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# MEMOIRS

BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

# SIR ROBERT PEEL,

BART., M.P., &c.

PUBLISHED BY THE TRUSTEES OF HIS PAPERS,

LORD MAHON (NOW EARL STANHOPE),

AND

THE RIGHT HON. EDWARD CARDWELL, M.P.

PART II.—THE NEW GOVERNMENT; 1834-5.

PART III.—REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS; 1845-6.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1857.

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LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET,  
AND CHARING CROSS.

## P R E F A C E.

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THE Second Part of the Memoirs by Sir Robert Peel as here presented to the public, is derived from his MS. without the omission of a single word, except in the case of one name which has been left in blank.

In the Third Part, however, the omission of several passages will be apparent even to the most cursory reader.

The lamentable event which closed the career of Sir Robert Peel, and placed these papers in the hands of the Editors, at a period so much nearer to the transactions related in them than Sir Robert Peel could have contemplated at the time of his bequest, renders obligatory a corresponding degree of care in observing the cautions imposed by the terms of the trust. In the Third Part, therefore, referring to occurrences which have taken place within a few years only from the present time, those terms, and the manifest propriety of the case, have made it the duty of the Editors, as they conceive, to omit, wholly or in part, some letters and some paragraphs which were included in the original MS. They hope that, by short explanatory notes, they have succeeded in preventing any obscurity or interruption of the narrative; and they also hope

that the reader will approve their decision rather to publish the Memoir now, with some necessary omissions, than to wait indefinitely for the prospect of being able at some distant time to print the whole.

Should there be, on the contrary, some persons who, notwithstanding these omissions, think that too many confidential letters have been here disclosed, the Editors may be allowed to state, that in no case have they thought themselves justified in publishing for the first time communications from any still surviving statesman without his full consent being first obtained.

Finally, the Editors desire to observe, that in giving to the world the Memoirs as written by Sir Robert Peel, they are merely seeking to fulfil his wishes and intentions. Any further publication of his papers must rest on their responsibility alone. It is now their intention to select from the correspondence between Sir Robert Peel and several of his colleagues and friends, a series, especially of such letters as, while written with all the unreserve of personal regard or official connection, may yet at this time be given to the world without any breach of public or of private confidence.

The Editors propose that the new volumes should correspond in size and type with those already published, so as to form in fact a sequel to them.

S.

E. C.

LONDON, *February*, 1857.

PART II.

THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

1834-5.





# MEMOIRS BY SIR R. PEEL:

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## PART II.

### THE NEW GOVERNMENT; 1834-5.

THE correspondence of July 1834 being referred to in the accompanying Memorandum of Sir Robert Peel, may properly, as in order of time, precede it.—(*Eds.*)

Lord MELBOURNE to Sir R. PEEL.

(Secret.)

“ Whitehall, July 11, 1834.

“ SIR,

“ His Majesty, upon accepting the resignation of Earl Grey and Viscount Althorp on the 8th instant, commanded me to attend him at St. James's on the next day, the 9th instant, at half past one P. M.; and in the audience with which His Majesty was then pleased to honour me, His Majesty made a communication of his wishes and opinions with respect to the formation of a Ministry. To this communication I thought it my duty to return the reply, of which the enclosed is a copy.

“ I have this morning been directed by His Majesty

to send this document to you as well as to the Duke of Wellington and Mr. Stanley, for the purpose of putting you in possession of His Majesty's feelings and opinions upon the present posture of public affairs. The tenor and substance of my letter to His Majesty render it almost unnecessary for me to add that I make this communication solely in obedience to His Majesty's commands.

“I have the honour, &c.,

“MELBOURNE.”

Lord MELBOURNE to the KING.

(Copy enclosed to Sir R. PEEL.)

“Whitehall, July 10, 1834.

“Viscount Melbourne presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and feels secure that your Majesty will not doubt that Viscount Melbourne has considered the Memorandum which your Majesty was graciously pleased to place in his hands yesterday, with the attention which its importance demands, and with that solicitude which must be excited in every mind by the present very critical position of public affairs. Viscount Melbourne cannot be otherwise than deeply sensible of the confidence which your Majesty reposes in him upon the present occasion, and of the too flattering terms in which the expression of that confidence is conveyed; and it is further his duty to acknowledge with gratitude the very clear and distinct manner in which your Majesty has condescended to put Viscount Melbourne in possession of the patriotic senti-

ments by which your Majesty is actuated, and of the enlarged views which your Majesty takes of the state and condition of the country.

“It appears to Viscount Melbourne to be very natural that, considering the difficulties and danger from conflicting interests and opinions to which your Majesty’s Government has been continually exposed, it should suggest itself to your Majesty’s mind that it would be very desirable to avoid these perpetually recurring inconveniences and perils by an union in the service of the State of all those who stand at the head of the respective parties in the country; and Viscount Melbourne is anxious to bear his humble testimony to that part of your Majesty’s communication which states that happily your Majesty can take this course without doing violence to any feeling. Viscount Melbourne is sincerely of opinion that no Sovereign has ever shown himself more superior to prejudice, either personal or political, or ‘more prepared to assent both to measures and arrangements according as they should appear most conducive to the welfare and security of the country.’

“With these views, your Majesty calls upon Viscount Melbourne ‘to enter into communication with the leading individuals of parties, and to endeavour at this crisis to prevail upon them to afford their aid and co-operation towards the formation of an administration upon an enlarged basis, combining the services of the most able and efficient members of each;’ and your Majesty further desires that ‘Viscount Melbourne will communicate with the Duke of Wellington, with

Sir Robert Peel, with Mr. Stanley, and with others of their respective parties, as well as with those who have hitherto acted with himself and have otherwise supported the administration, and that he will endeavour to bring them together, and to establish a community of purpose.’

“Your Majesty is graciously pleased to add that ‘you do not disguise from yourself the difficulty of the task which your Majesty is desirous of imposing upon Viscount Melbourne, nor the objections which Viscount Melbourne may possibly feel to take an active part in the endeavour to carry it into effect; but your Majesty trusts that Viscount Melbourne will not refuse to become your confidential agent upon this critical occasion.’

“Viscount Melbourne would indeed be greatly grieved if he did not venture to hope that your Majesty is convinced of his entire devotion to your Majesty’s person and service. He would be the most ungrateful of men if, for the sake of a master from whom, whilst he has had the honour to serve him, he has met with nothing but kindness and confidence, he were not prepared to make every exertion and to run every risk, provided a probable prospect were opened of promoting in the result the tranquillity of your Majesty’s reign, and advancing the honour and interests of the Crown. It is, therefore, with great concern that, after a careful deliberation upon your Majesty’s communication, Viscount Melbourne feels himself compelled to declare that the difficulty which your Majesty anticipates appears to be insurmountable, and that the objections to Viscount

Melbourne personally undertaking the task are so great as to render the successful termination of such an attempt utterly hopeless.

“The distinguished individuals enumerated by your Majesty, the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, Mr. Stanley, have all and each of them recently expressed not only general want of confidence in your Majesty’s Government, but the strongest objection, founded upon principle, to measures of great importance, either introduced into Parliament or adopted by virtue of your Majesty’s prerogative, to the Bill for the better collection of tithes in Ireland, and to the Commission of Inquiry into the state of religion in that country. Both these measures, particularly the last, Viscount Melbourne considers vital and essential in the present state of public feeling and opinion. Would it, then, be fair in Viscount Melbourne to offer to those distinguished individuals the appearance of a negotiation in which Viscount Melbourne would have everything to demand and nothing to concede ?

“In his audience of your Majesty yesterday, Viscount Melbourne ventured to lay before your Majesty some of those general objections which press forcibly upon his mind, to unions and coalitions of opposing parties. Viscount Melbourne will not repeat them now further than to say that these objections appear to him to acquire additional strength and weight from the political temper and character of the present times. Viscount Melbourne, however, is most ready to admit that all general rules must be subject to exceptions arising from peculiar circumstances, and that there never was a moment

which more imperiously required that men should not suffer themselves to be bound and shackled by preconceived opinions, but should act in that which appears to be the best mode of meeting the exigency of the immediate crisis.

“Viscount Melbourne again deeply laments the necessity which compels him to return to your Majesty’s communication an answer which he fears will be unsatisfactory. Viscount Melbourne has no personal dislikes or objections,—on the contrary, for all the individuals in question he entertains great respect; for one of them, Mr. Stanley, with whom he has more intimate acquaintance, warm affection; but he cannot perceive any ground upon which they can be brought together at present, nor any chance of such an accommodation as should be consistent with their own avowed principles, and satisfactory to the country.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lord MELBOURNE.

“Whitehall Gardens, July 11, 1834.

“MY LORD,

“I hasten to acknowledge the receipt of your Lordship’s letter, conveying to me by His Majesty’s commands the copy of a letter recently addressed to His Majesty by your Lordship.

“As I do not consider myself authorised by the tenor of your Lordship’s communication to address myself directly to His Majesty, I request that your Lordship will have the goodness to present my humble duty to His Majesty, together with my grateful acknow-

ledgments for His Majesty's condescension in having directed your Lordship to make this communication to me.

“ I have the honour to be, &c.,  
“ ROBERT PEEL.”

Lord MELBOURNE to Sir R. PEEL.

“ South Street, July 12, 1834.

“ SIR,

“ I lost no time in submitting to His Majesty your reply to my communication of yesterday, and I am commanded by His Majesty to acquaint you that His Majesty having read that reply had expressed a desire to receive through me such observations as you might think fit to make upon the paper sent to you by His Majesty's command.

“ I beg leave to add that I should be desirous, if it be convenient, of receiving your answer either this evening or in the forenoon of to-morrow, as I am commanded to attend His Majesty at Windsor at two.

“ I have the honour, &c.,  
“ MELBOURNE.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lord MELBOURNE.

“ Whitehall Gardens, July 13, 1834.

“ MY LORD,

“ I have the honour, in obedience to the King's commands, to convey to His Majesty through your Lordship the accompanying Memorandum in reference

to the letter of your Lordship to the King, which I received from you on Friday last.

“I cannot but avail myself of this opportunity of assuring your Lordship that those sentiments of personal respect towards me expressed in your letter to the King, are reciprocally entertained towards your Lordship by me in the fullest degree.

“I have the honour, &c.

“ROBERT PEEL.”

Sir R. PEEL to the KING.

“Whitehall Gardens, July 13, 1834.

“In obeying your Majesty’s commands to convey to your Majesty through Viscount Melbourne such observations as I might think fit, upon the paper transmitted to me yesterday by his Lordship, I beg leave to select that passage which expresses with so much clearness your Majesty’s own views and feelings, and which suggests those considerations to which alone it is important that I should advert.

“The passage is as follows:—‘With these views your Majesty calls upon Viscount Melbourne to enter into communication with the leading individuals of parties, and to endeavour at this crisis to prevail upon them to afford their aid and co-operation towards the formation of an administration upon an enlarged basis, combining the services of the most able and efficient members of each; and your Majesty further desires that Viscount Melbourne will communicate with the Duke of Wellington, with Sir Robert Peel, with Mr. Stanley, and



with others of their respective parties, as well as with those who have hitherto acted with himself and have otherwise supported the administration, and that he will endeavour to bring them together and to establish a community of purpose.’

“Before I make any observation upon the important subject to which my attention is thus directed, I trust that I may be permitted to express my cordial concurrence in the sentiments of Viscount Melbourne, that the course which your Majesty has pursued under the great difficulties of the present crisis is an additional and striking proof of your Majesty’s paternal anxiety for the welfare of your people, and of your Majesty’s superiority to every prejudice or partiality which could for an instant obstruct the benevolent and patriotic views of your Majesty.

“Upon the main point, the possibility of uniting in the same administration, with advantage to the King’s service, members of the late Government, with those who have like myself recently expressed a want of confidence in that Government, and have objected, upon principle, to measures of that Government that are still incomplete, I am bound to express my opinion, with the utmost deference to your Majesty, that such an union could not, in the present state of parties and the present position of public affairs, hold out the prospect of an efficient and vigorous administration.

“So far as there are any public means of forming a judgment, the Government of which Earl Grey was the head has been dissolved not in consequence of the active exertions of a hostile majority in either House of

Parliament nor of successful opposition to any of its measures, but mainly in consequence of conflicting opinions of members of that Government, either upon important principles or upon questions of public policy so grave that a compromise upon them was deemed to be inconsistent with personal honour or a sense of public duty.

“The impracticability of reuniting in your Majesty’s service those who were agreed in their general views of policy, appears to exclude the hope that any selection of men from parties opposed to each other could at the present time ensure an administration united in principle and strong in the mutual confidence of its members.

“The very measures which involve the principles or the great considerations of policy on which your Majesty’s late servants differed, are still open to review or are pending for discussion in Parliament; and I cannot foresee (even if there were an agreement upon other matters of public concern, which I apprehend is not the case) that there could be any adjustment of the conflicting views which have been so recently taken upon the specific measures above referred to by members of your Majesty’s late Government and those who have been opposed to them.

“Viscount Melbourne has justly observed in his letter to your Majesty, that measures which his Lordship considers vital and essential in the present state of public feeling and opinion, have very recently encountered opposition, founded on principle, from those with whom your Majesty has desired Lord Melbourne to enter into

communication; and I cannot but concur, therefore, in the opinion which Lord Melbourne has already on his own part expressed to your Majesty, that there could be no successful result to a negotiation in which Lord Melbourne would have everything to demand and nothing to concede.

“I have only to add the expression of an earnest hope that your Majesty will not consider this frank and unreserved declaration of an opinion at variance with the sentiments and views of your Majesty, as at all inconsistent with the utmost deference and respect, and the most anxious desire that your Majesty may be enabled to make such arrangements for the conduct of your Government as may best conduce to your Majesty’s own ease and happiness, and to the tranquillity and welfare of the country.

“ROBERT PEEL.”

Lord MELBOURNE to Sir R. PEEL.

“South Street, July 14, 1834.

“SIR,

“I have the honour of acknowledging your communication of the 13th instant, enclosing a letter addressed to the King, which I have presented to His Majesty.

“I have the honour, &c.,

“MELBOURNE.”

## The KING to Sir R. PEEL.

“Windsor Castle, July 14, 1834.

“The King received yesterday from Viscount Melbourne the letter which Sir Robert Peel addressed to His Majesty in consequence of the communication which he had desired Viscount Melbourne to make to him.

“His Majesty cannot forbear assuring Sir Robert Peel of his sense of the manner in which he has met this communication, and of the terms in which he has adverted to the feeling and the motives which have influenced His Majesty’s course upon this occasion. It is satisfactory to him to know that these are justly understood and appreciated in so respectable a quarter ; and although he cannot help regretting the failure of his purpose, His Majesty is bound to admit that the opinions which have been so forcibly stated by Sir Robert Peel and by others of its impracticability have appeared to him conclusive.

“WILLIAM R.”

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Upon the enclosure which contained the copies of the correspondence with Lord Melbourne, the following Note was written by Sir Robert Peel.—(*Eds.*)

## MEMORANDUM.

“The Duke of Wellington and I acted in concert throughout this correspondence. The letter which

he addressed to the King in consequence of the second communication of Lord Melbourne was shown to me by him before it was despatched, as my letter was shown to him; but neither of us suggested any alteration in the letter of the other. We took precisely the same view of the whole subject,—each of us being resolved to afford the King every assistance in our power, if His Majesty should require that assistance, without conditions as to union with others of different political principles and party connections, and giving us full liberty to exercise our discretion in respect to Dissolution and public measures generally.

“We had no wish to be invited to take office even upon those terms, but were resolved, if invited, not to decline the responsibility, and to exhaust every constitutional means of ascertaining whether the country, or rather whether the constituent body, would support an administration formed upon Conservative principles. Those principles I, for one, consider to be perfectly compatible with cautious and well-digested reforms in every institution which really requires reform, and with the redress of proved grievances.

“ROBERT PEEL.

“July 23, 1834.”

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MEMORANDUM AS TO MY APPOINTMENT TO THE OFFICE  
OF FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY IN 1834, AND  
TO THE ADMINISTRATION OVER WHICH I PRESIDED.

“The case in which this Memorandum is found contains all the correspondence which passed previously to my appointment to the office of First Lord of the Treasury at the latter end of 1834, and during the period for which I held office. In this correspondence is not included the merely official correspondence of the Department of the Treasury. This is the confidential correspondence on all public matters, other than strictly departmental, that fell within my cognizance as First Minister of the Crown. But as I was in daily personal intercourse with my colleagues, the most important part of the public business was discussed and settled at Cabinet meetings and other conferences of a similar nature. Still, the time will come when these records will be interesting, and may throw a light on the history of the period which they embrace. I have not withdrawn a single letter addressed to me, nor the copy of one written by me. It is probable that very few letters were despatched of which a copy was not taken, with the exception of those which I wrote to the King after my return, late at night, from the House of Commons, giving His Majesty an account of the debate.

“I made no Memorandum of what took place at Cabinet meetings and in personal conference with the Duke of Wellington and those of my colleagues with whom I was in habits of the most confidential inter-

course. I had in truth no time for this, as will readily be believed when it is considered that I had to superintend the general conduct of the administration, to undertake the lead of the House of Commons, to carry on the requisite communications with the King, to find time for the ceremonies of the Court, to give personal audiences to the various parties from whom information was to be gained, or who had (what they thought) grievances to complain of, or pretensions to enforce, to transact the proper business of my own department, the Treasury (of all the details of which, being in the House of Commons, I ought to be master), and lastly, to carry on the daily correspondence with all those who addressed the Minister. The extent of that correspondence may be judged of from the amount to which it accumulated in a few weeks.

“ This correspondence and the Parliamentary Debates contain probably the best and most impartial account that could be given of the short administration of which I was the head, and of the part which I personally took in the formation of the Ministry and general conduct of the Government.

“ I left England for Italy on the 14th of October, 1834, with Lady Peel and my daughter Julia, afterwards Lady Villiers, little foreseeing the probability of my sudden recall on any ground similar to that on which it took place, and having had no communication, previously to my departure, with the Duke of Wellington or any other person, respecting the position and prospects of the administration which existed at the time of my departure. It is scarcely necessary to con-

tradict or even notice the report that was at one time spread, that there had been some previous concert or understanding with His late Majesty in contemplation of the events that took place in November. So far as I am concerned, and so far as I know, there was no communication whatever, direct or indirect, with His late Majesty after we left office in 1830, except, indeed, when an attempt to form a Government was made by His Majesty on the temporary retirement of Earl Grey in 1832, and in July 1834, when Lord Melbourne was directed by the King to make a communication to the Duke of Wellington, Lord Stanley, and myself respecting an union in the King's service of public men of different political connections. The correspondence on this subject will be found among the Papers. My belief is that His Majesty uniformly acted with scrupulous fidelity towards his advisers, whatever might be their political bias. I am sure he did, so far as I am concerned, both when I was in office and when I was acting in opposition to His Majesty's Government.

“ I had been at Rome about ten or eleven days, when Mr. Hudson arrived there, bearing the letters following :—

Sir H. TAYLOR to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Brighton, November 15, 1834.

“ MY DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“ The King has ordered me to introduce to you Mr. Hudson, who is the bearer of His Majesty's and the



Duke of Wellington's letters to you. He is Resident Gentleman Usher to the Queen, and has always been confidentially employed by the King, who has the highest opinion of him, which he well merits. I may add that he is deservedly a general favourite in this circle.

“Believe me, &c.,

“H. TAYLOR.”

The KING to Sir R. PEEL.

“The King having had a most satisfactory and confidential conversation with the Duke of Wellington on the formation of a new Government, calls on Sir Robert Peel to return without loss of time to England, to put himself at the head of the administration of the country.

“In the mean time His Majesty has appointed the Duke of Wellington First Lord of the Treasury and Secretary of State for the Home Department, in order to hold the Government till the return of Sir Robert Peel.

“It will likewise be necessary to put the Great Seal in Commission, and the King has named Lord Lyndhurst the First Commissioner.

“WILLIAM R.

“Pavilion, Brighton, November 15, 1834.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“Brighton, November 15, 1834: at night.

“MY DEAR PEEL,

“You will have heard of the death of Lord Spencer.

“It appears that upon the formation of the Government in July, the whole arrangement turned upon the question whether Lord Althorp would or would not continue to hold the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, and to do the King’s business in the House of Commons.

“Upon sending the account of the probability of Lord Spencer’s death, Lord Melbourne expressed to the King his apprehension that ‘most serious difficulty and embarrassment will be the consequence of that event.’

“When he announced the event on the following day, he mentioned the necessity of securing Lord Spencer’s services in some high and responsible office; but he apprehended some difficulty in this respect, as, ‘when the Government was constituted in its present form in July last, Viscount Althorp informed Viscount Melbourne that when the event which has taken place would arrive, he would take that opportunity of withdrawing from office altogether.’

“I enclose an extended extract of Lord Melbourne’s real letter of the 12th November, in which, although he does not diminish the difficulties of the position of the Government, he offers to continue in office if the

King should require his services ; and the King's final answer of the ——— after he had seen Lord Melbourne.

“ The contingencies referred to in the King's last-mentioned answer are, first, the probability that he would be pressed by his Cabinet to withdraw the stipends from the Clergy of the Church of England in Ireland, in whose parishes there should be found no Protestants ; next, the probability that some of his Ministers would vote upon questions in favour of such propositions in Parliament, although His Majesty should object to them ; and lastly the certainty that Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Spring Rice would retire from office if an attempt should be made to force such propositions on His Majesty or through Parliament.

“ The King asked me to undertake to form a Government for him on the grounds stated in these papers of which I have given you the sketch. I told His Majesty that the difficulty of the task consisted in the state of the House of Commons, and that all our efforts must be turned to get the better of these difficulties : that I earnestly recommended to His Majesty to choose a Minister in the House of Commons, and that you should be the person.

“ His Majesty answered that he would not have hesitated if you had been in England, but that as you were abroad, and it was necessary to act immediately, he had sent for me.

“ He mentioned that ——— had threatened that he would not put the Great Seal to a Commission to prorogue the Parliament. I then told him that I

thought nothing would be more unfair than to call upon you to put yourself at the head of a Government which another individual should have formed.

“That it would be injurious to you and to His Majesty himself.

“But that as it appeared to be necessary to take possession of the Government, I was perfectly ready to hold for the present the offices of First Lord of the Treasury and Secretary of State for the Home Department, till you should return home; and that the Seal might be put in Commission, Lord Lyndhurst being the First Commissioner.

“I only request you to return home as soon as you can.

“It may be necessary to appoint a Secretary or Secretaries of the Treasury in order to prepare matters for your Elections; but these shall be only temporary.

“I don't know of any other appointment that can be necessary.

“I enclose a letter from the King.

“You shall hear from me at Paris; or, if I should have occasion to write, on an early day at Lyons or Turin.

“Believe me, &c.,

“WELLINGTON.

“It appears that —— —— did not make the threat that he would not prorogue the Parliament, but that Lord Melbourne said here that he was in such a state of excitement that he might take that course.”

Extract of a Letter from Lord MELBOURNE to the KING, dated November 12, 1834, and enclosed by the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“ Your Majesty will recollect that the Government in its present form was mainly founded upon the personal weight and influence possessed by Earl Spencer in the House of Commons, and upon the arrangement which placed in his hands the conduct of the business of Government in that assembly. That foundation is now withdrawn by the elevation of that nobleman to the House of Peers, and in these new and altered circumstances it is for your Majesty to consider whether it is your pleasure to authorise Viscount Melbourne to attempt to make such fresh arrangements as may enable your Majesty’s present servants to continue to conduct the affairs of the country, or whether your Majesty deems it advisable to adopt any other course.

“ Viscount Melbourne accepted the high and responsible office which he at present holds, because he thought that at that moment it was in his power to render service to your Majesty and to the country. Viscount Melbourne will never abandon your Majesty; his humble services shall always be at your Majesty’s disposal whilst they can be given honourably and conscientiously, and whilst your Majesty is pleased to deem them worthy of your acceptance; but Viscount Melbourne earnestly entreats that no personal consideration for him may prevent your Majesty from taking any measures or seeking any other advice which your

Majesty may think more likely to conduce to your Majesty's service and to the advantage of the country.

“Whatever may be your Majesty's views, Viscount Melbourne humbly conceives that they will be forwarded and assisted by a full and unreserved communication upon the present state of public affairs.”

The KING to Lord MELBOURNE.

(Copy enclosed by the Duke of WELLINGTON.)

“The King, after the very confidential conversation with Viscount Melbourne on the state of the country in consequence of the removal of Viscount Althorp to the House of Peers and his therefore becoming Earl Spencer, thinks it right to inform Lord Melbourne that His Majesty conceives that the general weight and consideration of the present Government is so much diminished in the House of Commons and with the country at large, as to render it impossible that they should continue to conduct the public affairs in the Commons, and particularly when it is considered the King's confidential servants cannot derive any support from the House of Lords which can balance the want of success in the Commons.

“His Majesty, therefore, under this view and the apprehension of contingencies which the King has expressed to Lord Melbourne verbally, does not think it would be acting fairly or honourably by his Lordship to call upon the Viscount for the continuance of his services in a position of which the tenure appears to the King so precarious.

“ His Majesty need, however, hardly repeat the assurance, so often conveyed to Lord Melbourne, of the high sense the King entertains of his Lordship’s valuable services and character.

“ WILLIAM R.

“ Pavilion, Brighton, November 14, 1834.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

(Private and confidential.)

“ Brighton, November 15, 1834.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ You will observe that the King’s case is not quite one of his Ministers quitting him : I think that it might have been such a one if His Majesty had not been so ready to seize upon the first notion of difficulties resulting from Lord Spencer’s death.

“ Lord —— swears that they are turned out. However, it is quite clear that they could not go on, and they are all, particularly Lord Melbourne, delighted to be relieved. I am not astonished. If they had remained in office till a difficulty should occur in Parliament, the King could not have allowed them to quit him. This is the reason for which he is in such a hurry to get rid of them now, and to dissolve.

“ I don’t think that we are at all responsible for his quarrel with them ; it was an affair quite settled when he sent for me.

“ Believe me, &c.,

“ WELLINGTON.”

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On my return, on the night of Tuesday the 25th of November, from a ball at the Duchess of Torlonia's, those letters were delivered to me at my residence in Rome, the Hôtel de l'Europe.

I had seen in the public papers the intelligence of the death of Earl Spencer (Lord Althorp's father) one or two days before Mr. Hudson's arrival; and although I thought it probable that the necessary removal of Lord Althorp from the House of Commons would have a material bearing on the position and the interests of the Government, I did not contemplate the sudden dissolution of it. I was about to leave Rome for Naples on the day or day but one after Mr. Hudson's arrival, and had made arrangements for my return from Naples, after staying there a short time, by the steam-boat which plied between Naples and Genoa. I had actually taken the passage for our return to Civita Vecchia for myself, Lady Peel, and our travelling companions. These projects were of course interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Hudson. I delivered to him letters in reply to those which he had brought, and made immediate preparations for my departure.

Sir R. PEEL to the KING.

“Rome, November 25, 1834.

“Sir Robert Peel presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and has had the honour of receiving from the hands of Mr. Hudson the communication which that gentleman was commanded by your Majesty to deliver to Sir Robert Peel.



“Sir Robert Peel begs leave most respectfully to assure your Majesty that he will proceed on his journey to England without a moment’s delay.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“Rome, November 25, 1834. Tuesday night,  
11 o’clock.

“MY DEAR DUKE,

“Mr. Hudson has just delivered to me the letters with which he was entrusted by His Majesty and by you.

“I was on the point of proceeding to Naples, and intended to return as far as Genoa or Marseilles by a steam-boat which passes between Naples and the latter place, and which will leave Naples about the 3rd or 4th of December. I need not say that I have at once abandoned this intention, and have given such directions as will, I trust, enable me to leave Rome for England tomorrow morning.

“I am much obliged to you for the particulars you have sent me respecting the circumstances which immediately preceded the King’s communication to you ; and although my immediate departure for England renders it unnecessary for me to enter into the consideration of the present state of affairs, I will not conclude this hasty letter without assuring you that I am deeply sensible of the very honourable and considerate manner in which you have acted in obedience to the King’s demand for your advice and assistance.

“Believe me, &c.,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

By dint of considerable exertion my preparations were completed the following day, and we left Rome about three o'clock on Wednesday the 26th of November. I had taken the precaution of providing myself with a separate passport, in case Lady Peel should be unable to bear the fatigue of rapid and continued travelling. She accompanied me, however, the whole way to Dover, where we landed on the evening of the 8th of December. We travelled eight nights out of the twelve we were on the road, having no choice but to halt on four of them. We stayed one night at Massa (at least a few hours of the night) in consequence of a rapid torrent which could not be safely ferried over by dark; one night at Susa, previously to crossing Mont Cenis; one night at Lyons, which had been lately declared *en état de siège*, and where it was necessary to have the passports *visé*; one night at Paris, where I expected letters that it might be useful for me to receive previously to my arrival in England.

In the course of the journey I had met a messenger (near Macon) bringing newspapers and letters from the Duke of Wellington and others, which I answered from Macon by the messenger.

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ London, November 20, 1834.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I am sending off a messenger, and I think it as well to write to you, although I have but little to tell you. The arrangement which I announced to you on

the 15th was carried into execution: on the 17th I kissed hands as First Commissioner of the Treasury, the Secretaries of State gave up their Seals, and I received that of the Home Secretary, and was sworn into office.

“The former Ministers were sulky enough. The King had expected it, and had desired me to have Members of Council in readiness. They were called in that I might be sworn.

“I have not yet had a commission made out for the Treasury, as I think it probable that the former commissioners will not allow their names to stand therein. I mean to put in Beckett, Planta, and three Peers, so as to leave no doubt of the temporary nature of the arrangement.

“Lord Lyndhurst will hold the Great Seal with the office of Lord Chief-Baron for the moment, according to former precedents. He will receive it to-morrow.

“Everything is quiet. The change appears to give general satisfaction. The King is in high spirits.

“The Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland has desired to have leave to come away, and to appoint Lords Justices. The permission has been granted to him. The Lords Justices will be as usual the Primate, the Lord-Chancellor, and the Commander of the Forces.

“We have heard from Mr. Hudson, and from what I have heard of your intended movements I calculate that he will overtake you at Florence about the 23rd or 24th.

“Believe me, &c.

“WELLINGTON.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ London, November 22, 1834.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I have but little to tell you. Lord Brougham resigned the Great Seal yesterday, which was delivered to the custody of Lord Lyndhurst, and he was sworn in in Council.

“ The King is gone out of town this day.

“ The new Commission of Treasury with three Peers, Beckett and Planta, will be opened on Monday.

“ Attempts have been made to create excitement in London and in different parts of the country, but they have failed entirely. The country was never more tranquil. The funds are rising gradually, and everything appears to go on as usual.

“ Addresses are coming in from different parts of the country to thank the King for dismissing his Ministers; and from all that I hear I should not be surprised if these should be adopted universally.

“ Believe me, &c.,

“ WELLINGTON.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ London, November 30, 1834.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I have but little to tell you that is of importance since I wrote to you last.

“ The usual attempts are making to excite a feeling against what exists and what is likely to occur, but

without much success. The Common Council, however, have agreed to present an Address which the King will receive upon the throne this week, if the Duke of Gloucester, who is very ill indeed, should not die; and there are some Addresses, principally from Scotland, from places of inferior importance.

“ You will see in the newspapers an admirable letter from Serjeant Spankie to his constituents. I think that the sentiments in this letter are what prevail generally in the country.

“ I enclose a paper which may be of use to you as a sort of memorandum, and will show you at one view the immediate demands upon you, and your means of satisfying them. One cross means Cabinet, or other offices equal thereto; two crosses Privy Council, or great Household offices; three crosses, Diplomatic, Legal, or Judicial office.

“ I send this for your convenience, not intending to influence your judgment by any opinion of mine—my object being to assist you by every means in my power. I think that you will find the Tories, Tory Lords in particular, very well disposed to go all reasonable lengths in the way of reform of institutions. I have their letters to show you. I have been astonished at their being so docile.

“ Lord Wellesley will leave Ireland in the course of this week. As soon as he comes away I will call for accounts of the present state of the Church, the Church Inquiry, &c., so as that you may have all the information upon that subject at the earliest possible period.

“ The Reports of the Committee on Elections are

favourable. That is the great point of all. I reckon that we must carry two hundred Elections at least that were carried in the last Parliament by Radicals and Whigs.

“ I shall probably hear on to-morrow or next day of your having received my letter and the King’s of the 16th, and I shall know something of the probability of your coming to England. Our last account of you was that you had left Florence for Rome on the 13th.

“ I will write to you again if I should have anything to tell you deserving your attention.

“ The King comes to London to-morrow to stay till you will arrive.

“ You will observe that I put down Lord Stanley, &c. in this list; I do so only to make it complete. I give no opinion now upon the measure of including them in your arrangement; excepting that I think it is expected, and will give satisfaction.

“ I am not so certain of their accepting any offer, particularly Lord Stanley. The great Whigs, such as Lord Grey, profess that this is the most fortunate event for the country!

“ Believe me, &c.,

“ WELLINGTON.”

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There was this advantage at least from the interval between my recall from Rome and arrival in London, that I had ample opportunity for considering various important matters, coolly and without interruption, during my journey. In my letters to the King and

the Duke of Wellington from Rome, I had merely given an assurance that I would return without delay to England. As I should by my acceptance of the office of First Minister become technically, if not morally, responsible for the dissolution of the preceding Government, although I had not the remotest concern in it, I did not at once, upon the hurried statement which was sent to me of the circumstances connected with it, pledge myself to the acceptance of office. I greatly doubted indeed the policy of breaking up the Government of Lord Melbourne at that time. I entertained little hope that the Ministry about to replace it would be a stable one—would command such a majority in the House of Commons as would enable it to transact the public business. I was not altogether satisfied by the accounts I first received with the sufficiency of the reason for the dissolution of the late Government—namely, the removal of Lord Althorp to the Lords—and the objections of the King to Lord John Russell as Lord Althorp's successor in the lead of the House of Commons.

If change under the then existing circumstances were desirable at all, it appeared to me more likely to lead to a satisfactory and permanent result if it should take place in consequence of dissensions among members of Lord Melbourne's Government, or quarrels between the Government and its supporters, or in short from any cause rather than the direct intervention of the King, except of course in the case of some event manifestly justifying such intervention, and ensuring for the act of the Sovereign very general support and

approbation throughout the country. Notwithstanding these impressions, however, very little consideration was necessary to convince me that I had no alternative but to undertake the office of Prime Minister instantly on my arrival. The King's course had been decided on. The former Government was dismissed from office. Had it been possible that I should have been consulted previously, I might have dissuaded the act of dismissal as premature and impolitic; but I could not reconcile it to my feelings, or indeed to my sense of duty, to subject the King and the Monarchy to the humiliation, through my refusal of office, of inviting his dismissed servants to resume their appointments. My refusal could only have been founded on avowed disapprobation of the course taken by the King; and the same reasons which must be assigned for the refusal of office by myself, ought to be conclusive against my cordially supporting others of similar political opinions in the attempt which I should have declined on my part to make.

Little sanguine as I was as to success, I was firmly resolved therefore to obey the King's commands, and to direct every energy to the arduous duties which awaited me on my arrival in England.

I arrived in London very early on the morning of the 9th of December, having travelled all night from Dover.

I waited upon the King immediately, before I saw any other person, and placed my services at His Majesty's disposal, informing His Majesty that I thought it of importance that I should not delay a moment in



accepting the office of First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer—I mean that I should not show that doubt and hesitation which consultation with others might imply, or make my acceptance of office contingent upon the answers which I might receive from others whom it might be my duty to invite to enter into the King's service.

His Majesty was very cordial in his assurances of unreserved confidence and zealous support, and placed the recent Household offices at my entire disposal. I requested His Majesty's permission to write at once to Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham, earnestly entreating them to give me the benefit of their co-operation as colleagues in the Cabinet; and with the King's ready assent, I wrote on that day (the 9th of December) to each of them. My letters, with their replies, will be found among the correspondence:—

Sir ROBERT PEEL to Lord STANLEY.\*

“ Whitehall, December 9, 1834.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ I arrived in London this day in obedience to a very unexpected summons which I received from the King (I being then at Rome) on the 26th of November.

“ In an interview which I have had with His Majesty

\* The Right Hon. E. G. Stanley had become Lord Stanley by the decease of his grandfather the Earl of Derby, on the 21st of October, 1834. But from former habit, Sir R. Peel appears to have still addressed him as “ Sir.”—(*Eds.*)

since my arrival, I have informed His Majesty that I do not feel myself justified in the present position of public affairs in withholding any services which it may be in my power to render. I have undertaken therefore to assist His Majesty in the formation of a new Government, and have myself accepted the offices of First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer.

“ It is impossible for me to enter upon the very arduous duties thus assigned to me without making an earnest effort to procure for His Majesty and for the country the immense advantage of your co-operation; and I infinitely prefer to make at once a direct appeal to you for your assistance, rather than resort to any indirect means of attempting to ascertain beforehand the probable result of my proposal.

“ Under ordinary circumstances I might perhaps have required more time for deliberation; I might have shrunk from the apparent presumption of inviting your accession to a Government of which I am to be the head—might have weighed the various considerations which might influence you to decline the offer, and the possible prejudice to a new Government from its rejection. But in the present crisis such scruples have little weight with me compared with the obligation under which I feel myself to leave nothing untried which can give the King’s Government a claim to the public support and confidence.

“ If I thought the offer involved on either side any compromise of public principle, I should scorn to make it—as I know you would to accept it; but the great practical questions on which serious difference could

have arisen between us are, I trust, finally and irrevocably settled ; and, adverting to the course we have respectively taken since their settlement, I cannot recall to mind, nor can I foresee, any such disagreement as to the principles on which the Government of this country should be hereafter conducted as should discourage the present appeal.

“ If you will so far entertain it as to afford me the advantage of personal communication with you, I will enter into the most frank and unreserved explanation of my views on the several points on which you may require it ; and if that be satisfactory to you, so far as public measures are concerned, I confidently hope there can be no serious difficulties in respect of official arrangements.

“ The appointments which I have this day proposed to His Majesty are, of the Duke of Wellington to the office of Foreign Secretary of State, and of Lord Lyndhurst to that of Lord Chancellor. I have written to Sir James Graham by the bearer of this letter, expressing an earnest hope that he may feel it consistent with his duty as a public man to enter into the King’s service.

