the Roman Catholic Association, the Political Unions, the Anti-Corn-Law League.

There is no influence at the same time so powerful and so singular as that of individual character. It arises as often from the weakness of the character as from its strength. The dispersion of this clever and showy ministry is a fine illustration of this truth. One morning the Arch-Mediocrity himself died. At the first blush, it would seem that little difficulties could be experienced in finding his substitute. His long occupation of the post proved, at any rate, that the qualification was not excessive. But this cabinet, with its serene and blooming visage, had been all this time charged with fierce and emulous ambitions. They waited the signal, but they waited in grim repose. The death of the nominal leader, whose formal superiority, wounding no vanity, and offending no pride, secured in their councils, equality among the able, was the tocsin of their anarchy. There existed in this cabinet two men, who were resolved immediately to be prime ministers; a third who was resolved eventually to be prime minister, but would at any rate occupy no ministerial post without the lead of a House of Parliament; and a fourth, who felt himself capable of being prime minister, but despaired of the revolution which could alone make him one; and who found an untimely end when that revolution had arrived.

Had Mr. Secretary Canning remained leader of the House of Commons under the Duke of Wellington, all that he would have gained by the death of Lord Liverpool was a master. Had the Duke of Wellington become Secretary of State under Mr. Canning he would have materially advanced his political position, not only by holding the seals of a high department in which he was calculated to excel, but by becoming leader of the House of Lords. But his Grace was induced by certain court intriguers to believe that the King would send for him, and he was also aware that Mr. Peel would no longer serve under any minister in the House of Commons. Under any circumstances it would have been impossible to keep the Liverpool Cabinet together. The struggle, therefore, between the Duke of

Wellington and 'my dear Mr. Canning' was inter necine, and ended somewhat unexpectedly.

And here we must stop to do justice to our friend Mr. Rigby, whose conduct on this occasion was distinguished by a bustling dexterity which was quite charming. He had, as we have before intimated, on the credit of some clever lampoons written during the Queen's trial, which were, in fact, the effusions of Lucian Gay, wriggled himself into a sort of occasional unworthy favour at the palace, where he was half butt and half buffoon. Here, during the interregnum occasioned by the death, or rather inevitable retirement, of Lord Liverpool, Mr. Rigby contrived to scrape up a conviction that the Duke was the winning horse, and in consequence there appeared a series of leading articles in a notorious evening newspaper, in which it was, as Tadpole and Taper declared, most 'slashingly' shown, that the son of an actress could never be tolerated as a Prime Minister of England. Not content with this, and never doubting for a moment the authentic basis of his persuasion, Mr. Rigby poured forth his coarse volubility on the subject at several of the new clubs which he was getting up in order to revenge himself for having been black-balled at White's.

What with arrangements about Lord Monmouth's boroughs, and the lucky bottling of some claret which the Duke had imported on Mr. Rigby's recommendation, this distinguished gentleman contrived to pay almost hourly visits at Apsley House, and so bullied Tadpole and Taper that they scarcely dared address him. About four-and-twenty hours before the result, and when it was generally supposed that the Duke was in, Mr. Rigby, who had gone down to Windsor to ask his Majesty the date of some obscure historical incident, which Rigby, of course, very well knew, found that audiences were impossible, that Majesty was agitated, and learned, from an humble but secure authority, that in spite of all his slashing articles, and Lucian Gay's parodies of the Irish melodies, Canning was to be Prime Minister.

This would seem something of a predicament! To common minds, there are no such things as scrapes for gentlemen with Mr. Rigby's talents for action. He had indeed, in the world, the credit of being an adept in machinations, and was supposed ever to be involved in profound and complicated contrivances. This was quite a mistake. There was nothing profound about Mr. Rigby; and his intellect was totally incapable of devising or sustaining an intricate or continuous scheme. He was, in short, a man who neither felt nor thought; but who possessed, in a very remarkable degree, a restless instinct for adroit baseness. On the present occasion he got into his carriage, and drove at the utmost speed from Windsor to the Foreign Office. The Secretary of State was engaged when he arrived; but Mr. Rigby would listen to no difficulties. He rushed upstairs, flung open the door, and with agitated countenance, and eyes suffused with tears, threw himself into the arms of the astonished Mr. Canning.

'All is right,' exclaimed the devoted Rigby, in broken tones; 'I have convinced the King that the First Minister must be in the House of Commons. No one knows it but myself; but it is certain.'

We have seen that at an early period of his career, Mr. Peel withdrew from official life. His course had been one of unbroken prosperity; the hero of the University had become the favourite of the House of Commons. His retreat, therefore, was not prompted by chagrin. Nor need it have been suggested by a calculating ambition, for the ordinary course of events was fast bearing to him all to which man could aspire. One might rather suppose, that he had already gained sufficient experience, perhaps in his Irish Secretaryship, to make him pause in that career of superficial success which education and custom had hitherto chalked out for him, rather than the creative energies of his own mind. A thoughtful intellect may have already detected elements in our social system which required a finer observation, and a more unbroken study, than the gyves and trammels of office would permit. He may have

discovered that the representation of the University, looked upon in those days as the blue ribbon of the House of Commons, was a sufficient fetter without unnecessarily adding to its restraint. He may have wished to reserve himself for a happier occasion, and a more progressive period. He may have felt the strong necessity of arresting himself in his rapid career of felicitous routine, to survey his position in calmness, and to comprehend the stirring age that was approaching.

For that, he could not but be conscious that the education which he had consummated, however ornate and refined, was not sufficient. That age of economical statesmanship which Lord Shelburne had predicted in 1787, when he demolished, in the House of Lords, Bishop Watson and the Balance of Trade, which Mr. Pitt had comprehended, and for which he was preparing the nation when the French Revolution diverted the public mind into a stronger and more turbulent current, was again impending, while the intervening history of the country had been prolific in events which had aggravated the necessity of investigating the sources of the wealth of nations. The time had arrived when parliamentary pre-eminence could no longer be achieved or maintained by gorgeous abstractions borrowed from Burke, or shallow systems purloined from De Lolme, adorned with Horatian points, or varied with Virgilian passages. It was to be an age of abstruse disquisition, that required a compact and sinewy intellect, nurtured in a class of learning not yet honoured in colleges, and which might arrive at conclusions conflicting with predominant prejudices.

