

CHAPTER XXXVI

1866-67

REFORM

AFTER the withdrawal of the Reform Bill of 1860, no other measure in this direction was introduced during the lifetime of Lord Palmerston. But after his death, in October, 1865, when Lord Russell became Prime Minister, there was a general expectation that some proposals of Reform would be laid before Parliament.

The change in the Premiership did not greatly affect the personnel of the Government. Lord Clarendon succeeded Lord Russell at the Foreign Office, while his place as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was filled by Mr. Goschen. Sir Charles Wood, who had been obliged to resign the India Office on account of illness, was succeeded by Lord de Grey, and Lord Hartington became Secretary for War.

Soon after the General Election of 1865, which resulted in the return of the Liberal party with an increased majority, the Duke wrote to Mr. Gladstone :

‘ Yes, our majority is too big by half for “ resting and being thankful ”; and I have thought for some time that, even if this had not been so, we still ought to be considering some practical measure on the question of Reform. I think we could carry any reasonable measure; though, of course, a new Parliament will not like anything which would compel another dissolution soon.’

The Bill, which was introduced by Mr. Gladstone on March 12, 1866, was very moderate in tone. It proposed to reduce the county franchise from £50 to £14, and the borough franchise from £10 to £7, and included a clause for the enfranchisement of lodgers. As in the case of the Bill of 1860, Parliament was indifferent on the subject, and even Mr. Gladstone's eloquence failed to arouse the interest of the House. The Conservatives were united against the Bill, and accused the Government of introducing only half of the measure, and of concealing in the meantime the part dealing with Redistribution. The Bill passed its first reading two days later, and the second reading was announced for April 12th.

In the interval, Mr. Gladstone addressed a great Reform meeting at Liverpool on April 6th, and the Duke, who was present, refers in his journal to 'the magnificent speech' made by Mr. Gladstone on this occasion. At a banquet held on the previous evening, the Duke, replying to the toast of the 'House of Lords,' spoke in support of the Reform Bill.

Three days before the second reading of the Bill the Duke wrote to Mr. Gladstone :

'I am very unwilling to give up "grouping,"* even though it be on a small scale, and only as a commencement.

'As regards the line of disfranchisement, I see no insuperable objection to Lord Russell's double rule of a minimum of 5,000 population and 300 ten-pounders, although, of course, the latter test is open to the cavil that you should take the voters under the new franchise and not under the old. But the

* This refers to the proposal to group small boroughs together instead of disenfranchising them.

ten-pounders are equally good as a test of relative size and importance.

'This double test will take in Colne and Wilton, to leave out which would seem to be ridiculous. As regards this limited grouping, I would simply take this rule: Add all the boroughs deprived of exclusive representation to the nearest borough of population under, say, 10,000.

'I should greatly prefer your more extended plan of grouping. But if it be assumed that this is hopeless, I would not reject grouping altogether because it can only be commenced on a small scale.

'Let us remember that we are very likely to be obliged to appeal to the country, and with the country a tolerably bold scheme is more likely to help us than a small one.'

On April 11th, 1866, Mr. Gladstone wrote to the Duke:

'Have you made any progress in further investigating the rate of growth in the £10 constituency? I should like much to know any new results attained, and if there are none, to have once more the paper you kindly lent me.

'My brother speaks warmly of the effect of your visit to Liverpool.'

When the Bill came up for the second reading on April 12, it was met by Mr. Kinglake's adverse motion, 'That it is not expedient to go into committee on the said Bill until this House shall have before it the expected Bill for the redistribution of seats.'

The Government agreed that the Redistribution Bill should be laid before the House without delay. The Reform Bill passed the second reading by a majority of five only.

Meanwhile the Duke was endeavouring to avert the

calamity which he saw was rapidly approaching. On April 26th he wrote to Mr. Gladstone :

‘ As on the subject of Redistribution you intend to show what our opponents really mean, and what they aim at, so, on the subject of the Franchise, I think you may well show up what some, at least, of our opponents mean and aim at.

‘ They denounce what they call a “ blank reduction.” I find this objection very common. What is aimed at is a “ discriminating reduction ”—that is to say, one figure for small boroughs, and another for large towns.

‘ They assume that all the small boroughs are corrupt and all the big ones pure.