“ Allow me to assure you with perfect sincerity that whatever be the purport of your answer to this communication, my conviction will be the same—that it has been dictated by the highest sense of honour and duty.

“ I have, &c.,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

## Lord STANLEY to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Woodcote, December 11, 1834.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ I have this morning had the honour of receiving by messenger your flattering communication of the 9th instant, and lose no time in replying to it. I have the less difficulty in doing so, because, however grave the decision which I am thus called upon to make, I will not pretend that the proposal has been altogether unexpected; and because, looking anxiously to the present state of public affairs, and the possibility of such an offer as you have done me the honour to make, I have had the advantage of personal consultation as to the course to be pursued, with those friends in whom I have the greatest confidence, and whose opinions are entirely in accordance with my own. Had I entertained any doubts upon the subject, I should at once have proceeded to town for the purpose of accepting your obliging offer of putting myself in frank personal communication with you; and you do me only justice in supposing that if other difficulties were surmounted, official arrangements would form a very secondary consideration. But having maturely weighed the course which I am called upon to take alike by principle and by an earnest desire to promote the King's service, I should be unwilling to keep up the appearance of a negotiation which could lead to only one result.

“ I do not underrate the danger of the present crisis, nor the difficulty which must attend any attempt to

form a strong and united Government ; yet I should be prepared to encounter both, if I could persuade myself that my acceptance of the offer which you have made would be conducive to the public good, without any sacrifice of my own character and honour.

“ If the acceptance involve any such sacrifice, you will admit that it would be worse than useless ; for while it deprived me of the best means of future service, it would render abortive any assistance which I might wish to give to your administration.

“ I acknowledge that recent events have narrowed the ground of difference which heretofore divided us ; and I add with pleasure that my respect, no less for your private character than for your recognised ability, would render me not unwilling, from any personal consideration, to serve in an administration of which you were the chief. But although we agree in our desire to uphold the Protestant Church as by law established in England and Ireland ; although we agree further that the best and only means of effecting that object consist in a searching, though friendly investigation into those defects which impair the efficiency of the Establishment, with a view to their removal ; and though I am happy to believe that we should not be found to differ materially in our opinions as to the character and extent of the reforms which might be needed, yet our agreement upon these points must not blind us to the fact that throughout the last four years we have been placed in opposition to each other upon questions hardly less important. I was a member of Lord Grey’s administration from its commencement till

within a month of its close: his measures were supported and approved by me; I have uniformly advocated in Parliament the great principles on which they rest; some of those measures, not the least important, were introduced by myself; and I left Lord Grey's administration on account of a difference on one subject only—a difference, however, involving no less, as it appeared to me, than the independent maintenance of the Protestant Church in Ireland.

“ On this one point, and generally, I believe, upon questions connected with our Ecclesiastical Establishment, you and I agree: on most of the other measures introduced by Lord Grey's Government we have been brought into collision; I, acting as a member of that Government; you, as the avowed leader of a political party arrayed in organised opposition to it. It would be most uncandid in me not to admit that, since the passing of the Reform Bill, no one placed in such a situation could have conducted his opposition with more of moderation and fairness than you have done, and I acknowledge with pleasure my conviction that on repeated occasions your influence was successfully exerted to mitigate asperities and to check the intemperance of injudicious and over-zealous followers. Yet you will forgive me for saying that while such an exercise of your influence naturally lessens objections applying to yourself, the very circumstance of its having been required tends to increase the difficulty of my serving in your ranks. Nor is it possible that I, or the public, should forget that on the memorable occasion when, relinquishing office, Lord Grey, in his place in the House

of Lords, announced his intention to retire from the councils of the King, the Duke of Wellington seized that opportunity for passing in review the policy pursued by Lord Grey and his colleagues, and condemned in terms of bitterness not only the measure of Parliamentary Reform, but the abolition of Negro Slavery, the renewal of the Charters of the Bank of England and of the East India Company on the terms proposed by the Government, and the whole course of Foreign Policy by which Lord Grey had successfully endeavoured to preserve the peace of Europe. It is true that at the close of Lord Grey's Government you passed no such sweeping censure upon all his measures ; but in detail you had opposed many of them, and objected to the principles on which some were founded, especially to the whole scope and tendency of the Foreign Policy pursued. A few months only have elapsed : the Duke of Wellington is the person who, on the dissolution of Lord Melbourne's Cabinet, received the first mark of His Majesty's confidence ; this circumstance alone must stamp upon the administration about to be formed the impress of his name and principles ; and this administration I am asked to join, you being its acknowledged head ; the Duke of Wellington, as you inform me, filling the important office of Foreign Secretary ; and your followers, to whom I have before alluded, being the principal constituent parts of the Government. You will not mistake me if I say that private feeling, as well as political judgment, alike disincline me to the adoption of this proposal. The sudden conversion of long political opposition into the most intimate alliance, no

general coincidence of principle, except upon one point, being proved to exist between us, would shock public opinion, would be ruinous to my own character, and injurious to the Government which you seek to form.

“ The reputation of those who take a part in public affairs is a matter of national importance ; and confidence in public men has been more shaken by coalitions than by all the other acts of personal misconduct taken together. This consideration applies with peculiar force to the offer which you have now made to me. If any beneficial moral effect were produced by my separation from Lord Grey and my former colleagues, and my abandonment of office for the sake of conscience and principle, that effect would be wholly destroyed by my speedy return to office with their political opponents : the motives of my former conduct would be suspected, whereas now they cannot be impugned ; and any reasons which might be urged in vindication of the present junction would be powerless as opposed to the public sentiment which revolts against all political coalitions, especially when they are made the immediate stepping-stone to power.

“ If these considerations, which may seem personal, could be disregarded, and if a sacrifice of my own character (which I never can believe) were necessary for the public good, I am persuaded that joining your Government, thus suspected and lowered in public opinion, I should diminish its strength rather than add to its efficiency.

“ Entire secession from my former friends, and a complete junction with you, would increase the ani-



mosity and consolidate the opposition to which your Government will be exposed; and no effort of mine would avail to resist or to persuade, respect being gone, and confidence forfeited.

“ But if, as I was inclined sincerely to hope, and as the tone of your letter leads me to believe, the measures of your Government, not resisting, but directing the national desire of temperate improvement in all our institutions, to the utmost extent consistent with their safety and integrity, should enable me to give you an independent support in the House of Commons, I may venture perhaps to say that out of office I should have all the means of rendering you assistance, of which my present acceptance of office would altogether deprive me.

“ I am bound also to add, that, viewing with deep anxiety the state of affairs now existing in this country, I shall be disposed not only to support good measures brought forward by the King’s Government, and with them to resist all dangerous innovations, but to regard with favour the men who, under trying circumstances, shall faithfully endeavour to discharge their duty to the King and to their country.

“ You will excuse me if I have been tediously prolix in my answer. I have wished to be explicit; it is the best pledge of my sincerity, and the best return which I can make for the flattering offer which you have made, and the obliging terms in which it is conveyed; but my sense of duty to the King, my zeal for his service, and my desire to promote the public good, compel me respectfully, but firmly, to decline it.

“ It is not probable that you should have occasion to write to me again shortly ; but in case you should, I think it better to let you know that I return to Knowsley to-morrow, and set out early on Monday morning on my way to Glasgow, where I shall be the remainder of the week.

“ I have, &c.,

“ STANLEY.”

SIR R. PEEL to LORD STANLEY.

“ Whitehall, December 12, 1834.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ It may be satisfactory to you to receive the assurance that the letter which you addressed to me yesterday from Woodcote has been received, and I therefore trouble you with a few lines in acknowledgment of it. It would have been very consolatory to me, in the performance of a trust which no consideration whatever but an imperative sense of public duty could have induced me to undertake, to have had the advantage of your most powerful assistance as a Minister of the Crown.

“ Your letter precludes the hope of co-operation in that capacity, but it does not preclude the hope that the conduct of the Government will be viewed by you with an impartial and dispassionate judgment, and with a disposition to give to those whom the King may call to his service at a crisis of great difficulty such support as you can give consistently with principle and conviction. It would be unbecoming in me to thank you

for an assurance which is merely dictated by a high sense of duty; but I may say, without impropriety, that I shall be proud if the Government shall succeed, by the prudence and temperance of its policy, in gradually establishing a claim on your approbation and confidence.

“ Believe me, &c.,  
“ ROBERT PEEL.”

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Sir James Graham came up to town from Netherby, as he said, out of personal esteem for me, and respect for the communication which I had been authorised by the King to make to him; and, although he declined office, assured me of his warm personal regard and general desire to give me all the support he could consistently with his own principles and avowed opinions.

One important question I found practically, and perhaps unavoidably, decided before my arrival, namely, the Dissolution of the existing Parliament. Every one seemed to have taken it for granted that the Parliament must be dissolved, and preparations had accordingly been made almost universally for the coming contest. New candidates had declared themselves for many places—every newspaper was filled with addresses to constituents—and considerable expense in the prosecution of electioneering warfare had been already incurred.

I have little doubt, however, that supposing on my arrival the question of Dissolution had been *res integra*, and that a perfectly free and unfettered judgment could

have been formed upon it by me, I should have decided to dissolve without delay. I was indeed no advocate for frequent or abrupt Dissolutions. I had more than once had occasion in Council to express my distrust in them, as remedies for the weakness of a Government, constantly bearing in mind the remark of Lord Clarendon, at the commencement of his History of the Rebellion, upon the evil effects of an ill-considered exercise of this branch of the prerogative. "No man," says he, "can show me a source from whence these waters of bitterness we now taste, have more probably flowed than from those unreasonable and precipitate Dissolutions of Parliament." And again, "the passion and distemper gotten and received into Parliament cannot be removed and reformed by the more passionate breaking and dissolving of it." It was also to be remembered that Mr. Pitt had not suddenly dissolved the Parliament on his appointment to office in December, 1783—that he had triumphed over every obstruction that a hostile majority could interpose—that those obstructions, and the discussions to which they gave rise, had excited the public mind in his favour, prepared the constituent body for the coming contest, and had contributed in some degree to give to Mr. Pitt the decisive majority which he gained in the new Parliament. It was contended, therefore, by some few that it might be advisable to pursue a corresponding course in 1834—to make a trial of the existing Parliament, and not to dissolve except in case of failure, and with the probable advantage of being enabled to justify Dissolution by the proceedings of an unreason-

able and factious opposition encountered in the course of the trial, and thereby to increase the probability of a successful appeal to the people. But on the other hand, and in favour of immediate Dissolution, strong reasons presented themselves, apart from the consideration to which I have before referred, namely, the almost universal expectation that the Dissolution would take place, and the general preparations for the event. Though the circumstances of the two periods (1784 and 1835) were not wholly dissimilar, yet there was not a sufficient analogy to justify the conclusion that the course pursued by Mr. Pitt in 1784 would have the same result if adopted in 1835. The coalition of Mr. Fox and Lord North, and the India Bill brought forward by Mr. Fox, had given to their political opponents a great advantage over them.

The change in the representative system recently made by the Reform Bill, and its effect on the public mind, render any speculation on the probable consequences in 1835 of measures that had been successful in 1784 very uncertain. The support of the House of Lords might of course have been relied upon. But in the renewal of such a contest between rival parties as that which was carried on from the 12th of January to the 25th of March, 1784, there must have been in 1835 much more frequent and serious collisions between the two Houses than had taken place at the former period, and the jealousies and animosities provoked by the Reform Bill would infallibly have been rekindled. The progress of the contest would have given to the administration the decided character of a Government sup-

ported by the Crown and the Lords against the House of Commons, and I think it most probable that the constituent body would have taken part with their representatives, and been much more hostile to the new Government after the excitement of such a conflict than they were when not acting under its influence.

The existing relative strength of parties was also an important consideration ; the numbers acting with me in opposition to the Government just dissolved could not be calculated at more than 150. It seemed very improbable that there should be so sudden and so considerable a conversion among the supporters of that Government as to enable their successors to command a majority in the then existing House of Commons. There was every prospect, therefore, that the trial would not be successful, and that the Government would commence its career under the unfavourable auspices of condemnation by the House of Commons, possibly by a very considerable majority. The opposition offered to the Government might be more discreetly and skilfully conducted than that of 1784. The advantage anticipated from violent and unreasonable courses might not accrue, and yet the new Government might be exposed to a defeat, precisely at the moment (that moment being purposely selected) when Dissolution would be the most inconvenient in point of time, and upon some question (purposely selected also) offering the least desirable ground for appeal to the constituent body. To abandon office without making the experiment of Dissolution in case of signal defeat by the existing House of Commons, and supposing Dissolution to be practicable,

would be a course impossible to contemplate. It would be an unmanly and pusillanimous desertion of the King, and would, under the circumstances of the case, ensure triumph over him and over his prerogative of choosing his Ministers. Every public man, therefore, must have foreseen, first, the great probability of failure in an appeal for support to the existing House of Commons ; and, secondly, the determination, in case of failure, to dissolve ; and this foresight would have greatly limited the range (limited enough already after the refusal of Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham) from which fit men could be selected for Ministerial appointments. There would have been before their eyes the almost certain prospect of a double Election : the first, on the acceptance of office ; the second (following perhaps in a few weeks or even days) on the event of a General Election. Many would have been deterred from taking office by the trouble and expense of two Elections. It might have been matter of extreme difficulty to form a Government at all. The difference of the two periods of 1784 and 1835, in point of public feeling and of the necessities of the public service, cannot be more strikingly manifested than by a reference to the composition of the administration formed by Mr. Pitt in December, 1783. The Cabinet consisted of—

Mr. PITT,  
 Lord THURLOW,  
 Lord GOWER,  
 The Duke of RUTLAND,

Lord CARMARTHEN,  
 Lord SYDNEY, and  
 Lord HOWE.

There was only a single member of the House of

Commons (Mr. Pitt himself) a member of the Cabinet. What would have been thought of an attempt on my part in 1835 to evade the difficulties of vacating seats, if I had presented to the House of Commons an administration in which Peers stood to Commoners in the proportion of the Cabinet of 1784?

Of one result of an immediate General Election there could be no doubt. There were sufficient indications from which to determine positively that there must be a very great increase to the Conservative strength in a new House of Commons as compared with the strength in the now existing House. The increase might not be sufficient to ensure the stability of a Government; but it would certainly be sufficient to constitute a very powerful Conservative body controlling a future Government leaning upon Radical support. A very great change in the relative strength of parties, and that change in favour of Conservative principles, was certain to take place. This advantage was secured by immediate Dissolution, and might have been hazarded by delay, and by trusting too implicitly to the power of commanding future Dissolution.

These considerations would, I have little doubt, have led me to decide in favour of immediate Dissolution, had I found on my arrival in England the choice between the two courses perfectly free and unembarrassed.

As might have been expected from the honour and scrupulous delicacy of the Duke of Wellington, I found every other question, every appointment to office, entirely open to consideration. The arrangements which it had been absolutely necessary to make for the intermediate



carrying on of the public business were all of a provisional and temporary nature, and distinctly understood to be so. My first duty was of course to complete the Government, and fill up the vacant appointments connected with it with the least practicable delay—with no other delay than that which was interposed by the necessity of waiting for the answers to the communications which I had made on the day of my arrival to Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham. The only appointments determined on (as I informed them) were those of the Duke of Wellington and Lord Lyndhurst. The nominations that subsequently took place to the several offices, Cabinet and subordinate, I need not detail. They are matter of record and public notoriety. Where the communications respecting those offices were not verbal, as some were, they will be found in the correspondence.

By far the most painful duty which I had to discharge was that of selection between parties of equal or nearly equal fitness for office. I had little time, amid the thousand things that pressed for consideration and despatch on my arrival in England—the arrear of public business, the constant and absolutely necessary intercourse with the King, and the various matters connected with the Dissolution—to weigh nicely conflicting claims and rival pretensions. All the time that I could devote to the consideration of them, I did, with an earnest desire to do justice, and where disappointment was inevitable, to mitigate it (if possible) by kind and friendly explanations. I had to lament that in one or two cases I signally failed to reconcile parties to the

decision to which I came, and was considered to have inflicted positive wrong, because I did not reinstate them in the situations which they held on the breaking up of the Duke of Wellington's Government in November, 1830. I was supported, however, by the consciousness that their disappointment did not arise from any preference given to personal objects of my own, or from the selection of personal friends from mere considerations of private friendship. My duty was to make the Government as strong and efficient as I could ; and, after the refusal of office by Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham, I continued to act as well as I could on the principle which had dictated the offer to them, and invited into the service of the Crown such men of Conservative principles as appeared most likely either to strengthen the Government by their talent, or to conciliate support to it on account of their political connections. The mere re-establishment of the Duke of Wellington's Government of 1830 would have saved me much trouble, but would have diminished the little hope I ever entertained of being enabled to make a successful struggle.

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From the great number of letters relative to official appointments at this period the Editors have selected the following :—

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ London, January 20, 1835.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I said a few words to you on Sunday about Murray being in the Cabinet ; and as I understand that

he is coming to town to-morrow, I write you a line upon it.

“The Cabinet is a Committee of the Privy Council, formed to consider of the measures of the Government to be discussed, or likely to be discussed, in Parliament.

“A man not in Parliament, and not likely to be there, ought not to be present. I don't believe that there is an instance of the presence of a man not in Parliament, excepting that of Fitzgerald in 1828-9.

“But this occurred in times when it was possible on any day to find a seat for him, and to bring him in. It is impossible at present.

“I submit this for your consideration. I can have no objection to Murray; but I am anxious that there should be no objection to the Cabinet which can be avoided.

“There can be no reason why he should not hold his office out of the Cabinet, as his predecessor did, if you should think proper.

“Yours, &c.,

“WELLINGTON.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“Whitehall, January 20, 1835.

“MY DEAR DUKE,

“I had considered the question of Murray's office, and had come to the same conclusion that you have done with respect to the inconvenience of establishing a precedent for persons out of Parliament sitting in the Cabinet.

“Yours most truly,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

Sir R. PEEL to Sir GEORGE MURRAY.

“ Whitehall Gardens, January 21, 1835.

“ MY DEAR MURRAY,

“ I thank you sincerely for your kind and liberal offer with regard to the office of Master-General, and in reference to your recent failure in the county of Perth. I need not say on the subject of that failure how much I regret it; chiefly on account of the loss which I personally shall suffer in the House of Commons.

“ It is quite impossible that any arrangement could be made with regard to the office of Master-General so gratifying to me, and so useful to the Government and the public service, as the tenure of that office by you, and I earnestly hope therefore that you will retain it.

“ I have more difficulty about the Cabinet, and I need not say solely and exclusively on the score of constitutional precedent. The holding of a seat in the Cabinet by a responsible adviser of the Crown—that adviser being neither in the House of Lords nor Commons—is, I fear, extremely unusual, if not unprecedented, in modern times.

“ But of this we will speak when we meet. Of course if there were any immediate prospect of your Return, the objection could not apply.

“ Ever, &c.,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lady CANNING.

“ January 31, 1835.

“ MY DEAR LADY CANNING,

“ I have resolved to make the communication I am about to make, directly to yourself, rather than through the medium of a common friend, not only because you are entitled to receive it first, but because no one is so capable as yourself of forming a sound judgment and giving advice to him to whom my communication immediately refers.

“ I hardly know whether I am justified in assuming the correctness of the information I have received, that your son has not formed any political opinions or political connections which forbid the offer I am about to make to you on his behalf.

“ If I am acting under an erroneous impression, my motive must be my justification. Assuming, however, that which I have heard to be correct, I am most anxious to assure you, that if your son is not disinclined, and if you think it for his advantage that he should enter into public life, I shall have the greatest satisfaction in placing him at once as one of the Lords in the department over which I preside, and in giving him every facility in acquiring that political knowledge and experience which, combined with his own talents and acquirements, may, I trust, enable him to maintain the lustre of the name he bears.

“ I do not attach to this office the condition that he shall at once come into Parliament.

“ I do not make it with a view to political support,

but on the impulse of those feelings of regard, respect, and admiration for his father, which were not abated by my separation from him in public life, and to which that separation now adds additional force.

“ Believe me, &c., &c.,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

Lady CANNING to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Grosvenor Square, February 1, 1835.

“ DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“ I trust I need not assure you that I receive your communication in the same spirit of kindness and confidence in which it is made, and I think I shall best evince my sense of the friendly feelings which have dictated your letter, by being perfectly candid and unreserved in my reply.

“ From whatever source you received the information that my son had not formed any political opinions or political connections which would forbid his acceptance of your kind offer, it is quite correct; and I have been so desirous that, in forming those opinions and connections, he should judge for himself of men and things as they now are, without any under-bias or prejudice belonging to past times, that it was only the other day, when the question of his coming into Parliament called for some explanation on those matters, that I ascertained how far even that degree of public life met his views.

“ I must confess that my own opinions have always led me to wish that he might not enter into politics with

a view to office, nor accept of office (if offered) until he had earned some claim to it by his own exertions. In these opinions I am glad to find we concur ; and this it is that necessarily prevents his acceding to your proposal, and not any apprehension that his political opinions should prove any bar to the connection.

“ It was with this view likewise that I endeavoured, when the opportunity offered itself, to bring him into Parliament, on the understanding of complete independence, and free from all pledges or party influence whatever. Unfortunately this opportunity was lost by the impossibility of his being present on the day of election. In these times I cannot feel very sanguine in the hope of finding speedily another seat of an equally independent description, but should any such again offer, he will gladly avail himself of it ; and he looks forward with satisfaction to the period when he may be enabled to testify by his independent support how much (as he believes) his political opinions coincide with yours ; and I cannot conclude without adding on my part that such a connection in politics would be, as far as I am at present enabled to judge, the most agreeable to myself.

“ Believe me, &c., &c.,

“ CANNING.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lord ELDON.

“ Whitehall, January 1, 1835.

“ DEAR LORD ELDON,

“ Your long experience in public life and devotion to your public duties will, I hope, have found an

excuse for me, if, under the circumstances under which I was called to England, and the incessant and most harassing occupation in which I have been since engaged both night and day, I have appeared deficient, through my silence, in that respect which I most sincerely entertain for you, and which, but for the circumstances to which I have referred, ought to have, and would have dictated much earlier communication to you on the subject of the position of public affairs, and the course which I propose, as the King's Minister, to pursue.

“That course has been now sufficiently indicated by the public declarations which I have been called upon to make, and by the appointments which have taken place, on my advice, to the chief offices of the King's Government. It only remains, therefore, for me to apologize to you for a seeming inadvertency and inattention, which would be wholly at variance with my real feelings, and to express my earnest hope that the administration over which I preside will entitle itself to your support and confidence.

“As I am writing to you, I may say a word with respect to our common friend Sir Charles Wetherell, for whom I know that you have the highest respect and regard. His name is not included in the list of those connected with the Government; but I hope that he himself feels that in the very difficult position in which I was placed, I did what I could to mark my sense of his character and services.

“My first offer of any legal office was to the Vice-Chancellor of England—of the Chancellorship of Ire-



land ; and had that offer been accepted, I should have offered the office of Vice-Chancellor to Sir Charles Wetherell. It was declined ; and I then proposed to Sir Charles Wetherell (mentioning to him what my intention had been) the office of Attorney-General. He was unwilling, and perhaps naturally and justly, to return to that office ; but I trust that we parted perfectly good friends, and with a conviction on his part that my wish, at least, had been to do justice amid the various professional claims which were presented to me for consideration.

“ Believe me, my dear Lord, with the sincerest respect and best wishes for your health and happiness,

“ Most faithfully yours,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

Lord ELDON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Hamilton Place, Monday morning.

“ DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“ I don't delay acknowledging the receipt of your kind letter, which, being directed to Encombe, did not reach that place till after I had left it, and was forwarded to me from that place.

“ If I forbear to enter into any statements respecting subjects in that letter, I might be thought disrespectful in delaying making my acknowledgments for the kindness and respect expressed towards me in it—a delay which might not be thought sufficiently apologized for by observations which could only apply to subjects

which I understand, from your letter, have already been determined upon.

“ I am, dear Sir, with feelings of great respect and regard,

“ Your obliged,

“ ELDON.”

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Immediately after the completion of the Cabinet I proposed to my colleagues that I should take advantage of the opportunity which the approaching election would afford, and in an Address to the constituent body of Tamworth declare the general principles upon which the Government proposed to act. My colleagues entirely approved of this course and of the Address which I submitted to their consideration, and which is here inserted :—

“ To the ELECTORS of the BOROUGH of TAMWORTH.

“ GENTLEMEN,

“ On the 26th of November last, being then at Rome, I received from His Majesty a summons, wholly unforeseen and unexpected by me, to return to England without delay, for the purpose of assisting His Majesty in the formation of a new Government. I instantly obeyed the command for my return ; and on my arrival, I did not hesitate, after an anxious review of the position of public affairs, to place at the disposal of my Sovereign any services which I might be thought capable of rendering.

“ My acceptance of the first office in the Government terminates, for the present, my political connection with you. In seeking the renewal of it, whenever you shall be called upon to perform the duty of electing a representative in Parliament, I feel it incumbent upon me to enter into a declaration of my views of public policy, as full and unreserved as I can make it, consistently with my duty as a Minister of the Crown.

“ You are entitled to this, from the nature of the trust which I again solicit, from the long habits of friendly intercourse in which we have lived, and from your tried adherence to me in times of difficulty, when the demonstration of unabated confidence was of peculiar value. I gladly avail myself also of this, a legitimate opportunity, of making a more public appeal—of addressing, through you, to that great and intelligent class of society of which you are a portion, and a fair and unexceptionable representative—to that class which is much less interested in the contentions of party, than in the maintenance of order and the cause of good government, that frank exposition of general principles and views which appears to be anxiously expected, and which it ought not to be the inclination, and cannot be the interest, of a Minister of this country to withhold.

“ Gentlemen, the arduous duties in which I am engaged have been imposed upon me through no act of mine. Whether they were an object of ambition coveted by me—whether I regard the power and distinction they confer as any sufficient compensation for the heavy sacrifices they involve—are matters of mere personal

concern, on which I will not waste a word. The King, in a crisis of great difficulty, required my services. The question I had to decide was this—Shall I obey the call? or shall I shrink from the responsibility, alleging as the reason, that I consider myself, in consequence of the Reform Bill, as labouring under a sort of moral disqualification, which must preclude me, and all who think with me, both now and for ever, from entering into the official service of the Crown? Would it, I ask, be becoming in any public man to act upon such a principle? Was it fit that I should assume that either the object or the effect of the Reform Bill has been to preclude all hope of a successful appeal to the good sense and calm judgment of the people, and so to fetter the prerogative of the Crown, that the King has no free choice among his subjects, but must select his Ministers from one section, and one section only, of public men?

“ I have taken another course, but I have not taken it without deep and anxious consideration as to the probability that my opinions are so far in unison with those of the constituent body of the United Kingdom as to enable me, and those with whom I am about to act, and whose sentiments are in entire concurrence with my own, to establish such a claim upon public confidence as shall enable us to conduct with vigour and success the Government of this country.

“ I have the firmest conviction that that confidence cannot be secured by any other course than that of a frank and explicit declaration of principle; that vague and unmeaning professions of popular opinions may

quiet distrust for a time, may influence this or that election ; but that such professions must ultimately and signally fail, if, being made, they are not adhered to, or if they are inconsistent with the honour and character of those who make them.

“ Now I say at once that I will not accept power on the condition of declaring myself an apostate from the principles on which I have heretofore acted. At the same time, I never will admit that I have been, either before or after the Reform Bill, the defender of abuses, or the enemy of judicious reforms. I appeal with confidence, in denial of the charge, to the active part I took in the great question of the Currency—in the consolidation and amendment of the Criminal Law—in the revision of the whole system of Trial by Jury—to the opinions I have professed, and uniformly acted on, with regard to other branches of the jurisprudence of the country—I appeal to this as a proof that I have not been disposed to acquiesce in acknowledged evils, either from the mere superstitious reverence for ancient usages, or from the dread of labour or responsibility in the application of a remedy.

“ But the Reform Bill, it is said, constitutes a new era, and it is the duty of a Minister to declare explicitly—first, whether he will maintain the Bill itself, and, secondly, whether he will act upon the spirit in which it was conceived.

“ With respect to the Reform Bill itself, I will repeat now the declaration which I made when I entered the House of Commons as a Member of the Reformed Parliament, that I consider the Reform Bill a final and

irrevocable settlement of a great Constitutional question—a settlement which no friend to the peace and welfare of this country would attempt to disturb, either by direct or by insidious means.

“ Then, as to the spirit of the Reform Bill, and the willingness to adopt and enforce it as a rule of government: if, by adopting the spirit of the Reform Bill, it be meant that we are to live in a perpetual vortex of agitation; that public men can only support themselves in public estimation by adopting every popular impression of the day,—by promising the instant redress of anything which anybody may call an abuse,—by abandoning altogether that great aid of government—more powerful than either law or reason—the respect for ancient rights, and the deference to prescriptive authority; if this be the spirit of the Reform Bill, I will not undertake to adopt it. But if the spirit of the Reform Bill implies merely a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper, combining, with the firm maintenance of established rights, the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances,—in that case, I can for myself and colleagues undertake to act in such a spirit and with such intentions.

“ Such declarations of general principle are, I am aware, necessarily vague; but, in order to be more explicit, I will endeavour to apply them practically to some of those questions which have of late attracted the greater share of public interest and attention.

“ I take, first, the inquiry into Municipal Corporations:

“ It is not my intention to advise the Crown to interrupt the progress of that inquiry, nor to transfer the conduct of it from those to whom it was committed by the late Government. For myself, I gave the best proof that I was not unfriendly to the principle of inquiry, by consenting to be a member of that Committee of the House of Commons on which it was originally devolved. No report has yet been made by the Commissioners to whom the inquiry was afterwards referred; and, until that report be made, I cannot be expected to give, on the part of the Government, any other pledge than that they will bestow on the suggestions it may contain, and the evidence on which they may be founded, a full and unprejudiced consideration.

“ I will, in the next place, address myself to the questions in which those of our fellow-countrymen who dissent from the doctrines of the Established Church take an especial interest.

“ Instead of making new professions, I will refer to the course which I took upon those subjects when out of power.

“ In the first place, I supported the measure brought forward by Lord Althorp, the object of which was to exempt all classes from the payment of Church-rates, applying in lieu thereof, out of a branch of the revenue, a certain sum for the building and repair of churches. I never expressed, nor did I entertain, the slightest objection to the principle of a bill of which Lord John Russell was the author, intended to relieve the conscientious scruples of Dissenters in respect to the ceremony of marriage. I give no opinion now on the particular

measures themselves: they were proposed by Ministers in whom the Dissenters had confidence; they were intended to give relief; and it is sufficient for my present purpose to state that I supported the principle of them.

“ I opposed—and I am bound to state that my opinions in that respect have undergone no change—the admission of Dissenters, as a claim of right, into the Universities; but I expressly declared that if regulations, enforced by public authorities superintending the professions of law and medicine, and the studies connected with them, had the effect of conferring advantages of the nature of civil privileges on one class of the King’s subjects from which another was excluded—those regulations ought to undergo modification, with the view of placing all the King’s subjects, whatever their religious creeds, upon a footing of perfect equality with respect to any civil privilege.

“ I appeal to the course which I pursued on those several questions, when office must have been out of contemplation; and I ask, with confidence, does that course imply that I was actuated by any illiberal or intolerant spirit towards the Dissenting body, or by an unwillingness to consider fairly the redress of any real grievances?

“ In the examination of other questions which excited public feeling, I will not omit the Pension List. I resisted—and, with the opinions I entertain, I should again resist—a retrospective inquiry into pensions granted by the Crown at a time when the discretion of the Crown was neither fettered by law nor by the



expression of any opinion on the part of the House of Commons ; but I voted for the Resolution, moved by Lord Althorp, that pensions on the Civil List ought, for the future, to be confined to such persons only as have just claims to the Royal beneficence, or are entitled to consideration on account either of their personal services to the Crown, or of the performance of duties to the public, or of their scientific or literary eminence. On the Resolution which I thus supported as a private Member of Parliament, I shall scrupulously act as a Minister of the Crown, and shall advise the grant of no pension which is not in conformity with the spirit and intention of the vote to which I was a party.

“ Then, as to the great question of Church Reform. On that head I have no new professions to make. I cannot give my consent to the alienating of Church property, in any part of the United Kingdom, from strictly Ecclesiastical purposes. But I repeat now the opinions that I have already expressed in Parliament in regard to the Church Establishment in Ireland—that if, by an improved distribution of the revenues of the Church, its just influence can be extended, and the true interests of the Established religion promoted, all other considerations should be made subordinate to the advancement of objects of such paramount importance.

“ As to Church property in this country, no person has expressed a more earnest wish than I have done that the question of tithe, complicated and difficult as I acknowledge it to be, should, if possible, be satis-

factorily settled by the means of a commutation, founded upon just principles, and proposed after mature consideration.

“With regard to alterations in the laws which govern our Ecclesiastical Establishment, I have had no recent opportunity of giving that grave consideration to a subject of the deepest interest, which could alone justify me in making any public declaration of opinion. It is a subject which must undergo the fullest deliberation, and into that deliberation the Government will enter, with the sincerest desire to remove every abuse that can impair the efficiency of the Establishment, to extend the sphere of its usefulness, and to strengthen and confirm its just claims upon the respect and affections of the people.

“It is unnecessary for my purpose to enter into further details. I have said enough, with respect to general principles and their practical application to public measures, to indicate the spirit in which the King’s Government is prepared to act. Our object will be—the maintenance of peace—the scrupulous and honourable fulfilment, without reference to their original policy, of all existing engagements with Foreign Powers,—the support of public credit—the enforcement of strict economy—and the just and impartial consideration of what is due to all interests—agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial.

“Whatever may be the issue of the undertaking in which I am engaged, I feel assured that you will mark, by a renewal of your confidence, your approbation of the course I have pursued in accepting office. I enter

upon the arduous duties assigned to me with the deepest sense of the responsibility they involve, with great distrust of my own qualifications for their adequate discharge, but at the same time with a resolution to persevere, which nothing could inspire but the strong impulse of public duty, the consciousness of upright motives, and the firm belief that the people of this country will so far maintain the prerogative of the King, as to give to the Ministers of his choice, not an implicit confidence, but a fair trial.

“ I am, Gentlemen,

“ With affectionate regard,

“ Most faithfully yours,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

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I held no language and expressed no opinions in this Address which I had not previously held while acting in opposition to the Government. I did not attempt to mitigate hostility by any new professions, or to court popular favour by promises of more extensive reforms than those to the principle of which I had assented before I took office. It was said by my opponents that I held a new language as to the Reform Bill. I certainly tried to calm any anxiety on that head among the advocates of the Reform of Parliament by an explicit declaration that I considered the measure final and irrevocable. But was the language I held new? was it adopted for the first time

because it was convenient in my altered position to disclaim hostility to the measure that had passed into a law? On this and on every other matter noticed in the Address, the best, the only satisfactory mode of determining whether new professions were made, is to compare the expressions used in this Address with declarations previously made by me.

I said in the Address that "I considered the Reform Bill a final and irrevocable settlement of a great Constitutional question—a settlement which no friend to the peace and welfare of this country would attempt to disturb, either by direct or by insidious means."

With respect to acting in the spirit of the Reform Bill, I observed in the Address that "if, by adopting the spirit of the Reform Bill, it be meant that we are to live in a perpetual vortex of agitation, that public men can only support themselves in public estimation by adopting every popular impression of the day—by promising the instant redress of anything which anybody may call an abuse—by abandoning altogether that great aid of Government, more powerful than either law or reason, the respect for ancient rights, and the deference to prescriptive authority—if this be the spirit of the Reform Bill, I will not undertake to adopt it; but if the spirit of the Reform Bill implies merely a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper, combining with the firm maintenance of established rights the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances—in that case I can, for myself and col-

eagues, undertake to act in such a spirit and with such intentions.”

Now in 1833 I took my seat in a small minority as a member of the first Parliament summoned under the Reform Act. In the debate on the Address I used the following expressions :—“The King’s Government had abstained from all unseemly triumph in the King’s Speech respecting the measure of Reform. He (Sir R. Peel) would profit by their example, and would say nothing upon that head, but consider *that question as finally and irrevocably disposed of*. He was now determined to look forward to the future alone, and considering the Constitution as it existed, to take his stand on main and essential matters, to join in resisting every attempt at new measures which could not be stirred without unsettling the public mind and endangering public prosperity.” Again, on the same occasion, “He was for reforming every institution that really required reform ; but he was for doing it gradually, dispassionately, and deliberately, in order that the reform might be lasting.”—Surely there was no great discrepancy in the sentiments expressed by me with regard to the Reform Bill in and out of office.

Among the measures which received my earliest attention the moment that the Government was formed, was the appointment of the Ecclesiastical Commission for the purpose of instituting those inquiries and entering into those deliberations which were the necessary preliminaries to an effectual reform of such

abuses in the Church Establishment as most urgently required extirpation, and to a supply of the most grievous deficiencies in the ministration of religious rites and worship. My object and intentions in establishing this Commission are detailed in the accompanying letter to Lord Harrowby, pressing him to become a member of the Ecclesiastical Commission. I purposely formed the Commission of persons decidedly friendly to the Establishment; I purposely excluded from the Commission every person who was not regarded as a friend to the Church, placing upon the Commission a large proportion (as compared with the lay members) of the highest spiritual authorities. I did this for the purpose of propitiating towards the intended Reform of the Church the good will and confidence of the Church itself. I clearly foresaw the necessity of this, fearing that when Reform—though it had been loudly demanded by many attached members of the Church—though the necessity and the practicability of it had been enforced by high clerical authorities (Dr. Burton, for instance, the Professor of Divinity at Oxford)—fearing that when Reform should assume a definite shape, and be accompanied by those suggestions of practical improvement which affect the interests and expectations of individuals, and are the real test of the earnestness and sincerity of advocates of Reform, it would be much less popular and palatable than when it had been dimly seen at a distance, and was merely a convenient topic for the safe display of liberal opinions and professions.

