

Speech of the Right Honourable Viscount Howick, in the House of Commons, on Thursday, March 26th, 1807 : stating the circumstances which led to the change of administration.

Contributors

Grey, Charles Grey, Earl, 1764-1845.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

London : Printed for J. Ridgway, 1807.

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S P E E C H

OF THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

VISCOUNT HOWICK,

IN THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

On Thursday, March 26th, 1807 ;

STATING THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED

TO THE

Change of Administration.

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR J. RIDGWAY, NO. 170, OPPOSITE BOND STREET,
PICCADILLY.

1807.

Price Sixpence.

STEPHEN

OF THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

VISCOUNT HOWICK,

IN THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

On Thursday, March 20th, 1807

STATING THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED

TO THE

Change of Administration.

LONDON:

Printed for J. KIDGWAY, NO. 110, OPPOSITE BOND STREET,

MILLS.

1807.

S. GOSNELL, Printer, Little Queen Street.

S P E E C H,

&c.

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

Thursday, 26th March 1807.

Mr. Huskisson. I BEG leave to move, Sir, That this House, at its rising, do adjourn to Wednesday se'nnight.

The question was put.

Lord Howick. Sir, upon the motion which has just been made by the Hon. Gentleman, for an adjournment during the period which is usually allowed for a recess, at this season of the year, I trust it will not be thought irrelevant to the subject, if I take this opportunity of giving to the House that explanation of which I yesterday gave notice. It is of the utmost importance to myself and to my colleagues, that the circumstances which have led to the recent change of His Majesty's Ministers may be fully understood. It is of importance to the House, and to the Public, that they may be enabled to form a proper estimate and opinion of the character and conduct of those persons to whom the administration of public affairs was so lately intrusted, and truly to appreciate all the circumstances of that situation, in which, in consequence of that change, the country is now placed. It is of importance to the House, in the decision of the question now stated from the Chair, inasmuch as the propriety of an adjournment, of a longer or a shorter

duration, may depend upon the necessity of adopting some measures at the earliest possible period, to avert the consequences of the extraordinary events which have taken place. To myself personally, every feeling both of duty and of honour renders it of the highest importance, that I should, as soon as possible, convince the House that my conduct has not been such as to make them repent of the kind indulgence which I have experienced from them. Undoubtedly, Sir, every moment's delay, in which my conduct may be a matter of doubt with those from whom I have received, together with my colleagues, such distinguished support, has been exceedingly painful to me; yet, conceiving it to be my duty, I have abstained from saying any thing upon this subject till that moment arrived, when it was no longer necessary to be silent; when His Majesty has declared his intention of placing the administration of affairs in other hands. I now therefore, having received His Majesty's permission to do so, am at liberty to state, without a breach of duty, those circumstances which I am most anxious should be fully understood by the public. Desirous, however, as I may be to take the earliest possible moment to make this statement, and sensible that in justice to our own characters it can no longer be delayed, I confess I feel in common with those, who expressed that opinion last night, considerable regret that I am under the necessity of doing so in the absence of those persons, whose presence some may think requisite, to watch the accuracy of my statement. I am sure the Honourable Gentleman*, who made some observations to this effect last night, will not charge me with intending to state any thing to the House which I do not myself believe to be strictly correct; the Honourable Gentleman might, without any injurious suspicion of me, be of opinion, that the natural partiality with which men

are apt to view their own conduct, required the presence of other persons, possessed of all the facts, and capable of correcting any unintentional errors, which this cause might produce. I am as anxious as any man that these persons should be present upon such an occasion, and I hope that this matter will yet be discussed at some future time, upon some motion proposed to this House, which may give an opportunity of making a restatement, if restatement should be necessary, but at all events of examining and sifting every part of the details which I am this day about to lay before you.

Sir, it is neither in my nature nor in my habits to shrink from the examination of any man: but I felt myself reduced to this alternative, either to submit to have the public mind prejudiced by false reports and misrepresentations, supported by partial extracts from confidential papers; or in the absence of the persons alluded to, to take this early opportunity of entering into the discussion. I am convinced that a fair, candid, and correct statement is the only antidote to such wilful misrepresentation; and that this is the only mode, consistent with my character, and with my duty as a Member of Parliament, in which I could lay before the public a fair exposition of every part of my conduct. Under such circumstances it was impossible for me, in justice to myself and my colleagues—nay, in justice to the public itself, which might be misled by such deception, it was impossible for me to suffer so long a period of time to elapse as might intervene before the new Ministers could resume their seats in the House. Sir, in doing so, however, upon the present occasion, their absence will have this effect, that I shall as much as possible confine myself to a mere statement of the facts, and abstain as far as I can from every thing that can provoke discussion; I shall state only what I conceive to be necessary for my own vindica-

tion, avoiding every thing like argument, and leaving all such points to that future discussion, which at an early day, after the holidays, I trust will take place; when an opportunity will be afforded of stating to the House every thing that may be material upon the subject.