Adopting this view of the position of Mr. Peel, strengthened as it is by his early withdrawal for awhile from the direction of public affairs, it may not only be a charitable but a true estimate of the motives which influenced him in his conduct towards Mr. Canning, to conclude that he was not guided in that transaction by the disingenuous rivalry usually imputed to him. His statement in Parliament of the determining circumstances of his conduct, coupled with

his subsequent and almost immediate policy, may perhaps always leave this a painful and ambiguous passage in his career; but in passing judgment on public men, it behoves us ever to take large and extended views of their conduct; and previous incidents will often satisfactorily explain subsequent events, which, without their illustrating aid, are involved in misapprehension or mystery.

It would seem, therefore, that Sir Robert Peel, from an early period, meditated his emancipation from the political confederacy in which he was implicated, and that he has been continually baffled in this project. He broke loose from Lord Liverpool; he retired from Mr. Canning. Forced again into becoming the subordinate leader of the weakest government in parliamentary annals, he believed he had at length achieved his emancipation, when he declared to his late colleagues, after the overthrow of 1830, that he would never again accept a secondary position in office. But the Duke of Wellington was too old a tactician to lose so valuable an ally. So his Grace declared after the Reform Bill was passed, as its inevitable result, that thenceforth the Prime Minister must be a member of the House of Commons; and this aphorism, cited as usual by the Duke's parasites as demonstration of his supreme sagacity, was a graceful mode of resigning the pre-eminence which had been productive of such great party disasters. It is remarkable that the party who devised and passed the Reform Bill, and who, in consequence, governed the nation for ten years, never once had their Prime Minister in the House of Commons: but that does not signify; the Duke's maxim is still quoted as an oracle almost equal in prescience to his famous query, 'How is the King's government to be carried on?' a question to which his Grace by this time has contrived to give a tolerably practical answer.

Sir Robert Peel, who had escaped from Lord Liverpool, escaped from Mr. Canning, escaped even from the Duke of Wellington in 1832, was at length caught in 1834; the victim of ceaseless intriguers, who neither comprehended his position, nor that of their country.

CHAPTER II.

BEAUMANOIR was one of those Palladian palaces, vast and ornate, such as the genius of Kent and Campbell delighted in at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Placed on a noble elevation, yet screened from the northern blast, its sumptuous front, connected with its far-spreading wings by Corinthian colonnades, was the boast and pride of the midland counties. The surrounding gardens, equalling in extent the size of ordinary parks, were crowded with temples dedicated to abstract virtues and to departed friends. Occasionally a triumphal arch celebrated a general whom the family still esteemed a hero; and sometimes a votive column commemorated the great statesman who had advanced the family a step in the peerage. Beyond the limits of this pleasance the hart and hind wandered in a wilderness abounding in ferny coverts and green and stately trees.

The noble proprietor of this demesne had many of the virtues of his class; a few of their failings. He had that public spirit which became his station. He was not one of those who avoided the exertions and the sacrifices which should be inseparable from high position, by the hollow pretext of a taste for privacy, and a devotion to domestic joys. He was munificent, tender, and bounteous to the poor, and loved a flowing hospitality. A keen sportsman, he was not untinged by letters, and had indeed a cultivated taste for the fine arts. Though an ardent politician, he was tolerant to adverse opinions, and full of amenity to his opponents. A firm supporter of the corn-laws, he never refused a lease. Notwithstanding there ran through his whole demeanour and the habit of his mind, a vein of native simplicity that was full of charm, his manner was finished. He never offended any one's self-love. His good breeding, indeed, sprang from the only sure source of gentle manners, a kind heart. To have pained others would have

pained himself. Perhaps, too, this noble sympathy may have been in some degree prompted by the ancient blood in his veins, an accident of lineage rather rare with the English nobility. One could hardly praise him for the strong affections that bound him to his hearth, for fortune had given him the most pleasing family in the world; but, above all, a peerless wife.

The Duchess was one of those women who are the delight of existence. She was sprung from a house not inferior to that with which she had blended, and was gifted with that rare beauty which time ever spares, so that she seemed now only the elder sister of her own beautiful daughters. She, too, was distinguished by that perfect good breeding which is the result of nature and not of education: for it may be found in a cottage, and may be missed in a palace. 'Tis a genial regard for the feelings of others that springs from an absence of selfishness. The Duchess, indeed, was in every sense a fine lady; her manners were refined and full of dignity; but nothing in the world could have induced her to appear bored when another was addressing or attempting to amuse her. She was not one of those vulgar fine ladies who meet you one day with a vacant stare, as if unconscious of your existence, and address you on another in a tone of impertinent familiarity. Her temper, perhaps, was somewhat quick, which made this consideration for the feelings of others still more admirable, for it was the result of a strict moral discipline acting on a good heart. Although the best of wives and mothers, she had some charity for her neighbours. Needing herself no indulgence, she could be indulgent; and would by no means favour that strait-laced morality that would constrain the innocent play of the social body. She was accomplished, well read, and had a lively fancy. Add to this that sunbeam of a happy home, a gay and cheerful spirit in its mistress, and one might form some faint idea of this gracious personage.

The eldest son of this house was now on the Continent; of his two younger brothers, one was with his regiment,

and the other was Coningsby's friend at Eton, our Henry Sydney. The two eldest daughters had just married, on the same day, and at the same altar; and the remaining one, Theresa, was still a child.

The Duke had occupied a chief post in the Household under the late administration, and his present guests chiefly consisted of his former colleagues in office. There were several members of the late cabinet, several members for his Grace's late boroughs, looking very much like martyrs, full of suffering and of hope. Mr. Tadpole and Mr. Taper were also there; they too had lost their seats since 1832; but being men of business, and accustomed from early life to look about them, they had already commenced the combinations which on a future occasion were to bear them back to the assembly where they were so missed.

Taper had his eye on a small constituency which had escaped the fatal schedules, and where he had what they called a 'connection;' that is to say, a section of the suffrages who had a lively remembrance of Treasury favours once bestowed by Mr. Taper, and who had not been so liberally dealt with by the existing powers. This connection of Taper was in time to leaven the whole mass of the constituent body, and make it rise in full rebellion against its present liberal representative, who being one of a majority of three hundred, could get nothing when he called at Whitehall or Downing Street.

Tadpole, on the contrary, who was of a larger grasp of mind than Taper, with more of imagination and device but not so safe a man, was coquetting with a manufacturing town and a large constituency, where he was to succeed by the aid of the Wesleyans, of which pious body he had suddenly become a fervent admirer. The great Mr. Rigby, too, was a guest out of Parliament, nor caring to be in; but hearing that his friends had some hopes, he thought he would just come down to dash them.