‘ It would be well to show up this common notion by the fact, notorious to all, that bribery has been detected in more large towns than in small ones.

‘ To deny a vote to a householder at Arundel who has a good house for £7, and to give it to a roomholder in Liverpool who pays the same rent for two rooms, would be a violently unjust proposal. Yet this is what is aimed at. Let bribery be severely dealt with where detected, but don’t let it be made a pretext for wholesale injustice.’

On the 19th of June the Government was defeated, on an amendment brought forward by Lord Dunkellin, and the Ministers tendered their resignations to the Queen. Her Majesty at first asked them to reconsider their decision, but several members of the Cabinet, including the Duke of Argyll, were strongly of opinion that it was undesirable to carry on the Government, on account of the absence of unanimity in the party.

The Queen therefore accepted Lord Russell’s resignation, and Lord Derby was sent for and asked to form an Administration.

After the resignation of the Liberal Government, the Duke went to Scotland, and remained at Inveraray for some months. Towards the end of October he travelled with the Duchess and some of his family to Rome, where he had arranged to spend the winter. Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone and the Cardwells were in Rome at the same time, as well as a number of other friends.

The Duke greatly enjoyed his visits to the different galleries and churches, his delight in art making him keenly appreciative of the treasures to be found in Rome. The notes in his diary record his impressions at the time, but they are, unfortunately, too brief for transcription.

In addition to English friends, the Duke had many Italian acquaintances in Rome, and while there he was received by the Pope, and visited the King, in company with Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Cardwell. He also became acquainted with several of the Cardinals. He was especially attracted by Cardinal Grassellini, whom he described as a 'charming old man.' They met frequently in Rome, and had amicable discussions on religious questions, regarding which their views were necessarily entirely opposed. They were, however, in sympathy on broader issues, as is shown by a letter which, after his return to England, the Duke received from the Cardinal, to whom he had sent a copy of his book, 'The Reign of Law.' Cardinal Grassellini wrote as follows :

' EXCELLENCE,

' J'ai à peine achevé la lecture du charmant livre que vous avez voulu m'envoyer, et je me hâte de prendre la plume pour vous remercier, et pour vous assurer du plaisir et de l'admiration que j'ai éprouvé

en le lisant sérieusement. Vous avez choisi un grand et bien important argument—La *loi* c'est dans le Monde Physique et dans le Monde Moral la pensée de Dieu, le doigt de Dieu, sa Création, sa Providence, son Omnipotence. Vous avez très-bien promené ce doigt de Dieu par tout le Royaume de la Nature et par tout la Société Civile, vous avez encore su le retrouver dans les profondeurs de l'âme et dans l'intelligence de la Créature, image et ressemblance de Dieu. A la belle analyse de ces grands sujets vous avez ajouté une constante clarté, un ordre, une élégance, une richesse de connaissances qui rendent votre livre très-intéressant et très-instructif aux grands penseurs, comme aux gens du monde. Je vais en répéter la lecture, et je me trouve maintenant encore plus heureux de notre voyage d'Ancone à Rome.

'Agrééz, etc. Toujours avec l'espoir de vous revoir à Rome

'Votre serviteur dévoué,

'LE CARDINAL GRASSELLINI.'

The party in Rome broke up early in the New Year, and the Duke and Mr. Gladstone returned to London in time for the opening of Parliament in February, 1867.

The British electors had not shown much enthusiasm about Mr. Gladstone's Reform Bill of 1866, but public interest was now aroused, even in the most remote districts of the country, and this accounted for the action taken by the Conservative party on the subject of Reform. The question had been a matter of discussion between the Duke and Mr. Gladstone when they were together in Rome, and they agreed in the opinion that the country would not accept from the Tories a measure of Reform as moderate as Mr. Gladstone had proposed. The Bill, however, which was

brought forward by Mr. Disraeli, proved to be a thoroughly Radical measure, which, by the introduction of Household Suffrage, involved the enfranchisement of a much larger number of citizens than had been proposed in Mr. Gladstone's Bill. The Liberals were naturally totally unprepared for the introduction by a Conservative Government of a Radical measure so much in advance of any reform of the franchise which they had contemplated, although the Bill was eventually carried by the help of a section of the Opposition, who voted with the Government.