Sir, having premised thus much, I shall proceed to lay before the House the statement which I have promised. When the late Administration was formed, there were included in it many Members whose opinions and principles, with respect to what is called the Catholic Question, were generally known; they had been very recently manifested to the public, in the most authentic of all ways, by their speeches and their votes in Parliament. I am sure there did not exist in any quarter an expectation or suspicion that those persons, whose characters were so well known, could be induced, for the sake of office or emolument, to abandon any of the opinions and principles which they had so solemnly expressed and avowed. In point of fact, no condition inconsistent with the freest exercise of their judgment was proposed to them, nor did they come into the Government subject to any such stipulation, which, if it had been exacted from them, they would have found it incumbent upon them, in honour and in duty, then, as now, to decline. At the same time, however, that I state this with respect to their opinions and principles, I will not attempt to deny that great difficulties were known to stand in the way of further concessions to the Catholics of England and Ireland. And as His Majesty's late Ministers came into Administration totally unfettered, upon all subjects, I can speak for every individual among them, that they had a sincere and anxious desire, while they conducted the Government in conformity to their own principles, and with the best wishes for the interests of the state, to avoid, if possible, every thing that was repugnant to any of those feelings and

opinions, which, upon every motive of duty, affection, and attachment, they were most bound to respect.

Sir, these were the principles upon which those who composed the last Administration came into power: their opinions upon the Catholic question were well known; but they hoped, by a prudent, lenient, and conciliatory system of government, to keep that question for some time at rest; and for a considerable period their hopes and expectations were flattered with every appearance of success. However, Sir, towards the latter end of the last year there did occur circumstances in the west of Ireland, which increased all the anxiety with which, from their first introduction to office, they had directed their attention to that country; a most valuable, but, I am afraid I must add, the most vulnerable part of the British dominions. The disturbances, which towards the end of last year reigned in the West, engaged our most anxious deliberations; and although we were urged by many persons, who are fonder of the policy of force than I am, to resort to measures of extraordinary severity; although, on the second day* of the present

* Upon the report of the Address, 20th December last, Mr. *Perceval* is said, among other observations, to have urged these: "No mention had been made of the state of Ireland. He trusted that this silence might be ascribed to the total want of foundation for the alarming rumours that had reached this country. Ministers must unquestionably be the judges how far the usual prerogatives of the Crown were sufficient to suppress insurrection or rebellion, in whatever quarter it might appear; the decision rested with them: he only begged them to consider, that the protraction of the necessary day of punishment was not mercy; and the delay which allowed insurrection to proceed, until it became impossible to quell it without a considerable shedding of blood, was not kindness. He hoped that the omission of any notice of the situation of the sister island, was occasioned by the absence of any necessity for an extraordinary exertion of the law. Should such a necessity unfortunately arise,

session, we were eagerly pressed by an Hon. and Learned Gentleman, who was impatient for rigour, and could not wait for the determination of His Majesty's Ministers; yet to effect the reduction of that spirit which prevailed in Ireland, we determined to confide in an active exertion of the known powers of the law; and, thank God, our hopes in this respect were realized, without recurring to those severities, which less politic and more intemperate advisers had wished to recommend. But, Sir, after these occurrences, it became necessary to look more immediately to measures, that might tend to conciliate and tranquillize that country. Several measures were in contemplation, and among them that which I had the honour of lately introducing into this House, appeared to be one of the most obvious. It seemed calculated to prove highly beneficial to the empire at large, as well as to Ireland itself. It was expected to afford the means of recruiting our naval and military force, so necessary at the present moment to be carried to the utmost extent; by facilitating the introduction of those persons into the service who are at present in a great measure excluded, by what I must call the ill-understood policy of the existing laws. The Bill which I brought in for this purpose has been improperly termed the Catholic Bill; for it included Dissenters from the established Church of every description. We certainly expected from it, that it would contribute essentially to the tranquillity of Ireland, by holding out to the gentlemen of that country the prospect of rising in the army and navy, and thus diffusing motives of attachment towards this country among the people in general; at the same time that it would afford a vent to the

and should Ministers call on the House for an enlargement of the executive power, he could assure them that they should meet with no opposition on his part to any proper measure of vigour, which they might think it expedient to propose."