The political grapes were sour for Mr. Rigby; a prophet of evil, he preached only mortification and repentance and despair to his late colleagues. It was the only satisfaction

left Mr. Rigby, except assuring the Duke that the finest pictures in his gallery were copies, and recommending him to pull down Beaumanoir, and rebuild it on a design with which Mr. Rigby would furnish him.

The battue and the banquet were over; the ladies had withdrawn; and the butler placed fresh claret on the table.

'And you really think you could give us a majority, Tadpole?' said the Duke.

Mr. Tadpole, with some ceremony, took a memorandum-book out of his pocket, amid the smiles and the faint well-bred merriment of his friends.

'Tadpole is nothing without his book,' whispered Lord Fitz-Booby.

'It is here,' said Mr. Tadpole, emphatically patting his volume, 'a clear working majority of twenty-two.'

'Near sailing that!' cried the Duke.

'A far better majority than the present Government have,' said Mr. Tadpole.

'There is nothing like a good small majority,' said Mr. Taper, 'and a good registration.'

'Ay! register, register, register!' said the Duke. 'Those were immortal words.'

'I can tell your Grace three far better ones,' said Mr. Tadpole, with a self-complacent air. 'Object, object, object!'

'You may register, and you may object,' said Mr. Rigby, 'but you will never get rid of Schedule A and Schedule B.'

'But who could have supposed two years ago that affairs would be in their present position?' said Mr. Taper, deferentially.

'I foretold it,' said Mr. Rigby. 'Every one knows that no government now can last twelve months.'

'We may make fresh boroughs,' said Taper. 'We have reduced Shabbyton at the last registration under three hundred.'

'And the Wesleyans!' said Tadpole. 'We never counted on the Wesleyans!'

'I am told these Wesleyans are really a respectable body,' said Lord Fitz-Booby. 'I believe there is no material difference between their tenets and those of the Establishment. I never heard of them much till lately. We have too long confounded them with the mass of Dissenters, but their conduct at several of the later elections prove that they are far from being unreasonable and disloyal individuals. When we come in, something should be done for the Wesleyans, eh, Rigby?'

'All that your Lordship can do for the Wesleyans is what they will very shortly do for themselves, appropriate a portion of the Church Revenues to their own use.'

'Nay, nay,' said Mr. Tadpole with a chuckle, 'I don't think we shall find the Church attacked again in a hurry. I only wish they would try! A good Church cry before a registration,' he continued, rubbing his hands; 'eh, my Lord, I think that would do.'

'But how are we to turn them out?' said the Duke.

'Ah!' said Mr. Taper, 'that is a great question.'

'What do you think of a repeal of the Malt Tax?' said Lord Fitz-Booby. 'They have been trying it on in —shire, and I am told it goes down very well.'

'No repeal of any tax,' said Taper, sincerely shocked, and shaking his head; 'and the Malt Tax of all others. I am all against that.'

'It is a very good cry though, if there be no other,' said Tadpole.

'I am all for a religious cry,' said Taper. 'It means nothing, and, if successful, does not interfere with business when we are in.'

'You will have religious cries enough in a short time,' said Mr. Rigby, rather wearied of any one speaking but himself, and thereat he commenced a discourse, which was, in fact, one of his 'slashing' articles in petto on Church Reform, and which abounded in parallels between the present affairs and those of the reign of Charles I. Tadpole, who did not pretend to know anything but the state of the registration, and Taper, whose political reading

was confined to an intimate acquaintance with the Red Book and Beatson's Political Index, which he could repeat backwards, were silenced. The Duke, who was well instructed and liked to be talked to, sipped his claret, and was rather amused by Rigby's lecture, particularly by one or two statements characterised by Rigby's happy audacity, but which the Duke was too indolent to question. Lord Fitz-Booby listened with his mouth open, but rather bored. At length, when there was a momentary pause, he said

'In my time, the regular thing was to move an amendment on the address.'

'Quite out of the question,' exclaimed Tadpole, with a scoff.

'Entirely given up,' said Taper, with a sneer.

'If you will drink no more claret, we will go and hear some music,' said the Duke.

CHAPTER III.

A BREAKFAST at Beaumanoir was a meal of some ceremony. Every guest was expected to attend, and at a somewhat early hour. Their host and hostess set them the example of punctuality. 'Tis an old form rigidly adhered to in some great houses, but, it must be confessed, does not contrast very agreeably with the easier arrangements of establishments of less pretension and of more modern order.

The morning after the dinner to which we have been recently introduced, there was one individual absent from the breakfast-table whose non-appearance could scarcely be passed over without notice; and several inquired with some anxiety, whether their host were indisposed.

'The Duke has received some letters from London which detain him,' replied the Duchess. 'He will join us.'

'Your Grace will be glad to hear that your son Henry is very well,' said Mr. Rigby; 'I heard of him this morn-

ing. Harry Coningsby enclosed me a letter for his grandfather, and tells me that he and Henry Sydney had just had a capital run with the King's hounds.'

'It is three years since we have seen Mr. Coningsby,' said the Duchess. 'Once he was often here. He was a great favourite of mine. I hardly ever knew a more interesting boy.'

'Yes, I have done a great deal for him,' said Mr. Rigby. 'Lord Monmouth is fond of him, and wishes that he should make a figure; but how any one is to distinguish himself now, I am really at a loss to comprehend.'

'But are affairs so very bad?' said the Duchess, smiling. 'I thought that we were all regaining our good sense and good temper.'

'I believe all the good sense and all the good temper in England are concentrated in your Grace,' said Mr. Rigby, galkantly.

'I should be sorry to be such a monopolist. But Lord Fitz-Booby was giving me last night quite a glowing report of Mr. Tadpole's prospects for the nation. We were all to have our own again; and Percy to carry the county.'

'My dear Madam, before twelve months are past, there will not be a county in England. Why should there be? If boroughs are to be disfranchised, why should not counties be destroyed?'

At this moment the Duke entered, apparently agitated. He bowed to his guests, and apologised for his unusual absence. 'The truth is,' he continued, 'I have just received a very important despatch. An event has occurred which may materially affect affairs. Lord Spencer is dead.'

A thunderbolt in a summer sky, as Sir William Temple says, could not have produced a greater sensation. The business of the repast ceased in a moment. The knives and forks were suddenly silent. All was still.

'It is an immense event,' said Tadpole.

'I don't see my way,' said Taper.

'When did he die?' said Lord Fitz-Booby.

'I don't believe it,' said Mr. Rigby.

'They have got their man ready,' said Tadpole.

'It is impossible to say what will happen,' said Taper.

'Now is the time for an amendment on the address,' said Fitz-Booby.

'There are two reasons which convince me that Lord Spencer is not dead,' said Mr. Rigby.