I fully expected that the first result of a sincere and united endeavour on the part of the Executive Government and the Church to work out practical improvement would be general satisfaction and confidence among all reasonable men, and the abatement of extravagant demands in favour either of violent change or of the rigorous maintenance of the existing law and practice in ecclesiastical matters. I much feared that the second result would be a prevailing and dangerous impression that in consequence of this tranquillized state of the public mind, in consequence of having thus appeased the angry clamour for innovation by the promise of improvement, the necessity for any change whatever had passed away, and that the Church might safely be left unmolested. I was desirous, therefore, to take every security that the Constitution of the Commission could afford, against the suspicion of an unfriendly spirit, and against the consequences of alarm, real or pretended, as to the intentions and objects of those to whom the important duties of the Commission were to be entrusted. I did all that I could by private correspondence to reconcile to the appointment and to the probable recommendations of the Commission those sincere friends of the Church who were most adverse to any innovation, and whose opinions had the greatest weight from the purity of their lives and disinterestedness of their conduct, and from their high professional character and attainments. I refer particularly to my correspondence with my lamented friend Dr. Van Mildert, the Bishop of Durham, and others. The objects contemplated by the appointment

of the Commission are set forth in the letters which I wrote to Lord Harrowby, to the Bishop of Exeter, and others.

Sir R. PEEL to Lord HARROWBY.

(Confidential.)

“ Whitehall, January 12, 1835.

“ MY DEAR LORD HARROWBY,

“ I hope that the deep interest which you have uniformly taken in the real welfare of the Church will induce you to lend a favourable ear to my present proposal.

“ I am convinced of the absolute necessity of taking some effectual and practical step with a view not only to the satisfaction of the public mind, but to the higher object of promoting the spiritual efficiency of the Church, and the great moral and religious purposes for which the Church was founded.

“ I feel it my solemn duty as a Minister, and as a member of the Church, to advise the Crown to administer its Church patronage from this time forth on a new principle, and calmly and dispassionately to consider, as great preferments fall vacant, whether there may not be some appropriation of the revenues of those preferments better calculated to serve the cause of religion than an exact adherence to the existing law and long observed usage in respect to those revenues. The best way to illustrate my meaning and intentions is to take a practical case.

“ If the Bishopric of Ely were to fall vacant to-



morrow, I should advise the Crown not to make an immediate appointment to it, but to consider these several particulars :

“ The amount of the revenues of the See, and the propriety of appropriating only a part of those revenues to the support (the decorous, nay the liberal support) of the Episcopal station : The expediency of making some new distribution of Episcopal duties between the Bishopric of Ely and adjoining or neighbouring Bishoprics, which are comparatively overloaded with functions which might be annexed to Ely : Lastly, a review of the livings within the diocese, and especially of those at the disposal of the Bishop, with a view to appropriate the superfluous revenues of the See to their increase, in cases wherein the existing provision should be notoriously inadequate to ensure a resident minister.

“ If there could be any other appropriation of the superfluous revenues of the See better calculated to effect the object at which alone I am aiming, I would not of course exclude the suggestion of that other appropriation from the fullest consideration.

“ If the Deanery of Durham were to become vacant, I should advise an inquiry upon a similar principle. I should look to the provision now made for the performance of spiritual duties in the great towns in the neighbourhood of Durham, which have grown up since Durham was so richly endowed. I should look again to the provision of Episcopal duties in the North of England ; and if I, and those real friends of the Church with whom I should be most anxious to consult,

should be (as I am confident we should be) of opinion that the altered circumstances of the times—the state of public feeling—the spiritual interests of the Establishment—required the application of a new principle, I should at once advise the Crown to consent to its application.

“ Amidst the harassing duties in which I have been lately engaged, and which, to say the truth, have up to this time left me but little leisure to consider any other matters than those immediately connected with the formation of the Government, this subject has chiefly occupied my anxious attention. I have had much confidential communication with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, and I have the satisfaction of finding on their part an earnest desire to lend me their assistance, and the support of their authority in doing something effectual in Church reform, in the encouraging and (where possible) the compulsion of residence—the prevention of improper pluralities—the gradual extirpation of sinecures in the Church.

“ The immediate course I propose to pursue for the purpose of laying the safe foundations at least of progressive reform in the Church, is the appointment of a Commission to which I should *confidentially* refer, on the avoidance of any great preferment, the consideration of those arrangements in detail which might best promote the object I have in view, and which Commission might also consider prospectively the arrangements which it might be advisable to adopt, either with the consent of those who have at present existing interests, or, if their consent cannot be had, on the occurrence of a vacancy.

“ I think of constituting the Commission thus:—

The Archbishop of CANTERBURY.	The Lord CHANCELLOR.
The Archbishop of YORK.	Sir ROBERT PEEL.
The Bishop of LONDON.	Mr. GOULBURN.
The Bishop of LINCOLN.	Mr. CHARLES WYNN.
The Bishop of GLOUCESTER.	Sir HERBERT JENNER;

and, with your permission, yourself.

“ I will only repeat that I earnestly hope that your general concurrence in the views of which I have given the outline, and your devotion to the real interests of religion and the Church, may induce you to give me on this Commission the inestimable value of your sanction and cooperation.

“ Believe me, &c.,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

Sir R. PEEL to Bishop of EXETER.

(Most private.)

“ Whitehall, January 21, 1835.

“ MY DEAR BISHOP,

“ I doubt whether the best principle in respect to Dissenters' marriages is not this:—Make the civil contract, or rather, I would say, the acknowledgment of the contract by both parties before a civil magistrate an indispensable condition: encourage but do not compel any religious rite—leave that to the good sense and good feeling of the parties. If you cannot depend upon them, the obligation of law will give you no good security for any decorous religious ceremony; it might enforce some ceremony or other, but that might pur-

posely be made of a ridiculous or revolting character. Speak, therefore, of religious rites in your Bill, assume the performance of them, but do not require them by penalties. Pray read the enclosed from Mr. Goulburn, and the Memorandum drawn up by Mr. Gregson, on suggestions of mine, adopting the principle to which I have before referred.

“I shall be exceedingly obliged to you to send me your views on Church Reform, and particularly on the following points:—

“The more equal apportionment of Episcopal duties and Episcopal incomes, on the termination of existing interests.

“The appointment of suffragan Bishops to aid in the execution of Episcopal Duties—such Bishops not having seats in the House of Lords—would such appointments be a desirable measure or not?

“After providing for the maintenance of the fabric and the proper performance of all Cathedral services, in what mode can the superfluous wealth of Cathedrals be made available for the spiritual instruction of the people, with the greatest effect and the least violation of principle? It is in vain to disguise from ourselves that, either by friendly or unfriendly hands, ecclesiastical sinecures must share the fate to which all other sinecures have been doomed. I think it is impossible to maintain the principle that an office of the Church, without corresponding duties, shall have large emoluments attached to it, while the cure of souls in some populous district is wholly unprovided for. No one can contend that the latter evil ought to continue unre-

dressed. Where is the hope of redress except from Ecclesiastical Revenues?

“Can we give increased facilities to the building of churches by voluntary contribution?”

“By what means, consistent with justice to all parties, can we increase the emoluments of a minister who has spiritual duties of real importance to perform, who is notoriously underpaid, and who holds a living in the gift of a private patron? It clearly would not be just to increase those emoluments from any public or ecclesiastical fund, and leave the private patron the uncontrolled value.

“I wish I had brought my queries to a conclusion from having exhausted them; but I must not trespass upon your time and patience too much in a single letter.

“Believe me, &c., &c.,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

Sir R. PEEL to Bishop of DURHAM.

“Whitehall, February 23, 1835.

“MY DEAR BISHOP OF DURHAM,

“That public business must be of more than ordinary and pressing importance which I did not set aside for the purpose of reading with earnest attention a letter from you, and that letter, too, on a subject of such vital importance as the one on which you have addressed me.

“I will, with your permission, refer to the political and the religious considerations which it involves.

“ It is a matter of extreme difficulty to determine when it is the duty of a Minister of the Crown to undertake the interference with ancient usages and venerable institutions. If he determines to do nothing, he may incur the risk of insuring interference by ruder and more hostile hands. If he advises and undertakes interference, he appears to the unthinking to be needlessly departing from principle, to be unsettling what it may be very dangerous to disturb, and to be establishing a precedent which may be appealed to against himself by those dangerous innovators whose intervention he wishes to avert.

“ I know no other guide that he can take to regulate his course amid such difficulties but his deliberate and conscientious conviction of what may be ultimately the best for the security and permanent interests of the establishments he desires to protect and serve.

“ The important question connected with the Church which was forced upon me, and which required immediate decision, was this :

“ Is it prudent and safe on the part of the Crown to decline all interference with the state of the Church, and to leave that question to be disposed of as may seem best to the House of Commons, trusting implicitly either to the forbearance and caution of that House, or to the power of the House of Lords to reject what may be injurious ?

“ I cannot with a safe conscience answer that question in the affirmative.

“ I entreat you to look with me at the constitution of the present House of Commons. We have a decided

majority of the representatives of both Ireland and Scotland hostile to the Church, and, I fear, no inconsiderable number of the representatives of England either unfriendly or indifferent to the interests of the Church.

“ On the first discussion that takes place in the House of Commons after my appointment as Prime Minister, on the proposal to replace in the Chair the late Speaker, who has served the House for eighteen years and during seven successive Parliaments, I find myself in a minority of ten.

“ It is in vain for me to disguise from myself that very few of those who voted in that majority will prove themselves in the day of trial friends to the Church.

“ The minority is composed in great part of members professing the utmost attachment to the Church, but all, with few exceptions, requiring the correction of whatever can justly be called an abuse in the Establishment.

“ In that minority Lord Stanley and his friends voted, increasing of course, to the extent of their numbers, the force we could bring into the field. At his late election for Lancashire, Lord Stanley, a declared friend of the Church, who sacrificed his office in maintenance of the principle that Church property in Ireland should not be applicable to secular purposes, delivered these opinions on the subject of Church reform :—

“ ‘ I know also that Ecclesiastical Reform must come, and that it is certain with regard to two great branches, namely, both as to the temporalities of the Church and also as to her internal discipline. I too, like my honourable friend, would not be a consenting party to abstract-

ing one farthing from the revenues of the clergy, who, I believe in my conscience, are not overpaid, but as a body are hardly adequate to supply the religious wants of the people. But I do say that it is absolutely necessary to have a different distribution of the revenues of the Church, to afford a more equal distribution of the means of religious instruction; that the abuses of non-residence, the abuses of pluralities, and the abuses of the present appropriation of Chapter and Cathedral property should be got rid of, and that the revenues of the Church should be so disposed of as to give the people of England the greatest amount of benefit from the exertion of competently but not overpaid ministers.'

“ Now, looking at the majority and at the constitution of the minority, what course is it prudent for us to take? Shall we leave Church reform in the hands of the House of Commons, or shall we make an honest, *bonâ fide* attempt to reserve to the Crown and to advisers selected by the Crown the cautious and deliberate review of a question of such extreme delicacy and importance?

“ Believe me, my dear Lord, that I am acting under the deepest impression that the effort I have made so to reserve that question affords the best (I had almost said the only) prospect of any safe and satisfactory adjustment of it.

“ So much for the political considerations that are connected with this subject, and their bearing, not on the political prospects of an administration, but on the vital interests of the Church.

“ May I presume now, with the utmost deference for your superior knowledge, and with unbounded respect



for your high and venerable character, to say a word to you on much higher concerns—on the intrinsic merits of the measure I have advised, and its relation to the spiritual welfare of the Establishment ?

“ I admit the force of your observations as to the advantage of Cathedral dignities, their tendency to elevate the general character of the profession, their utility (if honestly applied) as retreats for, and encouragement of, learning ; and I should be the last person to propose any harsh measures of confiscation, or the sudden appropriation of the revenues of Deans and Chapters (in the absence of all friendly and confidential consultation with them) to objects foreign to their original destination.

“ But I do earnestly advise a comprehensive and impartial consideration of the *whole* position of the Church, and that our anxiety for one branch of the Establishment should not divert our care from the other objects of most important and pressing concern. I do earnestly ask, whether it be fit that the great manufacturing towns and districts of the country should be left, as to the means of spiritual instruction, in their present state ? Is it right (I ask the question on purely religious grounds) that such a place as Nottingham, for instance, should remain, as it has hitherto remained, with no provision for the maintenance of the ministers of the Church of England excepting the scanty means which they can collect from pew-rents or Easter dues ?

“ Is it right that the two parishes of St. Margaret and St. John, Westminster, with a population of 50,000 souls—parishes dependent on the Dean and Chapter of Westminster—in the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral

church—under the daily eye of Parliament, should remain without, in either case, a decent provision for even a single minister of the Church of England? In these parishes there are additional churches subscribed for, but not built, because there is no endowment; and Dissent is increasing not on account of hostility to the Church, but because there is a religious feeling which the Church of England will not conciliate towards herself.

“Apart from all popular clamour, from all political considerations, is it better for the Church of England, for the interest of that faith, the propagation and maintenance of which is surely the primary object of her establishment, to continue the old method of disposing of all the prebends of Westminster as sinecure dignities, or to make a certain number of them instrumental in removing such a scandal from the Church as that which two great neglected parishes in the heart of the metropolis, and in immediate connection with the Chapter, are exhibiting at this hour?”

“Let me take another case—that of Colne—a parish in Lancashire, the centre of a large manufacturing district. It contains about 18,000 inhabitants, has one minister with a stipend of about 160*l.* a-year, 100*l.* of which is raised by Easter dues, paid with the utmost reluctance and ill-will, each cottager having to pay 5½*d.* a head, and frequently resisting payment until after an order of a magistrate, which increases the charge tenfold.

“I have mentioned three examples of parishes—one of the metropolis, one in a large town, one in a great manufacturing district; and they are not unfair instances

of the miserable provision made for divine worship in very many parishes similarly circumstanced. Can we reconcile it to ourselves in a religious point of view that these things should remain as they are? If we cannot, if we must admit that they are wrong, is there the shadow of a hope that Parliament will be content merely to supply the deficiency—will leave Cathedral dignities and Cathedral revenues precisely on their present footing, and make provision, out of public funds, for the increase of all livings inadequately provided for? Suppose there were a vacancy to-morrow in the Deanery of Durham, would it be prudent for me, either as a Minister or as a conscientious friend of the Church, to advise the King to fill up the appointment, leaving it with its present emoluments of 9,000*l.* a-year, and with no other spiritual functions than those which belong properly to the Dean? There would certainly be, on the one hand, the advantage of strict adherence to the letter at least of the statutes of the Chapter; there would be the gain to the Minister of a great aristocratic appointment, which might possibly be well bestowed on some man of pre-eminent worth and extraordinary learning; but would such advantages compensate for the alienation of thousands from the Church who would witness this appointment, with all its emoluments intact, devolving on an individual, and at the same time populous districts in the neighbourhood of Durham overrun with Dissent from no other cause than that there is no adequate provision for the performance of the rites of the Church of England?

“ If the Deanery of Durham were retained with all

its functions, and with ample emoluments for the station, and if at the same time some mode could be devised for making a portion of the revenues (surely the excessive revenues) now attached to the Deanery instrumental in planting a new Bishopric in the north of England, and relieving the See of Chester from some portion of labours above human strength, could it be truly said that this would undermine the Church?

“Would a measure of this kind, or the attachment of a prebend of Durham to such a rectory as that of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, or the application of the emoluments of a prebend to the spiritual improvement of immense masses of population (selecting, if possible, those which are connected with the Chapter by vicinage or local ties)—would such acts be any greater violation of rigid principle than the sale of the property of the Chapter for the purpose of endowing an University, or the attachment of prebends to the professorships in that University?

“Does any reasonable man complain that a prebend of Lichfield has been attached to an unendowed parish in Birmingham, or doubt the advantage to the Church, to the temporal as well as the spiritual interests of the Church, of such an application of it?

“Under any circumstances I should say not; but, under the present circumstances, the practical question for decision is this,—shall these precedents be cautiously acted upon by friends of the Church for the *bonâ fide* purpose of extending the influence of the Church, or shall Church Reform be left to reckless innovators and undisguised enemies?

“I have written this letter amid so many interruptions and so hastily, that I ought, perhaps, to apologize to you for an apparent abruptness and peremptoriness in the manner and tone of it, perhaps for its unconnectedness and want of clearness.

“I have been obliged to have it re-copied, that I might not inflict upon you the double penalty of a tedious and an illegible letter.

“Believe me, &c.,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

“P. S.—I omitted to state in my letter that I entirely concur in your opinion that it could not be politic or just, under any circumstances, to contract the means of the Chapter of Durham to give effect in the fullest degree to their wise and liberal intentions in respect to the University which has been founded under their auspices.”

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Those letters, hastily written as they necessarily were amid all the excitement of the time, are better evidence of my intentions and views than anything I could now advance. I might extend the same remark to my private correspondence on all other subjects. Not a word of it was written with the slightest reference to future publication ; and the very haste in which it was all necessarily written makes it more satisfactory testimony to the real character of the opinions and impressions it communicates, than if I had had leisure to weigh the import of phrases and

to turn elaborate sentences. I am now writing after the event, with the knowledge of all that has subsequently passed, with the means, if I was so inclined, of giving a false colour to transactions by suppressing unfavourable truths; but the private correspondence, from which, as I before observed, I have not withdrawn a syllable, is, I firmly believe, fair and impartial evidence as to the real nature of the events and transactions to which it refers, and a true record of the sentiments, views, and impressions which it conveys.

ROBERT PEEL.

## APPENDIX.

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The following Paper was drawn up in anticipation of the Motion about to be made by Lord John Russell for the alienation from Ecclesiastical purposes of any surplus Revenues of the Irish Church.—(*Eds.*)

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### CABINET MEMORANDUM.

Whitehall, March 25, 1835.

SIR ROBERT PEEL feels it to be his duty to call, previously to the meeting of the next Cabinet, the serious attention of his colleagues to the position of the Government in the House of Commons, and to this great question, whether it is consistent either with the credit and character of public men, or the interests of the King's service, to continue the attempt of conducting a Government with a minority in the House of Commons. Let us calmly review what has taken place. The Government has been beaten since the meeting of Parliament on the choice of a Speaker, and on the amendment of the Address.

I was obliged to name Mr. Bernal for the Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means from inability to secure the election of any one in the confidence of the

Government. The first diplomatic appointment which we made\* could not have been persisted in, and was resigned, in consequence of the interference of the House of Commons, by the person designated for it.

We have made no progress whatever with public business—have only yet passed through three or four votes on Navy Estimates in the Committee of Supply—have been obstructed every night by frivolous debates, or motions made as amendments on the Speaker's leaving the Chair, which had no sort of reference to the vote on supply.

I am aware that it is in the power of any individual member to take this course, and to create these impediments; but the course is taken and the impediments are created because we are in a minority—because we have not the weight and authority to check, through the opinion and voice of a majority, the vexatious opposition of individual members.

Last night, on a question relating to the appointment of a Committee to inquire into the most frivolous accusations against an officer in command of the marines at Chatham, although we proposed to concede an inquiry limited to such of the allegations as affected his official conduct, we were in a minority of 160 to 130.

On Monday next there will be a call of the House, and a proposition, to which we no doubt shall be unable to accede, will be made respecting the supposed surplus of ecclesiastical property in Ireland.

\* Of the Marquess of Londonderry as Ambassador to the Court of Petersburg.—(*Eds.*)



If, after the defeats to which I have above referred—after the failure to conduct satisfactorily the public business in ordinary matters through the House of Commons—if we are beat upon that principle, in maintaining of which Lord Stanley and his friends retired from office last year, what course shall we pursue?

Shall we continue responsible for the government of Ireland, and shall we proceed with measures relating to the Church of Ireland founded on an opposite principle? What is our prospect of carrying those measures in defiance of a majority? What is our prospect (after a defeat on a great principle) of commanding larger numbers and a better attendance, and of being enabled to carry on satisfactorily the public business of the country, and to defeat the attempts, either direct or indirect, to obstruct it?

It may be said, Wait till you have evidence that you cannot conduct the public business with satisfaction.

I ask, in reply, What additional evidence can we have, and where is the point at which a Government is to confess its inability to conduct public affairs?

Nothing can, in my opinion, justify an administration in persevering against a majority, but a rational and well-grounded hope of acquiring additional support, and converting a minority into a majority.

I see no ground for entertaining that hope; but I do see the greatest prejudice to the cause of good government, to the character of an administration and of the public men who compose it, and to the prerogatives

of the Crown, in a long-continued course, either of acquiescing in what you believe to be wrong, for fear of being in a minority, or of exhibiting the Executive Government without control over the House of Commons, and attempting (after sufficient proof of their failure) to govern with a minority.

We have tried the result of an appeal to the people; we cannot, I think, entertain the belief that there will arise, through our maintenance of office, the justification of a second appeal, or the prospect of acquiring great additional strength from the result of it.

If we are beaten on Monday, I shall greatly deprecate the entrance upon a course which I foresee will lead to the following results:—We shall ensure (shall we not justify?) constant obstruction to the course of public business. The impediments will be apparently unimportant, will involve perhaps no great principle, but would be effectual for their purpose. It will become very difficult to determine the point at which an actual paralysis of the functions of Government will occur. The acquiescence of one night will be pleaded as a precedent for the acquiescence of the night following; and at last, without any plain intelligible ground of public principle, we shall be compelled to retire, and shall be told that, if we consented to retain office after having been in a minority on such a great principle as the integrity of Church property, we ought not to have resigned on some much smaller matter.

ROBERT PEEL.

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Sir R. PEEL to the KING.

Whitehall, March 29, 1835.

Sir Robert Peel presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and has had the honour of receiving your Majesty's gracious communication of yesterday.

Sir Robert Peel fears that the effect of a majority against the Government on Lord John Russell's motion of to-morrow will be more serious and more prejudicial to your Majesty's Government than your Majesty anticipates.

That motion brought forward at the present moment, before the Tithe Bill announced in your Majesty's Speech has been introduced (although leave for its introduction has been given), and before any Report whatever from the Commission of Public Instruction has been received, can only be defended and supported upon the ground of want of confidence in your Majesty's advisers.

There would be the opportunity of proposing any practical measure in the Committee upon the Tithe Bill; but the House of Commons, if it shall assent to Lord John Russell's Resolution, will take in effect the conduct of the Bill out of the hands of Government, and will destroy all hope of being enabled to carry that Bill into a law.

Your Majesty must bear in mind, that this vote will follow a succession of votes adverse to the views of your Majesty's Ministers; that there is great public evil in permitting the House of Commons to exhibit itself to the country free from any control on the part

of the Executive Government, and usurping, in consequence of the absence of that control, many of the functions of the Government.

This state of things might be tolerated for a time ; it might be tolerated so long as there was a rational hope of converting a Ministerial minority into a majority, or of making an appeal to the people with a prospect of decided success. Sir Robert Peel fears that there is not ground for entertaining such a hope, or for believing that the position of the Government will be improved by persevering after a defeat on the question of the Irish Church.

It is said the Resolution of Lord John Russell is an abstract one ; but Sir Robert Peel ventures to assure your Majesty that in the present state of Ireland, and the present position of Church property, and the Tithe question, the Resolution, if carried, will have important practical results.

The immediate bearing of it will be upon the Tithe Bill, and above all upon the collection of tithe in Ireland. That collection has been now suspended for three or four years in many parts of the South of Ireland.

The attempt must be made without delay to levy it, or rather to provide a new principle by which the immediate payment of the charge for tithe may be transferred from the occupier to the owner of the land.

The amount paid by the owner must, however, be recovered from the occupier—from that occupier who has paid nothing for three or four years past.

Your Majesty too well knows the condition of

Ireland, not to feel how much the difficulties of effecting this, great under any circumstances, must be aggravated, if the attempt has to be made against a principle sanctioned by a majority of the House of Commons.

There are many cases in which public opinion, or the opinion of the House of Lords, might counterbalance a vote of the House of Commons carried by a considerable majority; but the Tithe question in Ireland is one upon which, as opposed to such a majority, neither public opinion in England, nor that of the House of Lords, would have a material effect.

Sir Robert Peel humbly assures your Majesty that he is not influenced, in submitting these important considerations to your Majesty's serious attention, by any feeling of personal dissatisfaction or mortification at his own position in the House of Commons. He would be proud to make any sacrifice, consistent with honour, that could relieve your Majesty from embarrassment, and would be amply repaid for it by his own sense of public duty, and your Majesty's kind and gracious approbation.

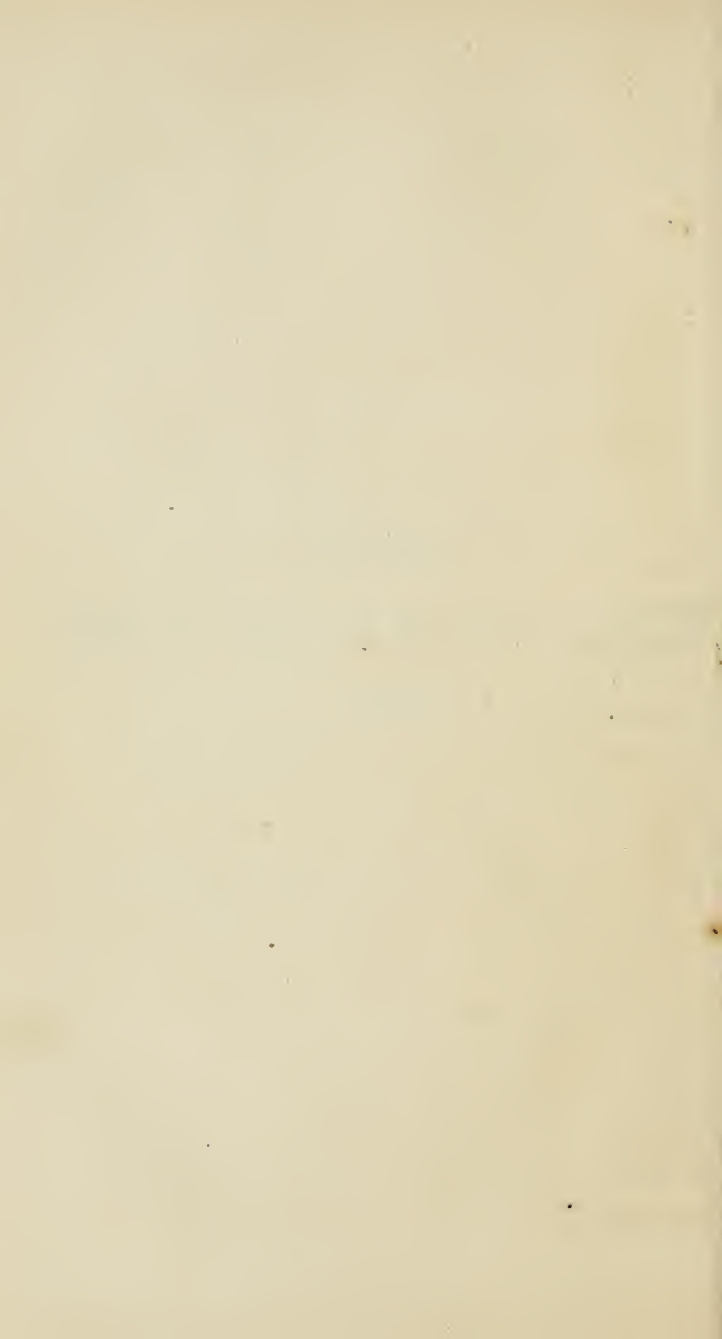
The apprehension he entertains from continued perseverance in the attempt to govern by a minority, is, that it will be difficult for an administration, however composed, to recover a control over the House of Commons; that the House of Commons, having been habituated to the exercise of functions not properly belonging to them, will be unwilling to relinquish it; and that the Royal Prerogatives and Royal Authority will inevitably suffer from continued manifestation of weakness on the part of the Executive Government.



PART III.

REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS.

1845-6.





## PART III.

### REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS; 1845-6.

THE papers incorporated with or attached to this Memoir relate to the failure of the potato crop in the autumn of 1845, and to the succession of events which followed it: namely, the Dissolution of the Government in December of that year, the abortive attempt of Lord John Russell to form an administration at that time, the resumption of power by the members of the former Government (with the exception of Lord Stanley), the Repeal of the Corn Laws, and the final resignation of Sir Robert Peel and his colleagues in the month of July 1846.

The extent to which there are written records in existence in reference to the discussions in Cabinet upon public transactions, depends frequently upon accidental circumstances.

When there is the opportunity of daily personal communication among those who take the chief part in such transactions, it may happen that little or nothing is committed to writing at the time. There *may*, therefore, be no contemporary record of discussions

in Cabinet, or of the personal conferences which have taken place between the leading members of a Government.

I consider it very fortunate that, in respect to the several events to which this Memoir refers, there are in existence contemporary documents to a much greater extent than is usual under similar circumstances.

Those documents contain a more faithful narrative and explanation of that which took place than any that memory could supply; and, given as they shall be without the slightest qualification or reserve, will afford the best security that justice is done to the motives and conduct of all those who were chiefly concerned in the transactions to which the documents in question refer.

Before I advert to those documents or to the reports which reached the Government in the early part of the autumn of 1845 respecting the failure of the potato crop, I will briefly refer to the position of the Corn Law Question at the close of the Session of 1845, unaffected as it then was by failure, or apprehension of failure, in any particular article of food.

The progress of discussion had made a material change in the opinions of many persons with regard to the policy of protection to domestic agriculture, and the extent to which that policy should be carried.

I had adopted at an early period of my public life, without, I fear, much serious reflection, the opinions generally prevalent at the time among men of all par-

ties, as to the justice and necessity of protection to domestic agriculture.

They were the opinions of Sir Henry Parnell and Mr. Ricardo, of Lord John Russell and Lord Melbourne, as well as of the Duke of Wellington, Mr. Canning, and Mr. Huskisson. I had, however, been a willing party, both in 1828 and 1842, to the reductions which took place in the amount of protection fixed by the Corn Law of 1815, a law which was based on the assumption that wheat could not profitably be grown at a price lower than eighty shillings a quarter.

One of the first acts of the Government over which I presided (the Government of August, 1841) was to propose a material change in the Corn Law of 1828. Although the measures which effected that change did not remain long in operation—being superseded by the Act of 1846—yet some interest may still be attached to the discussions in Cabinet which preceded the alteration of the law of 1828. In conformity with my general practice, I brought the subject under the consideration of my colleagues by means of written Memoranda, in preference to proposals made verbally. Such Memoranda were read by me at a meeting of the Cabinet, and afterwards sent in circulation among the members of the Government. The best opportunity was thus afforded for a mature consideration of statements made and of arguments adduced in support of measures proposed for consideration, and the most effectual precaution taken against misconstruction and hasty, inconsiderate decision. I will not interrupt the narrative of the events of 1845-6 by inserting in this place

the two Memoranda in which, soon after the appointment of the Government in 1841, I brought the subject of the Corn Laws under its consideration; but as they will serve to mark the progress of my opinions on that subject, and the extent of the difference between the impressions on which I acted at the two periods of 1841 and 1845 respectively, and as the chief value of this Memoir must be owing to the fact that there is no suppression or withholding of any document calculated to throw light on the matters of which it treats, I will place the Memoranda in the Appendix, that there may be the means of reference to them.

In the first of these Memoranda I recommend my colleagues to undertake the revision of the Corn Laws of 1828, as an act of the Government. In the second, after I had procured their assent to the principle of revision, I submit a proposal in respect to the extent to which such revision should be carried, and to the details of the new law. That proposal was ultimately adopted, after considerable discussion in Cabinet, and a Bill was brought into the House of Commons at an early period of the Session of 1842, which finally passed into a law, providing for a material diminution in the amount of the import duties on the several kinds of foreign grain. The prohibition which then existed on the import of foreign cattle and meat was removed in the same Session, and their import permitted on moderate rates of duty. These changes, although they gave little satisfaction to the most eager opponents of the Corn Law, and were indeed denounced by some as perfectly nugatory, were not effected without great

murmuring and some open opposition to the Government on the part of many of its supporters.

The Duke of Buckingham resigned his seat in the Cabinet rather than be a party to them, nor was it an easy matter to procure the unanimous adoption of the measures I proposed by the remaining members of the Government.

During the discussions in Parliament on the Corn Law of 1842 I was more than once pressed to give a guarantee (so far as a Minister could give it) that the amount of protection established by that law should be permanently adhered to ; but, although I did not then contemplate the necessity for further change, I uniformly refused to fetter the discretion of the Government by any such assurances as those that were required from me. It is unnecessary for the purposes of this Memoir that I should refer in detail to the events that took place in the interval between the passing of the Corn Bill in 1842, and the close of the Session of 1845. During that interval the opinions I had previously entertained on the subject of protection to agriculture had undergone a great change.

The main causes of that change are stated in a public letter which I addressed to my constituents shortly before the General Election of 1847, from which the following is an extract. The latter part of this extract refers to a question in some respects distinct, namely, the difficulty there would be in subsequently maintaining inviolate the Corn Law of 1842 in the event of its suspension in 1845 on account of apprehended scarcity. I will give, however, the extract entire, as

the reasoning applies with nearly equal force to the principle of continued protection as well as to the policy of its revival after having been once in abeyance. The letter is dated July, 1847.

To the ELECTORS of TAMWORTH.

“My confidence in the validity of the reasons on which I had myself heretofore relied for the maintenance of restrictions on the import of corn had been materially weakened. It had been weakened by the conflict of arguments on the principle of a restrictive policy; by many concurring proofs that the wages of labour do not vary with the price of corn; by the contrast presented in two successive periods of dearth and abundance, in the health, morals, and tranquillity and general prosperity of the whole community; by serious doubts whether, in the present condition of this country, cheapness and plenty are not ensured for the future in a higher degree by the free intercourse in corn, than by restrictions on its importation for the purpose of giving protection to domestic agriculture.”

“It had been weakened also by the following considerations, which were in a great degree new elements in forming a judgment on this vital matter.

“The general repeal of prohibitory duties, and the recent application of the principles of free trade to almost all articles of import from abroad, made the Corn Laws the object of more searching scrutiny and more invidious comment, and narrowed the ground on which their defence could be maintained.

“Among the articles of foreign import prohibited up to the year 1842, and then admitted at low rates of duty, were some important articles of agricultural produce, salted and fresh meat, oxen, sheep, cows, &c. You probably recollect the panic which this admission caused—the forced sale of stock, the prophecies that it would be impossible to compete with the foreign grazier, and that meat would be reduced to threepence a pound. Five years have passed since this great change in the law took place, and your own experience will enable you to judge whether the panic was well founded and whether the prophecies have been fulfilled.

“The complete failure of these prophecies had naturally had its effect on public opinion with regard to the probable consequences of a freer intercourse in other articles of agricultural produce.

“There was another circumstance still more calculated to diminish apprehensions as to the risk of opening the corn market of this country to foreign competition. There has appeared of late years a tendency to increase in the consumption of articles of subsistence much more rapid than the increase in the population. It is difficult, if not impossible, on account of the absence of statistical information, to measure accurately that increase in the case of articles of first necessity, such as corn and meat; but it may be inferred from the relative consumption at different periods of articles in respect to which the comparison can be instituted.

“The following is an account of some of the principal

articles entered for home consumption in the years 1841 and 1846 respectively:—

ARTICLES.	1841.	1846.
Cocoa .. .. lbs.	1,930,764	2,962,327
Coffee .. .. lbs.	28,420,980	36,781,391
Currants .. .. cwts.	190,071	359,315
Rice .. .. cwts.	245,887	466,961
Pepper .. .. lbs.	2,750,790	3,297,431
Sugar .. .. cwts.	4,065,971	5,231,845
Molasses .. .. cwts.	402,422	582,665
Tea .. .. lbs.	36,681,877	46,728,208
Tobacco and snuff .. .. lbs.	22,308,385	27,001,908
Brandy .. .. gallons.	1,165,137	1,515,954
Geneva .. .. gallons.	15,404	40,211
British spirits .. .. gallons.	20,642,333	23,122,581
Malt, charged with duty .. bushels.	36,164,448	41,979,000

“Surely it is impossible to refer to this comparative table without being forcibly struck by the rapid increase in the consumption of the articles which it embraces. Can there be a doubt that if the consumption of articles of a secondary necessity has been thus advancing, the consumption of articles of first necessity, of meat and of bread for instance, has been making at least an equally rapid progress?

“During the greater part of the period included in the return, from the middle of 1842 to the end of 1846, the free trade measures have been in operation. They have been in operation, therefore, concurrently, at least, with these evidences of the increasing ease and comfort of the people. Other causes have no doubt contributed to that ease and comfort; but even if the whole effect be assigned to those other causes, to railway enterprise, or anything else, it does not affect my pre-



sent argument. If there be from any cause a tendency to the consumption of articles of the first necessity much more rapid than the increase of population, the responsibility of undertaking to regulate the supply of food by legislative restraints, and the difficulty of maintaining those restraints in the event of any sudden check to prosperity, or increased price of subsistence, will be greatly augmented; while on the other hand, the danger to be apprehended from foreign competition is materially lessened.

“ It was from the combined influence of these various considerations—from diminished confidence in the necessity or advantage of protection—from the increasing difficulty of resisting the application to articles of food of those principles which had been gradually applied to so many other articles—from the result of the experiment made with regard to cattle and meat in 1842—from the evidences of rapidly increasing consumption—from the aggravation of every other difficulty in the maintenance of the Corn Laws, by the fact of their suspension on the first real pressure—it was from the combined influence of such considerations that I came to the conclusion that the attempt to maintain those laws inviolate after their suspension would be impolitic, that the struggle for their maintenance would assume a new character, and that no advantage to be gained by success could counterbalance the consequences of failure, or even the evils attending protracted conflict.

“ My opinions in this respect may have been erroneous, but they were not formed without mature and painful deliberation, and I am wholly unconscious of

any single motive of self-interest, personal or political, which was not calculated to bias my judgment in favour of an opposite conclusion. If, from the confidence which the agricultural interest had reposed in the Government, and the support they had freely given to it, that interest had a special claim upon me, I should have ill satisfied that claim by giving advice at a very critical period which might certainly have been more acceptable—which might have protected myself from the imputation of being inconsistent and unfaithful—but which in my heart and conscience I believed to be, as applicable to that time and those circumstances, unsound and dangerous.

“Between the maintenance of the Corn Laws inviolate, and a measure involving their ultimate repeal, I saw no middle course satisfactory or advantageous to any interest. I saw still less of satisfaction or advantage in indecision and irrational delay: I could not admit the incompetency of the present Parliament to deal with this as with every other question of public concern. There appeared to me, upon the whole, much less of public evil in the resolution finally to adjust the question of the Corn Laws than in any other that could be then adopted; and that being my deliberate conviction, I felt it to be my duty to incur the painful sacrifices which the acting upon that conviction must inevitably entail.”