superabundant population, and draw from the very sources of discontent the means of strength and security. These were the motives which induced the King's Ministers to propose that measure. I do not know that it is necessary for me to state, and yet the arts which have been practised may render it useful to state, that, in bringing forward this measure, their intention was not to invade, but to strengthen, the securities of the established Church itself. If I estimate rightly in what those securities consist, I think they are interwoven with the security and existence of the empire. Can the one be safe, if the other be in danger? And are not the necessary means for the defence of the empire, the best security for its religious establishments? If ever Ireland should be exposed, which God avert! to a successful invasion of the enemy, I call upon those who accuse us of endangering the establishments, to reflect what must then be the fate of our Church and the Protestant religion.

Sir, while this measure was under consideration, accounts were received from Ireland, transmitted by the Lord Lieutenant *, of a disposition manifested by the Catholics to prosecute, by a petition to Parliament, those claims which they had so recently urged in a former session. Notwithstanding the known opinions which I and some of my colleagues hold in favour of those claims, we were persuaded, that the agitation of the question at this time was not likely to be attended with advantage; and so far as our private advice and influence could extend, it was used to dissuade the Catholics from the attempt. The knowledge, however, of their intention was an additional inducement in recommending the measure which we had already in contemplation. We hoped, though it was offered in no view of compromise, that it might prevent the agitation of

* Dated 4th February.

that very question, by affording satisfaction to the Catholics of Ireland in general; at the same time that we considered it as recommended by every principle of policy. We trusted that this limited measure of concession might be brought forward without encountering those objections which were involved in the general question of what is commonly called emancipation. In reverting to the Irish Act of Parliament, passed in the year 1793, and observing the incongruity which subsists in the law of the United Kingdom, we could not overlook the pledge explicitly given at that time by the Lord Chancellor of Ireland*, and by the Secretary of Ireland*, that a similar law, to allow the admission of Catholics both into the army and navy, should be introduced in England. This pledge to the Catholics is recorded in the Secretary of State's Office, in a dispatch from Mr. Hobart, now Lord Buckinghamshire. We considered it therefore not more a measure of general policy, than an act of good faith and consistency; and we did hope, that upon all these grounds we should be able to obtain for them that boon which had been promised them upon a former occasion, under the authority of Government, and that the proposal would meet with that general approbation from all parties, to which it seemed to us so well entitled. It was upon all these grounds proposed to His Majesty, and a detailed dispatch was written and sent to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (a document which I wish I could lay before the House upon the present occasion), stating much better than I have been stating them, all the reasons which induced us to propose this measure—the draft of this dispatch was previously sent, accompanied by a Cabinet minute † to His Majesty. To that first proposal His Majesty expressed a strong dissent;

* Lord Clare and Lord Buckinghamshire.

† Dated 9th February.

and upon receiving the answer from His Majesty, the Cabinet again deliberated upon it, and again made a respectful representation * to His Majesty as to the grounds upon which they thought it expedient as a point of general policy, principle, and good faith. To that representation came back an answer from His Majesty expressing still considerable reluctance, but, however, signifying his consent. I say, Sir, that that answer conveyed a reluctant, but a positive assent. Under that high sanction and authority the dispatch was sent to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and soon after a meeting was held of the Catholics, with Mr. Elliot, the principal Secretary, and the Lord Chancellor, in which it was stated (abstaining from every thing that related to the Petition) that this measure was to be introduced into the Mutiny Bill.