'I fear there is no doubt of it,' said the Duke, shaking his head.

'Lord Althorp was the only man who could keep them together,' said Lord Fitz-Booby.

'On the contrary,' said Tadpole. 'If I be right in my man, and I have no doubt of it, you will have a radical programme, and they will be stronger than ever.'

'Do you think they can get the steam up again?' said Taper, musingly.

'They will bid high,' replied Tadpole. 'Nothing could be more unfortunate than this death. Things were going on so well and so quietly! The Wesleyans almost with us!'

'And Shabbyton too!' mournfully exclaimed Taper. 'Another registration and quiet times, and I could have reduced the constituency to two hundred and fifty.'

'If Lord Spencer had died on the 10th,' said Rigby, 'it must have been known to Henry Rivers. And I have a letter from Henry Rivers by this post. Now, Althorp is in Northamptonshire, mark that, and Northampton is a county ——'

'My dear Rigby,' said the Duke, 'pardon me for interrupting you. Unhappily, there is no doubt Lord Spencer is dead, for I am one of his executors.'

This announcement silenced even Mr. Rigby, and the conversation now entirely merged in speculations on what would occur. Numerous were the conjectures hazarded, but the prevailing impression was, that this unforeseen event might embarrass those secret expectations of Court succour in which a certain section of the party had for some time reason to indulge.

From the moment, however, of the announcement of Lord Spencer's death, a change might be visibly observed

in the tone of the party at Beaumanoir. They became silent, moody, and restless. There seemed a general, though not avowed, conviction that a crisis of some kind or other was at hand. The post, too, brought letters every day from town teeming with fanciful speculations, and occasionally mysterious hopes.

'I kept this cover for Peel,' said the Duke pensively, as he loaded his gun on the morning of the 14th. 'Do you know, I was always against his going to Rome.'

'It is very odd,' said Tadpole, 'but I was thinking of the very same thing.'

'It will be fifteen years before England will see a Tory Government,' said Mr. Rigby, drawing his ramrod, 'and then it will only last five months.'

'Melbourne, Althorp, and Durham, all in the Lords,' said Taper. 'Three leaders! They must quarrel.'

'If Durham come in, mark me, he will dissolve on Household Suffrage and the Ballot,' said Tadpole.

'Not nearly so good a cry as Church,' replied Taper.

'With the Malt Tax,' said Tadpole. 'Church, without the Malt Tax, will not do against Household Suffrage and Ballot.'

'Malt Tax is madness,' said Taper. 'A good farmer's friend cry without Malt Tax would work just as well.'

'They will never dissolve,' said the Duke. 'They are so strong.'

'They cannot go on with three hundred majority,' said Taper. 'Forty is as much as can be managed with open constituencies.'

'If he had only gone to Paris instead of Rome!' said the Duke.

'Yes,' said Mr. Rigby, 'I could have written to him then by every post, and undeceived him as to his position.'

'After all he is the only man,' said the Duke; 'and I really believe the country thinks so.'

'Pray, what is the country?' inquired Mr. Rigby. 'The country is nothing; it is the constituency you have to deal with.'

'And to manage them you must have a good cry,' said Taper. 'All now depends upon a good cry.'

'So much for the science of politics,' said the Duke, bringing down a pheasant. 'How Peel would have enjoyed this cover!

'He will have plenty of time for sport during his life,' said Mr. Rigby.

On the evening of the 15th of November, a despatch arrived at Beaumanoir, informing his Grace that the King had dismissed the Whig Ministry, and sent for the Duke of Wellington. Thus the first agitating suspense was over; to be succeeded, however, by expectation still more anxious. It was remarkable that every individual suddenly found that he had particular business in London which could not be neglected. The Duke very properly pleaded his executorial duties; but begged his guests on no account to be disturbed by his inevitable absence. Lord Fitz-Booby had just received a letter from his daughter, who was indisposed, at Brighton, and he was most anxious to reach her. Tadpole had to receive deputations from Wesleyans, and well-registered boroughs anxious to receive well-principled candidates. Taper was off to get the first job at the contingent Treasury, in favour of the Borough of Shabbyton. Mr. Rigby alone was silent; but he quietly ordered a post-chaise at daybreak, and long before his fellow guests were roused from their slumbers, he was halfway to London, ready to give advice, either at the pavilion or at Apsley House.

CHAPTER IV.

ALTHOUGH it is far from improbable that, had Sir Robert Peel been in England in the autumn of 1834, the Whig government would not have been dismissed; nevertheless, whatever may now be the opinion of the policy of that measure; whether it be looked on as a premature move-

ment which necessarily led to the compact reorganisation of the Liberal party, or as a great stroke of State, which, by securing at all events a dissolution of the Parliament of 1832, restored the healthy balance of parties in the Legislature, questions into which we do not now wish to enter, it must be generally admitted, that the conduct of every individual eminently concerned in that great historical transaction was characterised by the rarest and most admirable quality of public life, moral courage. The Sovereign who dismissed a Ministry apparently supported by an overwhelming majority in the Parliament and the nation, and called to his councils the absent chief of a parliamentary section, scarcely numbering at that moment one hundred and forty individuals, and of a party in the country supposed to be utterly discomfited by a recent revolution; the two ministers who in this absence provisionally administered the affairs of the kingdom in the teeth of an enraged and unscrupulous Opposition, and perhaps themselves not sustained by a profound conviction, that the arrival of their expected leader would convert their provisional into a permanent position; above all the statesman who accepted the great charge at a time and under circumstances which marred probably the deep projects of his own prescient sagacity and maturing ambition; were all men gifted with a high spirit of enterprise, and animated by that active fortitude which is the soul of free governments.

It was a lively season, that winter of 1834! What hopes, what fears, and what bets! From the day on which Mr. Hudson was to arrive at Rome to the election of the Speaker, not a contingency that was not the subject of a wager! People sprang up like mushrooms; town suddenly became full. Everybody who had been in office, and everybody who wished to be in office; everybody who had ever had anything, and everybody who ever expected to have anything, were alike visible. All of course by mere accident; one might meet the same men regularly every day for a month, who were only 'passing through town.'