The Duke's letters to Mr. Gladstone show that he held to the idea of limitation of the franchise. On April 23rd, 1867, when recovering from a short attack of illness caused by a severe chill, he wrote :

'Till within the last two days, it has been a labour to me to write at all, else I should have written to you long ago to say how much I felt for you in the desertion of so many who ought to have behaved better. I really believe that cowardice about a dissolution was more at the bottom of it than anything else, coupled with some cowardice about being supposed to vote against "Household Suffrage." But besides these feelings there is a thoroughly discontented spirit, and a great desire to limit by every possible and plausible device anything like a large enfranchisement.

'I can't help thinking that on some main points the Liberal party will yet be compelled to vote straight. But probably you are right in supposing that the chances of this will be increased if you appear simply as supporting the amendments of individual members.

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'I mean to go to Scotland in the first week of May, when I have some county business, and I look forward to this as more likely to set me up again than anything else. I ought to be at Inveraray for a meeting on the

8th May, and I hope to get a fortnight there among the hyacinths. Nothing will come up to the Lords till July, I suppose.

'I like the idea of an amendment of which MacLaren has given notice, having for its object to define "house" so as to require a certain minimum of decent accommodation. People seem to forget that at present a "house" may be a garret or a cellar, with a whole family pigging together, including thus the lowest of the population.'

To Mr. Gladstone (April 27th).

'I hope to meet you on Wednesday at Chiswick. I fear that any effort on your part now to get rid of "Household Suffrage" would again divide and proclaim the division of the Liberal party. But I don't say that this is a conclusive argument against it, if you make up your mind that as "house" is now defined this suffrage will be a real risk to the country.

'I confess I don't like it at all, considering that "house" means any room or cellar which has a separate entrance, and the more chance there is of succeeding in getting rid of the Government restrictions, the more need there is of some definition which shall help to exclude the very lowest and most ignorant class. * * * * *

'Someone has sent me a review of my book* in the *Guardian*, and I am very much pleased with the clear and accurate account or abstract it gives of the main argument. I wonder who writes it?'

During the debate in the House of Lords on the Government measure, on July 23rd, 1867, the Duke said:

'The noble Earl [the Earl of Derby] did indeed, in moving the second reading, explain to us last night

* 'The Reign of Law.'

how it came to pass that the Government had proposed this measure, but he said nothing to allay the fears which he and his colleagues have awakened in the minds of Parliament and of the country with respect to any measure which should swamp the present constituencies by the mere power of numbers. He told us that he introduced this Bill because he was unwilling to be a stop-gap, but he failed to tell us why, rather than be a stop-gap, he had deemed it to be his duty to become a weather-cock.

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‘ Do not let us conceal from ourselves the magnitude of the changes to which we are now about to give our assent. It is no mere matter of opinion, I apprehend, but matter of simple fact, that we are about to agree to the second reading of a Bill which, not twelve months, but six months ago, at the beginning of this session, no member of this House would have ventured to propose, and which, if it had been proposed, would have been met by your Lordships with a unanimous shout of “Not content!” It does, indeed, at times occur in matters of long controversy that some new and happy thought removes all difficulties and reconciles all opinions, but it is not with a case of that nature that we have now to deal. The noble and learned Lord on the Woolsack [Lord Chelmsford] talked of a compromise, and this Bill is, I admit, so far as the redistribution of seats is concerned, a compromise—or, rather, it is a mere makeshift; but so far as relates to the borough franchise—that great subject of contest between different parties—let us not conceal from ourselves the fact that the Bill is no compromise, for on that point it is a measure of entire and complete surrender of every opinion that has ever been held or expressed by the Conservative party in this country.

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‘ You will, therefore, have under the operation of this Bill a total of 440,000 electors belonging to the

working classes, as against 249,000 belonging to the middle and upper classes of society. That, my Lords, is the nature of the change to which we are asked to give our assent, and to which we are asked to give our assent, too, by a Conservative Government, the leader of which told us a few years ago that he conceived it to be his mission and that of his party to stem the tide of democracy.