Some discussion arose upon it, and a question was put to Mr. Elliot by one of the Catholic deputies, Mr. O'Connor, whether the proposed measure went the length of including the admission of Catholics into all ranks of the army, or whether it was to be limited by the restrictions of the Irish Act. Mr. Elliot's answer was, in the words of the dispatch, that it was proposed to enable His Majesty to confer, on any of his subjects, any military commission whatever. There can be no question, however, that Mr. Elliot had conceived doubts as to the extent of the measure, that he expressed himself doubtfully, and that his answer was reported as doubtful to a meeting of the Catholics; but it was at the same time declared by the deputies who attended this conference, that they understood it to be the intention of Government, that staff appointments in the army, which had been excepted in the Irish Act, should be opened to them. The dispatches stating what had passed at these

* Dated 10th February.

meetings, the question put, and the answer given with respect to the extent of the measure, as well as the understanding which the Catholics had conceived of it, were regularly submitted to His Majesty; and no dissatisfaction or uneasiness was expressed in consequence of what was thus brought under his view. I am bound to say, however, that it has since appeared that the measure had not been distinctly understood; not only His Majesty, but some Members of the Cabinet, had not been fully aware of its extent; and I must confess that I had not myself sufficiently attended to the distinction between it and the Irish Act. When this appeared, it became the subject of a new deliberation, in which an objection was stated by a respectable Member of the Cabinet* to any concession beyond the Irish Act. A majority, however, concurred in recommending the measure in the form in which it was afterwards introduced; but as doubts had arisen, and an apprehension was entertained that it might have been misunderstood by His Majesty, it was determined to bring the matter distinctly under his royal observation, by a second dispatch to the Lord Lieutenant, clearly stating its full extent.

And here I must state that some distinctions ought to be taken between the duties of Ministers' and those of private Members of Parliament. I conceive that a Minister may, as an individual Member of Parliament, introduce measures for which the authority of Government is not at all pledged; I could adduce instances of this in the administration of the late Mr. Pitt. The House will at once recollect the motion for a reform in Parliament, and that for the abolition of the Slave Trade; both these motions were introduced by him as an individual Member of Parliament, without the responsibility of Government being attached to them. Sir, during the short period

* The Lord President.

that I have had the honour of holding a situation under His Majesty, I and my noble colleague have, in the same manner, brought forward successfully the measure of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, to which I shall look with satisfaction for the remainder of my days. But, Sir, where a measure arising out of various causes which have engaged the attention of His Majesty's confidential servants, is to be brought forward with the authority of Government, the measure itself, as well as the case to which it applies, ought, undoubtedly, to be first submitted to His Majesty. I certainly feel that I ought not to have introduced a measure of this description without the sanction of that authority; and I should think myself reprehensible in the highest degree, and deserving all the censure that is endeavoured to be cast upon me, if I had proposed this Bill to Parliament without believing that I had His Majesty's consent.

Sir, I have stated that a doubt arose as to the understanding of the extent of this Bill; it was, therefore, determined (Lord Spencer at that time being absent on account of his health) that I should write a dispatch to the Lord Lieutenant enclosing the clauses intended to be introduced into the Mutiny Bill, stating distinctly that they were in conformity with the general words of the dispatch which had been sent on the 12th of February last, marking expressly that the Catholics were to be admitted to hold any commission or appointment whatever; and observing that a confirmation was thus given of Mr. Elliot's answer to the Catholic deputies. This dispatch so expressed, for the purpose of removing all doubts, and enclosing, as I have already stated, the intended clauses, was sent down by me on Monday night the 2d of March to His Majesty. This dispatch having been perused by His Majesty, came back from Windsor on the following morning, without a word of comment or objection; and with this sanction I acted, as in the course of my official business I had been

uniformly accustomed to do—I immediately forwarded it to the Lord Lieutenant.

Sir, at this time the Committee on the Mutiny Bill was, I believe, appointed for the Wednesday; but objections had been started to the enactment of the proposed measure by clauses in that Bill: it was, therefore, upon reconsideration, determined to introduce a separate Bill. On Wednesday the 4th of March the dispatch, which I have just mentioned, having been previously sent to the Lord Lieutenant, I attended at the Levee at St. James's, and had an audience with His Majesty upon the business of my office; after that was over, His Majesty was graciously pleased to ask me what was the business appointed for that day in the House. I stated to His Majesty that the Committee on the Mutiny Bill stood as the order of the day, and explained to him the nature of the change that had taken place in the mode of proceeding, and the reasons which had induced the introduction of a separate Bill: the King afterwards asked me whether the separate Bill intended to be brought forward was not the same as the Irish Act of Parliament: I stated to him the circumstances in which they differed; to which I added, that I apprehended it had been already explained to His Majesty in the last dispatch which had been submitted to him. I also stated the reasons why I conceived the measure, in the extent to which it was intended to be carried, to be of the utmost importance to the welfare and security of the Government of the country. And here, Sir, I must acknowledge, that His Majesty, upon that occasion, did express a general dislike and disapprobation of the measure. I mean to state every thing frankly, but I did understand that conversation to conclude by words giving a consent, a reluctant consent, I admit; or, perhaps, it would be more correctly stated as not withdrawing the consent which had been originally given. I conceived, therefore,