Now was the time for men to come forward who had

never despaired of their country. True they had voted for the Reform Bill, but that was to prevent a revolution. And now they were quite ready to vote against the Reform Bill, but this was to prevent a dissolution. These are the true patriots, whose confidence in the good sense of their countrymen and in their own selfishness is about equal. In the meantime, the hundred and forty threw a grim glance on the numerous waiters on Providence, and amiable trimmers, who affectionately enquired every day when news might be expected of Sir Robert. Though too weak to form a government, and having contributed in no wise by their exertions to the fall of the late, the cohort of Parliamentary Tories felt all the alarm of men who have accidentally stumbled on some treasure-trove, at the suspicious sympathy of new allies. But, after all, who were to form the government, and what was the government to be? Was it to be a Tory government, or an Enlightened-Spirit-of-the-Age Liberal-Moderate-Reform government; was it to be a government of high philosophy or of low practice; of principle or of expediency; of great measures or of little merit? A government of statesmen or of clerks? Of Humbug or of Humdrum? Great questions these, but unfortunately there was nobody to answer them. They tried the Duke; but nothing could be pumped out of him. All that he knew, which he told in his curt, husky manner, was, that he had to carry on the King's government. As for his solitary colleague, he listened and smiled, and then in his musical voice asked them questions in return, which is the best possible mode of avoiding awkward inquiries. It was very unfair this; for no one knew what tone to take; whether they should go down to their public dinners and denounce the Reform Act or praise it; whether the Church was to be re-modelled or only admonished; whether Ireland was to be conquered or conciliated.

'This can't go on much longer,' said Taper to Tadpole, as they reviewed together their electioneering correspondence on the 1st of December; 'we have no cry.'

'He is half way by this time,' said Tadpole; 'send an

extract from a private letter to the *Standard*, dated Augsburg, and say he will be here in four days.'

At last he came; the great man in a great position, summoned from Rome to govern England. The very day that he arrived he had his audience with the King.

It was two days after this audience; the town, though November, in a state of excitement; clubs crowded, not only morning rooms, but halls and staircases swarming with members eager to give and to receive rumours equally vain; streets lined with cabs and chariots, grooms and horses; it was two days after this audience that Mr. Ormsby, celebrated for his political dinners, gave one to a numerous party. Indeed his saloons to-day, during the half-hour of gathering which precedes dinner, offered in the various groups, the anxious countenances, the inquiring voices, and the mysterious whispers, rather the character of an Exchange or Bourse than the tone of a festive society.

Here might be marked a murmuring knot of greyheaded privy-councillors, who had held fat offices under Perceval and Liverpool, and who looked back to the Reform Act as to a hideous dream; there some middle-aged aspirants might be observed who had lost their seats in the convulsion, but who flattered themselves they had done something for the party in the interval, by spending nothing except their breath in fighting hopeless boroughs, and occasionally publishing a pamphlet, which really produced less effect than chalking the walls. Light as air, and proud as a young peacock, tripped on his toes a young Tory, who had contrived to keep his seat in a Parliament where he had done nothing, but who thought an Under-Secretaryship was now secure, particularly as he was the son of a noble Lord who had also in a public capacity plundered and blundered in the good old time. The true political adventurer, who with dull desperation had stuck at nothing, had never neglected a treasury note, had been present at every division, never spoke when he was asked to be silent, and was always ready on any subject when they wanted him to

open his mouth; who had treated his leaders with servility even behind their backs, and was happy for the day if a future Secretary of the Treasury bowed to him; who had not only discountenanced discontent in the party, but had regularly reported in strict confidence every instance of insubordination which came to his knowledge; might there too be detected under all the agonies of the crisis; just beginning to feel the dread misgiving, whether being a slave and a sneak were sufficient qualifications for office, without family or connection. Poor fellow! half the industry he had wasted on his cheerless craft might have made his fortune in some decent trade!

In dazzling contrast with these throes of low ambition, were some brilliant personages who had just scampered up from Melton, thinking it probable that Sir Robert might want some moral lords of the bed-chamber. Whatever may have been their private fears or feelings, all however seemed smiling and significant, as if they knew something if they chose to tell it, and that something very much to their own satisfaction. The only grave countenance that was occasionally ushered into the room belonged to some individual whose destiny was not in doubt, and who was already practising the official air that was in future to repress the familiarity of his former fellow-strugglers.

‘Do you hear anything?’ said a great noble who wanted something in the general scramble, but what he knew not; only he had a vague feeling he ought to have something, having made such great sacrifices.

‘There is a report that Clifford is to be Secretary to the Board of Control,’ said Mr. Earwig, whose whole soul was in this subaltern arrangement, of which the Minister of course had not even thought; ‘but I cannot trace it to any authority.’

‘I wonder who will be their Master of the Horse,’ said the great noble, loving gossip though he despised the gossipier.

‘Clifford has done nothing for the party,’ said Mr. Earwig.

'I dare say Rambrooke will have the Buckhounds,' said the great noble, musingly.

'Your Lordship has not heard Clifford's name mentioned?' continued Mr. Earwig.

'I should think they had not come to that sort of thing,' said the great noble, with ill-disguised contempt. 'The first thing after the Cabinet is formed is the Household: the things you talk of are done last;' and he turned upon his heel, and met the imperturbable countenance and clear sarcastic eye of Lord Eskdale.

'You have not heard anything?' asked the great noble of his brother patrician.

'Yes, a great deal since I have been in this room; but unfortunately it is all untrue.'

'There is a report that Rambrooke is to have the Buckhounds; but I cannot trace it to any authority.'

'Pooh!' said Lord Eskdale.

'I don't see that Rambrooke should have the Buckhounds any more than anybody else. What sacrifices has he made?'

'Past sacrifices are nothing,' said Lord Eskdale. 'Present sacrifices are the thing we want: men who will sacrifice their principles, and join us.'

'You have not heard Rambrooke's name mentioned?'

'When a Minister has no Cabinet, and only one hundred and forty supporters in the House of Commons, he has something else to think of than places at Court,' said Lord Eskdale, as he slowly turned away to ask Lucian Gay whether it were true that Jenny Colon was coming over.

Shortly after this, Henry Sydney's father, who dined with Mr. Ormsby, drew Lord Eskdale into a window, and said in an under tone

'So there is to be a kind of programme: something is to be written.'

'Well, we want a cue,' said Lord Eskdale. 'I heard of this last night: Rigby has written something.'

The Duke shook his head.

'No; Peel means to do it himself.'

But at this moment Mr. Ormsby begged his Grace to lead them to dinner.

‘Something is to be written.’ It is curious to recall the vague terms in which the first projection of documents, that are to exercise a vast influence on the course of affairs or the minds of nations, is often mentioned. This ‘something to be written’ was written; and speedily; and has ever since been talked of.