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I will now revert to the especial and peculiar circumstances which led to the meeting of the Ministers at the latter end of October, 1845, and were the immediate

cause of the discussions in Cabinet and the train of events which followed.

I wish to place upon record the information which I received with regard to the probable failure of the potato-crop, and the correspondence which took place between those members of the Government who from their official station were chiefly responsible for the adoption of measures calculated to mitigate the evil consequences of a sudden and extensive defalcation in the ordinary supply of food. In giving these documents at length, I may perhaps appear to overrate their importance, and unduly to assume that the interest which at one time they might have derived from party excitement will survive its abatement. They are, however, the materials from which the future historian will extract that which is worthy of permanent record, and from which, with the aid of other contemporary evidence, he will pronounce his judgment on the motives and conduct of public men. Even if the details entered into be more copious than is required for such purposes, some allowance will be made for the natural anxiety of one who has been the object of much bitter reproach and very persevering hostility, to interpose the only safeguard which it is in his power to interpose against lasting injury from unjust accusation.

It is not perhaps too much to ask for a dispassionate consideration of the information and opinions in regard to the threatening of a great misfortune which were presented to the Ministers whose imperative duty it was to avert if possible the calamity of famine. It is not too much to ask that due weight may be given to that testimony to the real feelings, impressions, and intentions

of those Ministers, which will be supplied by the daily communications that passed between them under circumstances that banish all reserve—the approach of an indefinite and portentous misfortune, and the deep sense of a common responsibility.

It is from such evidence that a just inference can be drawn whether those Ministers were liable to the reproach of having exaggerated the danger to be apprehended for the purpose of supporting foregone conclusions, of justifying superfluous precautions, and of thus preparing the way for the ultimate repeal of the Corn Laws, or whether, on the other hand, considering the magnitude of the interests at stake, the difficulty of estimating the real character and extent of the threatened evil, the alarming consequences that must ensue if the worst fears should be realised, the course taken by those Ministers—whatever might be its ultimate bearing on the Corn Laws—was justified by the highest considerations of public duty.

The members of the Government upon whom at this crisis the chief responsibility rested, were the First Lord of the Treasury, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, and the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. Between them the principal correspondence took place, and to one or other of them the most material information as to the character and progress of the disease which affected the potato-plant in various parts of the country was addressed.

The earliest account which I received of the appearance of disease was from the Isle of Wight at the commencement of the month of August, 1845.

On the 11th of August the following letter was addressed to Sir James Graham. He sent it to me on the 12th with this remark:—

“The letter from the potato-merchant rather confirms the report from the Isle of Wight. I have directed inquiries to be made.”

Mr. R. PARKER, Potato Dealer, to Sir J. GRAHAM.

“Being myself a large grower, some years to the extent of 300 acres in Kent, where I farm—am also a salesman in London, and have been engaged largely in the retail part of the business—can give an opinion.

“I received a letter on the 1st inst. from my agent at Ash, near Sandwich, stating the crops were blighted in that neighbourhood the same as in October last year (it was then only partial in East Kent). On Tuesday last I went down by the Dover eight o'clock train; on my arrival there I immediately drove all round the neighbourhood of Sandwich, Ash, Wingham, and its neighbourhood, and found the whole of the crops, early and late, not excepting the cottagers' gardens, were being entirely destroyed. On my return I could trace it by the side of the whole line at Tonbridge; have since looked over the tops that come as covering on that article to the different markets, and find they are all affected. On Thursday last I paid a visit to my farm at Maidstone, and found it had made fearful destruction there, and returned by way of Gravesend—all were alike affected. The same evening I went to East and

West Ham in Essex ; amongst the large growths found it was just appearing. Friday I went to Leytonstone and neighbourhood—all are alike.

“ I am given to understand it is so in Holland and France, and should it be general in this country, it will be a shocking calamity for the poor. Being apprehensive it might be general, I thought it my duty to inform you, thinking it probable you might think it of importance to make further inquiry.”

I proceed to give, according to their dates, the communications which passed from time to time between Sir James Graham and myself referring to the prospects of the harvest.

Sir J. Graham writes—

“ Whitehall, August 20, 1845.

“ Yesterday was dreadful ; but to-day is fine, and the glass is rising. I saw Goulburn, who came from home this morning, and Darby, who came from Sussex, and they both say that the crops are good, the harvest now general, and that no serious injury has been done. Lewis, who came from S. Wales, says, on the other hand, that the corn is quite green in that district, and that they despair of its ever ripening. The quantities of old corn brought to market keep down the price to the astonishment of every one.”

It was not until the middle of September that apprehensions were entertained as to the failure of the potato-crop, and even then, as might naturally be ex-

pected, the reports from different parts of the country varied very materially. Between Sept. 18 and Oct. 4 the following letters passed between Sir James Graham and me:—

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“Netherby, September 18.

“I have asked repeatedly for information as to the state of the potato-crop in Ireland: until now the reports have been favourable. My apprehensions have greatly increased since my arrival here: for I find the disease among the potatoes very general; and we have had a day of heavy rain here, which will do much injury to the grain: a very small proportion of it is as yet secured.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“Netherby, September 19.

“I hope that there may be some exaggeration in this report of the failure of the potato-crop in Ireland; but there is no doubt that to some extent the disease has made its appearance in that country. We had again a great deal of rain yesterday; and the weather is broken and no longer favourable.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“Netherby, September 28.

“The enclosed account of the potato-crop in Ireland is more satisfactory, and corresponds with the reports

from various other quarters. I am willing now to hope that the failure, though extensive, is by no means general, and that the supply will not on the whole be much below the average. Much will depend on the approaching winter; if the frost be severe, I am afraid that the potatoes will not keep."

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

"Netherby, September 29.

"We have had very boisterous and indifferent weather, and a very small portion of the crop is yet secured. The wheat must have suffered severely, and the yield will be deficient. Oats and barley are excellent, and as yet not much injured. The potato-crop is hurt; but the decay in the ground is by no means general in this county. Before the next harvest the price of wheat, I fear, must rise considerably. Trade, however, in Lancashire continues sound and excellent."

Sir R. PEEL to Sir J. GRAHAM.

"September 30.

"I have a good account from Mayo of the potato-crop, confirming Lord Heytesbury's to you."

Sir R. PEEL to Sir J. GRAHAM.

"Drayton Manor, October 3.

"I send a letter from Fremantle, and one from Mr. M'Cann of Drogheda, which had led me to hope



that the unfavourable reports as to the potato-crop in Ireland have been greatly exaggerated. Mr. M'Cann's letter is consolatory generally."

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Even so late as the 6th of October the accounts from Ireland were not decidedly unfavourable, and on that day Sir J. Graham, writing from Netherby, observes—

"The accounts of the potato-crop in Ireland are more favourable than I had ventured to expect. The recent terrible rains will still do harm. I am afraid that the price of food generally will be very high."

Soon after the 6th of October the reports from Ireland became very unsatisfactory. On the 13th of October I addressed the following letter to Sir J. Graham:—

Sir R. PEEL to Sir J. GRAHAM.

"Whitehall, October 13.

"The accounts of the state of the potato-crop in Ireland are becoming very alarming. I enclose letters which have very recently reached me. Lord Heytesbury says that the reports which reach the Irish Government are very unsatisfactory. I presume that if the worst should happen which is predicted, the pressure would not be *immediate*. There is such a tendency to exaggeration and inaccuracy in Irish reports that delay in acting upon them is always desirable; but I foresee the necessity that may be imposed upon us at an early period of considering whether there is not that well-grounded apprehension of actual scarcity that justifies and compels

the adoption of every means of relief which the exercise of the prerogative or legislation might afford.

“I have no confidence in such remedies as the prohibition of exports, or the stoppage of the distilleries. The removal of impediments to import is the only effectual remedy.”

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On the same day on which my letter was addressed to Sir J. Graham, he wrote to me the one which follows:—

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“Netherby, October 13.

“The enclosed letter from the Lord-Lieutenant conveys to us information of the most serious kind, which requires our immediate attention. I am willing still to hope that the present fears are exaggerated; for the reports have varied almost from day to day, and it was admitted about a fortnight ago that greater apprehensions were entertained with respect to the potato-crop in Ireland than the facts since ascertained fully justified.

“On the other hand the time has now arrived when the potatoes are taken out of the ground, and when speculation on the subject is reduced to certainty. (A great national risk is always incurred when a population so dense as that of Ireland subsists on the potato; for it is the cheapest and the lowest food, and if it fail, no substitute can be found for starving multitudes.)

“It will be necessary after this warning that we should apply our immediate thoughts and attention to

measures which may mitigate this national calamity; for human skill can supply no remedy.

“In Belgium and in Holland, if I mistake not, a similar evil has been met by opening the ports to all articles of first necessity for human food. It is desirable that we should know, without loss of time, what has been done by our Continental neighbours in similar circumstances. (Indian corn might be obtained from the United States readily, and on cheap terms, if the people would eat it; but unfortunately it is an acquired taste; and if we opened the ports to maize duty-free, most popular and irresistible arguments present themselves why flour and oatmeal, the staple of the food of man, should not be restricted in its supply by artificial means, while Heaven has withheld from an entire people its accustomed sustenance. Could we with propriety remit duties in November by Order in Council, when Parliament might so easily be called together? Can these duties, once remitted by Act of Parliament, be ever again reimposed? Ought they to be maintained with their present stringency, if the people of Ireland be reduced to the last extremity for want of food?

“These are some of the reflections to which the letter of the Lord-Lieutenant gives rise.

“Your intimate knowledge of the condition of the peasantry of Ireland, your kind and humane feelings towards them, and the fatal certainty that a famine in that quarter of the United Kingdom will be a great crisis in our national affairs, will lead you, while there is yet time, to deliberate anxiously on the course which it may be necessary for us to take. I repeat my hope

that the extent and urgency of the evil may be exaggerated; but it is necessary to be prepared for the worst after this warning from our Lord-Lieutenant, who does not readily give credit to false alarms.”

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The following letters passed between Sir J. Graham and me between the 14th and 17th October:—

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“Netherby, October 14.

“In addition to the letter which I sent to you yesterday from the Lord-Lieutenant, I now forward the enclosed. I have also had a letter from Lord Clare, who expresses great apprehension with respect to the failure of the potato crop in Ireland.

“The police reports also from all parts of the country where digging has commenced are very unfavourable.

“You will observe that the Lord-Lieutenant suggests the necessity of considering the steps which it may be prudent to take if the serious apprehensions now entertained should be well founded.”

Sir R. PEEL to Sir J. GRAHAM.

“Drayton Manor, October 15.

“My letter on the awful question of the potato crop in Ireland will have crossed yours to me. I have written by this post to Lord Heytesbury.

“Interference with the due course of the laws respecting the supply of food is so momentous and so lasting in its consequences, that we must not act without the

most accurate information. I fear the worst—I have written to the Duke also.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Netherby, October 17.

“ I quite feel with you, that the most accurate and detailed information must be obtained from Ireland before we can venture to form a decision which, though arising from temporary circumstances, may produce momentous changes of a permanent character.

“ The suspension of the existing Corn Law on the avowed admission that its maintenance aggravates the evil of scarcity, and that its remission is the surest mode of restoring plenty, would render its re-enactment or future operation quite impracticable; yet if the evil be as urgent as I fear it will be, to this suspension we shall be driven.

“ I have entreated the Lord-Lieutenant to give us the most ample information. The real truth cannot be known until the digging is concluded: this will not be before the first week of November.”

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About the middle of October I thought it advisable to despatch to Ireland two men of the highest eminence in the department of science to which they belonged, Professor Lindley and Dr. Lyon Playfair. I thought that, having no connection with Ireland, and being free from the contagion of undue local apprehensions, they would be enabled to form a dispassionate judgment as to the real character and extent of the evil to be appre-

hended, and to give the most trustworthy information as to facts, and the best opinions as to the remedies which it might be possible to apply. In the following letter I apprise Sir J. Graham of the step I had resolved to take.

SIR R. PEEL to SIR J. GRAHAM.

“ Drayton Manor, October 18, 1845.

“ Dr. Lyon Playfair, Buckland, and Josiah Parkes are here.

“ They are impressed with a belief that it may be possible to mitigate the evil of the potato disease by some chemical application, and by the issue of plain practical instructions for the treatment of those potatoes which are not at all, or only partially, affected by the disorder. But Playfair has seen proofs, even during his short stay here, of the absolute necessity of promptitude in the application of any remedy that may be devised.

“ He will go by my desire to London to-morrow, will immediately confer with Professor Lindley, the highest botanical authority, and proceed, I trust with Lindley, to Dublin for the purpose of conferring with Lord Heytesbury, and reporting to him the result of the chemical experiments which they will make upon the potato on Playfair’s arrival in London.

“ I write by this post to Lord Heytesbury, to request him to send at once for Professor Kane, and any other eminent scientific or experienced man whom he may deem it advisable to consult—to be prepared with spe-

cimens of the diseased potatoes in various stages of the disorder—to collect all the authentic information which is accessible—and to be ready by Wednesday or Thursday next to enter into communication with Playfair and Lindley, aided by the science and practical knowledge which Ireland may afford.

“We have examined here various potatoes that have been affected ; and witnessing the rapidity of decay and the necessity for immediate action, I have not hesitated to interrupt Playfair’s present occupation, and to direct his immediate attention to this still more pressing matter.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“Netherby, October 20.

“The measure which you have taken, of sending Dr. Playfair and Professor Lindley to Dublin, is very judicious. I am not sanguine in the hope that any chemical process within the reach of the peasantry of Ireland can arrest the progress of decay in the potatoes already affected ; and we have such a deluge of rain, that independently of disease they must rot in the ground from wet, except on very dry land. But there are many points on which a scientific inquiry may be most useful, particularly the vital one with respect to the seed for next year. The Lord Advocate tells me that the disease among the potatoes in Scotland is also very prevalent : there is a murrain among the cattle and sheep, and a great deal of corn both here and in Scotland is still on the ground ; and we never have two days without rain. Since Friday it has blown a gale

of wind, with incessant rain. In short, the prospect is most gloomy and alarming; and I know not where the remedy is to be found.”

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The reports of Dr. Playfair and Professor Lindley, according to the periods at which they were made, will be hereafter given. The letters from Lord Heytesbury, Sir J. Graham, and others, which I am about to insert, are of a prior date.

Before I advert to the meeting of the Cabinet at the latter end of October, and the discussions which then took place, I will present according to the order of their respective dates the principal communications which had been previously received by me, and were the foundation of the judgment which I had formed, and of the advice which I gave when the Cabinet assembled. I insert those letters only which from the position and character of the writers and their means of observation were the best entitled to serious attention. There are many others that remain on record, received from private individuals, from stipendiary magistrates in Ireland, and other civil authorities. In their general tenor they will be found, I think, at least as unfavourable as the letters included in this Memoir. I am unwilling, however, to encumber it with superfluous details.

I shall separate from the subsequent correspondence that which had taken place previously to the end of the month of October, because at that period the Cabinet assembled, and the communications that followed could not have influenced the proposals which I then made to my colleagues.



LORD STUART DE DECIES to Sir THOS. FREMANTLE.

“Dromana, October 9.

“I feel it to be my duty to state for the information of the Lord-Lieutenant, that the disease known by the name of the Potato Cholera has been found very prevalent in the crops of that vegetable, as far as they have been yet examined in this and the adjoining Poor Law union of the county of Waterford; and there is much reason to apprehend that when the digging shall have become general, it will appear that the disease in question has affected the supply of this esculent, upon which the poorer classes are almost entirely dependent for the year’s subsistence, to a calamitous extent.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lord HEYTESBURY.

“Drayton Manor, October 15.

“MY DEAR LORD HEYTESBURY,

“The accounts from Ireland of the potato crop, confirmed as they are by your high authority, are very alarming.

“We must consider whether it is possible by legislation, or by the exercise of prerogative, to apply a remedy to the great evil with which we are threatened. The application of such remedy involves considerations of the utmost magnitude. The remedy is the removal of all impediments to the import of all kinds of human food—that is, the total and absolute repeal for ever of all duties on all articles of subsistence.

“I believe that practically there would be no alternative. To remit the duty on Indian corn expressly for the purpose of averting famine, would make it very invidious to retain a duty on other species of corn more generally applicable to the food of man.

“You might remit nominally for one year; but who will re-establish the Corn Laws once abrogated, though from a casual and temporary pressure?

“I have good ground therefore for stating that the application of a temporary remedy to a temporary evil does in this particular case involve considerations of the utmost and most lasting importance.

“You must therefore send us from time to time the most authentic information you can. There is such a tendency in Ireland to disregard accuracy and to exaggerate, that one is unwilling to give hasty credence to Irish statements. There can, however, I fear, be no reason to doubt that the failure of the potato crop will be very general.

“Has the recent fine weather (which has, I presume, extended to Ireland) had a favourable effect? What is the price of potatoes in the different markets? Is that price rapidly increasing?

“I fear the lowness of price—even if it exist—might be no indication of abundance. There might be an undue quantity of inferior potatoes sent for sale, for fear of rapid decay if they were kept on hand.

“Can you employ any persons to collect information to be relied on, in the chief potato growing districts in Ireland?

“Would a person of intelligence specially sent to

Galway, Cork, &c. &c., have better means of ascertaining the facts and the prospects of the failure than can be derived from written reports from stipendiary magistrates or others?

“The private letters which reach me are very discouraging. Still action in this case, on the authority of the Executive, is so important a matter, that it ought to be grounded on nothing short of moral certainty of its necessity.

“At what period would the pressure be felt? Would it be immediate if the reports of the full extent of the evil are confirmed, or is there a stock of old potatoes sufficient to last for a certain time?

“I need not recommend to you the utmost reserve as to the future, I mean as to the possibility of Government interference. There could be none without summoning Parliament, to adopt measures or confirm those of the Executive.”

Lord HEYTESBURY to Sir R. PEEL.

“Vice-Regal Lodge, October 17.

“MY DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“I have to acknowledge yours of the 15th, which I have communicated *most confidentially* to Sir Thomas Fremantle.

“We are very fully impressed with the immense importance of the question, and the consequences to which it may lead. Our attention has been earnestly directed to it, ever since the reports from the provinces have been so unsatisfactory. These reports continue to

be of a very alarming nature, and leave no doubt upon the mind but that the potato crops have failed almost everywhere. I enclose an abstract of those received yesterday. A more favourable account indeed has been received by Mr. Acourt from the Dean of Ossory, whose letter I also enclose; but I must observe that the Dean, though a sensible, is a somewhat sanguine man, and is apt to view matters in the most favourable light.

“I am not inclined to think that a special commission would be able to collect more accurate information than that which is furnished by the several County Inspectors. When the potato-digging is a little more advanced, we might move the Lieutenants of counties to call meetings of the resident landholders, with a view to ascertaining the amount of the evil, and their opinion of the measures most proper to be adopted. I see no objections to such a course, though it is possible that some may suggest themselves to your better judgment.

“Oats and oatmeal have risen greatly in price, but as yet there has been no sensible increase in the price of potatoes in the market. This is accounted for by the eagerness of the holders to get rid of the produce of their fields before the decay commences, which they are told by the alarmists will infallibly take place.

“Even if the crops should turn out to be as bad as is now apprehended, it is not thought that there will be any immediate pressure in the market. There will be enough saved for immediate consumption. The evil will probably not be felt in all its intensity till towards

the month of February, or beginning of spring. I am assured that there is no stock whatever of last year's potatoes in the country.

“Gloomy as all this is, it would be hardly prudent to adopt any very strong or decisive measures till the final result of the potato harvest can be fully ascertained. The digging will not be all over till about the second week in November.

“I may refer you for what was done upon a former occasion to various proclamations of Lord Cornwallis in the years 1800-1, and to the 41st George III., chap. 36, renewed by the 43rd George III., chap. 13. These Acts are no longer in force, having only been passed to meet the difficulties then existing.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“Netherby, October 18.

“MY DEAR PEEL,

“I send you the enclosed correspondence between me and the Lord-Lieutenant. I should only trouble you with vain repetitions if I added anything to it; but I am greatly troubled by this Irish calamity, which occupies my thoughts; and it becomes greater in prospect the more I consider it. It is awful to observe how the Almighty humbles the pride of nations.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Netherby, October 19.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“I send you a further report respecting the potato crop in Ireland, which is not more favourable as the digging advances.

“The precedents for proceeding by proclamation from the Lord-Lieutenant in Ireland, and not by Order in Council, are directly in point; but it is also clear that proclamations of this kind must be followed by an Act of Indemnity. Moreover in 1801 the laws which regulated the importation of corn were very different from our present code; and at that time, if I mistake not, the corn trade between Ireland and Great Britain was not open, but a coasting duty was levied in British ports on the introduction of Irish produce.

“ With our present Corn Laws, and with a free trade between Great Britain and Ireland, would it be possible to open the ports for provisions in Ireland, and to maintain the duties under the sliding scale in Great Britain? / Would not opening the ports in Ireland mortally offend our agricultural supporters, while the free traders would be disgusted with the maintenance of the Corn Laws in Great Britain? and in these circumstances what would be our chance of obtaining an Act of Indemnity? //

“ With a free trade between Ireland and Great Britain, the opening of the Irish ports would be equivalent to the opening of the British ports, save only that all foreign produce, to be admitted duty free into

Great Britain, must pass through Ireland, and must be charged with the extra cost of transshipment, and of this extra voyage. I state these difficulties as they occur to me, that they may be presented to your mind.”

Mr. BULLER to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Dublin, October 19.

“ SIR,

“ My position as Secretary to the Royal Agricultural Improvement Society of Ireland has put me in possession of facts connected with the present alarming state of the potato crop in this country, which I am anxious to communicate to you privately, rather than as an official communication for the present. About a month since I issued a circular to the different local societies in connection with the central one, amounting to one hundred and twenty, requesting the secretaries to furnish me with all the information in their power respecting the disease in question in their immediate neighbourhood.

“ The proceedings at the cattle show at Ballinasloe suspended all inquiry for the last three weeks ; but on my return to town on Friday, I found a mass of information on the subject, which proves beyond a doubt that the entire crop is more or less affected in all parts of the country.

“ I lost no time in summoning the council specially, in order to lay the different returns before them ; and a sub-committee has been formed, with Professor Kane

as chairman, for the purpose of investigating the details and reporting on the subject.

“I should add that in most of the early reports I received, previous to October 1st, the parties told me that there was no appearance of the disease in their localities ; but many of them have subsequently informed me that they were deceived, and that on digging out the crop they found it as bad as reported in other cases. This I conceived so calculated to mislead the public on the point, that I communicated with Sir T. Fremantle on the subject, and he told me that similar reports were forwarded to him, and that it was only on those that came within the last week that they could rely, and which confirmed their worst fears on the subject.

“I beg leave also to state that after the cattle show at Ballinasloe, I made a tour through the counties of Mayo and Roscommon, in company with Messrs. Barry and Mulvanny, the Inspectors of Fisheries ; and after the most careful inquiries we found the entire crop most generally affected, though at first they thought it had escaped, as in other places.

“Sir, these details and facts will be laid more fully officially before the Irish Government in a few days ; but I did not wish to allow a moment to elapse, to inform you thus *privately* of the extent of this fearful malady, in order that no time should be lost in adopting the necessary measures of precaution and relief for this country.

“I may also add that a panic has seized all parties to a greater extent than I ever remember since the



cholera, and that I fear it will increase when the extent of the mischief is more generally known.

“All further information shall be forwarded through Sir T. Fremantle in the course of the ensuing week.”

Lord HEYTESBURY to Sir R. PEEL.

“Vice-Regal Lodge, October 20, 1845.

“I have just received your letter of the 18th, and have written to Professor Kane to request to see him at his earliest convenience. You will see by the enclosed extract from the ‘Freeman’s Journal’ of this morning, that he is already occupying himself with the subject, under the direction of the Agricultural Improvement Society. He will have everything ready for Dr. L. Playfair and Professor Lindley when they arrive. Our accounts continue to be of the most discouraging nature. They are regularly transmitted to Sir James Graham’s office. One of the most embarrassing circumstances attending the disease is, that potatoes dug up to all appearance perfectly sound, after a short time begin to decay, and very soon rot altogether. Under such circumstances it is impossible to form any decisive opinion as to the amount of the calamity.

“With respect to the cause of the disease, the general opinion here is, that the season has been so ungenial, and the absence of sunshine so remarkable during the last two months, that the potato has very imperfectly ripened. There is not, it is thought, anything new in the disease but its extent. I will

send back to you Dr. L. Playfair's note, as soon as I have communicated it to Professor Kane."

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

" Netherby, October 21.

"I have received also from the Lord-Lieutenant the letter which I enclose, and I send you also the copy of my answer. The Lord-Lieutenant begins to press for instructions with respect to prohibiting by proclamation the export of potatoes and distillation from potatoes. As he justly observes, if we begin to have recourse to proclamations, they cannot be limited to *exports*; and if we advance in that line the step is most serious.

"I propose to be in London on the 29th. By that time the digging of the potatoes in Ireland will be far advanced. Dr. Playfair will have been for some days in Dublin, and we shall be better able to form an opinion of the real extent of the danger and of the evil.

"I think that if you and I met about that time we could discuss matters generally with great advantage."

Sir R. PEEL to Sir J. GRAHAM.

" Drayton, October 22.

"You mentioned some time ago that you intended to return to London about the 20th. I therefore have addressed my letters to you in London. You

will have seen that I propose a meeting of the Cabinet on the 31st of October. I intend to be in London on the 25th (Saturday next).

“I am summoned to Windsor Castle from Monday, 27th, to Thursday, 30th.

“Lord Heytesbury, from his occasional remarks on proclamations, seems to labour under an impression that there is a constitutional right to issue them. Now there is absolutely none. There is no more abstract right to prohibit the export of a potato than to command any other violation of law.

“Governments have assumed, and will assume, in extreme cases, unconstitutional power, and will trust to the good sense of the people convinced by the necessity to obey the proclamation, and to Parliament to indemnify the issuers. The proclamations to which Lord Heytesbury refers may be useful as precedents, but they leave the matter where they found it in point of law; they give no sort of authority.

“I have a strong impression that we shall do more harm than good by controlling the free action of the people in respect to the legal *export* of these commodities, or the legal use of them.

“However, this is one of the points we must consider in Cabinet. I have detained some of the enclosures in your letters respecting the potato disease, in order that they may be sent in circulation.”

Extract of a Letter to Dr. LYON PLAYFAIR from the Rev. Mr. CLAY, Chaplain to the House of Correction at Preston, dated

“ October 23, 1845.

“ It is too certain that the potato crop in this part of the country will be a serious failure. I have obtained information from the districts extending as far as Rufford and Croston on the South, the Fylde country and Blackpool on the West, and Lancaster on the North; and from all quarters the accounts speak of great injury to the crops, though they vary as to the extent of it. My information, verbal and written, has come from scientific agriculturists, from practical farmers, and from dealers. Those among the first named who have paid much attention to the facts estimate the loss—as it exists *now*—at more than two-fifths; but the progress of the disease is so rapid, and its presence so universal, that it is impossible to conjecture what may be the amount of the defalcation by Christmas. I anticipate a most serious destruction of the root by that time.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Netherby, October 24.

“ I enclose another letter from the Lord-Lieutenant, giving a worse account of the potato crop as the digging advances, but stating that we are as yet unacquainted with the full extent of the mischief.

“ I think that Lord Heytesbury is aware that the

issue of proclamations is the exercise of a power beyond the law, which requires subsequent indemnity, and has not the force of law. The precedents which he cites illustrate this known truth; yet proclamations remitting duties, backed by an order to the Custom-house not to levy, are very effective measures, though the responsibility which attaches to their adoption is most onerous, especially when Parliament may readily be called together."

LORD HEYTESBURY to Sir R. PEEL.

"Vice-Regal Lodge, October 24.

"The two Professors are arrived, and in conjunction with Professor Kane are earnestly employed in investigating the nature of the potato disease, and the remedies to be applied in mitigation of the evil.

"I have requested them to occupy themselves first with the following questions:—

"1. What are the best means of preserving the potatoes which are dug up apparently in a sound state?

"2. Whether anything can stop the progress of the disease when it has once seized upon the potato; and if so, to what use potatoes so circumstanced can be applied?

"3. What means can be adopted for securing seed potatoes for next year?

"They will draw up as soon as possible short directions to be circulated through the provinces for the use of the lower orders, and a detailed report of their proceedings in due season.

“ From the accounts which reach us I should be inclined to say that the progress of the disease has in some localities been checked ; but I dare not lay too great a stress upon this, for we constantly receive satisfactory reports of the state of the potatoes when dug, and learn a few days after that they have all rotted in the pits. It is this insecurity that forms our greatest difficulty. We do not know, and cannot know, the extent of the evil.

“ There is a great cry for the prohibition of exportation, particularly of oats. With regard to potatoes, it seems to be pretty generally admitted that to prohibit the exportation of so perishable a produce would be of very doubtful advantage.

“ Towards the end of next week we shall know, I presume, the result of the deliberations of Her Majesty’s Government ; and as by that time the digging will be sufficiently advanced to enable us to guess at the probable result of the harvest, I shall then intimate to the several Lieutenants the propriety of calling county meetings, unless I should hear from you that you disapprove of such proceedings.

“ The danger of such meetings is in the remedies they may suggest, and the various subjects they may embrace in their discussions, wholly foreign to the question before them.

“ I enclose a summary of the reports of yesterday, and return the correspondence enclosed in yours.”

Extract from Letter from Lord MONTEAGLE, dated

“ October 24, 1845.

“ Take it, however, at the least, I do not recollect any former example of a calamitous failure being anything near so great and so alarming as the present. Generally we have seen the means of carrying our people forward at least till summer approaches, and till we were within two or three months of the new crop. The case is very different now, and in some places I know not how the peasantry will get through the winter in very many cases.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Netherby, October 26.

“ I enclose a note which I received from the Duke of Buccleuch this morning. You will observe what he says with respect to the probable high price of provisions in Scotland during the approaching winter.”

Duke of BUCCLEUCH to Sir J. GRAHAM.

“ October 25.

“ The disease in the potato crop is evidently extending throughout Scotland, but the degree of mischief it is very difficult to ascertain; the provisions usually consumed by the poorer classes in Scotland will, I fear, be very dear this winter.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Netherby, October 27.

“ I have sent you a large mass of official reports from Ireland. You will find them conflicting and varying from different localities ; but I should say that on the whole they are more favourable than we were led to expect a short time ago. In this neighbourhood the estimate is that at least one-third of the potato crop is destroyed. If this be the measure of the loss in Ireland, the extreme pressure from want will not take place until the month of April or May. It was then in 1822 that the distress became extreme ; and it is then also that Parliament will be sitting, and that party struggles are at their height. It is most difficult to determine what our measures ought to be, especially while the real extent of the evil is still uncertain, and while from various motives the disposition to exaggerate it is so strong.

“ The Lord Advocate writes to me that the alarm in Scotland with respect to the potato crop is great and rapidly increasing.

“ He has received from Sir James Campbell, the late Provost of Glasgow, the note which I enclose. I have directed the Lord Advocate to institute the parochial inquiry. There is truth in the observation that no present Returns, however accurate, will show the full extent of the evil ; for pitting during the winter will be the trial, and potatoes which are now apparently sound, in spring when uncovered will be found useless. It is, however, most desirable to ascertain the *present*



state of the case, and I hope in a fortnight to have from Scotland very accurate reports.

“ The Anti-Corn Law pressure is about to commence, and it will be the most formidable movement in modern times. Everything depends on the skill, promptitude, and decision with which it is met.”

Sir JAMES CAMPBELL to the LORD ADVOCATE.

“ Glasgow, October 25.

“ In these times of so serious a cry about the failure of the potato crop, which is really giving the good people much anxiety, and which is to be made, I find, occasion for a fresh agitation on the subject of the Corn Laws, and as a first movement in this course, I learn there is to be a public meeting of the citizens of Glasgow convened next week, to petition Sir Robert Peel for the opening of the ports for corn, &c., free of duty. Such at least is the spirit of the proposed meeting.

“ Under these circumstances, it has occurred to me to suggest to your Lordship that some inquiry should be instituted—and I think it would better emanate from your Lordship than any other party—to ascertain as closely as possible the real extent of this potato calamity.

“ I think the information would be best got, and with least inconvenience, by a circular addressed to each of the ministers in our rural parishes throughout the country.

“ I feel pretty certain that tolerably accurate data

for judging of the extent of the evil would be obtained within ten days or a fortnight; and it would be of importance, as I do hope the extent of the evil is overrated."

Extract of Letter from LORD-LIEUTENANT of Ireland.

"October 27, 1845.

"We are most anxious for the result of the deliberations of the Cabinet upon the state of the potato crops in Ireland, for the accounts received from the constabulary as well as from various country gentlemen and public bodies continue to be of so alarming a nature that it seems desirable that something should be done, if it be only to tranquillise the public mind and diminish the panic.

"Everything is rising rapidly in price, and the people begin to show symptoms of discontent which may ripen into something worse.

"Should I be authorised in issuing a proclamation prohibiting distillation from grain? This is demanded on all sides."

Dr. LYON PLAYFAIR to Sir R. PEEL.

(Extract.)

"Dublin, October 26.

"I sent you a draft copy of a Report which I intend to offer to my colleagues to-morrow morning for their signature, and with verbal alterations I am sure it will be adopted. You will see the account is

melancholy, and it cannot be looked upon in other than a most serious light. We are confident that the accounts are underrated rather than exaggerated.

“The subject of next year’s crop is getting our anxious consideration. Peru we think out of the question for many reasons; Spain and the South of France we are looking to very anxiously. Pray aid us by ordering returns confidentially from the Consular Agents in the Mediterranean and the North of Spain, Portugal, &c., &c., as to the state of the potato crop there, and the capability of getting a supply from thence. I think it highly necessary that *instant* orders should be instituted for this purpose. I am sorry to give you so desponding a letter, but we cannot conceal from ourselves that the case is much worse than the public supposes. Of course we hold ourselves quite silent as to the extent of the evil, making this and the like reports confidential.”

The same to the same.

“Dublin, October 28.

“The accounts my colleagues and myself continue to receive are still such as to excite alarm as to the probable saving *as potatoes* of any very considerable part of the crop.

“We now see that probably the more important question is as to the seed for future years. About one-eighth of the crop will be required for seed; but we cannot get any return to show us what amount of land is under potatoes, in order to form an estimate as to

what will be required, and what the deficiency of food will be.

“ Professor Lindley has just returned from a tour of the potato shops in the city. The potatoes exhibited are those warranted sound, and are carefully picked as good, and yet he found nineteen bad for fourteen good.”

SIR R. PEEL to DR. LYON PLAYFAIR.

“ Whitehall, October 29.

“ I am indeed sorry that you are compelled to make so unfavourable a report, but the knowledge of the whole truth is one element of security.

“ I lost not a moment in directing that by the first opportunities instructions should be given to the effect you suggest to the several Consular authorities in the Mediterranean, Portugal, Spain, &c.”

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The Cabinet assembled on Friday the 31st of October. The meeting was at my house in Whitehall Gardens, as I was confined by indisposition. I read to the Cabinet on that day all the information which had been received by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, or by myself, which could throw light on the state of affairs, and the prospects of the country in respect of the supply of food. The Cabinet reassembled at my house on the following day, Saturday, the 1st of November. On that occasion I read to the Cabinet the following Memorandum :—

## CABINET MEMORANDUM, November 1.

“ If we can place confidence in the Reports which we have received, there is the prospect of a lamentable deficiency of the ordinary food of the people in many parts of Ireland, and in some parts of this country, and of Scotland. The evil *may be* much greater than present reports lead us to anticipate. Potatoes which now appear safe may become infected, and we must not exclude from our consideration the contingency of a great calamity.

“ We must remember that we are threatened with the evil at the very commencement of the year, the consumption of which is to be provided for by the present crop.

“ This is a new and fearful incident to this threatened scarcity.

“ We have sent eminent men of science to Ireland, who are directing their inquiries into the cause of the disorder, the palliatives of it, and the probable effect of it upon the quality of the seed for a future year.

“ They are proceeding cautiously—are unwilling to suggest remedies which may be delusive—but will at the earliest period offer to the public the simplest and most practical remedies which observation and scientific knowledge may enable them to offer.

“ I have sanctioned similar inquiries in Scotland.

“ The result of the combined inquiry can be made generally known for the information of the people in this part of the United Kingdom.

“ Inquiries have been addressed to the Consular Agents

in different parts of Europe (and they can be extended to other countries) as to the available supply of potatoes for the purpose of seed.

“The question is what other measures shall be taken by the Government.

“Inaction—the letting things take their own course—seems to me impossible.

“With the documents we have in our possession, with the opinions of our own Commissioners as to the probable extent of the evil, the pressing entreaties from the Lord-Lieutenant for instructions, the possible contingency that in the course of two months the evil may prove to have been much more extensive than any one has yet contemplated, inaction and indifference might involve the country in serious danger, and the Government in the heaviest responsibility.

“I recommend, therefore, that we should in the first place adopt some such measures as were adopted at former periods of much more partial scarcity—that we should authorise the Lord-Lieutenant to appoint a Commission for the purpose of considering the mode in which relief, when necessary, can be applied, through the means of employment where employment can be had.

“The head of the Board of Works should be a member of the Commission. Three or four men of known integrity should be selected to co-operate with him. Sir John Hill should be despatched to Ireland to aid the Lord-Lieutenant and the Commission with his local knowledge and experience.

“The instructions under which he acted at former periods should be sent to the Lord-Lieutenant.

“The first point for consideration by this Commission is the mode in which public money should be advanced to companies or private individuals ready to give security for repayment, and willing to employ the poor during the season of pressure on works of local improvement, either of general utility or of benefit to private property.”

“Sir Thomas Fremantle in his last letter says that the machinery for aiding draining operations is in existence.

“There may be many cases in which there will be no opportunities for giving employment, and in which subsistence must be provided without any equivalent given in return.

“One of the objects of the Commissioners should be to restrict those cases within limits as narrow as possible.

“The Commission should consider the formation of local associations, and act in concert with them.

“An immediate authority should be given to the Lord-Lieutenant to take secretly precautions against the occurrence of any severe suffering in remote or totally destitute districts before any Commission can be formed or systematic arrangement made.

“The immediate assistance of Sir John Hill would be very valuable in this respect.

“There will be no hope of contributions from England for the mitigation of this calamity.