that I still had sufficient authority, as a Member of the Government, for the introduction of the Bill. I stated to my Lord Grenville, immediately on coming out of the closet, what had passed there; his opinion upon that statement was the same as mine, and we were confirmed in our belief that His Majesty did not intend to signify any absolute objection to the introduction of the Bill, from the total silence which he observed upon this subject in the audience which Lord Grenville afterwards had. His Majesty did not say one word to Lord Grenville, the leading Member of the Administration, upon a measure which, it now appears, had the misfortune of being exposed to his most decided opposition. Under these impressions, on the next day, or the day after, I introduced the Bill into Parliament: the motives which had produced it, the extent to which it went, were fully explained; not only were the arguments on which those persons relied who had proposed the measure, stated at some length, but the objections to them were urged with no inconsiderable vehemence. We know, Sir, that debates in this House, though they cannot consistently with our orders be published, do find their way out of doors, and attract, particularly on any interesting subject, general observation. They, probably, do not excite the weakest interest in those whose concern for the public welfare is the greatest. But, Sir, though this degree of publicity was now given to the measure, and though it could not be misunderstood, during a whole week which subsequently elapsed, I remained in complete ignorance, and without the slightest suspicion of the very serious, and, as it has appeared, insurmountable objections, which have since been made to it. Objections had, undoubtedly, been stated by one of my colleagues, for whom I have great respect, upon the first clearing up of the misunderstanding which had prevailed with respect to the extent of the Bill: these objections, during the interval of which

I have been speaking, assumed a more decided form, and he offered his resignation in consequence of them; but though, after the introduction of the Bill, I had communication with His Majesty in the course of my official duty on other subjects, I had no reason till the Wednesday following, when I was absent both from this House and from my usual attendance on His Majesty, on account of the death of a near relation, to believe that any extension whatever of the proposed measure, beyond the provisions of the Irish Act, had been found absolutely irreconcilable with his principles and his feelings. On that day* His Majesty stated to Lord Grenville his decided objection, and referred, as having before signified this objection, to the conversation with which he had honoured me on the preceding Wednesday. I certainly had not so understood His Majesty. If I had, I need not say that I should have found myself bound by every motive of interest and duty to submit so important a circumstance to the consideration of my colleagues before I moved for leave to bring in the Bill. But, Sir, it would have been most unbecoming in me, even if I could have entertained such a suspicion, to insinuate a doubt of the royal word. We were convinced that the King had been misunderstood by me, and as I had been placed in the unfortunate situation of introducing the Bill under this misapprehension, I thought it my duty to suspend any further proceedings upon it, till I should have had an opportunity of explaining to His Majesty the circumstances of my conduct. I accordingly on the night of Thursday the 12th proposed to the House to postpone the second reading of the Bill to a farther day, and at the same time requested an audience of His Majesty, which he was graciously pleased to honour me with on the following morning. Upon laying

* Wednesday, March the 11th.

before His Majesty the reasons which had induced me to believe that I was not as his Minister acting in opposition to his royal pleasure; he was pleased to express his conviction that what had happened had arisen from an erroneous conception on my part, but acquitted me most graciously, but most unequivocally, of any intentional disregard of his opinions. From that moment it became a matter of the most anxious consideration to His Majesty's Ministers how they might best repair the effects of the misunderstanding which had taken place; they immediately applied their attention to the means of reducing the new Bill to the standard of the Irish Act, in the hope that they might be able still to carry it forward as an useful public measure under the sanction of His Majesty's consent. But when we came to examine the objections that had been made to it, they were found to affect the measure in so considerable a degree, that, upon a full consideration of the subject, we were convinced there could be no hope of correcting the Bill in such a manner as to relieve it from the objections that prevailed against it, and at the same time leave it in a state in which it would be likely to attain those ends which His Majesty's late Ministers had in view when it was originally proposed.