We believe we may venture to assume that at no period during the movements of 1834-5 did Sir Robert Peel ever believe in the success of his administration. Its mere failure could occasion him little dissatisfaction; he was compensated for it by the noble opportunity afforded to him for the display of those great qualities, both moral and intellectual, which the swaddling-clothes of a routine prosperity had long repressed, but of which his opposition to the Reform Bill had given to the nation a significant intimation. The brief administration elevated him in public opinion, and even in the eye of Europe; and it is probable that a much longer term of power would not have contributed more to his fame.

The probable effect of the premature effort of his party on his future position as a Minister was, however, far from being so satisfactory. At the lowest ebb of his political fortunes, it cannot be doubted that Sir Robert Peel looked forward, perhaps through the vista of many years, to a period when the national mind, arrived by reflection and experience at certain conclusions, would seek in him a powerful expositor of its convictions. His time of life permitted him to be tranquil in adversity, and to profit by its salutary uses. He would then have acceded to power as the representative of a Creed, instead of being the leader of a Confederacy, and he would have been supported by earnest and enduring enthusiasm, instead of by that churlish sufferance which is the result of a supposed balance of advantages in his favour. This is the consequence of the tactics of those short-sighted intriguers, who persisted in looking upon a revolution as a mere party

struggle, and would not permit the mind of the nation to work through the inevitable phases that awaited it. In 1834, England, though frightened at the reality of Reform, still adhered to its phrases; it was inclined, as practical England, to maintain existing institutions; but, as theoretical England, it was suspicious that they were indefensible.

No one had arisen either in Parliament, the Universities, or the Press, to lead the public mind to the investigation of principles; and not to mistake, in their reformatations, the corruption of practice for fundamental ideas. It was this perplexed, ill-informed, jaded, shallow generation, repeating cries which they did not comprehend, and wearied with the endless ebullitions of their own barren conceit, that Sir Robert Peel was summoned to govern. It was from such materials, ample in quantity, but in all spiritual qualities most deficient; with great numbers, largely acried, Consoled up to their chins, but without knowledge, genius, thought, truth, or faith, that Sir Robert Peel was to form a 'great Conservative party on a comprehensive basis.' That he did this like a dexterous politician, who can deny? Whether he realised those prescient views of a great statesman in which he had doubtless indulged, and in which, though still clogged by the leadership of 1834, he may yet find fame for himself and salvation for his country, is altogether another question. His difficult attempt was expressed in an address to his constituents, which now ranks among state papers. We shall attempt briefly to consider it with the impartiality of the future.

CHAPTER V.

THE TAMWORTH MANIFESTO of 1834 was an attempt to construct a party without principles; its basis therefore was necessarily Latitudinarianism; and its inevitable consequence has been Political Infidelity.

At an epoch of political perplexity and social alarm, the

confederation was convenient, and was calculated by aggregation to encourage the timid and confused. But when the perturbation was a little subsided, and men began to inquire why they were banded together, the difficulty of defining their purpose proved that the league, however respectable, was not a party. The leaders indeed might profit by their eminent position to obtain power for their individual gratification, but it was impossible to secure their followers that which, after all, must be the great recompense of a political party, the putting in practice of their opinions; for they had none.

There was indeed a considerable shouting about what they called Conservative principles; but the awkward question naturally arose, what will you conserve? The prerogatives of the Crown, provided they are not exercised; the independence of the House of Lords, provided it is not asserted; the Ecclesiastical estate, provided it is regulated by a commission of laymen. Everything, in short, that is established, as long as it is a phrase and not a fact.

In the meantime, while forms and phrases are religiously cherished in order to make the semblance of a creed, the rule of practice is to bend to the passion or combination of the hour. Conservatism assumes in theory that everything established should be maintained; but adopts in practice that everything that is established is indefensible. To reconcile this theory and this practice, they produce what they call 'the best bargain;' some arrangement which has no principle and no purpose, except to obtain a temporary lull of agitation, until the mind of the Conservatives, without a guide and without an aim, distracted, tempted, and bewildered, is prepared for another arrangement, equally statesmanlike with the preceding one.

Conservatism was an attempt to carry on affairs by substituting the fulfilment of the duties of office for the performance of the functions of government; and to maintain this negative system by the mere influence of property, reputable private conduct, and what are called good connections. Conservatism discards Prescription, shrinks from

Principle, disavows Progress; having rejected all respect for Antiquity, it offers no redress for the Present, and makes no preparation for the Future. It is obvious that for a time, under favourable circumstances, such a confederation might succeed; but it is equally clear, that on the arrival of one of those critical conjunctures that will periodically occur in all states, and which such an unimpassioned system is even calculated ultimately to create, all power of resistance will be wanting: the barren curse of political infidelity will paralyse all action; and the Conservative Constitution will be discovered to be a *Caput Mortuum*.

CHAPTER VI.

IN the meantime, after dinner, Tadpole and Taper, who were among the guests of Mr. Ormsby, withdrew to a distant sofa, out of earshot, and indulged in confidential talk.

‘Such a strength in debate was never before found on a Treasury bench,’ said Mr. Tadpole; ‘the other side will be dumbfounded.’

‘And what do you put our numbers at now?’ inquired Mr. Taper.

‘Would you take fifty-five for our majority?’ rejoined Mr. Tadpole.

‘It is not so much the tail they have, as the excuse their junction will be for the moderate, sensible men to come over,’ said Taper. ‘Our friend Sir Everard for example, it would settle him.’

‘He is a solemn imposter,’ rejoined Mr. Tadpole; ‘but he is a baronet and a county member, and very much looked up to by the Wesleyans. The other men, I know, have refused him a peerage.’

‘And we might hold out judicious hopes,’ said Taper.

‘No one can do that better than you,’ said Tadpole. ‘I am apt to say too much about those things.’

'I make it a rule never to open my mouth on such subjects,' said Taper. 'A nod or a wink will speak volumes. An affectionate pressure of the hand will sometimes do a great deal; and I have promised many a peerage without committing myself, by an ingenious habit of deference which cannot be mistaken by the future noble.'

'I wonder what they will do with Rigby,' said Tadpole.

'He wants a good deal,' said Taper.

'I tell you what, Mr. Taper, the time is gone by when a Marquess of Monmouth was Letter A, No. 1.'

'Very true, Mr. Tadpole. A wise man would do well now to look to the great middle class, as I said the other day to the electors of Shabbyton.'

'I had sooner be supported by the Wesleyans,' said Mr. Tadpole, 'than by all the marquesses in the peerage.'

'At the same time,' said Mr. Taper, 'Rigby is a considerable man. If we want a slashing article —'

'Pooh!' said Mr. Tadpole. 'He is quite gone by. He takes three months for his slashing articles. Give me the man who can write a leader. Rigby can't write a leader.'