“Monster meetings, the ungrateful return for past kindness, the subscriptions in Ireland to Repeal rent and O’Connell tribute, will have disinclined the charitable here to make any great exertions for Irish relief.

“The main dependence ~~must be on Irish local exertion~~ and on the public purse, and every effort will be made in Ireland to impose the burden on the latter.

“I would not recommend peremptory instructions to the Lord-Lieutenant to proceed at once to the formation of such a Commission as that to which I refer. I would give him authority to form it, either immediately or after consultation and mature consideration, and also authority to guard against the consequence of immediate and local destitution by the best means in his power.

“I would instruct him to make all the preparations that it is possible to make by way of precaution against a sudden and general scarcity of food. They may be greater than is necessary; but comparing the evil of superfluous precaution with that which may result from being unprepared for a wide-spread famine, or, which is the same thing, utter inability to purchase or procure food, there cannot, I think, be a question as to the alternative to be adopted.

“All pecuniary advances that may be requisite, either for the preparatory measures or for the actual supply of food in particular cases, should be at once authorised.

“It is very possible that in remote districts in Scotland some measures of the same kind may be requisite.

“It appears to me that the adoption of these measures, the advance or promise of public money to provide food or employ labour, on account of apprehended scarcity of food, will compel the assembling of Parliament before Christmas.

“Before the meeting of Parliament we must be pre-



pared with the measures to be proposed and the language to be held at its meeting.

“ We must indeed be so prepared, not merely before the actual meeting of Parliament, but before we finally resolve on the calling of Parliament for the despatch of business.

“ The calling of Parliament at an unusual period on any matter connected with a scarcity of food is a most important step.

“ It compels an immediate decision on these questions.

“ Shall we maintain unaltered—

“ Shall we modify—

“ Shall we suspend—the operation of the Corn Laws ?

“ The first vote we propose—a vote of credit, for instance, for 100,000*l.*, to be placed at the disposal of the Lord-Lieutenant for the supply of food—opens the whole question.

“ Can we vote public money for the sustenance of any considerable portion of the people on account of actual or apprehended scarcity, and maintain in full operation the existing restrictions on the free import of grain ?

“ I am bound to say my impression is that we cannot. There is the example of Parliament for the remission of duty at former periods of scarcity. There is the example in the present year, and in consequence of the same apprehensions of scarcity, of Russia, Belgium, and Holland, in each of which the laws imposing duties on foreign grain are suspended.

“ Countries from which, under ordinary circumstances, we might draw supplies, are prohibiting export.

“ I heard to-day that at Mayence and in the countries bordering on the Rhine the export of potatoes down the Rhine is prohibited.

“ Some of our ordinary sources of supply are therefore closed to us.

“ Independently of scarcity in Ireland, the increased prices of corn may cause stagnation in manufactures, and a pressure in some of the great manufacturing districts in this country.

“ The Irish population of Manchester and Liverpool are, I presume, supported in great measure on potatoes ; and though present prices may be low, that lowness may be no indication of abundance.

“ I cannot disguise from myself that the calling together of Parliament on account of apprehended scarcity—the prohibition of export in other countries—the removal of restrictions on import (sanctioned, as in the case of Belgium, by an unanimous vote of the Chambers)—the demand for public money, to be applied to provide sustenance for a portion of the people—will constitute a great crisis, and that it will be dangerous for the Government, having assembled Parliament, to resist with all its energies any material modification of the Corn Law.

“ By material modification I mean of the law as it applies to the import of barley, oats, and wheat.

“ There are reasons—very good ones, under ordinary circumstances—for dealing specially with colonial grain, or with maize, or with rice ; but I greatly fear that partial and limited interference with the Corn Law, under the circumstances under which Parliament will

assemble (if it be assembled) at the latter end of this month, will be no solution of our difficulties.

“Supposing it were granted to me, for the purpose of argument, that the suspension of the Corn Law is inevitable, the question arises, shall the suspension take place by an act of prerogative, or by legislation at the instance of the Government ?

“In favour of suspension by prerogative, there is the argument that it is done at once, that it is decisive for the time, that it prevents all that suspense and stagnation which will follow the notoriety of facts as to the potato crop, the meetings of the Cabinet, the notice in a few days of the summoning of Parliament.

“It gives the earliest notice in foreign countries, and it gives to the proceeding the character of an act done on an urgent necessity, which no human foresight could have guarded against.

“The objections to it are—that it compels instant decision by the Cabinet—that it imposes upon us the necessity of proving that there could be no delay.

“It may justly be said, Parliament, after much deliberation, sanctioned an elaborate and comprehensive system of Corn Laws. The Crown has the power to summon Parliament by a notice of fourteen days. Why should the Crown, by the stroke of a pen, abrogate laws so fully considered by Parliament, instead of summoning Parliament at the earliest period, and inviting Parliament to do that which it is the proper province of Parliament to do ?

“There is this advantage also in doing whatever it may be necessary to do in the ordinary constitutional mode.

“It gives us some further time for consideration.

“It is possible for us to take this course—to separate to-day under the strong impression that the meeting of Parliament on some day not later than the 27th of November is inevitable—to have a meeting of the Cabinet finally to decide our course at the latter end of next week.

“If we then resolve on calling Parliament, to fix the day for the Council at which the day of meeting for the despatch of business shall be determined.

“This course is possible, but it leaves unaltered the necessity of determining, before we resolve on calling Parliament, the course we shall pursue. We must make our choice between determined maintenance, modification, and suspension of the existing Corn Law.

“In writing the above I have merely considered the question on its own abstract merits, without reference to mere party considerations, or our own position as public men, the authors of the present Corn Law. I am fully aware of the gravity of the considerations connected with this part of the question.

“ROBERT PEEL.”

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In the course of the conversation which followed the reading of the above Memorandum, it became evident that very serious differences of opinion existed as to the necessity for adopting any extraordinary measures, and as to the character of the measures which it might be advisable to adopt.

The Cabinet separated, fixing another Cabinet for Thursday the 6th of November. The accounts received

in the interim were not calculated to allay the apprehensions to which former Reports had given rise: these apprehensions were not confined to persons in high official stations. In proof of this I shall insert some communications which bear date between the 31st October and the 6th November.

There had been a public meeting in Dublin on the 31st October to consider the state and prospects of Ireland in regard to the threatened scarcity of food. At that meeting a Committee was appointed, over which the Duke of Leinster presided, with instructions to make inquiry into the subject and to report the result.

The following communication was made to the Lord-Lieutenant by this Committee.

RESOLUTIONS of a MEETING over which the Duke of  
LEINSTER presided.

“ October 31.

“That the Committee do respectfully represent to his Excellency the Lord-Lieutenant, that it has now been ascertained beyond a doubt that famine, and consequent pestilence, are immediately imminent, unless the Government shall without hesitation or delay take the most prompt measures to provide food for the people, and to organise means for the distribution of such food in each locality throughout the land.

“That we respectfully call upon his Excellency the Lord-Lieutenant forthwith to order the ports of Ireland to be opened for the importation of Indian corn, rice, and other articles suited for human food.”

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The indications of failure in the potato crop were not confined to Ireland. The Chairman of the Board of Excise, Mr. John Wood, in a letter dated the 2nd November, made this report of the state of the crop in that district of Yorkshire from which his letter is dated.

Mr. J. WOOD to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Scoreby-Dunnington, York, November 2.

“ You will regret to hear that the potato disease has now manifested itself in the most extensive manner in this district. Potatoes were selling ten days since at 2s. to 2s. 6d. a bushel of 70 lbs. in York. Yesterday the same weight sold at 1s. 2d., owing to the farmers bringing an extra quantity to market.

“ I have consequently had several pits opened on this estate, and I fear that before Christmas we shall not have a sound one; what the poor are to live on I cannot guess.

“ I know you will be anxious to have accurate information, and therefore have ventured to give you this account.

“ Believe me, &c.

“ JOHN WOOD.”

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Among various other communications of similar import, the three following letters were received from the Duke of Portland, Lord Kenyon, and the Earl of Clare; they bear date respectively the 3rd and 5th of November. The answer which I ad-

dressed to the Duke of Portland follows his Grace's letter to me.

Duke of PORTLAND to Sir R. PEEL.

(Private and Confidential.)

“ Welbeck, near Worksop, November 2.

“ SIR,

“ There can be no doubt that the failure of the potato crop in Ireland must produce this winter the most cruel distress there among the lower orders. Considering their conduct, which is very near a state of rebellion, I cannot think the Queen's Government ought to show them any favour, or give them assistance in any way.

“ But I do *not* think that individuals are obliged to look at the question in the same way; or that a subscription made by opulent individuals in England, to be added to what might be subscribed by the Catholic gentry in Ireland, would not have the best effect—besides the mere relief of distress. It appears to me that if such a subscription should be thought an advisable measure, it would add much to its value if it appeared to be promoted by the great beneficed clergy in both countries, and those who have the reputation of bigoted attachment to the Established Church. If this should be adopted, either it will receive much assistance from the Roman Catholics of Ireland, or it will not. If it did not, it would go a long way towards destroying the influence of the agitation there; if it did—originating as it would do with Protestants—

it would tend to soothe the angry feelings of the zealots of both religions.

“These are my ideas, which if you approve, you will know better than I can tell you what will be the best mode of carrying them into effect.

“I will only add that if it is set a-going, I will subscribe to it 1000*l.* or more. I do not propose to confine the benefit of it to the Roman Catholics, but to extend it indifferently to all religions. I deprecate the promotion of it by public meetings.

“I have the honour, &c.

“SCOTT PORTLAND.

“Nobody shall know that I have written this letter.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of PORTLAND.

“Whitehall, November 3.

“MY LORD DUKE,

“I feel exceedingly obliged by your kind and considerate communication.

“I will for the present content myself with the acknowledgment of it.

“Our whole thoughts are at present occupied with the measures which it may be prudent or necessary to adopt for the purpose of palliating the evil of the threatened scarcity of food in Ireland; and when those measures shall have taken any definite shape, I will avail myself of an early opportunity of again addressing your Grace.

“Believe me, &c.,

“R. P.”



Lord KENYON to Sir R. PEEL.

“Peel Hall, Bolton, November 3, 1845.

“Lord Kenyon takes the liberty of suggesting to Sir Robert Peel, as he sees no such suggestion offered, the expediency and duty of offering a large bounty for the provision of fish round the British Isles, and for salting the same. He has also offered premiums for dribbling wheat where the soil is of such description as to prevent its being too late. It is practised most beneficially in Lord Walsingham’s neighbourhood near Thetford, saving much seed and producing better crops. Lord K. takes the liberty of suggesting a special public acknowledgment of our dependence on God’s mercy in our present distressed state.”

Lord CLARE to Mr. PENNEFATHER.

“November 5, 1845.

“The reports of the potato crop are bad to-day—this I heard at Abraham’s seed shop, who had his information from various quarters. My impression is, you may tell Lord H. and Sir Thomas, that three months hence the potatoes will be nearly if not quite gone. I hope I may be mistaken. By the 1st of next month we shall know to a tolerable certainty whether they are gradually rotting in the pits; if they are, they will be all useless by February. I think Government should make up its mind what to do, and to be prepared for what must be done when the ca-

lamiety is approaching our doors; let it once knock at them, and in the present frame of mind of the people I will not answer for the consequences.

“The farmers, with a good crop of corn and high prices, will struggle through the year; but what will you do with the unemployed multitude, whose store of provisions for the next ten months is gone, and who have not a shilling to purchase food? All my labourers have lost their rood or two roods of potatoes. I will get meal for them; but the thousands of the occupiers of con-acre land in wild and remote districts, how are they to exist until August, 1846?”

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From these letters it would seem that the Duke of Portland considered it certain “that the failure of the potato crop in Ireland must produce in the ensuing winter the most cruel distress there among the lower orders of the people.”

Lord Kenyon suggested the offer “of a large bounty for the provision of fish round the British Isles.” He suggested also “a special public acknowledgment of our dependence on God’s mercy in our present distressed state.”

The Earl of Clare thought that it was incumbent upon the Government to make up its mind what to do, and to be prepared for what must be done when the calamity is approaching our doors. “Let it,” he says, “once knock at them, and in the present frame of mind of the people I will not answer for the consequences.” Lord Clare observes that all his own

labourers had lost their rood or two roods of potatoes. "The farmers," he says, "with a good crop of corn and high prices, will struggle through the year." He then puts this question: "but what will you do with the unemployed multitude whose store of provisions for the next ten months is gone, and who have not a shilling to purchase food?"

These several letters are honourable to those who were the authors of them. Each of them felt it to be his duty to offer such suggestions to those in authority as might possibly contribute to the mitigation of a threatened calamity.

With the performance of that duty, their own responsibility, so far as public interests were concerned, terminated. But their communications, honest and sincere as they were, only added to the weight of responsibility imposed upon those to whom they were addressed.

The Minister who foresaw with the Duke of Portland that there would be "cruel distress" in Ireland from the scarcity of food, might surely advise the removal of restrictions on its import without justly incurring the reproach of treason and perfidy to his party connections. He might think it hardly consistent with reason to adopt the advice of Lord Kenyon, and offer a bounty on catching fish, or make a public acknowledgment of our dependence on God's mercy, and at the same time leave in full operation the restraints which man had imposed upon the import of provisions.

He might feel that to the startling question put by the Earl of Clare, "What will you do with the unem-

ployed multitude whose store of provisions for the next ten months is gone?"—he might feel that to that question a satisfactory answer would not be given by the Minister who should leave without an effort to remove it a minimum duty of 12*s.* upon a quarter of wheat when the price was less than 51*s.*, and a minimum duty of 8*s.* on Indian corn if the price of barley was less than 31*s.*

On the 6th November the adjourned meeting of the Cabinet took place. On the 3rd, in pursuance of the decision of the Cabinet at its last meeting, a letter had been addressed by Sir James Graham to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, directing him to make preparatory arrangements in general conformity with those suggested in the Memorandum which I read to the Cabinet on the 31st October.

Those instructions were prefaced by the following observations :

Sir J. GRAHAM to Lord HEYTESBURY.

“The reports which you have transmitted to me from officers employed by Government in different parts of Ireland confirm the apprehension that in many populous districts of that country the ordinary food of the people will be deficient. A considerable portion of the potato crop has been rendered by disease unfit for use, and that portion which now appears safe may soon become infected. The stores, therefore, on which reliance is placed both for seed and food may probably fail; and neither the extent of the calamity nor the period of the year when the pressure may become

urgent can be foreseen with certainty. The twelve months are now only commencing for which the present crop of potatoes is the sole provision of sustenance for the great body of the Irish people; and if this provision be exhausted or destroyed prematurely, scarcity and even famine are inevitable.

“Men of science have been sent to Ireland in the hope that they may be enabled to suggest remedies which may arrest the progress of the disease, and preserve that portion of the crop which is still untainted; and the consular agents in different ports of Europe and of America have been directed to make inquiries and to endeavour to obtain a supply of sound potatoes available for seed.

“But these precautions are obviously insufficient to meet the urgency and danger of the case. The remedies suggested may not succeed: the use of them may be neglected: the fear of loss from the decay of the potato will naturally lead to early and wasteful consumption, and in a very short time we may be involved in all the difficulties of a general scarcity in Ireland.

“In these circumstances it is prudent to make timely arrangements, that we may be prepared to meet and to mitigate as much as possible this great calamity.”

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From what passed at the Cabinet held on the 31st October, it was easy to foresee that there was little prospect of a common accord as to the measures to be adopted. On the 5th November I apprised Her Majesty of the probability of serious differences of opinion.

At the meeting of the Cabinet on Thursday the 6th of November, I submitted certain proposals for the consideration of my colleagues.

The following Memorandum, made previously to the meeting, contains the outline of those proposals.

CABINET MEMORANDUM, November 6.

“To issue forthwith an Order in Council remitting the duty on grain in bond to one shilling, and opening the ports for the admission of all species of grain at a smaller rate of duty until a day named in the Order.

“To call Parliament together on the 27th instant, to ask for indemnity and for a sanction of the Order by law.

“To propose to Parliament no other measure than that during the sitting before Christmas. To declare an intention of submitting to Parliament immediately after the recess a modification of the existing law, but to decline entering into any details in Parliament with regard to such modification.

“Such modification to include the admission at a nominal duty of Indian corn and of British colonial corn—to proceed with regard to other descriptions of grain upon the principle of the existing law, after a careful consideration of the practical working of the present machinery for taking the averages.”

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The Cabinet by a very considerable majority declined giving its assent to the proposals which I thus made to them. They were supported by only three members of the Cabinet—the Earl of Aberdeen, Sir James Graham,

and Mr. Sidney Herbert. The other members of the Cabinet, some on the ground of objection to the principle of the measures recommended, others upon the ground that there was not yet sufficient evidence of the necessity for them, withheld their sanction.

On account of the gravity of the question, and the smallness of the minority assenting to my views, I might perhaps have been justified in at once relinquishing office ; but after mature reflection, considering that [the rejection of my proposals was not a peremptory one by all of those who for the present declined to adopt them, that additional information might materially abate the objections of many, and that the dissolution of a Government on account of differences on such a matter as that under consideration must cause great excitement in the public mind, I determined to retain office until there should be the opportunity of reconsideration of the whole subject. That opportunity would necessarily recur at the latter end of this current month (November), when it was agreed that the Cabinet should again assemble. In determining to retain office for the present, I determined also not to recede from the position which I had taken, and ultimately to resign office if I should find on the re-assembling of the Cabinet that the opinions I had expressed did not meet with general concurrence. I determined also, in order to guard against the mischievous consequences of failure in such an undertaking, not to attempt the adjustment of the question at issue unless there should be a moral assurance of ultimate success. It was most painful to me to differ from colleagues with whom I had hitherto acted with uninterrupted harmony, for whom I had sincere personal

regard, and cordial esteem and respect founded on an intimate knowledge of their motives and conduct in the discharge of their respective duties.

I am very anxious that in leaving upon record the vindication of my own course, I may not do injustice to those who differed from me as to the urgency of the crisis, and the policy to be pursued. I know not how I can more effectually avoid the risk of that injustice than by giving the communications made to me by my colleagues that are in my possession. They will be at the same time a proof of the integrity and sincerity of those from whom they proceeded, and of the friendly feelings which subsisted between us notwithstanding the difference of opinion on the subject to which these communications refer. On the 2nd of November the following letter was addressed to me by Lord Stanley. The Memorandum which accompanied it was returned to Lord Stanley, and as I did not retain a copy, I cannot insert that Memorandum. It contained a very detailed, clear, and able exposition of the grounds on which Lord Stanley dissented from the proposals submitted by me to the Cabinet.

Lord STANLEY to Sir R. PEEL.

(Secret.)

“ Colonial Office, November 2, 1845.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I find it difficult to express to you the regret with which I see how widely I differ in opinion with Graham and yourself as to the necessity for proposing to Parliament a repeal of the Corn Laws. Since the



Cabinet on Saturday I have reflected much and anxiously upon it; but I cannot bring my mind to any other conclusion than that at which I had then arrived. I have thought it best to put down in writing the view of the case which presents itself to me; and when you have read it, I will thank you to send it on to Graham, with whom I have had no conversation upon it. I foresee that this question, if you persevere in your present opinion, must break up the Government one way or the other; but I shall greatly regret indeed if it should be broken up, not in consequence of our feeling that we had proposed measures which it properly belonged to others to carry, but in consequence of differences of opinion among ourselves.

“I have just seen Bishop Hughes, the Vicar-Apostolic of Gibraltar, who is returned from Ireland within these few days. He has been visiting the counties of Wexford and Cork, and his report is that much injury has been done to the potatoes, and they will fall very short, as they are bringing sound potatoes into the market for fear of their rotting; but he added that the farmers in those counties would be amply indemnified by their crop of oats, which he states to be *immense*. They are not in any serious alarm.

“Pray let me have the enclosure back, as I have no copy of it.

“I return G. Vernon’s letter with many thanks. I see it promises additional supplies from Canada, which must very shortly arrive.

“Believe me, &c.,

“STANLEY.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“ November 3, 1845.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I return this paper\* with a heavy heart. I am not convinced by the reasoning, but I am touched by the kindness and the truth of some expressions which it contains.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ J. G. R. GRAHAM.”

On the 5th of November I wrote to Lord Stanley the letter which follows in acknowledgment of his :—

Sir R. PEEL to Lord STANLEY.

(Secret.)

“ Whitehall, November 5, 1845.

“ MY DEAR STANLEY,

“ I return you the enclosed paper. I have shown it to Graham in compliance with your wish to that effect, but I have not mentioned it to any other person whatever, nor shall I do so. I need not say that I have read this paper with the deepest attention—with the deepest regret also that there should be any difference of opinion between us on such a matter as that to which this paper refers.

“ I will not enter into any controversy with you upon it at the present moment. I must, however, observe that I have not proposed to the Cabinet that we should

\* The Memorandum of Lord Stanley.

recommend to Parliament the repeal of the Corn Laws, still less that we should offer our advice to the Queen that the Corn Laws ought to be abandoned.

“ Believe me, &c.,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

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In a subsequent part of this Memoir (p. 321) will be found a reference to a criticism which has often been made, both at the time and since, upon the manner in which the Repeal of the Corn Laws was proposed and carried, as distinguished from the Repeal itself. And there will also be found Sir Robert Peel's answer to that criticism. The same day on which he wrote the preceding letter to Lord Stanley, namely the 5th of November, was the date of another communication addressed to him at this period from a statesman of high character, not, however, the same referred to at page 321.

It was the opinion of the writer that the actual Corn Laws could not long be maintained—that any Corn Law could not be of long duration—and that whether an attempt at modification should be made in preference to total repeal was a question of very doubtful policy. Holding this opinion, the writer went on to observe that the course which he should like to see pursued would be, that in the Session preceding the Dissolution Sir Robert Peel should propound to the country his intention to propose to the new Parliament either a modification of the Corn Law expressly framed with a view to its abolition within a given time, or a total repeal of the law coupled with any measure, either of adaptation of taxation or other relief, which might in some degree lighten the pressure upon those who would most severely feel its force.

Of this letter Sir R. Peel writes as follows, in continuation of his Memoir.—(*Eds.*)

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Dictated as I knew it to be by the most friendly feelings towards myself, and conveying with the utmost frankness the opinion of a very intelligent and honour-

able mind, this letter had every claim upon my serious and respectful consideration.

But my opinion as to the real character of the course thus suggested was totally at variance with that entertained by ——.

It appeared to me a course calculated perhaps to save appearances, and to exempt the Minister adopting it from some degree of responsibility, but not a manly, honourable, or statesman-like course.

—— assumed that the existing Corn Law must and ought to be abandoned at a very early period, but recommended that no opinion to that effect should be avowed during the approaching Session. But who could doubt that during that Session the Corn Law would be fiercely assailed, and assailed with redoubled vigour on account of the apprehended scarcity?

By whom was the defence of that law to be conducted, and the maintenance of it to be insisted upon? Surely not by a Government which had already resolved in their own minds to advise the abandonment of the law after the lapse of a short period, at any rate before the next Dissolution?

The surmise of such an intention on the part of Government would be fatal to the hope of maintaining the law even for a single Session. It would ensure an almost unanimous condemnation of such a policy—an almost unanimous expression of opinion that even immediate repeal was preferable to the suspense of a resolution taken but deferred. How were we to act with regard to our own friends and supporters? Were they to be left in total ignorance of our intentions, and to be

permitted to commit themselves to the maintenance of the existing law at the very time that we had secretly resolved that it could not be maintained, and that it ought to be repealed or modified with a view to its abolition by the next Parliament? This surely would be a much more objectionable course, so far as party interests and fidelity to party engagements were concerned, than the open declaration of opinion the moment that opinion was formed, that public exigencies demanded the early consideration of the Corn Laws with a view to their repeal. If it were meant that no actual resolution on this head should be taken by the Government collectively, but that I, individually, as the Chief Minister of the Crown, should contemplate the course recommended, the difficulty appeared to me at least equally insurmountable.

A state of affairs then existed which compelled an immediate decision on this preliminary question, Shall measures be immediately taken for increasing the supply of food by the suspension of import-duties? I believe the Cabinet would have cheerfully decided in the affirmative if I could have given the assurance that in my opinion the suspension ought to be for a limited time, and that at the expiration of that time the pre-existing law ought to revive and to be firmly maintained.

How was it possible for me to give such an assurance to my colleagues if I secretly contemplated the necessity for a very early abandonment of the law?

The suggestion of — that during the approaching Session the duties on Indian corn and possibly on Australian wheat might be repealed, offered no solution of

the difficulties to which I am referring. Whenever the next discussion of the Corn Laws should take place, it would be under circumstances which would make the attempt at such a partial modification of them very impolitic. There are many occasions, and this was one of them, on which it is wise to consider the temper of the public mind, as well as the abstract reasonableness of a particular proposition ; and it appeared to me that to admit at such a critical period the necessity for some alteration of the Corn Laws for the purpose of increasing the supply of food, and to limit that alteration to the free import of maize and of a few quarters of wheat from a colony at the antipodes, would be injurious to the character of the landed interest, and would render it still more difficult and more invidious to maintain the import duties on the agricultural produce which such a proposition would leave untouched.

It appeared to me also that there were grave objections to the proposal that we should notify to the constituent body on the eve of a General Election the intention to repeal the Corn Laws for the express purpose of inviting an expression of their opinion on that particular subject. I thought such an appeal would ensure a bitter conflict between different classes of society, and would preclude the possibility of dispassionate consideration by a Parliament, the members of which would have probably committed themselves by explicit declarations and pledges, and would approach a discussion which could not be deferred, with all the heat and animosity engendered by severe contests at the hustings.

The main objects ——— had in view in offering these suggestions were, that “we might be under no just imputation of betraying party attachments, that we might preserve our honour as public men, and might not have the reproach cast upon us by posterity that in our hands the cause of Constitutional Government had received a heavy, perhaps even a deadly blow.”

It appeared to me that all these considerations—the betrayal of party attachments—the maintenance of the honour of public men—the real interests of the cause of Constitutional Government, must all be determined by the answer which the heart and conscience of a responsible Minister might give to the question, What is that course which the public interests really demand? What is the course best calculated under present circumstances to diminish the risk of great suffering and the discontent which will be the consequence of that suffering if timely precautions which might be taken be neglected?

If, after mature reflection, there was the honest belief that certain measures ought to be adopted, and adopted without delay, it would not be consistent with true fidelity to party attachments, with a true sense of personal honour, with a true devotion to the cause of Constitutional Government, to evade the conclusions of a man’s own deliberate judgment and to tax his ingenuity for specious reasons for maintaining in debate some alternative of which in his conscience he did not approve.

It was not difficult indeed to find such reasons, and not unsafe to insist on them. There was the full assurance of support from powerful majorities in each

House of Parliament well disposed to the maintenance of the Corn Laws. I was not insensible to the evil of acting counter to the will of those majorities, of severing party connections, and of subjecting public men to suspicion and reproach and the loss of public confidence; but I felt a strong conviction that such evils were light in comparison with those which must be incurred by the sacrifice of national interests to party attachments, and by deferring necessary precautions against scarcity of food for the purpose of consulting appearances and preserving the show of personal consistency. I felt, too, that the injury to the character of public men, the admitted evil of shaking confidence in their integrity and honour, would be only temporary; that if a public man resolved to take a course which his own deliberate judgment approved—if that course were manifestly opposed to his own private and political interests—if he preferred it with all its sacrifices to some other, the taking of which would exempt him from personal responsibility, would enable him to escape much obloquy, and to retain the goodwill and favour of his party—I felt, I say, a strong conviction that no clamour and misrepresentation, however sustained and systematic, would prevent the ultimate development of the truth, the ultimate acknowledgment that party interests would not have been promoted—the honour of public men would not have been maintained—the cause of Constitutional Government would not have been served, if a Minister had at a critical period shrunk from the duty of giving that advice which he believed to be the best, and from incurring every per-



sonal sacrifice which the giving of that advice might entail. I felt assured that this ultimate acknowledgment, however tardily made, would amply repair, so far at least as the public interests were concerned, the temporary evil of unjust suspicion and unjust reproach cast upon the motives and conduct of public men.

It is time, however, to revert to the course of events and the proceedings of the Cabinet.

The Cabinet separated on the 6th of November, with the understanding that it was to be summoned towards the latter end of the month, for the purpose of considering the additional information which might have been then received, and of finally determining on the course to be pursued.

The following are some of the principal communications which reached me in the interval between the separation and reassembling of the Cabinet. They were not calculated to diminish the anxiety with which I contemplated the possible consequences of a very great deficiency in that article of food on which, according to the estimate of Sir Robert Kane, "four millions of the Irish people might be considered exclusively to rely."

Extract of Letter from LORD-LIEUTENANT of Ireland.

"November 8, 1845.

"It is perfectly true that I did, in my answer to the Lord Mayor, say that there was no immediate pressure in the market; but you must not give too wide a meaning to that observation, which had reference merely

to his demand that the exportation of grain should be prohibited and the ports immediately thrown open. My meaning was that there was nothing so pressing as to require us to act without waiting for the decision of the responsible advisers of the Crown. But the danger may be upon us before we are aware of its being near; for, as I said in a former letter, the sudden decay of potatoes dug up in an apparently sound state sets all calculation at defiance. Some precautionary measures must be adopted, and adopted promptly, for there is danger in delay. As the digging of the potatoes advances we see it more clearly, and I regret to say that Professor Lindley, when he took leave of me yesterday, told me that he doubted very much whether the potatoes would keep through the winter."

Extract of Letter from Mr. BULLER, Secretary to the Royal Agricultural Improvement Society of Ireland, to Sir R. PEEL.

" November 8, 1845.

" Having been engaged with Professors Lindley, Playfair, and Kane since the arrival of the Commission in Ireland, and having also paid much attention to the subject in my official capacity as connected with this Society, I have had many opportunities of studying the nature and extent of the disease, and I feel bound to tell you that the alarming accounts are every day increasing, and that the present most inclement weather will add considerably to the evil by preventing the people from saving even the portion of the crop which is not affected."

Extract of Letter from LORD-LIEUTENANT of Ireland.

“ November 11, 1845.

“ The accounts we receive of the progress of the potato harvest from the constabulary are still very unsatisfactory, but those from the resident magistrates are rather less unfavourable.

“ P. S.—Since this letter was written later reports have been submitted to me, in which even the resident magistrates now appear to be of opinion that the disease is extending, and the evil much greater than they had imagined it to be.

“ The heavy rains of the last few days have done infinite mischief.”

Extract from Report of Professor LINDLEY and  
Dr. PLAYFAIR.

“ November 15, 1845.

“ During our stay in Ireland we carefully examined such official papers as were transmitted to us from the Castle. We consulted persons acquainted with the facts of the disease, we visited the district lying between Dublin and Drogheda, and inspected various potato fields and stores in the counties of Dublin, Louth, Meath, Westmeath, and a part of Kildare. Judging from the evidence thus collected and from what we have seen of the progress of the disease in England, we can come to no other conclusion than that one half of the actual potato crop of Ireland is either

destroyed or remains in a state unfit for the food of man. We, moreover, feel it our duty to apprise you that we fear this to be a low estimate.

“We would now add, melancholy as this picture is, that in all probability the late rainy weather has rendered the mischief yet greater.

“It is also necessary to direct your attention to the quantity of seed potatoes which must be reserved for the coming year, if the cultivation of this plant is to be persevered in. We can state that, on an average, one-eighth of a crop is required for planting the same quantity of ground, so that in fact only three-eighths of the crop can in our view be at this moment assumed to be available as food.”

Extract from Letter of LORD-LIEUTENANT.

“November 17, 1845.

“I have nothing satisfactory to communicate to you from the provinces. The disease progresses, apparently unchecked by any of the precautions adopted; and the ill-intentioned leave nothing undone to irritate and exasperate the people. A very bad spirit prevails in many of the provinces.

“If we had to deal only with a short crop, we might calculate with some degree of certainty upon the time when the pressure would be felt; but how rely upon any calculation when the potatoes are perishing in the pits?

“When the evil day of scarcity does come, it will probably come with fearful rapidity. We must not allow ourselves to be taken by surprise.”

Mr. HOPE JOHNSTONE, M.P., to Sir R. PEEL.

“Cramond, near Edinburgh,  
November 22, 1845.

“I am sorry to say that, in so far as my own observation has gone, the disease appears to be progressing. I have to-day examined a large quantity of potatoes, grown on some of the best and dryest soils in this neighbourhood, and have not found one potato in twenty untainted, while three-fourths are quite unfit for human food. These have been carefully housed and have never been exposed to damp since they were taken out of the ground. In Dumfriesshire, also, the decay is going on rapidly.”

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Some days after the separation of the Cabinet on the 6th of November, I resolved (acting in concert with Sir James Graham and Mr. Goulburn) to take the unusual step of authorising a very large purchase of Indian corn in the United States on account of the Government.

I should greatly have preferred the introduction of this additional supply of food through the ordinary medium of private adventure, stimulated as it would have been by the suspension of the import duty. I considered it, however, of so much importance to provide, *by any means*, for an increased supply of food, and to habituate the Irish people to the consumption of a novel species of food as a substitute for their ordinary subsistence, that I did not hesitate to unite with

those of my colleagues whom I have above-named in secretly giving a very large order for the purchase of Indian corn and meal in the markets of the United States. The whole transaction was conducted with great judgment and discretion by the house of Baring, acting on behalf of the Treasury, that department undertaking the whole pecuniary responsibility.

On the 22nd of November Lord John Russell addressed a public letter to the electors of the city of London, which, considering his position as the leader of a powerful party—the period at which this letter appeared—the opinions which it expressed that the existing Corn Law was “the blight of commerce and the bane of agriculture,” the invitation which it gave to the people “by petition, by address, by remonstrances,” to require the repeal of that law, could not fail to exercise a very material influence on the public mind and on the subject matter of our deliberations in Cabinet.

It justified the conclusion that the Whig party was prepared to unite with the Anti-Corn Law League in demanding the total repeal of the Corn Laws. The sentiments expressed in that letter might not have the entire and unanimous assent of all those who were connected with Lord John Russell by the ties of party; but this letter was published at a very critical moment by the head of that party, and there was no public declaration of dissent on the part of any leading member of it.

To prevent the trouble of reference to the records, it may be convenient to give the letter of Lord John Russell a place in this Memoir.

Lord J. RUSSELL to the ELECTORS of the CITY of  
LONDON.

“GENTLEMEN,

“The present state of the country in regard to its supply of food cannot be viewed without apprehension. Forethought and bold precaution may avert any serious evils—indecision and procrastination may produce a state of suffering which it is frightful to contemplate.

“Three weeks ago it was generally expected that Parliament would be immediately called together. The announcement that Ministers were prepared at that time to advise the Crown to summon Parliament, and to propose on their first meeting a suspension of the import duties on corn, would have caused orders at once to be sent to various ports of Europe and America for the purchase and transmission of grain for the consumption of the United Kingdom. An Order in Council dispensing with the law was neither necessary nor desirable. No party in Parliament would have made itself responsible for the obstruction of a measure so urgent and so beneficial.

“The Queen’s Ministers have met and separated without affording us any promise of such seasonable relief.

“It becomes us, therefore, the Queen’s subjects, to consider how we can best avert, or at all events mitigate, calamities of no ordinary magnitude.

“Two evils require your consideration. One of these is the disease in the potatoes, affecting very

seriously parts of England and Scotland, and committing fearful ravages in Ireland.

“ The extent of this evil has not yet been ascertained, and every week, indeed, tends either to reveal unexpected disease, or to abate in some districts the alarm previously entertained. But there is one misfortune peculiar to the failure in this particular crop. The effect of a bad corn-harvest is, in the first place, to diminish the supply in the market, and to raise the price—hence diminished consumption, and the privation of incipient scarcity, by which the whole stock is more equally distributed over the year, and the ultimate pressure is greatly mitigated; but the fear of the breaking out of this unknown disease in the potatoes induces the holders to hurry into the market, and thus we have at one and the same time rapid consumption and impending deficiency—scarcity of the article and cheapness of price. The ultimate suffering must thereby be rendered far more severe than it otherwise would be. The evil to which I have adverted may be owing to an adverse season, to a mysterious disease in the potato, to want of science or of care in propagating the plant. In any of these cases Government is no more subject to blame for the failure of the potato crop than it was entitled to credit for the plentiful corn-harvests which we have lately enjoyed.

“ Another evil, however, under which we are suffering, is the fruit of Ministerial counsel and Parliamentary law. It is the direct consequence of an Act of Parliament passed three years ago, on the recommendation of the present advisers of the Crown. By this law,



grain of all kinds has been made subject to very high duties on importation. These duties are so contrived that the worse the quality of the corn, the higher is the duty; so that when good wheat rises to 70*s.* a quarter, the average price of all wheat is 57*s.* or 58*s.*, and the duty 15*s.* or 14*s.* a quarter. Thus the corn barometer points to fair, while the ship is bending under a storm.

“ This defect was pointed out many years ago by writers on the Corn Laws, and was urged upon the attention of the House of Commons when the present Act was under consideration.

“ But I confess that on the general subject my views have in the course of twenty years undergone a great alteration. I used to be of opinion that corn was an exception to the general rules of political economy; but observation and experience have convinced me that we ought to abstain from all interference with the supply of food. Neither a Government nor a Legislature can ever regulate the corn market with the beneficial effects which the entire freedom of sale and purchase are sure of themselves to produce.

“ I have for several years endeavoured to obtain a compromise on this subject. In 1839 I voted for a committee of the whole House, with the view of supporting the substitution of a moderate fixed duty for the sliding-scale. In 1841 I announced the intention of the then Government of proposing a fixed duty of 8*s.* a quarter. In the past Session I proposed the imposition of some lower duty. These propositions were successively rejected. The present First Lord of the Treasury met them in 1839, 1840, and 1841 by elo-

quent panegyrics of the existing system—the plenty it had caused, the rural happiness it had diffused. He met the propositions for diminished protection in the same way in which he had met the offer of securities for Protestant interests in 1817 and 1825—in the same way in which he met the proposal to allow Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham to send members to Parliament in 1830.

“The result of resistance to qualified concessions must be the same in the present instance as in those I have mentioned. It is no longer worth while to contend for a fixed duty. In 1841 the free-trade party would have agreed to a duty of 8s. a quarter on wheat, and after a lapse of years this duty might have been further reduced, and ultimately abolished. But the imposition of any duty at present, without a provision for its extinction within a short period, would but prolong a contest already sufficiently fruitful of animosity and discontent. The struggle to make bread scarce and dear, when it is clear that part at least of the additional price goes to increase rent, is a struggle deeply injurious to an aristocracy which (this quarrel once removed) is strong in property, strong in the construction of our legislature, strong in opinion, strong in ancient associations, and the memory of immortal services.