In this situation, Sir, after anxiously weighing all the circumstances of the case, we determined—(I should here explain that the representations which were made in this stage of the proceedings were confined to those Members of the Cabinet who had concurred in opinion upon the measure to its full extent,) we determined, however painful the sacrifice might personally be, to abandon the Bill altogether. It was, I say, a most painful sacrifice of personal feeling to public duty; a sacrifice which nothing short of a conviction that the measure had been introduced under a misunderstanding into this House, could have induced me to make; a sacrifice dictated

only by a desire of doing what, under circumstances of such embarrassment, we conceived, after the most anxious deliberation, to be most consistent with our respect to our Sovereign, and with the obligations imposed on us in the double capacity of Members of the Administration and of the Legislature. In this situation we determined to make a sacrifice, which in any case where personal feelings and public duties come in competition with each other, I hope I shall never hesitate to make. It was, however, I repeat, a great and painful sacrifice; and in making it, it was necessary that we should take care not to place ourselves in a situation in which we might be made incapable of rendering hereafter any useful service to the public. The circumstances which occurred rendered the measures to be taken, with a view to the future security and peace of Ireland, a consideration of greater delicacy and difficulty than ever. Our public duty and our private honour made it indispensable that we should be free and unfettered on this point of our necessary deliberations. Circumstances had occurred in an early period of these transactions, and had been more strongly manifested during this latter period of the discussion, which implied a restriction on this important subject; and we found it necessary not only to reserve to ourselves the power of explaining to Parliament our conduct with respect to the Bill we had consented to withdraw; and of declaring in Parliament individually the opinions which we hold with respect to the Catholic claims, in the possible event of a discussion of their Petition; but also to state it as essential to our own characters, as well as to the public interest, that the deference which we had felt it our duty to shew, on this occasion, to the opinions and feelings expressed by His Majesty, should not be understood as restraining us from submitting, from time to time, as it was our duty, for His

Majesty's decision, such measures respecting that part of the United Kingdom, as the course of circumstances should appear to require; accompanied with an humble assurance, that in discharging that and every other part of our duty, so long as His Majesty should think fit to honour us with his confidence, nothing should be omitted on our part, which could best testify our invariable and respectful attachment to His Majesty, and our sincere and anxious concern for His Majesty's personal ease and comfort, and for the prosperity and honour of His Majesty's government. This part of our proceeding has been most improperly misrepresented to the public. It has been stated in that mutilated publication to which I have already alluded, as if we had reserved to ourselves the power of bringing this particular measure again before Parliament; and the important words "*for your Majesty's decision,*" as well as the concluding paragraphs, are in that extract omitted, purposely to give a false colour to the proceeding. Not only was the respectful statement which we made in writing to His Majesty, accompanied with our declaration of our sincere and anxious desire to consult, on all occasions, His Majesty's personal ease and comfort; but it was distinctly stated personally, both by my Lord Grenville and myself, that it would be our constant wish and endeavour to keep from him, as much as possible, all subjects which might be distressing to his mind. I appeal then with confidence to the House, on the purity of the motives by which we were actuated, on the deference and respect shewn, to the utmost limit of our public duty, to His Majesty's personal feelings and opinions.

But was it necessary to make the reserve which I have stated, and which, in consequence of the foulest misrepresentation, has been the object of such severe censure? I beg the House to consider the situation in which we were

placed. The Bill already introduced, and received with apparent favour by the House, was to be withdrawn. Was it not necessary that, in withdrawing it, I should, in justice to myself, endeavour to shew that it had not been lightly and wantonly proposed? Could I do so without some reference to the arguments, by which I had originally supported it, and which I will not now repeat? Was it not necessary then that I should be allowed to declare the grounds upon which an opinion, that I could not renounce, had been formed? But this, it is said, was placing my opinion in opposition to that of my Royal Master, and exposing him to any odium which might attach on a personal opposition to the measure. I will not examine this charge as applicable to a Member of Parliament; I will consider it only as affecting the conduct of the King's Minister: and in this latter view I think it may be admitted, that under the particular circumstances of the case, after the prejudice and alarm which had been excited, and with a view to the consequences likely to arise from a public agitation of the question, public reasons, in no degree reflecting on His Majesty, might have been assigned for withdrawing the Bill; at the same time that I might, with all the respect due from a Minister of the Crown, and with the freedom of a Member of Parliament, have endeavoured to explain to the satisfaction of the House the reasons which had influenced my conduct. Sir, I do not believe that there is one Member of right feeling in the House, who will deny that this course was necessary to the support of my consistency and honour; and I feel equally confident in asserting, that it was in no degree inconsistent with my duty as a Minister of the Crown. But it was necessary that we should look beyond the conduct to be pursued in withdrawing the Bill. The Catholic Petition, it now seemed certain, would be sent over to Parliament. It was to be apprehended, that the discussion upon it would be urged with