'Very few can,' said Mr. Taper. 'However, I don't think much of the press. Its power is gone by. They overdid it.'

'There is Tom Chudleigh,' said Tadpole. 'What is he to have?'

'Nothing, I hope,' said Taper. 'I hate him. A coxcomb! Cracking his jokes and laughing at us.'

'He has done a good deal for the party, though,' said Tadpole. 'That, to be sure, is only an additional reason for throwing him over, as he is too far committed to venture to oppose us. But I am afraid from something that dropped to-day, that Sir Robert thinks he has claims.'

'We must stop them,' said Taper, growing pale. 'Fellows like Chudleigh, when they once get in, are always in one's way. I have no objection to young noblemen being put forward, for they are preferred so rapidly, and then their fathers die, that in the long run they do not practically interfere with us.'

'Well, his name was mentioned,' said Tadpole. 'There is no concealing that.'

'I will speak to Earwig,' said Taper. 'He shall just drop into Sir Robert's ear by chance, that Chudleigh used to quiz him in the smoking-room. Those little bits of information do a great deal of good.'

'Well, I leave him to you,' said Tadpole. 'I am heartily with you in keeping out all fellows like Chudleigh. They are very well for opposition; but in office we don't want wits.'

'And when shall we have the answer from Knowsley?' inquired Taper. 'You anticipate no possible difficulty?'

'I tell you it is "carte blanche,"' replied Tadpole. 'Four places in the cabinet. Two secretaryships at the least. Do you happen to know any gentleman of your acquaintance, Mr. Taper, who refuses Secretaryships of State so easily, that you can for an instant doubt of the present arrangement?'

'I know none indeed,' said Mr. Taper, with a grim smile.

'The thing is done,' said Mr. Tadpole.

'And now for our cry,' said Mr. Taper.

'It is not a Cabinet for a good cry,' said Tadpole; 'but then, on the other hand, it is a Cabinet that will sow dissension in the opposite ranks, and prevent them having a good cry.'

'Ancient institutions and modern improvements, I suppose, Mr. Tadpole?'

'Ameliorations is the better word; ameliorations. Nobody knows exactly what it means.'

'We go strong on the Church?' said Mr. Taper.

'And no repeal of the Malt Tax; you were right, Taper. It can't be listened to for a moment.'

'Something might be done with prerogative,' said Mr. Taper; 'the King's constitutional choice.'

'Not too much,' replied Mr. Tadpole. 'It is a raw time yet for prerogative.'

'Ah! Tadpole,' said Mr. Taper, getting a little maudlin; 'I often think, if the time should ever come, when you and I should be joint Secretaries of the Treasury!'

'We shall see, we shall see. All we have to do is to get into Parliament, work well together, and keep other men down.'

'We will do our best,' said Taper. 'A dissolution you hold inevitable?'

'How are you and I to get into Parliament if there be not one? We must make it inevitable. I tell you what, Taper, the lists must prove a dissolution inevitable. You understand me? If the present Parliament goes on, where shall we be? We shall have new men cropping up every session.'

'True, terribly true,' said Mr. Taper. 'That we should ever live to see a Tory government again! We have reason to be very thankful.'

'Hush!' said Mr. Tadpole. 'The time has gone by for Tory governments; what the country requires is a sound Conservative government.'

'A sound Conservative government,' said Taper, musingly. 'I understand: Tory men and Whig measures.'

CHAPTER VII.

AMID the contentions of party, the fierce struggles of ambition, and the intricacies of political intrigue, let us not forget our Eton friends. During the period which elapsed from the failure of the Duke of Wellington to form a government in 1832, to the failure of Sir Robert Peel to carry on a government in 1835, the boys had entered, and advanced in youth. The ties of friendship which then united several of them had only been confirmed by continued companionship. Coningsby and Henry Sydney, and Buckhurst and Vere, were still bound together by entire sympathy, and by the affection of which sympathy is the only sure spring. But their intimacies had been increased by another familiar friend. There had risen up between Coningsby and Millbank mutual sentiments of deep, and

even ardent, regard. Acquaintance had developed the superior qualities of Millbank. His thoughtful and inquiring mind, his inflexible integrity, his stern independence, and yet the engaging union of extreme tenderness of heart with all this strength of character, had won the goodwill, and often excited the admiration, of Coningsby. Our hero, too, was gratified by the affectionate deference that was often shown to him by one who condescended to no other individual; he was proud of having saved the life of a member of their community whom masters and boys alike considered; and he ended by loving the being on whom he had conferred a great obligation.

The friends of Coningsby, the sweet-tempered and intelligent Henry Sydney, the fiery and generous Buckhurst, and the calm and sagacious Vere, had ever been favourably inclined to Millbank, and had they not been, the example of Coningsby would soon have influenced them. He had obtained over his intimates the ascendant power, which is the destiny of genius. Nor was the submission of such spirits to be held cheap. Although they were willing to take the colour of their minds from him, they were in intellect and attainments, in personal accomplishments and general character, the leaders of the school; an authority not to be won from five hundred high-spirited boys without the possession of great virtues and great talents.

As for the dominion of Coningsby himself, it was not limited to the immediate circle of his friends. He had become the hero of Eton; the being of whose existence everybody was proud, and in whose career every boy took an interest. They talked of him, they quoted him, they imitated him. Fame and power are the objects of all men. Even their partial fruition is gained by very few; and that too at the expense of social pleasure, health, conscience, life. Yet what power of manhood in passionate intenseness, appealing at the same time to the subject and the votary, can rival that which is exercised by the idolised chieftain of a great public school? What fame of after days equals the rapture of celebrity that thrills the youthful poet, as in

tones of rare emotion he recites his triumphant verses amid the devoted plaudits of the flower of England? That's fame, that's power; real, unquestioned, undoubted, catholic. Alas! the schoolboy, when he becomes a man, finds that power, even fame, like everything else, is an affair of party.

Coningsby liked very much to talk politics with Millbank. He heard things from Millbank which were new to him. Himself, as he supposed, a high Tory, which he was according to the revelation of the Rigbys, he was also sufficiently familiar with the hereditary tenets of his Whig friend, Lord Vere. Politics had as yet appeared to him a struggle whether the country was to be governed by Whig nobles or Tory nobles; and he thought it very unfortunate that he should probably have to enter life with his friends out of power, and his family boroughs destroyed. But in conversing with Millbank, he heard for the first time of influential classes in the country, who were not noble, and were yet determined to acquire power. And although Millbank's views, which were of course merely caught up from his father, without the intervention of his own intelligence, were doubtless crude enough, and were often very acutely canvassed and satisfactorily demolished by the clever prejudices of another school, which Coningsby had at command, still they were, unconsciously to the recipient, materials for thought, and insensibly provoked in his mind a spirit of inquiry into political questions, for which he had a predisposition.