“Let us, then, unite to put an end to a system which has been proved to be the blight of commerce, the bane of agriculture, the source of bitter divisions among classes, the cause of penury, fever, mortality, and crime among the people.

“But if this end is to be achieved, it must be gained

by the unequivocal expression of the public voice. It is not to be denied that many elections for cities and towns in 1841, and some in 1845, appear to favour the assertion that free-trade is not popular with the great mass of the community. The Government appear to be waiting for some excuse to give up the present Corn Law. Let the people by petition, by address, by remonstrance, afford them the excuse they seek. Let the Ministry propose such a revision of the taxes as in their opinion may render the public burdens more just and more equal; let them add any other provisions which caution and even scrupulous forbearance may suggest; but let the removal of restrictions on the admission of the main articles of food and clothing used by the mass of the people be required, in plain terms, as useful to all great interests, and indispensable to the progress of the nation.

“ J. RUSSELL.

“Edinburgh, November 22, 1845.”

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It was asserted by many who were careless about the foundation of their assertions, that I had been influenced in the advice which I offered to the Cabinet by the appearance of this letter. A simple reference to dates will prove that this could not have been the case.

The Cabinet reassembled on Tuesday the 25th November, and was occupied on that and the following day in considering the instructions to be given to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and by him to be conveyed to the Commission which had been appointed for the

consideration and adoption of such measures as might tend to mitigate the evil consequences of the scarcity which was apprehended.

These instructions appeared to be unanimously approved of by the Cabinet. The letter containing them, addressed by Sir James Graham to Lord Heytesbury, will be found in the Records of the Home Office.

I considered the proposed despatch of that letter, with the unanimous approval of the Cabinet, was an important event in our discussions on the pending question.

The danger to be apprehended was so fully admitted, and set forth in such strong terms, that I thought it difficult to reconcile the issue of this letter with passiveness and inaction in respect to the means of increasing the supply of food. Among other passages in that letter were the following :—

Sir J. GRAHAM to Lord HEYTESBURY.

“ Professor Lindley and Dr. Playfair have stated that in their opinion one-half of the whole Irish potato crop of this year is already destroyed ; that a large proportion of the remainder, unless unusual precaution be adopted, will not keep beyond the winter ; and that in the spring the supply of potatoes, whether for seed or food, will be very scanty.

“ Reports from other quarters are much less unfavourable, but a general scarcity of potatoes is to be apprehended, and it is impossible to exaggerate the difficulties which must attend the substitution of dearer for cheaper food among people who have long subsisted

on the potato almost exclusively, and who are not in the receipt of daily wages for a large portion of the year.

“The danger of fever following in the train of scarcity ought to be ever present to the mind of the Commission. If this sad calamity should occur, the workhouses in many districts would afford accommodation for fever patients; the other inmates must in these circumstances be removed, and temporary arrangements must be made for their housing and support.

“I have already requested the Poor Law Commissioners to make preparations for this possible visitation of fever which is so much to be dreaded; and your Excellency will not fail to declare to the Commission that any assistance which the Government can supply will be readily given in aid of the provisions already made by law to arrest the progress of fever.

“I am anxious also to point out the danger of a general want of seed potatoes in the spring of next year.

“The difficulty arising from the failure of the present crop is hardly felt at the present time. It will be progressive, and will become more intense as the season advances. The proportion which seed bears to an average crop of potatoes is very large; it has been estimated at not less than one-eighth; and when we remember that a considerable portion of this year’s crop in Ireland is already destroyed, and that the remaining portion, if it be saved, must supply food for nine months as well as seed for next year, it is obvious that no ordinary care is required to husband a sufficient quantity of sound potatoes fit for planting in the spring.

Unless this be done, the calamity of the present year is but the commencement of a more fatal series."

In conclusion, the letter observes with reference to various details that are entered into, "that they are so entered into in order that the Lord-Lieutenant may know how tender is the solicitude with which Her Majesty regards the present condition of her subjects in Ireland, and how earnest is the desire of the Government that no precaution or exertion shall be omitted which may mitigate the severity of the impending evil."

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Before the instructions contained in this letter were finally assented to by the Cabinet, I felt it to be my duty to state my opinion with regard to the consequences that ought naturally to follow the issue of such a letter. I therefore read to the Cabinet on Wednesday the 26th November the following Memorandum:—

CABINET MEMORANDUM, November 26.

"I cannot consent to the issue of these instructions, and undertake at the same time to maintain the existing Corn Law.

"Slight modifications of the existing law, as the consequence of these instructions, or immediately following them, would in my opinion answer no good end.

"The proposal of them would add to the difficulty of defending that portion of the Corn Law which it was sought to maintain.

"I think it ought to suspend the operation of the existing law for a limited period.

“ There is conflicting evidence as to the degree of pressure from the scarcity of food ; but there is that probability of severe pressure a very few months hence, that would, in my opinion, amply justify the precautionary measure of unrestricted import.

“ We have written authority which would justify it—written authority which, should the anticipations of those from whom we receive it prove correct, would impose on us a heavy responsibility for having neglected a precaution which has been taken in former periods of scarcity in this country, and by some countries in Europe within the last few weeks.

“ But independently of these considerations, the issue of these instructions fully justifies, if it does not require, the temporary removal of impediments to the free import of corn.

“ They contain a proof, not only that the crisis is great—not only that there is the probability of severe suffering from the scarcity of food, but the proof that we are ourselves convinced of it.

“ It appears to me that suspension of the Corn Law would be the course most consistent with these instructions. }

“ I will not refer to the preceding discussions in the Cabinet ; but the issue of these instructions, placing on record our deliberate convictions as to the possible extent of the evil with which we may have to contend, is a new event.

“ By acting now, the lapse of time since we last met in Cabinet would be accounted for.

“ I am prepared for one to take the responsibility of

suspending the law by an Order in Council, or of calling Parliament at a very early period, and advising in the speech from the Throne the suspension of the law.

“ I conceal from myself none of the difficulties that attend on suspension of the law.

“ Suspension of the law will compel a very early decision on the course to be pursued in anticipation of the period when the suspension would expire.

“ Suspension will compel a deliberate review of the whole question of agricultural protection. I firmly believe that it would be better for the country that that review should be undertaken by others.

“ Under ordinary circumstances I should advise that it should be so undertaken ; but I look now to the immediate emergency and to the duties it imposes on a Minister. I am ready to take the responsibility of meeting that emergency, if the opinions of my colleagues as to the extent of the evil and the nature of the remedy concur with mine.”

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I thought it also advisable to put my colleagues more fully in possession of my sentiments than I could do either by personal communication, or in the course of discussion in the Cabinet. I therefore sent in circulation on the 29th November the accompanying paper. I addressed it in the first instance to the Duke of Wellington with the accompanying note.



Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

(Secret.)

“ Whitehall, November 29.

“ MY DEAR DUKE,

“ In the enclosed Memorandum are contained the reasons which induce me to advise the suspension of the existing Corn Laws for a limited period.

“ I will not ask you to give me any opinion on the subject in returning me this paper; but only to have the kindness to read it, and to let me have the box by the post of to-morrow evening. I thought it right to mention confidentially to the Queen that I feared there were serious differences in the Cabinet as to the measures which the present emergency requires.

“ Believe me, &c.

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

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✓ CABINET MEMORANDUM, November 29.

“ The following Memorandum is an argument on this abstract question:—

“ What is the course most consistent with the public interests, under the present circumstances, in reference to the future supply of food? }

“ It does not discuss other questions (I admit very important questions), such as the following:—

“ Is the course suggested one which consistently with past professions or party engagements we can honourably and properly take? }

“ Even if the right course, does it involve the imme-

diate or ultimate necessity of other measures which we ought not to undertake ?

“Giving their due weight to these considerations, they do not relieve responsible Ministers from the duty of determining whether it be advisable or not that the ports should be opened for the purpose of averting a great and pressing danger.

“It appears to me that the consideration paramount to all others is this :—

“What precautionary measures do the public interests require us to take to guard against the consequences of that deficiency in one great article of subsistence of which we have already decisive proof, and also against those possible calamities of scarcity and disease which are at present conjectural, but which *may* come upon us very rapidly three or four months hence ?

“It may then be too late to take effectual precautions. We must now decide upon probabilities ; and the question is, does the evil of early and possibly superfluous precaution outweigh the advantage of it ?

“I think it does not ; and that the proper precaution—though, as I freely admit, it may possibly turn out to be a superfluous one—is, the permission for a limited time to import foreign grain free of duty.

“I arrive at this conclusion, partly from reason, partly from a reference to public feeling and impression, apart from strict argument.

“The calamity with which we are threatened is an unforeseen one, and one of a very unusual character.

“One great article of subsistence has failed to a very

considerable extent, not partially, but throughout many districts in Ireland, Scotland, and England.

“It is not too much to say, that it is highly probable that three millions of people must resort to other than their accustomed species of food.

“The failure of this article of subsistence is not confined to the United Kingdom.

“In many other parts of the world, in those parts chiefly in which potatoes are actually used for food, there is a similar failure.

“There must be a similar extraordinary and unexpected demand upon grain and other articles of food as a substitute.

“It is very difficult to foresee what may be the effect of this in diminishing the available quantity and increasing the price of those other articles of food.

“In the anticipation that the effect may be considerable, several countries in Europe have adopted timely precautions—precautions calculated to meet their own special exigencies, but having no immaterial bearing upon our own.

“Belgium, by an act of the Executive Government, unanimously sanctioned by the Chambers, has permitted the free importation of grain, rice, and other articles.

“The Manchester deputation told me that the market of Liverpool had been swept of rice at a certain time for export to Belgium, and that the price had risen from 90 to 100 per cent. at that time.

“Holland has taken the same course: the import duties on all kinds of grain are reduced till the 1st of June, 1846.

“Russia has permitted the importation of grain,

potatoes, and peas into the ports of the Baltic free of duty, until the 13th of July, 1845.

“As an order was issued at a later period than July, permitting the employment of foreign vessels for the purpose, ‘in consequence of the scarcity of corn in the Baltic and neighbouring provinces,’ I presume that the permission of free import has been continued.

“The Consular returns state that ‘Russia and Poland will require large importations, and will draw off whatever Hungary and Silesia can spare; but it does not appear that there is a surplus either in Silesia or Posen.’”

“Since I wrote the above sheet I have seen the two despatches—one from Vienna, the other from Munich—which accompany this Memorandum.

“In some countries the export of certain articles of food has been prohibited.

“Sweden has prohibited, on account of failure, the export of potatoes.

“The Porte has prohibited the export of grain from its Asiatic provinces, from the 27th of August last to the harvest time next year.

“The Pasha of Egypt has, I believe, very recently prohibited the export of some articles of subsistence from Egypt.

“In some parts of Europe, wherein export is not prohibited by law, the people have attempted to impede it by violence.

“Any considerable export from France would probably induce the Government to prohibit it, as they have the power to do, by ordinance.

“So much for the course pursued by foreign Governments with reference to the present apprehensions of scarcity.

“It is not unimportant, particularly with reference to public feeling and impression, to refer to the course taken by the British Government and Parliament at former periods under apprehensions of scarcity. The circumstances under which they were taken may not be precisely analogous to the present. The failure of the grain crops may have been more general—the state of the Corn Law may have been different. The question will still remain, If there be a deficiency in that article of food on which millions have relied, is there not so much of similarity in the circumstances of the present and former periods as to constitute the acts of the Legislature at those periods legitimate precedents for our guidance?

“To facilitate a judgment on this point I will quote the prices of wheat and refer to the provisions of the Corn Law at the periods when that law has been relaxed in favour of import free of duties, or at lower duties than those sanctioned by law.

“In 1756 the average price of wheat (the Winchester bushel) for the year was 40s. In 1757 it was 53s. 4d.

“Parliament met in December, 1756, and passed Acts discontinuing for a limited time the duties upon corn and flour imported.

“In 1767 the price of wheat was 57s. 4d.

“The first Acts of the Session were Acts ‘allowing the importation of wheat and wheat flour, oats and oat-meal, rye and rye-meal, into this kingdom, for a limited time free of duty.’

“The state of the Corn Law at those periods, 1756 and 1767, was this:—

“There were prohibitory duties on the import of wheat when the price of it was below 53*s.* 4*d.* a quarter, and a duty of 8*s.* a quarter on the import when the price was between 53*s.* 4*d.* and 80*s.*

“In 1791 a change in the Corn Law took place. When wheat was under 50*s.* it was subject to a duty of 24*s.* 3*d.* (a prohibitory duty); between 50*s.* and 54*s.* the duty was 2*s.* 6*d.*; above 54*s.* free import at a 6*d.* duty.

“In 1793, two years after the passing of the new Corn Law of 1791, the average price of corn per imperial quarter for the year was—wheat, 49*s.* 3*d.*; barley, 31*s.*; oats, 20*s.* 6*d.*

“The third Act, passed in the Session of 1793, was an Act for authorising His Majesty to prohibit the exportation of corn, meal, &c., and to permit the importation of corn, meal, or flour at the low duties.

“In 1795 and 1796 the law remained the same.

“In each of those years the price of wheat was above 75*s.*

“It was admissible under the law at a duty of 6*d.* the quarter.

“The third Act, passed in the Session of 1795, was an Act ‘for enabling His Majesty to permit the importation of corn and of other articles of provision for a limited time without payment of duty.’

“The same Act passed at the commencement of the Session of 1796.

“In 1799, the law remaining the same, and the average price of wheat for the year being 69*s.*, an Act

passed entitled ‘An Act to permit the importation of Corn, and for allowing the importation of other articles of provision without payment of duty, until six weeks after the commencement of the next Session of Parliament.’

“Now although the Corn Law at all these periods was based on a different principle from the present, yet after 1791 they had this in common, that when corn reached a certain price it should be admitted free of duty.

“I presume the motive of Parliament in temporarily relaxing the law was to encourage importation for a limited period, by the assurance that there should be no duty on import, or a low duty, during that period.

“I refer to these enactments not as precedents necessarily binding our judgment, but as proofs that the natural remedy for apprehended scarcity which suggested itself to Parliament at former periods was the free import of provisions for a limited time.

“It is asked what is the advantage to be now gained by the opening of the ports?

“There is the advantage of remedying that defect in the law which subjects maize to a high duty—a duty which will increase if the price of barley should fall; of ensuring to the importer of grain an immediate profit on the import, giving him a certainty that he can at once realise, free of duty, the price which grain may bear in the home market.

“There is the advantage of securing for ourselves a share of that surplus of food which some countries may possess, and on which there *may be*, in the course of the spring, an urgent demand from many parts of Europe.

“Is it quite clear, that if we have high and variable duties upon wheat, we shall enter fairly into competition for this surplus with those countries which have opened or may open their ports ?

“If the six weeks’ average shall at any period of the coming year give a price less than 63s., foreign wheat when imported must pay a duty of at least 10s.

“Under the peculiar circumstances of the present season—the failure of the potato crop—the inferior quality of our grain crop—the scantiness of supply from the Continent—the open ports of other countries—may not this amount of duty on foreign wheat be felt severely ? Is the Corn Law in all its provisions adapted to this unforeseen and very special case ?

“Is it not an advantage, by a spontaneous act of the Crown, to take a precaution against this contingency, and against the possible necessity of being compelled suddenly to take it ?

“It is said we can take it when the necessity shall be demonstrated. This might be true of an act to be done by the Executive when Parliament is not sitting.

“But surely on the first day of the Session we must announce our policy. We shall then have had ample time for consideration.

“We shall be *forced* to the announcement of our policy. Proposals will be made by our opponents. We must deal with them. Can we deal with them contingently and hypothetically ?

“Can we invite our friends to resist a certain amendment on the first week of the Session, in the contem-



plation of adopting it on new proof of its necessity a few weeks afterwards?

“I say then that there is an immediate advantage in the opening of the ports by the act or by the advice of the Crown: there *may be* a still greater advantage by anticipating an unavoidable necessity.

“But suppose there should be real scarcity in the spring; suppose there should be disease as the consequence of it; suppose there should be a turbulent spirit or actual violence: will it be no advantage to be enabled to say, ‘We have neglected no precautions; we have taken every measure which provident care and foresight could enable us to take; there are no restrictions on the import of food?’ Having done this, shall we not be enabled to act with greater energy and decision in repressing violence?

“Can we hope to carry a vote of half a million, or a quarter of a million, for supporting Irishmen with food?

“Can we go into the Liverpool market and raise the price of oats by Government purchases, leaving the Corn Law in full operation at the time? Will it be any sufficient answer, that while we are raising the price of oats by an unusual act of the Executive, contrary to every established principle, we are advancing the period at which, under the working of the Corn Law, foreign oats may be admitted duty free?

“One other consideration must be adverted to:—If, when we are proposing large votes for Irish employment or subsistence, we are also proposing votes for an increase of the army and for improved defences, will there not be additional difficulty if the prices of food

should range very high, and if we resolve to maintain during the period of pressure the existing Corn Law?

“Time presses, and on some definite course we must decide. Shall we undertake, without suspension, to modify the existing Corn Law? Shall we resolve to maintain the existing Corn Law? Shall we advise the suspension of that law for a limited period?”

“My opinion is for the last course, admitting as I do that it involves the necessity for the immediate consideration of the alterations to be made in the existing Corn Law, such alterations to take effect after the period of suspension. I should rather say it involves the question of the principle and degree of protection to agriculture.

“I must also admit that this question of opening the ports stands now in a very different position from that in which it did stand in the first week of November, when I first advised the measure.

“ROBERT PEEL.”

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This Memorandum was sent in circulation to my colleagues.

The circulation of this paper and the previous discussions in Cabinet brought me communications from some of my colleagues, which, from the desire which I have before expressed to conceal nothing, and to do justice to all, I incorporate with this narrative.

The communications in question were from the Duke of Wellington, Lord Wharncliffe, Lord Ripon, and Mr. Goulburn.

I give them in the order of their respective dates, with my reply in the cases in which I sent one.

Lord RIPON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ India Board, November 29, 1845.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ All public considerations make me feel so anxious that nothing should be left undone which may afford even a chance of preventing your Government from being transferred to other hands, that I venture to trouble you with this letter.

“ When the Cabinet last met, I understood you to say that you were desirous that we should undertake to consider the question of the Corn Laws, not merely in reference to the actual crisis in Ireland, but also with the view of endeavouring to place them generally upon a more satisfactory footing as regards the principle upon which protection might be given; and you alluded to a possibility of devising some mode of providing some equivalent or compensation for the protection which the existing Corn Laws profess to afford. This suggestion, although it was not developed, appears to me so important, that I would venture to submit that it deserves more consideration than it has received, or can receive in Tuesday's Cabinet; and although I cannot pretend to say how far its consideration would lead to more community of opinion upon the Corn Laws, I cannot think it ought to be at once rejected as inadmissible and impracticable. I am indeed well aware how time presses, and of the strong feeling which prevailed in the

Cabinet that before we should advise the Queen as to the meeting of Parliament, we ought to let her know (before the 10th of December) that there exists a hopeless difference of opinion with respect to the Corn Laws. But is it absolutely necessary that that difference should be *now* stated to be hopeless, if there be even a chance of opinion being brought to coincide? Might it not be sufficient to state to the Queen that there are certain measures of great importance deemed by the whole Cabinet to be necessary in order to meet the existing crisis, and the execution of which will require that Parliament should meet early in January: that there is, however, another question under our consideration (*viz.* that of the Corn Laws), upon which a difference of opinion prevails; that upon this point we have not definitively come to a conclusion, but that it will be our duty to lay our sentiments before Her Majesty at the earliest possible period? If such a course of proceeding were deemed practicable and proper, we might then obtain an additional fortnight, say from the 2nd to the 16th of December, for the purpose of considering the point referred to at the beginning of this letter.

“ I am not prepared to say what equivalent or compensation could be found which would be at once desirable and practicable. It would probably only be found in some new adjustment of special burthens upon agriculture (whether they be composed of general or local taxation), and an adaptation of any protection which might be retained to the probable amount of relief to be obtained from such an adjustment.

“ All this may be mere moonshine; but the crisis is

one of immense magnitude; and although, as far as I am personally concerned, I am very indifferent as to the mode in which it may affect myself, I cannot look without the greatest apprehension upon the evils which may fall upon the Queen and the country if you are withdrawn from the guidance of public affairs. I know very well how arduous your task has been—how ungenerously you have been treated by some, how unwisely by many: but you have rendered such invaluable services, and have deserved such a large measure of public confidence, that I catch at any idea which may possibly afford the means of preventing the occurrence of the calamity which I so much dread.

“Do not give yourself the trouble of answering this letter.

“Believe me, &c.

“RIPON.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lord RIPON.

(Secret.)

“Whitehall, November 30.

“MY DEAR RIPON,

“I think the main question is, or rather *was*, is suspension of import duty justifiable and advisable, or not?

“I advised it on the 1st of November, and my opinion remains unchanged; but intervening events have placed me in a different position from that in which I stood on the 1st of November.

“I think each member of the Cabinet should make

up his mind on the cardinal point—Ought there or ought there not to be a suspension of the import duties on foreign corn?

“It would be very unfortunate to differ about minor details.

“Ever, &c.

“ROBERT PEEL.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“Strathfieldsaye, November 30, 1845.

“MY DEAR PEEL,

“I have perused and return your Memorandum, with one from myself, of which I beg you to make such use as you may think proper.

“Ever, &c.

“WELLINGTON.”

The DUKE'S MEMORANDUM, November 30.

“I am one of those who think the continuance of the Corn Laws essential to the agriculture of the country in its existing state and particularly to that of Ireland, and a benefit to the whole community.

“I am afraid that it would be found that this country would cease to be the desirable and sought-after market of the world, if the interests of agriculture should be injured by a premature repeal of the Corn Laws.

“It appears to me likewise that this country is in a better situation than any other, in Europe certainly, to

bear the shock which is the consequence of the potato-disease, and this even in Ireland.

“ It must be observed that the evil in Ireland is not a deficiency of food for the year, or even of the particular description of food, potatoes; but the great and supposed general deficiency of that description of food operating upon the social condition of Ireland; the habits of the great body of the people, who are producers of the food which they consume during three-fourths of the year in general, and who must consequently be in a state of destitution, and who have not the pecuniary means, and, if they had the pecuniary means, are not in the habit of purchasing their food in the markets.

“ This is the difficulty in Ireland which rendered necessary the orders sent to the Lord-Lieutenant in the last week.

“ It is my opinion that we must look forward, not to three or four months only, but to this time next year, and that we should avoid to break down the Corn Laws till that measure should appear to be absolutely necessary. I cannot pretend to be so good a judge of this necessity as those are who have frequently discussed the Corn Laws, and who will have to discuss them again. But of this I do not entertain a doubt— if it is necessary to suspend the Corn Laws, to avoid real evils resulting from scarcity of food, we ought not to hesitate.

“ But I recommend that we should be convinced of the necessity, and make every effort to convince others of its existence.

“ Here then comes the question which Sir Robert Peel has not discussed—I mean the Party view of it.

“ The only ground upon which I think that view important is one upon which he must be a better judge than any one else ; that is, whether he could carry on a Government for the Queen supposing the support of the landed interest were withdrawn from him. I am afraid he must reckon upon its being withdrawn from him, unless he should be able to show clearly the necessity for the measure in question.

“ In respect to my own course, my only object in public life is to support Sir Robert Peel’s administration of the Government for the Queen.

“ A good Government for the country is more important than Corn Laws or any other consideration ; and as long as Sir Robert Peel possesses the confidence of the Queen and of the public, and he has strength to perform the duties, his administration of the Government must be supported.

“ My own judgment would lead me to maintain the Corn Laws.

“ Sir Robert Peel may think that his position in Parliament and in the public view requires that the course should be taken which he recommends ; and if that should be the case, I earnestly recommend that the Cabinet should support him, and I for one declare that I will do so.

“ WELLINGTON.”

(On a separate sheet.)

“ Having so stated, it is useless that I should write more ; but as Sir Robert Peel may desire to know what



course I would recommend in respect to the Queen's Speech, I mention that the Queen should recommend a reconsideration of the Corn Laws with a view to the suspension of their provisions, if that measure should appear to be necessary; and such alterations in respect to certain articles of food as may appear to be desirable, and may not be inconsistent with the principle and object of the laws.

“W.”

Mr. GOULBURN to Sir R. PEEL.

(Private and confidential.)

“Downing Street, Sunday evening,

“MY DEAR PEEL,

(November 30.)

“I have such an habitual deference to the superiority of your judgment, and such an entire confidence in the purity of your motives, that I always feel great doubt as to my being right when I differ from you in opinion. But the more I reflect upon the observations which you made to me a few days since as to your difficulty in again defending a Corn Law in Parliament, the more do I feel alarmed at the consequences of your taking a different course from that which you have previously adopted. An abandonment of your former opinions now would, I think, prejudice your and our characters as public men, and would be fraught with fatal results to the country's best interests; and as I probably hear many opinions on a subject of this kind which do not reach you, the view which I take of probable consequences may not be undeserving of

consideration—at least you will not misinterpret my motives in stating it.

“ I fairly own that I do not see how the repeal of the Corn Law is to afford relief to the distress with which we are threatened. I quite understand that if we had never had a Corn Law, it might be argued that we should now have had a larger supply in our warehouses, or that from the encouragement given by a free trade in corn to the growth of it in foreign countries, we should have had a larger fund on which to draw for a supply. But I think it next to impossible to show that the abandonment of the law now could materially affect this year's supply, or give us any corn which will not equally reach us under the law as it stands. This opinion is entertained by several who deal in corn, and who are friendly to a free trade in the article; and it has been stated also that a change in our Corn Law might not improbably induce other Continental states to prohibit exportation, they imagining from such a course of proceeding that the distress went even beyond what we can anticipate.

“ I do not wish to attribute to our Corn Law effects which perhaps do not flow from it; but the facts apparent are that the price of corn in England has not risen in proportion to the rise of price in other states of Europe: that it is at present by no means excessive—not equal to what it was in the years '38, '39, '40, '41, '42—not showing a tendency to a rapid rise, and not therefore establishing the opinion that the supply is very deficient. Under these circumstances it appears to me that the abandonment of the Corn Law would be taken

by the public generally as decisive evidence that we never intended to maintain it further than as an instrument by which to vex and defeat our enemies. The very caution with which we have spoken on the subject of corn will confirm this impression. Had we always announced a firm determination under all circumstances to uphold the Corn Law, it would have been more readily believed that in abandoning it now we were yielding to the pressure of an overwhelming necessity which we did not before anticipate. But when the public feel, as I believe they do, great doubts as to the existence of an adequate necessity—when greater doubts still are entertained as to the applicability of the abandonment of the Corn Law as a remedy to the present distress—they will, I fear, with few dissentient voices, tax us with treachery and deception, and charge us, from our former language, with having always had it in contemplation.

“So much as to the effect on our character as public men. But I view with greater alarm its effects on public interests. In my opinion the party of which you are the head is the only barrier which remains against the revolutionary effects of the Reform Bill. So long as that party remains unbroken, whether in or out of power, it has the means of doing much good, or at least of preventing much evil. But if it be broken in pieces by a destruction of confidence in its leaders (and I cannot but think that an abandonment of the Corn Law would produce that result), I see nothing before us but the exasperation of class animosities, a struggle for pre-eminence, and the ultimate triumph of unrestrained democracy.

“If indeed it were admitted to be right to give less protection to corn, I think, independent of the consideration which I have urged, a period of apprehended distress is not precisely the moment to choose for such an operation. It would be too like a surrender to clamour of what had been denied to reason. It would ensure no gratitude while it produced great confusion.

“The subject is, I am aware, too large to be properly discussed in a letter; but as I am obliged to be out of town the greater part of to-morrow, I could not reconcile it to myself not to state shortly what I fear will be the consequences of the adoption of any such course as the spontaneous surrender by this Government of a fair protection to corn, grounded upon the temporary emergency which we are unfortunately called upon to meet.

“Believe me, &c.,

“HENRY GOULBURN.”

MEMORANDUM by Mr. GOULBURN on PROTECTIVE  
DUTIES.

“I wish to consider protection to agriculture precisely as I would protection to manufactures, for agriculture after all is a manufacture of which the raw material is the earth and the manufactured article is corn.

“From the immense amount of our debt, and the charge imposed on every interest in the country in respect to it, every manufacturer in this country has in justice a claim to be protected as regards the supply

of the home consumer against the competition of a foreigner, who, not having the same charges upon him, is or ought to be able to supply articles at a cheaper rate.

“ On this ground you give cotton, linen, and woollen manufacturers a protection of from 10 to 20 per cent., and to this extent on the same ground I see no reason why corn should not be protected.

“ But has not corn on the same principle a strong title to extra protection on account of the mode in which the raw material and the manufactured article are both subject to duty ?

“ It appears from the Report on Local Taxation (p. 27), that local rates amount on an average of the whole of England and Wales to 2*s.* 8*d.* in the pound on all *real* property.

“ In real property, houses and other property distinct from land are included, and thence it is argued that land has no peculiar burthens.

“ It is true the burthen is not peculiar ; but it operates in a peculiar manner, just as a tax on cotton or wool would not be peculiar to manufactures, because every man using cotton or wool in a raw state would pay it equally with the manufacturer ; but it would operate with peculiar severity on the latter, because, by affecting his raw material, it would subject him to heavy additional charges on the preparation of his article for sale.

“ But while 2*s.* 8*d.* in the pound is the average rate of all England and Wales, it will be found that in agricultural districts the rate in the pound is much greater.

“It would require accurate investigation to ascertain what rate per acre of arable land a rate in the pound to this amount imposes. Whatever it be—and I cannot suppose that, taking all land together, you would value land as worth more than 20s. an acre—2s. 8*d.* per acre is the average charge imposed on the raw article of the corn manufacturer, or nearly 13 per cent.

“Relieve him from this charge, and freedom of import would be less important.

“In Scotland, where the charges on land are out of all proportion less, we consequently find that there is no strong feeling in favour of a protecting duty, while in England it is intense, precisely in proportion to these charges.

“The local rates affecting land in Scotland are about 300,000*l.*, in England and Wales 10,000,000*l.*

“This, I confess, appears to give a strong ground either for relief from the charge or for equivalent protection.

“As to the charge upon the manufactured article, viz., on the corn itself, in the shape of malt or a spirit duty, that is divided between the manufacturer and the consumer, and only affects the former inasmuch as it diminishes consumption; that is to say, provided the foreign competing article is placed in point of duty on an equal footing.

“The difficulty is how to give to the agriculturist that relief from the burthens which affect him to which he is entitled.

“If the protection which he now enjoys be suddenly withdrawn, it seems impossible. No sudden change of

taxation could be made to distribute among all classes equally what presses specially on him.

“If the protection be very gradually taken off, the matter is relieved of some of its difficulty.

“It might be feasible to throw upon the public generally the charges for the administration of justice—to relieve the county rates from the maintenance of bridges, gaols, &c., to such an extent as to diminish in a small degree the charges on land.

“A new law of settlement might distribute the burthens connected with the relief of the poor more equitably. The removal of the Land Tax, or the advantageous facilitation of its redemption, might be made a means of relief.

“Alterations in the duties imposed on conveyances and other instruments affecting land might be suggested.

“Some reduction of the Malt Tax also might be effected, which would increase the consumption of the article. But these measures involve great changes of taxation, and could only be adopted from time to time either as the revenue admitted of reduction, or as other means of taxation could be devised.

“The real difficulty is to ensure the payment to agriculture of the equivalent when the present advantages are withdrawn.

“HENRY GOULBURN.”

Lord WHARNCLIFFE to Sir R. PEEL.

(Private and confidential.)

“ Curzon Street, Monday evening,  
December 1, 1845.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ The result of to-morrow’s Cabinet may be so momentous, that I venture to state to you, before we meet, what appears to me to be an honourable and reasonable course for us to take in the present circumstances.

“ In the first place let us consider our present position.

“ 1st. It seems to be agreed, on all hands, that the time is past for opening the ports, whether that measure would have been right or wrong if done a month ago. I retain my former opinion upon that point, and indeed am confirmed in it; and I merely allude to it as a measure, by common consent, not to be now resorted to.

“ 2nd. We have all agreed upon the instructions issued to Mr. Lucas, Commissioner in Ireland, making preparations against a sudden approach of dearth, in consequence of the failure of the crop of potatoes in any district there.

“ 3rd. We have all agreed that it is advisable to call Parliament together about the 8th of January.

“ 4th. There has not appeared, so far as I recollect, upon the part of any of us, any objection to a modification of the present Corn Law so far as respects maize and rice. Upon these points we are agreed: what are those upon which we differ?



“ 1. We are not agreed in our opinions of the intensity of the emergency as respects the question of a sufficiency or scarcity of corn and potatoes fit for human food in the United Kingdom.

“ 2. Some of us are decidedly of opinion, of which number I confess myself to be one, that there is, *as yet*, no such case made out as would justify us as a Government, in the eyes of all moderate people, and more especially of those whose exertions brought us into office, and who are now supporting us, for condemning and abrogating our own law of three years ago, without its having been yet really tested ; and for giving up at the same time that principle of protection, to the maintenance of which, in some shape or another, that party may, as I think, justly say this Government is pledged.

“ 3. If such a course is to be adopted, I for one, and I believe many other members of the Cabinet also, are clearly of opinion that it should be so, not by us, but by those who have hitherto been opposed to us.

“ I think I have stated fairly the points upon which we agree, as well as those in which we differ ; and let us next consider the present position of the Government as regards our duty to our Sovereign, and as her advisers.

“ Parliament is prorogued to December 16, and our intention is to summon it to meet for despatch of business about the 8th of January, before which latter period we must agree upon the terms of Her Majesty's Speech, or the Government is at an end.

“ But I cannot see why we are called upon now, more

than a month before that speech will be delivered, to decide whether any or what allusions or expressions should be made or used in it respecting the Corn Laws.

“We have our separate opinions at this moment ; but is there any one of us that can say that those opinions may not be very much altered, if not entirely changed, by what may in that interval become more decided and apparent one way or another, and is it not time enough for us to come to a final decision upon the advice to be given to the Queen some three weeks hence? But it may be said that such a delay would be unfair to the Queen. I cannot see that it would be so. Supposing the Cabinet was to assemble immediately after Christmas, and the differences in the opinions of its members were found to be so irreconcilable that we could not tender any advice to her, there would still be a fortnight for the formation of a new Government before the meeting of Parliament ; and if the day fixed by us should be so near as to make it inconvenient to the new Government, there would be no difficulty in again proroguing Parliament for a short time ; or even if Parliament were to assemble upon that day, there would be no difficulty in proposing to it to adjourn for such time as might be necessary for the new Government to make its arrangements.

“On the other hand, are there no reasons why this Government should not be hastily broken up even as respects the Queen? We have enjoyed up to this moment her entire confidence, and she has a right to ask from us the utmost caution and deliberation before

we take the extreme step of resigning our offices, and thereby of placing her at the mercy of others.

“As respects the party in the State of which we may be said to be the head, and the public in general, no one can doubt that the putting an end to the Government at this precise juncture would have the worst effect upon the interests, and I may say the safety of the country, as well as upon our own characters. Such an event is entirely unsuspected at this moment, and would come like a clap of thunder upon our friends, who would naturally say they were betrayed, and the Conservative party would be annihilated. It would be attributed to the effect produced by Lord John Russell’s letter, and by the factious agitation now getting up, which would not only be most discreditable to us, but tend to weaken the power of resistance still left against any other measure backed by a popular cry from the great manufacturing towns.

“Is it, however, quite impossible that some course might be taken which would meet with the general, if not the universal concurrence of the Cabinet? The real difficulty is this: how can this Government, so pledged as it is, consistently propose such measures to Parliament as in their conscience they must feel to be, not only an abandonment of the present Corn Law, but of the principle of protection? And can they not propose such as, retaining that principle, will only modify that law according to the lessons of experience, or even will suspend its operation temporarily and to meet a great emergency? It appears to me that it can; and I venture to throw out the following suggestions:

“1st. That the Queen’s Speech, if it should ultimately be decided to recommend in it a modification or a temporary suspension of the Corn Law, should do so in terms which would show our decided intention to uphold the principle of protection in some way or other.

“2nd. That we should in Parliament proclaim our readiness to consider, with the calmness that befits the subject, whether some advantages might not be given to the agricultural interest which would compensate it for the loss of those which they imagine they receive from the present Corn Laws; but that, as we mean to uphold the principle of protection, we cannot consent to a repeal of the Corn Laws without a certainty of Parliament giving to that interest effectual relief in the shape of removal of burthens to which they are now subject, if not exclusively, at least mainly. If we should be defeated in all this by the efforts of our natural opponents, or by the desertion of our friends, or by a combination of both, we shall at all events die honourably, and with the approbation of our own consciences.

“I now submit all this for your consideration, as the result of my own reflections only; and am, &c.

“WHARNCLIFFE.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lord WHARNCLIFFE.

“Whitehall, December 2.

“MY DEAR WHARNCLIFFE,

“I have read with the greatest attention your letter to me of yesterday.

“It does not remove my previous impression that by

far the best course, both for our own credit and for the welfare of the country, is that each member of the Cabinet should give his honest opinion upon this question.

“Looking at the measure itself, and its probable consequences, is it right, either as a measure of present necessity or justifiable precaution, that the ports should be opened for a limited period for the admission of foreign grain ?

“Yours, &c.,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

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From Lord Stanley, to whom I sent the letter addressed to me by Lord Wharncliffe, I received the following note :—

Lord STANLEY to Sir R. PEEL.

“St. James’s Square, December 2, 1845.

“MY DEAR PEEL,

“Many thanks for sending me Wharncliffe’s letter. I concur in much that he says, and should concur in more were the question confined to the temporary measure. But as it extends to the main question of permanent protection, our minds ought to be made up as to the extent of that protection, in the main, if not in every detail ; and the course which he suggests of throwing the subject before Parliament, and declaring our readiness ‘to consider with calmness’ any measure of compensation for the removal of protection which we think ought to be maintained, is language very suitable

to an Opposition, or to independent Members of Parliament, but not to a Government. Such at least is my impression.

“ Yours, &c.

“ STANLEY.”