increased rather than diminished earnestness, in consequence of the disappointment likely to be felt from the failure of the Bill which had been proposed. With this prospect before us, what were we to do? Were we to determine to renounce our former opinions? Were we, which would have been no less disgraceful, to observe the expected discussion in perfect silence? No, Sir; neither of these things could, I think, be expected of us. There was only then a third line of conduct to which we could look, and that was a free declaration of our sentiments on this important question. Those of His Majesty's Ministers who agreed in general on this important question might adopt a different line of conduct, with respect to any discussion on the Petition. Some might think themselves acting best for the general interest by supporting a previous question; others might feel themselves bound to support the prayer of the Petition, if urged in proper and respectful terms. But a free declaration of their opinions was equally necessary from all; and with this necessity before us, I ask the House, whether we could, in justice to ourselves, or in fairness to His Majesty, in the situation to which things were then brought, omit humbly submitting to him the view we entertained of the conduct which it would be requisite for us to hold. If a doubt is entertained upon this question, let me put it the other way. Suppose that the Bill had been abandoned after the discussion, and in the manner that I have stated. Suppose, that, having so engaged to abandon it, we had gone to the two Houses of Parliament, and without any previous intimation to His Majesty, both in withdrawing the Bill, and afterwards on the introduction of the Petition, supported the opinions upon the Catholic question which we are known to hold. If we had done this, I desire to know what would have been the charge made against us, by those who now accuse us of an unfair and

disrespectful proceeding towards that Sovereign, whom, on account of his high situation and his personal virtues, we are equally bound to revere.

We took therefore that course which appeared to us to be most fair and honourable. Our reasons were respectfully stated to His Majesty, and we claimed a right to pronounce our opinions in Parliament on the occasions already stated, and also to submit for His Majesty's decision, from time to time, such advice respecting Ireland, as the course of circumstances and the interests of the empire should require. This I am sure, in point of fairness, cannot be reprehended; and it was equally supported by motives of personal respect and public duty to our Sovereign and to our country.

A minute written with this view, and expressed in the most respectful language, was accordingly sent to His Majesty. The Royal answer expressed satisfaction at our determination to withdraw the Bill, in deference to the King's opinions. It expressed some dissatisfaction, that we should feel it necessary as individuals to express our opinions, both on withdrawing the Bill, and in any discussion which might take place on the Petition. But the latter part of our statement it required us absolutely to withdraw, declaring that His Majesty could never consent to any concessions to the Catholics which we might in future propose to him; and demanding from us a positive assurance, which, as explained by the whole context of what was required of us, went not only to the question of concessions to the Catholics, but to all measures connected with it.

Sir, I am fully convinced that the motives and opinions, as far as they were personal motives and opinions, which dictated that demand on the part of His Majesty, were of the purest nature. I have been but a short time in the service of His Majesty; but I have had many opportunities of observing his gracious and benevolent intentions towards

his people, of his affection for them; and his desire to promote their happiness and welfare. As far as he was personally concerned (I say nothing of those who may have advised him), as far as His Majesty was personally concerned, I am sure he was actuated by the most conscientious motives, and the most honourable feelings. But with such a requisition, Sir, we found it impossible to comply, consistently with any idea we entertained of duty or of honour. We felt it incumbent on us most respectfully and humbly, but most explicitly, to represent to His Majesty, that those intrusted with Administration were bound by every obligation to submit to His Majesty, without reserve, the best advice they could frame, to meet the various exigencies and dangers of the times; and that the present formidable situation of Ireland required a repeated consideration of every fresh circumstance that might occur. We submitted, that in forbearing to urge any farther, while we continued in His Majesty's service, the measure that had been proposed to Parliament, we had gone to the utmost limits of our public duty; that we considered it would be criminal in us to bind ourselves to withhold from His Majesty, under all the circumstances that might arise, the counsels that might appear to us indispensably necessary; and that it was not possible for us, consistently with our sense of our obligations as the King's sworn Counsellors, to give assurances which would impose upon us a restraint, incompatible with the faithful discharge of our most important duty. The consequence was, that the next day, His Majesty, certainly with the most gracious and kind expressions with regard to every other part of our conduct, communicated to us his intention to look out for other Ministers. On the day after, we heard that other persons, not then in the number of His Majesty's Servants, had been sent for; and I was authorized a few days afterwards, in consequence of a request which I made, to declare

to the House that it was His Majesty's intention to form a new Administration. On Tuesday last, His Majesty signified to us his pleasure, that we should, on the following day, deliver up our seals of office; we accordingly did so.