It may be said, indeed, that generally among the upper boys there might be observed at this time, at Eton, a reigning inclination for political discussion. The school truly had at all times been proud of its statesmen and its parliamentary heroes, but this was merely a superficial feeling in comparison with the sentiment which now first became prevalent. The great public questions that were the consequence of the Reform of the House of Commons, had also agitated their young hearts. And especially the controversies that were now rife respecting the nature and character of ecclesiastical establishments, wonderfully ad-

dressed themselves to their excited intelligence. They read their newspapers with a keen relish, canvassed debates, and criticised speeches; and although in their debating society, which had been instituted more than a quarter of a century, discussion on topics of the day was prohibited, still by fixing on periods of our history when affairs were analogous to the present, many a youthful orator contrived very effectively to reply to Lord John, or to refute the fallacies of his rival.

As the political opinions predominant in the school were what in ordinary parlance are styled Tory, and indeed were far better entitled to that glorious epithet than the flimsy shifts which their fathers were professing in Parliament and the country; the formation and the fall of Sir Robert Peel's government had been watched by Etonians with great interest, and even excitement. The memorable efforts which the Minister himself made, supported only by the silent votes of his numerous adherents, and contending alone against the multiplied assaults of his able and determined foes, with a spirit equal to the great occasion, and with resources of parliamentary contest which seemed to increase with every exigency; these great and unsupported struggles alone were calculated to gain the sympathy of youthful and generous spirits. The assault on the revenues of the Church; the subsequent crusade against the House of Lords; the display of intellect and courage exhibited by Lord Lyndhurst in that assembly, when all seemed cowed and faint-hearted; all these were incidents or personal traits apt to stir the passions, and create in breasts not yet schooled to repress emotion, a sentiment even of enthusiasm. It is the personal that interests mankind, that fires their imagination, and wins their hearts. A cause is a great abstraction, and fit only for students; embodied in a party, it stirs men to action; but place at the head of that party a leader who can inspire enthusiasm, he commands the world. Divine faculty! Rare and incomparable privilege! A parliamentary leader who possesses it, doubles his majority; and he who has it not, may shroud himself

in artificial reserve, and study with undignified arrogance and an awkward haughtiness, but he will nevertheless be as far from controlling the spirit as from captivating the hearts of his sullen followers.

However, notwithstanding this general feeling at Eton, in 1835, in favour of 'Conservative principles,' which was, in fact, nothing more than a confused and mingled sympathy with some great political truths, which were at the bottom of every boy's heart, but nowhere else; and with the personal achievements and distinction of the chieftains of the party; when all this hubbub had subsided, and retrospection, in the course of a year, had exercised its moralising influence over the more thoughtful part of the nation, inquiries, at first faint and unpretending, and confined indeed for a long period to limited, though inquisitive, circles, began gently to circulate, what Conservative principles were.

These inquiries, urged indeed with a sort of hesitating scepticism, early reached Eton. They came, no doubt, from the Universities. They were of a character, however, far too subtle and refined to exercise any immediate influence over the minds of youth. To pursue them required previous knowledge and habitual thought. They were not yet publicly prosecuted by any school of politicians, or any section of the public press. They had not a local habitation or a name. They were whispered in conversation by a few. A tutor would speak of them in an esoteric vein to a favourite pupil, in whose abilities he had confidence, and whose future position in life would afford him the opportunity of influencing opinion. Among others, they fell upon the ear of Coningsby. They were addressed to a mind which was prepared for such researches.

There is a Library at Eton formed by the boys and governed by the boys; one of those free institutions which are the just pride of that noble school, which shows the capacity of the boys for self-government, and which has sprung from the large freedom that has been wisely conceded them, the prudence of which confidence has been

proved by their rarely abusing it. This Library has been formed by subscriptions of the present and still more by the gifts of old Etonians. Among the honoured names of these donors may be remarked those of the Grenvilles and Lord Wellesley; nor should we forget George IV., who enriched the collection with a magnificent copy of the *Delphin Classics*. The Institution is governed by six directors, the three first Collegers and the three first Oppidans for the time being; and the subscribers are limited to the one hundred senior members of the school.

It is only to be regretted that the collection is not so extensive as it is interesting and choice. Perhaps its existence is not so generally known as it deserves to be. One would think that every Eton man would be as proud of his name being registered as a donor in the Catalogue of this Library, as a Venetian of his name being inscribed in the *Golden Book*. Indeed an old Etonian, who still remembers with tenderness the sacred scene of youth, could scarcely do better than build a Gothic apartment for the reception of the collection. It cannot be doubted that the Provost and fellows would be gratified in granting a piece of ground for the purpose.

Great were the obligations of Coningsby to this Eton Library. It introduced him to that historic lore, that accumulation of facts and incidents illustrative of political conduct, for which he had imbibed an early relish. His study was especially directed to the annals of his own country, in which youth, and not youth alone, is frequently so deficient. This collection could afford him Clarendon and Burnet, and the authentic volumes of Coxe: these were rich materials for one anxious to be versed in the great parliamentary story of his country. During the last year of his stay at Eton, when he had completed his eighteenth year, Coningsby led a more retired life than previously; he read much, and pondered with all the pride of acquisition over his increasing knowledge.

And now the hour has come when this youth is to be launched into a world more vast than that in which he has

hitherto sojourned, yet for which this microcosm has been no ill preparation. He will become more wise; will he remain as generous? His ambition may be as great; will it be as noble? What, indeed, is to be the future of this existence that is now to be sent forth into the great aggregate of entities? Is it an ordinary organisation that will jostle among the crowd, and be jostled? Is it a finer temperament, susceptible of receiving the impressions and imbibing the inspirations of superior yet sympathising spirits? Or is it a primordial and creative mind; one that will say to his fellows, 'Behold, God has given me thought; I have discovered truth, and you shall believe?'

The night before Coningsby left Eton, alone in his room, before he retired to rest, he opened the lattice and looked for the last time upon the landscape before him; the stately keep of Windsor, the bowery meads of Eton, soft in the summer moon and still in the summer night. He gazed upon them; his countenance had none of the exultation, that under such circumstances might have distinguished a more careless glance, eager for fancied emancipation and passionate for a novel existence. Its expression, was serious, even sad; and he covered his brow with his hand.