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Thinking it desirable to bring before the Cabinet a specific measure, and thus terminate discussions leading to no good practical result, on Tuesday the 2nd of December I read to the Cabinet the following Memorandum:—

✓CABINET MEMORANDUM, December 2.

“ Before I advert to the measures which it may be advisable to propose in reference to the import of foreign corn, or in connection with the question of protection to agriculture, I feel it incumbent on me to remind my colleagues of the opinions which I have expressed in the House of Commons upon that subject.

“ I have always refused to give a pledge against an alteration of the existing Corn Laws. There were two debates on the Corn Laws in the course of last Session in which I took a part—the one on Lord John Russell’s Resolutions, the other on Mr. Villiers’s motion for the total and immediate Repeal of the Corn Laws.

“ On these motions I used expressions to this effect :

“ ‘ I cannot say that agriculture ought to be exempt from the gradual application of principles that have been applied to other interests.’

“ ‘ I wish to reconcile the gradual approach towards

sound principles with a full and cautious consideration of the relations which have been established and the interests that have grown up under a different system.’

“ ‘From the principle involved in the 2nd and 3rd Resolutions (Lord John Russell’s), that protective duties are in themselves evils, I cannot withhold my assent ; but the retrocession from a system of protective duties long established requires caution and great consideration.’

“ These opinions I expressed, and to these opinions I still adhere.

“ I think, quite independently of present circumstances, that it would be true policy gradually to relax protective duties, and that the experience of the last four years is decisively in favour of that policy.

“ If, in order to meet an unexpected calamity, the import duties on foreign grain were suspended, it would become necessary immediately to avow the course we intended to pursue with reference to the state of the law at the period when the suspension would expire.

“ It would be quite out of my power, consistently with my recorded opinions and my present convictions, to guarantee the existing amount of protection to agricultural produce on the termination of the suspension.

“ My opinions in favour of the gradual reduction of protective duties are certainly not weakened by what has passed since the close of last Session.

“ It would be perfectly consistent with my opinions to propose a reconsideration of the Corn Law.

“ I think it ought to be reconsidered, and amended—whether import duties were temporarily suspended or not.

“Suspension would indeed *compel* a reconsideration of the law, which might possibly have been postponed, under other circumstances than the present, to a future Session.

“I am not at this moment prepared with the details of a new Corn Bill: those details would require previous inquiry and careful consideration.

“There are some points on which I think a decision might at once be taken by the Cabinet. For instance, we could not, in my opinion, vindicate that enactment which makes the duty on Indian corn to fluctuate with the price of barley.

“It would be for the real advantage of all classes to admit Indian corn at the lowest possible amount of duty.

“One’s first impression is to admit grain, the growth or produce of British possessions, at a nominal duty.

“But a little consideration shows that no hasty decision should be taken on a point even of this subordinate kind.

“There might be no objection to admit grain, the produce of British possessions to the eastward of the Cape of Good Hope, at a nominal duty.

“But the North American provinces, other than Canada, present considerable difficulties, and I am not at this moment prepared to solve them.

“You admit Canadian wheat at a nominal duty, on the express condition that wheat the produce of the United States shall not be imported into Canada without the payment of a duty of 3s. a quarter.

“If you admit the free import of all grain without



restriction or condition from the other North American provinces, you give or appear to give them a decided advantage over Canada—because, so far as law is concerned, you establish a premium on the transit of American grain through those provinces in preference to Canada.

“Suppose, however, you were to admit Indian corn duty free, and suppose you could solve the difficulties as to the North American provinces, or, not being enabled to solve them, were to admit East Indian and Australian grain at a nominal duty, will you maintain without alteration the existing law as to the import of oats, barley, and wheat?

“I cannot enter into an engagement to do so.

“I think the very fact that you had relaxed the law in favour of maize and of Colonial grain, would increase the difficulty of maintaining unaltered the law in respect to wheat, oats, and barley.

“There would be something invidious (considering that the admission of maize is urged as a decided benefit to the farmer) in admitting maize freely, and refusing all relaxation of the import duties as to wheat.

“The admission of all Colonial corn into the British market, particularly if the conditions now attached to the admission of Canadian corn were not insisted on, would increase the differential duty in favour of your own Colonies as compared with foreign countries.

“A new Corn Law on that basis would be more unfavourable to foreign countries and to our commercial intercourse with foreign countries than the present Corn Law.

“Prussia, the United States, and other countries would complain of this, and with justice: it would be a retrograde policy as to them.

“For these reasons it appears to me that some modification of the law is unavoidable, even if you should not suspend the import duties on corn to meet a particular emergency.

“Then at once arises the question, what ought to be, not the precise details, but the character of that modification?

“Shall it proceed upon the basis of guaranteeing permanent protection to some extent or other to agriculture, or shall the new law contain within itself the principle of the gradual reduction and ultimate abolition of protective duties?

“I cannot undertake to guarantee as permanent the protection which any new law may for the present afford.

“It would naturally and justly be said of any *new* law that there can be no more security for the continuance of that law than there was for the continuance of that of 1842.

“I do not think you can carry a new Corn Law modifying the present, and professing to be permanent in its operation. Many advocates of protection would prefer to such a law, accompanied with such uncertainties, that final adjustment which can only ensue from total repeal.

“The choice, then, in my opinion, is between resistance to alteration in the existing law (so far at least as wheat, oats, and barley are concerned), and the pro-

posal of a new law that involves in its own enactments the principle of progressive reduction of protective duties.

“Mr. Ricardo proposed that there should be a certain duty upon corn, that duty annually diminishing by one shilling.

“The objections to a fixed duty apply to this plan, and I for one am committed against a fixed duty, retain my objections to it, and could not propose it.

“It would be consistent both with the course I have heretofore taken, and with my present opinions, to propose such a measure as that of which I will give the main outline.

“It will be founded upon the principle of the present law while it continues in operation, but will in the course of that operation ensure the ultimate and not remote extinction of protective duties.

“I will undertake to propose such a law, and should hope to be enabled to carry it if it meets with the cordial and unanimous sanction of my colleagues.

“I will first explain the purport of the law, and then, to make it perfectly clear, give examples of its operation.

“I propose that when wheat shall be below 51s. a quarter there shall be a certain duty upon import; that when wheat is above 51s. such duty shall diminish by one shilling, as the average price of wheat taken for a given period shall increase by one shilling; and that the whole scale of duties, the fixed and the varying, shall be diminished annually by one shilling or some other specified amount.

## EXAMPLES.

“Let us take the year 1846. If wheat be below 51s. a quarter, let a duty say of 8s. be payable on foreign import. If wheat be above 51s. let there be a corresponding increase\* of duty.

1846.			
WHEAT.	PRICE.		DUTY.
At or below	51s.	..	8s.
„	52s.	..	7s.
„	53s.	..	6s.
„	54s.	..	5s.

And so on, the duty falling to one shilling when the price of wheat is at or above 58s. a quarter.

“In the following year, 1847, I propose that the scale of duties should be diminished by one shilling.

1847.			
WHEAT.	PRICE.		DUTY.
Below	51s.	..	7s.
„	52s.	..	6s.
„	53s.	..	5s.
	&c. &c.		

In 1848.			
WHEAT.	PRICE.		DUTY.
Below	51s.	..	6s.
„	52s.	..	5s.
„	53s.	..	4s.

“I should propose that, either by this progressive diminution of duty to be annually continued or at a certain time to be named in the law, all duties on the import of grain, meal, and flour should be abolished.

“December 2, 1845.”

“ROBERT PEEL.

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\* *Sic* in orig.—(Eds.)

Our discussions in the Cabinet continued from the day when the Cabinet reassembled (25th of November) until the 5th of the following month.

There was a period in the course of those discussions when I entertained the belief that some such measure as that which I suggested in the Memorandum of the 2nd of December might receive the assent of all my colleagues. These expectations were, however, not fulfilled in the result.

Lord Stanley and the Duke of Buccleuch, after anxious reflection, each signified his inability to support a measure involving the ultimate repeal of the Corn Laws.

All the other members of the Government were prepared to support such a measure, and I felt assured of the cordial support of all, even of those who had hesitated in the first instance, from the moment that they consented to waive their objections. I could not, however, conceal from myself that the assent given by many was a reluctant one—that it was founded rather on a conviction (a perfectly pure and conscientious conviction) of the public evil that must arise from the dissolution of the Government at such a time and from such a cause, than on the deliberate approval of the particular course which I urged upon their adoption.

Under such circumstances, and considering the declared intention of the Duke of Buccleuch and Lord Stanley to retire from office, I thought it very doubtful whether I could conduct to a successful issue a proposal for the final adjustment of the Corn Law.

As I have previously observed, I thought that the public interest would be very injuriously affected by the failure of an attempt made by a Government to adjust that question. Other members of the Cabinet, without exception, I believe, concurred in this opinion; and, under these circumstances, I considered it to be my duty to tender my resignation to Her Majesty.

On the 5th of December I repaired to Osborne in the Isle of Wight, and humbly solicited Her Majesty to relieve me from duties which I felt I could no longer discharge with advantage to Her Majesty's service.

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In the course of the interviews with Her Majesty which took place after my arrival at Osborne on the 5th December, I trust that I satisfied the Queen that I was influenced by considerations of the public interest, and not by the fear of responsibility or of reproach, in humbly tendering my resignation of office. Her Majesty was pleased to accept it with marks of confidence and approbation which, however gratifying, made it a very painful act to replace in Her Majesty's hands the trust she had confided to me.

I will not say more than that the generous support which I had uniformly received from Her Majesty and from the Prince, and all that passed on the occasion of my retirement, made an impression on my heart which can never be effaced. I could not say less than this without doing violence to feelings of grateful and dutiful attachment.

Anticipating the difficulty which Her Majesty would have in forming a Government, considering all the circumstances under which the existing Government was about to be dissolved, and the state of party connections, and desirous to do anything in my power to diminish these difficulties, I addressed to Her Majesty, on my return to London, the following letter. The purport of it I had verbally communicated to the Queen and Prince during my stay at Osborne.

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It seems proper to make the following letter an exception to the general rule which in this Memoir has guided the Editors relative to the confidential communications to or from the Queen, which have not already with Her Majesty's permission been laid before Parliament. For, as will be seen, this letter was written with the avowed object of being made known to Lord John Russell as the statesman selected by Her Majesty to succeed Sir Robert Peel. And Lord John Russell himself, in his letter of the 16th of December, expressly refers to the paper of Sir Robert Peel thus communicated to him as forming one of the elements of his own determination.—(*Eds.*)

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Sir R. PEEL to the QUEEN.

“ Whitehall, December 8, 1845.

“ Sir Robert Peel presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and, influenced by no other motive than the desire to contribute, if possible, to the relief of your Majesty from embarrassment and to the protection of the public interests from injury, is induced to make

to your Majesty this confidential communication explanatory of Sir Robert Peel's position and intentions with regard to the great question which is now agitating the public mind.

“Your Majesty can, if you think fit, make this communication known to the Minister who, as successor to Sir Robert Peel, may be honoured by your Majesty's confidence.

“On the 1st of November last, Sir Robert Peel advised his colleagues, on account of the alarming accounts from Ireland and many districts in this country as to the failure of the potato crop from disease, and for the purpose of guarding against contingencies which in his opinion were not improbable, humbly to recommend to your Majesty that the duties on the import of foreign grain should be suspended for a limited period, either by an Order in Council or by Legislative Enactment—Parliament in either case being summoned without delay.

“Sir Robert Peel foresaw that this suspension, fully justified by the tenor of the reports to which he has referred, would compel, during the interval of suspension, the reconsideration of the Corn Laws.

“If the opinions of his colleagues had then been in concurrence with his own, he was fully prepared to take the responsibility of suspension, and of the necessary consequence of suspension, a comprehensive review of the laws imposing restrictions on the import of foreign grain and other articles of food, with a view to their gradual diminution and ultimate removal.



“ He was disposed to recommend that any new laws to be enacted should contain within themselves the principle of gradual and ultimate removal.

“ Sir Robert Peel is prepared to support in a private capacity, measures which may be in general conformity with those which he advised as a Minister.

“ It would be unbecoming in Sir Robert Peel to make any reference to the details of such measures.

“ Your Majesty has been good enough to inform Sir Robert Peel that it is your intention to propose to Lord John Russell to undertake the formation of a Government. The principle on which Sir Robert Peel was prepared to recommend the reconsideration of the laws affecting the import of the main articles of food was in general accordance with that referred to in the concluding paragraph of Lord John Russell’s Letter to the Electors of the City of London.

“ Sir Robert Peel wished to accompany the removal of restrictions on the admission of those articles with relief to the land from such charges as are unduly onerous, and with such other provisions as, in the terms of Lord John Russell’s Letter, ‘caution and even scrupulous forbearance may suggest.’

“ Sir Robert Peel will support measures founded on that general principle, and will exercise any influence he may possess to promote their success.

“ Sir Robert Peel feels it to be his duty to add, that should your Majesty’s future advisers, after consideration of the heavy demands made upon the army of the country for colonial service, of our relations with the United States, and of the bearing which steam naviga-

tion may have upon maritime warfare and the defence of the country, deem it advisable to propose an addition to the army and increased naval and military estimates, Sir Robert Peel will support the proposal, and will do all that he can to prevent it from being considered as indicative of hostile or altered feelings towards France ; and will assume for the increase in question any degree of responsibility, present or retrospective, which can fairly attach to him."

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Lord John Russell, who had been at Edinburgh when summoned to attend Her Majesty, was not able to reach Osborne until the afternoon of the 11th.

On receiving at that time the proposal to form a new administration, his Lordship appears to have adverted to the great difficulties of his position on the Corn Law question, more especially as apprehending the resistance of the House of Lords. And upon the whole he stated that he was not prepared to give any positive reply until after he had consulted with his friends and former colleagues. For that purpose he returned to London on the morning of the 12th.—(*Eds.*)

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On the 12th of December Lord John Russell had an interview with Sir James Graham at his (Lord John Russell's) request, and expressed a wish to ascertain, through the intervention of Sir James Graham, the nature and extent of the support which he might expect from me in the attempt to adjust the Corn Law question.

The following letter was addressed by Sir James Graham to Lord John Russell, after having been

previously submitted to me. The two notes from Sir James Graham to me refer to this letter. The enclosure named in the first was a note from Lord John Russell requesting an interview.

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Whitehall, December 12.

“ I have this moment received the enclosed. I have answered it by saying that I will call on him at half past five. As soon as I have paid the visit and had the interview, I will come to you.

“ Yours most sincerely,

“ J. R. G. GRAHAM.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Hill Street, December 12.

“ I send you the copy of the letter exactly as I have written it to Lord John Russell. When we meet to-morrow you can return this copy to me, for I have kept no other ; but you may wish to have a copy taken for your own use.

“ J. R. G. GRAHAM.”

Sir J. GRAHAM to Lord J. RUSSELL.

“ Hill Street, December 12.

“ DEAR LORD JOHN,

“ With reference to our conversation of this evening, the purport of Sir Robert Peel’s communications to me was this :—

“He thinks it would be embarrassing were he to suggest the details of any measure for the adjustment of the great question which presses for a settlement.

“He was prepared, some time before your letter of the 22nd of November had appeared, to advise measures which in their general outline did not materially vary from those which that letter suggested.

“He would have thought it good policy to conciliate acquiescence in the certain attainment at no remote period of the main object, by very liberal dealing as to pecuniary burdens, and at the same time to prevent alarm and the risk of disturbance by such provisions as caution and forbearance might suggest.

“In the present state of public affairs, and with Sir Robert Peel’s views as to the importance of a settlement of this question, he would be little disposed to make captious objections to the details of measures conceived in the spirit to which I have above referred, or to enter into party combinations for their defeat or obstruction.

“For my own part I do not hesitate to state my concurrence in the policy on which Sir Robert Peel was prepared to act, and my readiness to support it.

“Yours truly,

“J. R. G. GRAHAM.”\*

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\* In the original draft of this letter the first portion is in Sir Robert Peel’s handwriting; but the concluding paragraph, “For my own part,” &c., is added in Sir James Graham’s.—(*Eds.*)

In consequence of the letter thus addressed by Sir James Graham, with my concurrence, to Lord John Russell, Lord John had an interview with Her Majesty.

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The second interview of Lord John Russell with Her Majesty took place at Windsor Castle on the afternoon of the 13th of December, Lord John being on that occasion accompanied by the Marquess of Lansdowne. It appears that these two eminent statesmen were not prepared at that period to take office, without further explanations or assurances from Sir Robert Peel and other members of his Cabinet.

From the letter of Sir Robert Peel to the Duke of Wellington, which will presently follow, it will be seen that the Queen was graciously pleased to comply with the wish expressed to her by Lords John Russell and Lansdowne, and Herself to write to Sir Robert Peel, stating the object which the future Ministers had in view.

The purport and the result of Her Majesty's communication will be sufficiently shown by the course of Sir Robert Peel's own Memoir, with which the Editors now proceed.—(*Eds.*)

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If I had consulted my own private feelings, or had regarded my own personal interests, the reply I would have sent to Her Majesty would have been to this effect, that I admitted the reasonableness of the claim preferred by Lord Lansdowne—that I thought there ought to be a public proof that those of my late colleagues who had dissented from me were unable or unwilling to undertake the formation of a Government, and that I therefore advised Her Majesty to ascertain the fact in the clearest and most unequivocal manner,

by formally proposing to Lord Stanley, or to others adverse to a change in the Corn Laws, the formation of an administration on that basis.

I did not take this course for the following reasons:—

Though some of my colleagues had differed from me on the great question at issue, yet my communications with them had been, throughout our discussions, of the most unreserved and friendly character. We had spoken together of the probable result of our differences, namely the dissolution of the Government, and of the probable consequences of such an event, and I knew from that confidential intercourse that they were not willing to undertake the responsibility of forming a Government.

I had also good reason to believe that they deprecated the formal appeal being made to them by the Queen, and that they would greatly prefer to any such appeal that I should convey the assurance to Her Majesty that they were not prepared to undertake the Government.

If therefore I had advised the Queen to send to Lord Stanley, and to propose to him the office of Prime Minister, I should have advised Her Majesty to make an offer of her confidence which I had every reason to believe would not be accepted.

It may be that I was wrong in this—wrong both in point of policy and in point of official etiquette—that according to the established usage in such cases I should not have undertaken to answer for, or even to ascertain the inclinations of others, having different views from my own on the great point at issue—that I

should have advised the Queen to go through the ceremony of making a direct, formal offer, and receiving a formal refusal. Considering the events that so soon occurred, and my own most unlooked-for resumption of power, it would probably have been advantageous to my personal position if I had counselled this formal offer, foreseeing the formal refusal ; but I do not regret the course which I took : it was prompted by no interested or ungenerous policy, by no other motive than the desire to obviate the necessity of a useless parade—painful to the Queen, and painful also to those to whom the Queen must address herself. While, however, I resolved to give that assistance to Her Majesty which she required from me, and to enable Her Majesty to remove the difficulty which had been urged by Lord Lansdowne as an impediment to the acceptance of power by his friends, I resolved at the same time not to act upon the general impressions which previous confidential communications with my dissenting colleagues had left upon my mind, but to take the precaution of ascertaining whether others concurred as to the justice of these impressions, and of precluding by a direct personal communication with Lord Stanley and the Duke of Buccleuch the possibility of any misunderstanding on my part in respect to their views and intentions.

I sought therefore interviews with Lord Stanley and with the Duke of Buccleuch. I put each in possession of the purport of the communication which I had received from Her Majesty, stated the object for which I made the inquiry, and received from each the re-

newed assurance which I expected in respect to their fixed resolution not to undertake the task of forming an administration. With the Duke of Wellington the accompanying correspondence passed :—

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“ Whitehall, December 14.

“ MY DEAR DUKE,

“ The Queen saw Lord John Russell and Lord Lansdowne together yesterday.

“ Lord John and Lord Lansdowne inquired from the Queen whether those members of the Government who had differed from Sir R. Peel on the question of Protection to Agriculture were willing or able to form a new administration, observing that they might else say at a later period that they were prepared, but they had never been asked.

“ The Queen undertook to write to me on the subject.

“ I certainly understood that it was the opinion of all the members of the Government that it was not for the public advantage that the attempt should be made to form a Government on the principle of supporting the present Corn Law, or avowedly upon a protection principle.

“ I have seen Lord Stanley this day, and he states that he could not undertake to form such a Government, or to advise the attempt.

“ Do you consider that I should be authorised in informing the Queen that no member of the present



Government is prepared to form an administration on the principles above referred to?

“ I will see if I possibly can the Duke of Buccleuch to-morrow, although I feel very confident he would not undertake the task.

“ Ever, &c.,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Strathfieldsaye, December 14, 1845.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I have just now received your letter of this day's date.

“ As well as I can recollect what passed at the Cabinet on Friday before you went to Osborne, I think that you are authorised in informing the Queen that no member of the existing Cabinet is prepared to undertake to form a Government on the principle of maintaining the present Corn Law.

“ The question was discussed, whether it was desirable that you should propose a modification of the existing law, as suggested by you, and break up the Government after that proposition, unsupported by the landed interest in the House of Commons, should have been rejected ; or that you should at once inform Her Majesty that you could not make that proposition to the House of Commons with the support of an united Cabinet ; and the last-mentioned course was decided upon nearly unanimously.

“ I don't recollect to have heard distinctly whether one member of the Cabinet, namely, Lord Granville Somerset, was in favour of your stating your proposition to Parliament.

“ I don't think that it occurred to any member of the Cabinet that it was possible to form a Government of any other persons, or of any other modification of the existing Cabinet, on the principle of maintaining the existing Corn Laws.

“ Most sincerely yours,

“ WELLINGTON.”

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In consequence of the communications, written or verbal, which Sir Robert had thus received, he wrote a letter to the Queen, on the 15th of December, stating that he “ feels himself “ to be fully justified in informing your Majesty that no one “ of his colleagues who differed from Sir Robert Peel on the “ subjects which have been under the recent consideration of “ the Cabinet, is prepared to undertake the formation of a “ Government, or thinks that it would be for the public advantage that such an attempt should be made by other parties.”

But this answer to the point which Lord Lansdowne had suggested was not the only topic of Sir Robert Peel's letter to the Queen. Sir Robert Peel also understood Lord John Russell to have “ notified the intention to send to me the outlines of a measure for the adjustment of the Corn Laws, to “ ascertain from me whether it was such a measure as I was “ willing to support, and if I disapproved of the measure, or “ could not pledge myself to its support, in that case to decline “ the assumption of the Government.”

“ I felt it my duty,” adds Sir Robert Peel, in his explanatory Memorandum, “ humbly to protest against the fulfilment by “ Lord John Russell of any such intention ;” and this accord-

ingly formed the main subject of his letter to the Queen of the 15th of December.

For the same reasons as they have already stated in their note at page 223, the Editors think that the argument on this subject being intended not for Her Majesty alone, but mainly for communication to Lord John Russell, may, as in the former instance, justify an exception to their general rule.—(*Eds.*)

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Sir R. PEEL to the QUEEN.

(Extract.)

“ Whitehall, December 15.

“ Your Majesty has a perfect right to command from Sir Robert Peel the unreserved expression of his opinions, and every assistance that it is in his power to render for the purpose of relieving your Majesty and the country from embarrassment.

“ It is his earnest desire, without regard to any other than purely public considerations, to promote the adjustment of the great question, the settlement of which is become, by the events that have recently occurred, of increased urgency and importance.

“ The last thing which he contemplates is the deriving of any personal or party advantage from the issue of an attempt to effect that settlement.

“ Sir Robert Peel is fully sensible of the difficulties under which any administration that can be now formed by your Majesty must labour, and of the injurious consequences which must follow the failure of an honest endeavour to adjust the question at issue.

“ Every consideration of public duty must combine to induce Sir Robert Peel to facilitate and promote,

rather than to obstruct, measures having that object in view.

“ But Sir Robert Peel feels a strong conviction that the probability of success would not be increased by the communication to him of the outlines of a plan of adjustment for the purpose of receiving from him a preliminary pledge that it would have his support.

“ He humbly submits to your Majesty that there are objections to such a course which deserve to be maturely weighed.

“ A plan of adjustment might possibly embrace a series of measures which can hardly as yet have been carefully considered.

“ After consideration they might admit of change and modification, which your Majesty’s servants ought to retain full liberty to make.

“ The subsequent explanation of such changes or modification to a person not in your Majesty’s service would be full of difficulty.

“ Suggestions on his part with a view to modify or improve a measure thus communicated would be equally embarrassing.

“ But what chiefly presses on the mind of Sir Robert Peel is this—that a knowledge that a plan of adjustment had been concerted between Lord John Russell and himself, would increase rather than diminish the risk of failure. It would on the one hand indispose towards the support of the measure many of those friendly to the new Government who might otherwise be inclined to receive it with favour—on the other it would diminish the

influence and authority of Sir Robert Peel in respect to the promotion of a settlement, and his power to render useful service.

“ He is convinced that previous concert, or a previous pledge on his part to support a particular measure of adjustment, would be distasteful to the House of Commons, and embarrassing to all parties.

“ He assures your Majesty that these, and these alone, are the motives which induce him to discourage such a communication as that which Lord John Russell proposes to make to him.

“ In the general assurance which he has given, in a previous part of this communication, as to his earnest desire to be enabled to co-operate in effecting a just and comprehensive settlement of the question at issue, he is joined by those of his colleagues in the House of Commons with whom, since the receipt of your Majesty’s letter, he has had the opportunity of conferring—Sir James Graham, the Earl of Lincoln, and Mr. Herbert. Their concurrence with Sir Robert Peel in this respect was spontaneously and cordially given. Sir Robert Peel feels that he could not require or expect from them any more precise engagements.”

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The following letter from Lord John Russell to the Queen, as also the subsequent one of December 20, were by Her Majesty’s gracious permission read by Lord John to the House of Commons, in his explanatory speech of January 19, 1846. Thus, both these letters have already appeared in print.—(*Eds.*)

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Lord J. RUSSELL to the QUEEN.

“Chesham Place, December 16.

“Lord John Russell presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and has the honour to submit to your Majesty the following considerations.

“Sir Robert Peel’s letter to your Majesty, communicated to Lord John Russell at Osborne House, offers the support of Sir Robert Peel to his successors, provided their measures should be founded on certain principles which are there explained, and framed in a spirit of caution and forbearance towards the interests to be affected.

“The measures which Sir Robert Peel had in contemplation appear to have been a present suspension of the duties on corn, a repeal of the Corn Laws at no remote period, preceded by a diminution of duties, relief to the occupiers of land from burthens by which they are peculiarly affected, so far as it may be practicable.

“Upon full consideration of these proposals, Lord John Russell is fully prepared to assent to the opening of the ports and to the final relief which it was intended to afford.

“But upon maturely weighing the second proposal, namely, that by which duties would, after a suspension or temporary repeal, be reimposed and again diminished, there appear to him to be grave objections to such a measure.

“The advantage given thereby to the land appears to him more apparent than real; the uncertainty of prices in future years would be aggravated, and the prospect of a complete free trade would be still kept in the distance, the prospect alarming the farmer, and the distance irritating the merchant and manufacturer.

“In this view he finds that many persons deeply engaged to the maintenance and support of the agricultural class entirely participate.

“So great an object as the settlement of this question might indeed have been held sufficient to justify the support of Sir Robert Peel’s administration, had they proposed such a measure. But, as Lord John Russell is placed at present, he could not himself propose a measure against which the weight of argument as well as public opinion appears to him to preponderate.

“Had the harvest been plentiful and corn cheap, it might have been very advisable to have diminished the duties gradually, but the restoration of a duty after suspension has all the appearance of the re-enactment of a protective law.

“Lord John Russell humbly submits to your Majesty that, should the proposal of an immediate repeal instead of immediate suspension and ultimate repeal of the Corn Law preclude Sir Robert Peel from affording that support to the new Government which he spontaneously and handsomely offered in his letter of the 8th of December, Lord John Russell must humbly

decline the task so graciously confided to him by your Majesty.

“Lord John Russell concurs with the reasoning of Sir Robert Peel, which shows the inexpediency of pledging him to the outline of a series of measures. The measures for fiscal purposes, therefore, would have to be considered in detail by those alone who may be in your Majesty’s service.

“Lord John Russell trusts that your Majesty will attribute the reluctance which he feels to undertake the Government without a previous knowledge of the opinion of Sir Robert Peel to the extent here stated, to his very deep sense of the injury the country may sustain from the rejection of a measure of such vital importance, and not to a desire to obtain a security for those who may be in power.”

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The following letter was read to the House of Commons by Lord John Russell, with Her Majesty’s sanction and Sir Robert Peel’s approval, January 19, 1846.—(*Eds.*)

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Sir R. PEEL to the QUEEN.

“Whitehall, December 17, 1845.

“Sir Robert Peel presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and takes the earliest opportunity of



acknowledging the receipt of your Majesty's letter of yesterday, which reached him at a late hour last night.

“ He feels assured that your Majesty will permit him humbly to refer to the communications which he has addressed to your Majesty since his tender of resignation, as an evidence of his earnest desire to co-operate in a private capacity in the adjustment of the question of the Corn Laws.

“ In the letter of Lord John Russell to your Majesty, Lord John Russell expresses his concurrence in the reasoning of Sir Robert Peel, which shows the inexpediency of pledging him to the outline of a series of measures connected with the settlement of that question.

“ Lord John Russell requires at the same time that Sir Robert Peel should give assurances which amount substantially to a pledge that he will support one of those measures, namely, the immediate and total repeal of the Corn Laws.

“ Sir Robert Peel humbly expresses to your Majesty his regret that he does not feel it to be consistent with his duty to enter upon the consideration of this important question in Parliament, being fettered by a previous engagement of the nature of that required from him.”

On the following day, namely, the 18th of December, Sir Robert Peel, in another correspondence, stated his objection more fully in the following words.—(*Eds.*)

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“ I objected to concert and to preliminary pledges as calculated to dissatisfy the House of Commons, to embarrass all parties, and to diminish my ability to render efficient service. A pledge on a particular point is open to all the objections to which a pledge to a series of measures is liable. It is open to some additional objections. I do not know, and I ought not to know, the equivalents with which it may be intended to accompany any particular plan for the adjustment of the Corn Laws.

“ I do not know the constitution of the Government which may make the proposal; that is to say, whether there may not have been serious differences as to the measures to be proposed—whether some may not have been inclined to support those measures which as Minister I should have advised; and yet in ignorance, in necessary ignorance of all that has passed of the nature and extent of the relief which may be offered to the land from fiscal burdens, I am asked to pledge myself to the support of one particular and most important measure, and to relinquish that power of free and independent action which will constitute my chief strength.

“ I must say that after the communications I have made to Her Majesty, with no other view than to pro-

mote the public welfare, I do not think this is reasonable or just.

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

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At five in the afternoon of the 18th of December, Lord John Russell returned to Windsor Castle, and stated to Her Majesty that after considerable consultation and a full consideration of his position, he was ready to undertake the formation of a Government.

In consequence, Sir R. Peel was invited by Her Majesty to a parting interview on his relinquishment of office, and to take his leave of Her Majesty ; and the time for that interview was fixed at three o'clock on the afternoon of the 20th. In his Memoir Sir R. Peel proceeds as follows.—(*Eds.*)

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I repaired to Windsor Castle on the following day at the time appointed. Previously to my arrival the Queen had received the following letter from Lord John Russell.

Lord J. RUSSELL to the QUEEN.

“ Chesham Place, December 20.

“ Lord John Russell presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and has the honour to state that he has found it impossible to form an administration.

“ Lord John Russell was aware, from the first moment when your Majesty was pleased to propose to him this commission, that there were very great difficulties in the way, which it required the most cordial co-operation on the part of his friends, and the firm support of a

large portion of those who followed Sir Robert Peel, to surmount.

“Lord John Russell has had solely in view the settlement of the question of Corn Laws by which the country is so much agitated.

“Those who had served your Majesty and your Majesty’s predecessor in Cabinet offices during the administrations of Lord Grey and Lord Melbourne, who were now in political connection with Lord John Russell, were consulted by him. They agreed on the principles by which they would be guided in framing a measure for the repeal of the Corn Laws.

“Thus one great difficulty was surmounted. But as the party which acts with Lord John Russell is in a minority in both Houses of Parliament, it was necessary to ascertain how far they were likely to obtain the support of Sir Robert Peel.

“Your Majesty is acquainted with all that has passed on this subject. Lord John Russell is quite ready to admit that Sir Robert Peel has been willing from the commencement to the end to diminish the difficulties in the course of a new Government prepared to attempt the settlement of the Corn Laws.

“But Sir Robert Peel could not, of course, rely on the support of his political friends should the proposed measure be in their eyes dangerous and unwise.

“In this uncertainty of obtaining a majority in the House of Commons, it was absolutely necessary that all those who were prominent in the political party to which Lord John Russell is attached should give their zealous aid and act in concert in the new administration.

“ Lord John Russell has in one instance \* been unable to obtain this concert, and he must now consider that task as hopeless which has been from the beginning hazardous.

“ Lord John Russell is deeply sensible of the embarrassment caused by the present state of public affairs. He will be ready, therefore, to do all in his power, as a member of Parliament, to promote the settlement of that question which, in present circumstances, is the source of so much danger, especially to the welfare and peace of Ireland.

“ Lord John Russell would have formed his Ministry on the basis of a complete free trade in corn, to be established at once without gradation or delay. He would have accompanied that proposal with measures of relief to a considerable extent of the occupiers of land from the burthens to which they are subjected.

“ But he will be little disposed to insist, as a member of Parliament, on what may seem to your Majesty’s advisers an impracticable course. The country requires above all things an early and peaceable settlement of a question which, if not so settled, may in an adverse state of affairs cause a fearful convulsion.”

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In that letter Lord John Russell fully admits “ that I had been willing from the commencement to the end

\* In the case of Earl Grey, as afterwards explained.—(*Eds.*)

to diminish the difficulties in the course of a new Government prepared to attempt the settlement of the Corn Laws.”

Lord John Russell did me no more than justice in this respect. When the Queen, for instance, mentioned to me her wish that the Duke of Wellington should retain the command of the army, I told Her Majesty that I thought the Duke's acquiescence in that wish would add great strength to the new Government, and that if any difficulty should arise on the part of the Duke, I would willingly do anything in my power to remove it.

I had readily undertaken to convey to Lord Liverpool (in whom the Queen had very great and deserved confidence) the letter in which Her Majesty earnestly pressed him to retain the appointment of Lord Steward of the Household.

On retiring from office I had voluntarily empowered the Queen to give to her new Minister assurances of my desire to co-operate with him in the final settlement of the Corn Law question to the full extent to which such assurances could justly be expected from me.

If I had subsequently refused to give the pledge peremptorily required, as to my support of a specific measure for the immediate and total repeal of the Corn Laws, I did so because I considered that, after what had passed, such a pledge could not be fairly required from me, because the giving of it would impair my influence in the House of Commons, and my ability to promote the object which it was so important to

attain—because also it was my opinion that a measure insuring final and early adjustment of the question, but less abrupt than immediate and absolute repeal, would be less exposed to the risk of failure in its passage through the two Houses of Parliament.

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I repaired to Windsor Castle at the time appointed.

On entering the room Her Majesty said to me very graciously, “So far from taking leave of you, Sir Robert, I must require you to withdraw your resignation, and to remain in my service.”

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Sir Robert Peel states that he was now informed of the particular circumstances which had induced Lord John Russell to abandon his attempt to form a Government—namely, that a decided objection had been made by Lord Grey to one proposed appointment; that Lord John Russell had been unwilling to admit the force of that objection; and that, not finding a perfectly unanimous concurrence among his own friends in respect to the constitution of his Government, he considered that he could not satisfactorily discharge a duty which the circumstances of the time and the state of parties rendered more than ordinarily arduous.

But Sir Robert adds: “I need not further refer to this point, because there must be in existence a more full and authentic record of the causes which induced Lord John Russell to abandon the attempt to form a Government than any which I can supply.”

Sir Robert Peel also mentions a report which had reached him a few hours before of a serious difference among Lord John Russell's friends, so that he was in some measure prepared for the

event now announced to him, and had had leisure to reflect upon the course which in such a contingency it might become his duty to pursue.—(*Eds.*)

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After repeating the wish that I should resume my duties as her Minister, Her Majesty was pleased to observe that I might naturally require time for reflection and for communication with my colleagues before I gave a decisive answer to Her Majesty's proposal.

I informed Her Majesty, with every respectful acknowledgment for her kind consideration, that I had been enabled to turn in my mind the course which I ought to pursue, should Her Majesty again require my services ; that I had not indeed communicated with any one, but that my own mind was made up as to that course, provided it had Her Majesty's entire and cordial approval.

I informed Her Majesty that, considering that Lord Stanley and those of my colleagues who had differed from me had positively declined to undertake the formation of a Government, and that Lord John Russell, having had the concurrence and support of all his political friends, with a single exception, had abandoned the attempt to form one, I should feel it my duty, if required to do so by Her Majesty, to resume office.

If such were Her Majesty's pleasure, I humbly advised Her Majesty to permit me to decide at once upon the resumption of it, and to be enabled to an-



nounce to my late colleagues, on my return to London, that I had not hesitated to re-accept the appointment of First Minister. I thought I should speak with much greater authority if I was to invite them to support me in an effort which I was determined, and which I had positively undertaken to make, than if I were to return to London, apparently undecided, for the purpose of asking their opinion as to the propriety of making that effort.

I informed Her Majesty that I had taken a similar course when invited by Her Majesty's predecessor, King William, to assume the office of First Minister in December, 1834.

At that time I had an interview with His Majesty immediately after my arrival from the Continent, and before I had seen any other person. His Majesty on that occasion kindly offered me the opportunity of reflection on the proposal he had made to me, and of conference with others. I informed His Majesty that I considered the success of the attempt at that time to form and conduct a Government very doubtful, and that the appearance of delay or indecision on my part would increase the probability of failure ; that I had made up my mind not to withhold any assistance which His Majesty might think me capable of rendering ; and I humbly recommended His Majesty to permit me to leave St. James's Palace, having kissed His Majesty's hand on the acceptance of office, and being thus enabled to enter into conference with others, clothed with the full authority of his Minister.

The Queen was pleased cordially to approve of the suggestion I had ventured to offer to Her Majesty, and I returned from Windsor Castle to London on the evening of the 20th of December, 1845, having resumed all the functions of First Minister of the Crown.