This, Sir, is the history of the whole transaction. I have not referred to any papers to support my statement; but I do wish, and am extremely anxious, that all the documents that can be furnished may meet the public eye not in an improper, mutilated, or partial state. I shall be most happy, if His Majesty is graciously pleased to give permission to his new Servants to produce every paper that has passed upon the subject, in order that they may undergo the fullest examination in this House. I trust it will appear from those papers, that the statement I have made is correct in all its parts; and if that statement be correct, that the House will be satisfied upon the following points; first, that it was not without strong inducements of public interest that we proposed this measure originally to His Majesty; secondly, that whatever misunderstanding may unfortunately have arisen, we did not propose it to Parliament without a firm persuasion that it had His Majesty's sanction; thirdly, that when that misunderstanding was discovered, we went to the utmost limits of our duty in conceding the measure upon which that misunderstanding had arisen; and, fourthly, that in addition to that concession, under the peculiar circumstances in which we were placed, the respectful request that we submitted to His Majesty, to allow us the liberty to explain our opinions and conduct upon the particular measure, accompanied, as it was, by a declaration of our wish to consult his personal ease and comfort, was not wantonly pressed upon His Majesty, but from motives of duty and respect; and that the reserve we made as to the freedom of our future advice, was indispensable to our

character and situation, as Ministers of the Crown and as Servants of the Public.

These, Sir, are therefore the points which I wish the House to understand; this statement, which, though at some length, is after all perhaps too cursorily given, is that which I have wished to lay before the House and the Public. I shall be ready now, or at any future time, to go more fully into it whenever it shall be required of me.

Sir, I shall conclude by declaring that I feel no disposition to complain. I am sure, as I have already stated, that there can be but one feeling and one opinion of the gracious kindness of His Majesty, with respect to every class and description of his subjects; and so far from being a party to join in any thing that might lessen that attachment due to a virtuous Sovereign from an affectionate and grateful people, no man can be more anxious than I am to promote and secure it to the utmost of my power. I should indeed be most ungrateful if I could be actuated by a different feeling; for I have had, during the short period of my services, repeated marks of His Majesty's royal approbation; and I have the comfort and satisfaction, in retiring from office, to be able to state, upon the authority of His Majesty's own gracious assurance, that, till this difference occurred, His Majesty has been satisfied, that, however deficient I may have been in ability, I have constantly endeavoured, diligently and faithfully, to discharge my duty to him and to the public.

Sir, I stated in the outset that I would abstain from every thing like argument upon the subject. Upon the subject of the assurance required of us, I have, therefore, without discussing it as to its principle or its tendency, stated little more, than that I felt it to be a requisition, to which I could not subscribe consistently with my honour or my duty. I should indeed think it not only unconstitutional but highly

criminal in any Minister who could accept of or retain power subject to such a restraint. With that opinion, therefore, His Majesty's late Ministers were compelled respectfully but decidedly to declare, that it was a stipulation which they could not enter into, without forfeiting their own esteem, and inasmuch as it must fetter and confine them in the exercise of their judgments, on those points on which they ought to be most free, without depriving them of the character of useful and honourable Servants to their King and to their Country.

Here, Sir, I shall for the present leave my conduct to the candid consideration of the House and of the Public. I should be anxious, however, if any thing should arise out of this that could induce any Gentleman to think it a proper subject for a motion, when those persons return to their seats, whose presence at the discussion is considered to be necessary, that the question should be taken up with as little delay as possible. I am therefore desirous that the adjournment should be short, and I had hoped that Monday se'nnight, by which day the new writs may with ease be returned, would have been proposed for our meeting again; but the difference of two days is so small, that I do not feel disposed to press it. I shall therefore consent to the motion, stating only, that I shall be most anxious that the discussion may take place on the earliest possible day after the House shall have concluded its recess.

Ordered, That this House, at its rising, do adjourn to Wednesday se'nnight.

The Hon. Mr. *Brand* gave notice, that he would, on this day fortnight, submit certain resolutions to the House, on the subject of the recent change of Administration.

THE END.