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‘I have no confidence whatsoever in these new schemes for a complete reconstruction of the British Constitution. Last year we heard a great deal about “Americanizing” our institutions. I suppose we shall hear of it no more. As regards American institutions and our own, what is the essential difference between them? Has it not been this: that ours have been a growth, theirs have been emphatically a device—a device admirably contrived, indeed, by some of the greatest statesmen and politicians that ever spoke the English tongue, but necessarily adapted to the circumstances of a new country? Ours is a system which has grown for many generations, and although you talk of the balances of the Constitution, they are balances which arise from the condition of society, from the feelings entertained by one class towards another, and not by legal powers placed by Act of Parliament in the hands of one class to check the action of another.

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‘May I not suggest, however, that it is possible that the great political change we are now called upon to assent to, by which the political influence of the working classes will be largely increased, will also stimulate and increase the regard in which these claims will be held by those above them; that it will tend to bring about a more friendly consideration of their claims, a greater sympathy with their complaints, a more candid allowance even for their prejudices and

errors, and that in this way a most beneficent result may follow from our labours? . . .’

After a debate which continued for two nights, the Bill passed the second reading without a division.

The work of Parliamentary Reform was continued by the introduction, in the following year, of a Reform Bill for Scotland. The main feature of the Bill was the increase in the number of representatives for Scotland. The measure was introduced in the House of Commons by the Lord Advocate for Scotland (Mr. Moncrieff*), and in the House of Lords by Lord Malmesbury. The Government proposal had been to add the extra Scottish members to the numbers of the House, but an amendment was carried to disfranchise seven of the smallest boroughs in England, and transfer the representation to Scotland.

On the subject of the Scottish Reform Bill many letters passed between the Duke and Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Gladstone intended to oppose the proposal of the Government to increase the number of Scottish representatives. The Duke implored him not to do this, warning him that such a course would lead to Scottish members voting for the Government, which would simply aggravate the disorganization of the party. A letter to Mr. Gladstone from the Duke (January 30th, 1868) indicates the position of affairs :

‘ I saw Moncrieff. He told me that his own private opinion has been that all party action which might involve vital issues should be avoided till the new Parliament met. But he said he had been persuaded by the arguments used, or at least by the opinion expressed, at the meeting with you.

Now, I know well the influence exercised by your

* Afterwards Lord Moncrieff.

face and earnestness upon those who hear you. But I know also that sometimes when they leave the room they have misgivings as to whether they have been convinced, or merely carried away, and my impression is that Moncrieff is even now in this condition of mind.

‘I therefore must beseech you to have this matter again carefully considered. My own view is decidedly that during this coming session no attempt should be made to test party fidelity. But even if it be determined to apply any such test, surely it would be unwise to select for the purpose a vote on which Scottish members would have to choose between party fidelity and running the risk of losing for Scotland additional representation.

‘I admit the necessity sooner or later of putting an end to the condition of things in which a normal leader is regularly deserted by his men at the moment when he orders a charge. But all I say is, postpone till the new Parliament all attempts to rally or to test party allegiance, and above all choose a vote on which the tendencies of our party are as far as possible undivided.’

To Mr. Gladstone (February 1st, 1868).

‘My own impression is that the failure in our own Reform Bill, and in the fight of last session, arose mainly from the false position in which so many men had placed themselves by their own timorous and cowardly policy. But whatever the cause may have been, it is a cause operating still, and it will operate so long as the present Parliament lasts, upon all questions connected with Reform. The less they are tried or trusted the better. It may be possible to do something towards laying better foundations in the next Parliament.’

To Mr. Gladstone (February 3rd, 1868).

‘As regards the expediency of trying some testing question before the dissolution, much depends on the temper of the party. I fear it is as bad as ever. All the causes of estrangement which operated last session are in operation still. They feel that they treated you ill, and the whole subject of Reform with insincerity.

‘Clarendon, I take it, is as good a judge as most men of the temper of those around him. I asked him a couple of months ago (in writing on another matter) what impression he had from seeing people during the late autumn session. His reply was that he thought the party as disorganized as ever, and people as cross as ever.

‘If this is the case, it would only be to court defeat to fight with such troops. Of course, battle forced upon you must be accepted, but not otherwise.

‘I look for a great change in the new Parliament. Although Reform may not be out of the way, because of the redistribution question, yet its disorganizing influence will be abated, and I agree with the *Daily News* that your hold over the country is a very different thing from your hold over the present House of Commons.’

No serious opposition was offered to the Bill, which passed both Houses, and became law on July 13th, 1868.