Immediately on my arrival in London I summoned a meeting of all those of my late colleagues who were within reach. It took place in Downing Street at a late hour of the evening of the 20th.

A letter, which I addressed to Her Majesty immediately after the meeting, gives an account of what passed at it.

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It appears that Sir Robert Peel having left Her Majesty at four o'clock, met his colleagues at his house in Downing-street the same evening at half-past nine. All the members of the Cabinet were present except Lord Granville Somerset.

Sir Robert Peel informed them that he had not summoned them for the purpose of deliberating on what was to be done, but for the purpose of announcing to them that he was Her Majesty's Minister, and whether supported or not, was firmly resolved to meet Parliament as Her Majesty's Minister, and to propose such measures as the public exigencies required. Failure or success must depend upon their decision; but nothing could shake Sir Robert Peel's determination to meet Parliament, and to advise the Speech from the Throne.

Lord Stanley declared that he must persevere in resigning; that he thought the Corn Laws ought to be adhered to, and might have been maintained.

The Duke of Buccleuch, thinking that new circumstances had arisen, would not at once decide upon resigning.

The other Members of the Cabinet stated their determination

to support Sir Robert Peel in the course he had announced to them.

The observations of the Duke of Wellington at this meeting (though Sir Robert Peel in his letter gives them in almost the same words) will be best stated from the Duke's own speech in the House of Lords on the Ministerial explanations of January 26, 1846 :—

“ I was of opinion that the formation of a Government in which Her Majesty would have confidence was of much greater importance than the opinions of any individual on the Corn Laws, or on any other law. My Lords, I received a letter from my Right Hon. friend, desiring me to attend a Cabinet Council that evening, which I did. I applauded the conduct of my Right Hon. friend. I was delighted with it. It was exactly the course which I should have followed myself under similar circumstances, and I therefore determined, my Lords, to stand by him.”—(*Eds.*)

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From the private letters of Sir Robert Peel, at the close of this political crisis, the Editors have selected the following :—

Sir R. PEEL to PRINCESS LIEVEN, at Paris.

“ Whitehall, December 26, 1845.

“ MY DEAR MADAME DE LIEVEN,

“ Many thanks for those few lines in which you say all that could be said in volumes.

“ However unexpected is the turn which affairs have taken, it is for the best.

“ I resume power with greater means of rendering public service than I should have had if I had not relinquished it.

“ But it is a strange dream.

“ I feel like a man restored to life after his funeral

service had been preached, highly gratified by such condolences on his death as I received from the King and our valued friend M. Guizot.

“ Believe me, &c.,

“ R. PEEL.”

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In my letter to the Queen I informed Her Majesty that the Duke of Buccleuch, at the meeting on the evening of the 20th of December, had desired time for reflection before he formed a decision upon the proposal made to him to continue in Her Majesty's service.

In the following letters is a full explanation of the grounds upon which, from the highest and most honourable motives, the Duke determined not to withhold, at this critical time, his services from the Government about to be reconstituted.

Duke of BUCCLEUCH to Sir R. PEEL.

(Confidential.)

“ Montagu House, December 20, 1845.

“ MY DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“ That which has occurred this evening, and that which you have communicated to us, the very critical state in which the country now is, and above all, the duty which I owe to Her Majesty under the present circumstances, has made a most strong impression upon my mind.

“ At the risk therefore of imputation of vacillation or of any other motive by others, may I ask of you to give me a few hours’ time for further reflection before finally deciding upon the course which I may feel it to be my duty to pursue ?

“ Believe me, &c.,

“ BUCCLEUCH.”

Duke of BUCCLEUCH to Sir R. PEEL.

(Private.)

“ Montagu House, December 22, 1845.

“ MY DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“ I have given the subject every consideration. I feel myself to be placed in a most difficult position. You shall have my answer and decision by twelve o’clock. I trust you will not think I am creating unnecessary delay.

“ Yours most sincerely,

“ BUCCLEUCH.”

Duke of BUCCLEUCH to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Montagu House, December 22, 1845.

“ MY DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“ I have embodied my views and opinions in a letter to you, which I now enclose, and have to thank you for the ample time you have afforded to me for consideration, and to maturely weigh every point before finally deciding.

“ I feel that every apology is due from me for the

time I have consumed, more especially on account of the Queen; but I feel satisfied Her Majesty will pardon the delay of one whose whole object was to decide in what manner he could most faithfully serve, and discharge his duty to his Sovereign.

“ Believe me, &c.

“ BUCCLEUCH.”

Duke of BUCCLEUCH to Sir R. PEEL.

(Confidential.)

“ Montagu House, December 22, 1845.

“ MY DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“ It is unnecessary for me again to discuss the decision which I found it to be my painful duty to take some days since, nor need I recapitulate the reasons why at that time I felt I could not, as a Minister of the Crown, concur in proposing to Parliament the measure which was suggested by you relative to the Corn Laws.

“ I have still further considered that question. My former opinion upon the original proposal remains unaltered; indeed subsequent events (I say this with all deference) have tended to confirm the view I then took; but on the other hand I feel that circumstances are changed, and that they now differ essentially from what they were eighteen days since, with most important public results and alterations, both as to the relative position of parties, and as regards the measure before alluded to.

“ Lord John Russell having failed to form an

administration, which upon your resignation he was called upon by Her Majesty to undertake, and actually undertook to do, you have resolved to accept the trust reposed in you by Her Majesty, and to face all difficulties.

“ In proceeding to reconstruct the Cabinet, you have had recourse to your former colleagues, expressing again your intention to bring forward a measure for the final settlement of the Corn Laws.

“ At our last meeting I again expressed my sentiments upon the subject, and I need not recur to them except to repeat that I am convinced that recent events have rendered the measure proposed by you one of necessity, and no longer one of expediency ; and that I hold it to be now most essential that the corn question should be settled and a final arrangement effected.

“ I still feel the greatest difficulty in being a party to the originating of the measure which it is proposed to introduce, not being, as I have already stated, convinced of the propriety of that course which in the first instance led to the present state of affairs.

“ I have every confidence in the integrity and purity of the motives that have prompted you to urge its adoption.

“ I see clearly the position in which Her Majesty is placed, and the only alternative left to her in the event of your failure ; I perceive the disastrous consequences that must ensue, and also the present critical state of the country.

“ Under these circumstances I feel it to be my imperative duty to my Sovereign and to my country to make every personal sacrifice.

“ I am ready therefore, at the risk of any imputation

that may be cast upon me, to give my decided support, not only to your administration generally, but to the passing through Parliament a measure for the final settlement of the Corn Laws, founded upon the principles which you have stated, provided no fresh difficulties (which I do not anticipate) should occur on its details, although the support of this measure, I can assure you, involves no small sacrifice of feeling and opinion on my part.

“There can be no doubt that your proposal will not satisfy the ultra Free-trade party; that it will be bitterly opposed by the ultra Protectionists; it may, indeed ought to be supported by the majority of your Whig opponents; but it will be repugnant to the feeling of the great mass of the landed or agricultural interest, by whose constant support you can alone expect to be able to carry on the government.

“You attach great weight to the influence which my name and conduct may have with them, and on that ground press for my continuance in office.

“Assuming your estimate of my influence to be correct, I arrive at a different conclusion as to the course by which it may be rendered available.

“So far from believing that my influence will be strengthened by my holding office, I am convinced it would be much greater out of office than in it; and even allowing that your administration would for the moment be weakened by my immediate retirement, I should place myself in a position ultimately to give you far more effectual support than I can hope to do by continuing to form a part of the Government.



“ Such being still my opinion, I must request of you to satisfy yourself from inquiries of those who have the best opportunities of judging of the effect out of doors, of the course I may take, upon the large and influential party alluded to, whether that which I have advanced as my own opinion is not correct.

“ Should the result of your inquiries and your further consideration still lead you to the opinion that my continuing a member of the Cabinet will be essential to the stability of the Government, I shall feel myself bound to put aside my private feelings and opinions, and make them give way to that which the public good requires.

“ Should I, however, continue in office, I must reserve to myself entire liberty to state in Parliament fully and clearly my position, and the reasons which have induced me to remain a member of the Cabinet, and to support the measure intended to be proposed relative to corn.

“ There is one point to which, before concluding, I would call your attention.

“ The extent and nature of my private affairs are such as to render it impossible for me, under any circumstances, to remain in office beyond a very limited period. I do not mention this as a present excuse, but as a future and not distant necessity ; indeed nothing but the aspect of the political horizon during the last autumn deterred me from then urging my retirement, lest by doing so I should cause any weakness or embarrassment to Her Majesty’s Government.

“ Believe me, &c.

“ BUCCLEUCH.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of BUCCLEUCH.

“Whitehall, December 22, 1845.

“MY DEAR DUKE OF BUCCLEUCH,

“I answer your very kind and most patriotic letter without a moment’s hesitation or delay.

“Your consent to remain in office I consider to be of the utmost importance at the present crisis. Believe me that no human being will impute your remaining in it to any other than the highest motives. Your indifference to office, your dislike of its restraints, your wish to be relieved from it, are perfectly well known.

“There will be one universal feeling that nothing but a sense of public duty could have influenced you.

“You could not by any exertions in a private capacity (though I well know they would be most zealously made) repair the damage which your retirement at the present moment would cause.

“Believe me, &c.

“ROBERT PEEL.

“You will be glad to hear that Lord Dalhousie, without a moment’s hesitation, accepted a seat in the Cabinet, retaining the office of President of the Board of Trade.”

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The Duke consented not merely to remain in the Cabinet, but publicly to signify his resolution to give the most cordial support to the policy adopted, by accepting the higher office of President of the Council (which had become vacant by the death of Lord

Wharncliffe),\* in lieu of the appointment which he had before held, that of Lord Privy Seal.

The Earl of Haddington, prompted by the same generous feelings by which every other of my colleagues was animated, consented to exchange for this latter office the much more important trust of First Lord of the Admiralty ; thus enabling me to secure for the new Government the services of Lord Ellenborough.

Lord Dalhousie marked his approval of the course which it was proposed to pursue, by becoming a member of the Cabinet ; and Mr. Gladstone gave the new administration the weight of his high character and great abilities and acquirements, by undertaking to succeed Lord Stanley as Secretary of State for the Colonial Department.

The Cabinet thus reconstructed took into immediate consideration the measures to be proposed to Parliament.

It appeared to me that the important events which had occurred in rapid succession since the resignation of the Government on the 6th of December gave a new character to the questions which had been discussed in Cabinet previously to that resignation, and left no prudent or safe alternative, except to propose at once a measure on the subject of the Corn Laws which would involve their absolute repeal at a definite and early period.

I submitted to the Cabinet the details of a measure

\* James Archibald, first Lord Wharncliffe, died after only a few days' illness, December 19, 1845.—(Eds.)

calculated to effect that object, which, with the other accompanying measures for encouragement to agricultural improvement, and relief from some of the burdens borne in undue proportion by the land, received the general approval of my colleagues.

Of the details of these several measures, and of the prolonged discussions in Parliament which took place upon them, a full and faithful record will be found in the Parliamentary debates.

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The following letter forms no part of Sir Robert Peel's own Memoir. But in a transaction where so many doubts were expressed and changes of purpose made, it would appear not quite candid to one of the Editors were he, in recording these on the part of others, to pass over his own in silence.—(*Eds.*)

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Lord MAHON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ Grosvenor Place, January 29, 1846.

“ MY DEAR SIR ROBERT,

“ When I wrote to you on the 22nd of December last, I did not think it possible that any circumstances or any measures could reconcile me to a repeal of the Corn Laws; and I offered, if you should find it more convenient for your new arrangements, to place my resignation at once in your hands.

“ In your reply you left me the option, of which I availed myself, to postpone my decision until after I should have heard and considered the details of your intended scheme.

“ Having done so with the greatest attention, I now beg leave to state to you that my attachment to the Corn Laws as a wise and just enactment, under the peculiar circumstances of our country, still continues, but that my opinion as to the practicability of still maintaining them is no longer the same.

“ I find in the House of Commons every member who holds or ever has held Cabinet office combined for the repeal of these laws. Not only this, but I find other members, of not inferior weight and authority, such as Lords Ashley and Sandon and F. Egerton, prepared, though on various grounds, either to agree with or acquiesce in the measures you propose. Such adhesions seem to me a most material element of consideration, both as evincing the impossibility of forming any Government in the House of Commons on the Protection principle, and from the impression of such names upon the public mind.

“ Out of doors I find not only that fierce and reckless agitation against the Corn Laws to which we have for some time past been accustomed, and which, as I think, might be successfully withstood, but also some doubt and uncertainty amongst some of the Conservatives, arising from your speech on the first day of the Session. Several of my principal Conservative constituents, though having, as I believe, full confidence in me, and willing to abide by my decision, have yet intimated to me since that speech that it would give them pleasure if I should find myself able to support your views.

“ Under all these circumstances of public feeling within and without the House of Commons, I have,

though very reluctantly, yet decidedly, come to the conclusion that the maintenance of the Corn Laws has become impossible, and that a prolongation of the struggle during a few months more could answer no useful purpose.

“ I am therefore prepared, if you please, to retain office, acquiescing in and voting for your new measures. Some may perhaps ascribe this course in me to a sordid motive—the love of place; or to a timid motive—the unwillingness to maintain my own views in the teeth of my political friendships. But I am vain enough to believe that my character, public and private, is such as to shield me from these reproaches, and at all events I am conscious of not deserving them.

“ It is very possible, however, that you might wish my office to be filled by some less reluctant convert—some more warm and eager adherent of your new measures—than I can honestly profess to be. If so, I can only assure you that you would find in me no obstacle to that wish, and that my votes with respect to your measures would in no degree be affected by the change in my position.

“ Believe me, &c.

“ MAHON.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lord MAHON.

“ Whitehall, January 30, 1846.

“ MY DEAR LORD MAHON,

“ I sincerely rejoice in the decision to which you have come, not merely from the personal satisfaction

which I must derive from retaining you as a colleague in the service of the Crown, but from a deep conviction that, with your opinions, the sincerity of which no man can doubt, the course you propose to take is the manly and honourable course worthy of your high station and character.

“It is quite impossible that I could have contemplated, during the interval of suspense, any arrangement providing for the contingency of your retirement, or that I could now contemplate any so satisfactory to myself as your retention of office.

“Believe me, &c.

“ROBERT PEEL.”

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A portion of the correspondence of Sir Robert Peel with the Duke of Wellington, between January and May, 1846, has been inserted by the Editors, as illustrating, with several circumstances of great interest, the progress of the Corn Law Repeal Bill through both Houses.

The letters to and from the Duke in June, 1846, form part of Sir Robert Peel's own *Mémoire*.—(*Eds.*)

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Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“Whitehall, January 12, 1846.

“MY DEAR DUKE,

“In order to prevent misconstruction on the part of the Mover and Seconder, might it not be desirable to say to them that there would not be any express reference to the duties on corn as distinguished from other import duties, but that the intentions of the

Government on that subject would be brought forward on a separate motion on a very early day?

“They should be requested to consider even this a strictly private communication.

“Most truly yours,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“London, January 13, 1846.

“MY DEAR PEEL,

“I enclose the copy of a letter which I have received this morning from the Duke of Rutland. I have received one from Lord Salisbury of a similar purport.

“Lord de Ros has called upon me, who has been in different parts of Ireland. He gives a favourable account of the potatoes, very much agreeing with that tated in the Duke of Rutland’s letter.

“I have received an account from a person who has for many years kept a house and establishment in Dublin. He says that in eight years from 1838 to 1846 the price of potatoes in Dublin markets has varied from 3s. to 4s. per one hundred-weight; the average price on the prices of the eight years being 3s. 6½*d.* for one hundred-weight.

“The price at Christmas, 1845, was 4s. the hundred-weight; not quite 6*d.* the hundred-weight above the average price for the eight years from 1838.

“This is worthy of attention.

“Ever yours most sincerely,

“WELLINGTON.”



Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON,

“ Whitehall, January 14, 1846.

“ MY DEAR DUKE OF WELLINGTON,

“ I am much obliged to you for sending me a copy of the Duke of Rutland's letter. It is temperate both in language and spirit. I shall be very glad if the Duke of Rutland is enabled to give his consent to such an adjustment of the question of the Corn and Provision Laws as that which I brought under the consideration of the Cabinet on Monday last, and which met with their general concurrence. I have reason to believe that both in Ireland and Scotland the prevailing feeling is that it is for the public interest that this question should be finally settled.

“ I see the Protection Society has repealed its rule which prevents interference in elections, and proposes to fight the Anti-Corn Law League with their own weapons; that is, multiplying the lower class of county voters. All this will tell ultimately in favour of democracy when the excitement of the moment shall have subsided.

“ The 40s. freeholders in Ireland were an instrument used against the landlords.

“ I can readily believe that in many places the price of potatoes is very low; but no safe inference can be drawn from that fact.

“ It is not the case generally. In Manchester, at the last market day the price of sound potatoes was 10s. 6d. a load, compared with 6s. this time last year.

“But the very lowness of price in some towns is an unsatisfactory rather than a favourable indication as to future supply.

“The enclosed report of the markets of Armagh and Newry shows very low prices of potatoes at present, with great reason to fear an early deficiency in the supply.

“Very faithfully yours,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“Whitehall, January 16, 1846.

“MY DEAR DUKE,

“You will no doubt have heard from the Duke of Buccleuch, or directly from Lord Home, that he consents to move the Address.

“The enclosed is an extract from a letter from one of the best of the Irish Members, Captain Jones, R.N., a nephew of the Primate. It is dated Armagh, 12th January.

“The reports received yesterday from other parts of Ireland, from Sir Randolph Routh, our Commissary-General, are unfavourable.

“Demand for Government aid, and proof of its necessity, have come from parts of the counties of Cavan, Roscommon, and Meath.

“Sir Randolph Routh says, ‘There are many other very bad cases pressing on us.’

“Most truly yours,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“ Whitehall, January 17, 1846.

“ MY DEAR DUKE,

“ I advise the acceptance of Lord ——’s offer\* on the terms on which he makes it.

“ Lord Francis Egerton agrees to move the Address in the Commons with reservations nearly similar.

“ I explained to him in confidence the general outline of the course we meant to pursue.

“ His answer to this second letter of mine was simply this : ‘ I am intensely satisfied.’

“ As we cannot explain our measures in detail, I think we should allow Lord —— to stipulate for the right of free judgment on them, and be satisfied with the expression of his ‘ wish at all times to give efficient support to the Government.’

“ Most truly yours,

“ R. PEEL.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ London, January 20, 1846.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I enclose a letter received from Lord —— since my return to London this morning.

“ I will endeavour to find a noble Lord who will second the Motion for the Address to the Queen, which will be difficult at this last moment. †

\* To second the Address in the House of Lords.—(*Eds.*)

† The meeting of Parliament was fixed for the 22nd.—(*Eds.*)

“However, if I should not succeed, I will second the Motion of Lord Home myself, and state the reason.

“Ever yours most sincerely,

“WELLINGTON.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“London, January 20, 1846, 6 P.M.

“MY DEAR PEEL,

“I have the pleasure of informing you that Lord de Ros has consented to second the Motion for the Address in the House of Lords.

“I am perfectly satisfied with our Mover and Seconder.

“Ever yours most sincerely,

“WELLINGTON.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“London, February 7, 1846.

“MY DEAR PEEL,

“Lord Ashburton spoke to me yesterday in the House of Lords respecting an answer which you had given to Lord John Russell on the preceding day in the House of Commons in answer to a question put by him, as stated yesterday morning in the *Times* newspaper, viz.,

“‘Sir Robert Peel intended that the reduction of the duty on corn should take effect immediately when the Resolution passed and was reported.’

“I requested him not to ask any question in the House of Lords yesterday upon the subject, and told him that I would inquire how the matter stood between the adjournment of the House yesterday and its meeting on Monday, and would write to him before Monday.

“I shall be much obliged to you if you will let me know what I shall say to Lord Ashburton.

“I have looked into the Corn Act of 1842, and see that in that Act the duties were payable from the passing of the Act.

“You are aware of the difficulties under which we shall find ourselves in passing through the House of Lords the Corn Law Repeal Bill.

“I have been making every effort to overcome our difficulties, and although I cannot flatter myself that we shall be completely successful, I am not without hopes. But if it turns out that the reduction of the duty on corn is to take effect immediately when the Resolution passed and was reported in the House of Commons, I am afraid that it will be in vain to expect that any members of the House of Lords will vote for the Bill.

“Indeed, if the Resolution of the House of Commons can attain the object, the Bill would be useless.

“Ever yours most sincerely,

“WELLINGTON.”

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There does not appear among the Peel MSS. the copy or minute of any reply to this letter of the Duke of Wellington. It is pro-

bable that the subject was further discussed in conversation, perhaps in Cabinet, on that very day.

On Monday the 9th of February, however, it appears from 'Hansard's Debates' that Sir R. Peel rose in the House of Commons and spoke as follows :—

“ I am anxious to take the first opportunity of referring to a question which was put to me the other night by the Noble Lord the Member for the City of London. The Noble Lord (Lord John Russell), following his colleague (Mr. Pattison), asked me whether it was the intention of the Government to remit the duties on foreign corn immediately after the Resolution of this House should be reported? That question, Sir, was put to me by the Noble Lord without previous notice, and under the impression that the Treasury had dealt with the duties on corn in the same way as other duties, I answered the Noble Lord without previous notice, and under the impression that the Treasury would remit the duties on foreign corn on the report of the Resolution in this House. I gave that answer under the impression, as I have said, that the Treasury dealt with the duties on corn as with other duties. I find the impression is erroneous. In every case when the corn duties have been dealt with by Parliament, the reduction of duty has taken place from the passing of the Act; and the Treasury has never, in any case, on the report of the Resolution, undertaken to remit the duties. I should be exceedingly unwilling to assume, on the part of the Treasury, any authority for which there was not a precedent. I should be also exceedingly sorry to assume it in this case, because I fear that the assumption of that authority, for the first time, would have a tendency rather to prejudice than promote a satisfactory settlement of this question. It is the intention of the Government, therefore, to adhere to the course which has been uniformly pursued in all former periods of alteration in the Corn Laws, and make the reduction of duty, if the measure should meet with the sanction of Parliament, take effect from the passing of the Act.”

—(*Eds.*)

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It was not until the 15th of May that the Bill for the Repeal of the Corn Laws was read a third time in the House of Commons.

In the interval between the second reading of the Bill in the Lords and the committal of it, there appeared reason to apprehend that in the Committee, where the votes by proxy would not be admissible, the opponents of the Bill might succeed in effecting important changes in its provisions.

It therefore became necessary to consider whether, if such changes should be made, it would be advisable to restore the Bill to its original form by negating the amendments on a future stage, through the intervention of votes by proxy.

In the accompanying Memorandum I called the attention of my colleagues to these important subjects, and gave my opinion that every constitutional measure ought to be resorted to for the purpose of defeating the attempt materially to alter the leading provisions of the Bill.

SIR R. PEEL'S MEMORANDUM on PROXIES, May 10.

“ There ought in my opinion to be a *private* inquiry of a confidential nature into the precedents in the Lords of overruling decisions taken in Committees of the Lords, or, speaking generally, overruling decisions of Peers present by subsequent decisions, either of Peers present without proxies, or of Peers present with the aid of proxies.

“ As I think one of the greatest evils that could befall the country would be the mutilation of the Corn

Bill by the Lords, any constitutional remedy for such an evil ought, in my opinion, to be resorted to.

“Suppose the second reading of the Corn Bill be carried in the Lords by a considerable majority, proxies having been admitted—supposing by a small majority in Committee the Bill is materially altered—if we shrink from the attempt to rescind the decision in Committee by the same constitutional means by which we carried the second reading of the Bill, shall we not distinctly imply that votes by proxy are inferior in weight and value to the votes of Peers present? and that admission made in the case of a public measure, the principle of which is familiar to all, and which has been under discussion for the last thirty years, will not a severe blow be struck against the principle of voting by proxy?”

“ROBERT PEEL.”

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I had the satisfaction of finding upon this, as upon every other point that had required decision subsequently to the reconstruction of the Cabinet, a complete agreement of opinion among the members of the Government.

The following are the comments severally made by those of my colleagues who expressed their opinion in writing upon the subject to which my Memorandum adverted.



## Mr. GOULBURN ON PROXIES.

(Private.)

“ Downing Street, May 9, 1846.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ With reference to what passed when I saw you this morning, when doubts were expressed as to the fate of the Corn Bill in the Lords' Committee, in consequence of proxies not being allowed, I think it as well to remind you that, if we are sure of our friends, whatever amendments are made in Committee may be removed on the Report, when proxies are allowed.

“ Nor is this course without a precedent in a most important case in my own, and probably in your recollection—I mean the Regency Bill of 1811.

“ On that occasion an amendment relative to appointments to the King's household during his illness was moved by Lord Lansdowne and carried in Committee:—

CONTENTS . . . 107

NON-CONTENTS . . . 98

MAJORITY . . . 9 for his amendment.

“ On the Report Lord Liverpool proposed to leave out all the words of Lord Lansdowne's amendment, and the decision was—

CONTENTS . . . 86

NON-CONTENTS . . . 83

MAJORITY . . . 3 for the restoration of that clause to its original state.

“ Lord Clancarty then moved to restore the clause relative to the Council of the Queen to the state in

which it was previous to its alteration in the Committee of the House of Lords. On the division, he, that is to say the Government, were in a minority of 5 of Peers present, but had a majority of 13 of the proxies—the numbers being—

CONTENTS . . .	82	NON-CONTENTS . . .	87
PROXIES . . .	51	PROXIES . . .	38
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	133		125

leaving a majority of 8 (obtained by proxies) to reverse an amendment made without proxies in the Committee.

“ The precedent may be worth our consideration, and I therefore call your attention to it.

“ Yours, &c.

“ HENRY GOULBURN.”

#### Lord LYNDHURST on PROXIES.

“ I entertain no doubt upon this point: we *must not* lose the Bill by abstaining from the use of proxies upon the Report.

“ L.”

#### Duke of BUCCLEUCH.

“ There are no doubt many instances where an amendment carried in the Committee has been rejected by the House on the Report. I remember one case during the progress of the Poor Law Bill, when I voted in the majority in the Committee upon an amendment, which amendment was afterwards rejected by the House on the Report.

“ I entirely agree that we should be prepared to rescind, upon Report, any amendment that may be carried in Committee on the Corn Bill.

“ B.”

Lord ST. GERMAN on PROXIES, May 13, 1846.

“ My opinion on this question is clear, and I give it without hesitation.

“ I think that the Government is bound to use every constitutional and legitimate means in its power to ensure the passing of the Corn Bill, and that it ought not to be deterred by the fear of clamour or the dread of responsibility from employing the proxies at its disposal in rescinding on the Report any amendment that may be made in Committee.

“ The cases mentioned in some of the accompanying minutes appear to be strictly in point ; but were this otherwise, my advice would be the same.

“ I, like others of my colleagues, set little store by the privilege of voting by proxy ; and I am disposed to think that the House of Lords would do well to relinquish it ; but it is still in force, and I am satisfied that it ought to be exercised on this occasion.

“ ST. G.”

Lord ABERDEEN, May 12.

“ I very well recollect the debate on the Regency Bill in 1811, and took part in all the divisions on that occasion. The admission of proxies at all, on such a question, was much objected to ; but I do not think that

any objection was made to the use of proxies for the purpose of reversing the vote of the Committee.

“ ABERDEEN.”

Duke of WELLINGTON on PROXIES, May 12, 1846.

“ In the existing state of men’s minds, it is not easy to form an opinion what they will or will not do. In general, I should say that the House of Lords would be unwilling to alter in Committee a clause in a Bill, which the House ought not to alter according to the existing arrangement between the Houses for the transaction of business.

“ Because in fact such alteration would be on the part of the House of Lords an usurpation of power not admitted by the other branches of the Constitution.

“ The House may pass or reject a Money Bill, but not alter it in any manner.

“ It appears to me that in ordinary times it would not be easy to prevail upon the House to depart from this principle.

“ W.

“ I will look at the precedents of altering Bills upon Reports of Committees.”

Lord ELLENBOROUGH, May 11.

“ There are very few instances in which any vote in the Lords has been carried by proxies. It is much to be regretted when any such event occurs; but in the present case I think we are under the necessity of en-

deavouring to restore the Bill on the Report to the state in which it may be taken into Committee, unless some circumstances should occur which cannot now be anticipated, to make such a step inexpedient.

“I have always thought the Lords would be much better without the power of giving proxies ; but I have found very few Peers of my opinion. As long as the privilege is retained, we must not hesitate to resort to it in an extreme case, like that now supposed ; but the privilege itself would be damaged in public opinion by its use on this occasion, should so important a measure be practically carried by Peers not present.

“ E.”

Lord G. SOMERSET, May 12, 1846.

“It is to me clear that proxies ought to be given (if required) on the Report of the Committee on the Corn Bill.

“All Peers have had the fullest opportunity of being acquainted with the nature and objects of that measure ; those who send their proxies are, therefore, quite prepared to support or to oppose it. If they have any qualification to make to it, they will have given their proxies with such conditions as they may think right ; but those Peers who have sent up their proxies with the wish that the measure should receive, without alteration, the sanction of the House of Lords, would have just grounds of complaint should their wishes be frustrated by the non-exercise of their recognised power at a stage which is established expressly for the House of Parliament to

have the opportunity of reconsidering (if they shall so think fit) what has been done in the Committee.

“I can conceive no more serious or more practical degradation of the right of voting by proxy than the omitting to use the proxies in the assumed case.

“If the Corn Bill were lost by the non-employment of proxies, they (the proxies) would seem to me indefensible, and worse than useless.

“The precedents support their use, and in my judgment, however sorry I might be that the want of them should arise, I see no distinction between the use of them on the Report and their being used on any other stage of the measure.

“G. C. H. SOMERSET.”

Lord DALHOUSIE, May 11, 1846.

“The reason for admitting in Committee the votes only of Peers *present*, I apprehend to be, that in the details of a measure objections may be started not readily anticipated; and it is fitting that those who determine such points of detail, should hear all reasons and arguments which may be adduced.

“I cannot conceive that in the Corn Bill any such case can arise. There is not a point, not a fact, not an argument, which has not been shown and discussed fifty times.

“The plain question before the Lords, and the one question, will be whether the Corn Law shall be repealed after a short interval, or with a small exception.

“That will be the question throughout; and I do

certainly think that, having undertaken the settlement of this question (if settlement should by any means be within our power), we ought not to shrink from carrying our point at any stage by the sense of the Peers, constitutionally ascertained and constitutionally expressed on the point at issue, by their proxy given.

“It is very possible that clamour may be raised by the adoption of such a course; but I feel very certain that a greater and more just clamour would be raised if we were to hesitate to adopt it, especially when precedents exist on record.

“It is possible too that the employment of proxies on this occasion may be a severe trial for the privilege of voting by proxy.

“I am content to run the risk; nor do I think that any great harm would be done if the privilege should not be able to support the trial.

“D.”

#### Mr. HERBERT ON PROXIES.

“There are three precedents cited in these Memoranda for calling proxies on the Report of a Bill, with a view to reverse a decision arrived at by Peers present in Committee, viz., the Regency Bill, the Corn Bill of 1827, and the Poor Law Bill—all measures of great importance.

“These precedents amply justify the adoption of the same course, should the Corn Bill be mutilated in Committee.

“So far as the future safety of the right of proxy is

concerned, an argument may be deduced against it either from the use or disuse of it on this occasion ; but I quite agree with those who think that it cannot weigh against the danger which the country would incur, were the Corn Bill now to be defeated in the Lords ; and even were there no precedent for the course, the Government would be justified in making one to carry this measure through.

“ S. H.”

Lord HADDINGTON on PROXIES, May 14.

“ I have had the advantage of reading the opinions of almost all my colleagues ; and I most entirely concur with them in the conclusion to which they come.

“ It is possible that by using proxies to alter popular amendments of great importance made in Committee, the privilege might be rendered odious ; it might be sought to abrogate it. The reverse is the case in this instance.

“ Except on extraordinary occasions, or in cases where the principle of a Bill had been quite changed in Committee, I think proxies ought not to be used on the Report ; and I think the use of them in such cases would be deemed a great abuse of an old privilege—which in these days never would have been established. But in this case the principle of the Bill would be changed from repeal to modification, and I think the use of proxies to prevent this change would be fully justified on that ground, without reference to the enormous importance of preventing this measure from being destroyed,—especially by the Peers !



“ I am not sure that I should not have been for calling for proxies even if precedents had been doubtful ; but there are precedents enough.

“ H.”

Sir J. GRAHAM ON PROXIES.

“ House of Commons, May 14, 1846.

“ I entirely concur in the opinion expressed by my colleagues.

“ The precedents are clear and in point ; they fully justify the use of proxies on the Report with the view of reversing a vote which has passed in Committee on a Bill in the House of Lords.

“ There never was an occasion when the use of this privilege will be more in accordance with public opinion and with the public good than in the case contemplated by Sir R. Peel.

“ J. G.”

Lord RIPON.

“ I think we must not suffer the Bill to be lost by abstaining to use proxies upon the Report, in order to get rid of any amendment that would be fatal to the Bill. In 1827 I moved upon the Report of the Committee on the Corn Bill of that year to omit a clause introduced in the Committee. Proxies were called, but the Government was unable, even with the help of proxies, to throw out the clause : the attempt was made ; the Bill was finally dropped after the decision respecting the clause in question.

“ R.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“ Whitehall, May 17, 1846.

“ MY DEAR DUKE,

“ It may be convenient to you to know, with reference to future proceedings with the Corn Bill in the Lords, that the Queen has changed the day for the celebration of her birthday from Tuesday the 9th to Tuesday the 16th of June. The day first named was changed from its being in the week of Ascot Races.

“ There is one point which has a material bearing on the progress of the Corn Bill in the Lords.

“ The sugar duties, as you are aware, expire on the 5th of July. We must take a discussion on the bill on no very late day in the month of June; and I should think the result of a discussion on the sugar duties in the present state of political parties might not improbably be unfavourable.

“ There will perhaps be efforts made on this account to interpose delays in the progress of the Corn Bill in the Lords.

“ Most truly yours,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ London, May 19, 1846.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I am sorry to trouble you with a letter from Lord Ripon.\* I had suggested to him to move the

\* The Corn Law Bill was properly in the department of Lord Dalhousie, as President of the Board of Trade; and Lord Ripon

Corn Bill, thinking that it was desirable to keep Lord Dalhousie in reserve for the debate, as we must expect to have the Duke of Richmond, Lord Ashburton, and Lord Stanley. . . . .

“In the mean time, whether I am to move the House to agree to the second reading or to speak in the debate, there are some points on which I should wish to have information.

“These are: First, the compensation given or proposed to be given to those interested in the cultivation and in the sale of the produce of the land, which —— talked of as very large in the discussion in the Cabinet on the night of the 20th of December last.

“Has any calculation been made of its amount by the acre or as percentage on the supposed value of the land, or on the amount of rent paid?

“Then another important question which will be discussed is the effect of the measure upon the Tithe Commutation Act.

“As well as I recollect, the Act was forced upon the tithe-owners. It settles quantities permanently, but the question of value is settled by references to average prices of wheat for a series of years.

“Has anything passed in the House of Commons on this point?

“Judging from the contents of petitions and the

had expressed himself disinclined to undertake to move the second reading, though perfectly willing and ready to take part in the debate. Lord Ripon, however, very kindly and considerably relinquished his first objection, in compliance with the wish of both the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel.—(*Eds.*)

speeches of those who presented them, we shall certainly have this topic brought forward in the House of Lords.

“The course which I can take in the House of Lords, and in which I can really be of service to the Government, is in urging the House to avoid to separate itself from the House of Commons and the Crown, which is the course that I have successfully taken upon former occasions. . . . But I don't wish to avoid to discuss the subject, even in detail, if I should be informed.

“Ever yours most sincerely,  
“WELLINGTON.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

“Whitehall, May 20, 1846.

“MY DEAR DUKE OF WELLINGTON,

“I quite concur in your opinion that Lord Ripon ought to be requested to take charge of the Corn Bill in the Lords in preference to Lord Dalhousie, in order that the latter may be enabled to reply to speeches made subsequently to the speech of the Mover.

“I hope Lord Ellenborough will prepare himself for the debate. His assistance might be valuable.

“I will with the greatest pleasure supply you with any information which you may desire to have, and which it may be in my power to send you.

“First as to the bearing of the Corn Bill on the commutation of tithes.

“Very little objection was made to the Bill in the

Commons on that ground, and such objection as was made was of a contradictory character. One or two members said the Bill was unfavourable to the landed proprietor, inasmuch as the titheable land was chargeable with a fixed quantity of tithe in point of measure, to which it would remain subject should the land under tillage be converted into pasture.

“On the other hand it was urged, though very faintly, that the Bill was unfavourable to the tithe-owner because it might have the effect of lowering the money price of corn.

“I think there were very few if any petitions from tithe owners against the Bill.

“Enclosed is a Memorandum on this subject, entering into it at greater length.

“With respect to the discharge of the land from certain burdens to which it is at present subject, the proposals made by me to the Cabinet and assented to by the Cabinet have been announced by me on the part of the Government without the slightest variation.

“The charges transferred from the county rate or poor rate, and to be borne by the Treasury, will amount altogether to nearly 500,000*l.* per annum.

“The following are the items :

Maintenance of Prisoners . . . . .	£100,000
Prosecutions . . . . .	120,000
Schoolmasters in Union Workhouses . . . . .	30,000
Perth Prison, Scotland . . . . .	10,000
Irish Constabulary Force . . . . .	180,000
	<hr/>
	£440,000

“In addition to this, the salaries of the medical offi-

cers attending on the poor are to be borne by the public purse. I do not at present know the exact amount of the charge.

“It is proposed to alter the Law of Settlement so far as to give a right to pecuniary relief to a pauper family from the district in which they shall have had an industrial residence for the five years preceding the claim for relief. This will prevent the manufacturing districts from sending back the poor to the places of their settlement in times of manufacturing depression. Enclosed is a copy of the Bill.

“It is proposed also, in conformity with what passed in Cabinet, to bring in a Bill for the consolidation of highway trusts, in the hope of materially diminishing the highway rate by the consolidation of trusts.

“It is impossible to form an estimate of the benefit which particular districts of the country may derive from the operation of these measures, or from the transfer of pecuniary charges from the land.

“Their general tendency is to relieve the land from some charges which were said to press unduly upon it, and to introduce improvements into the administration of the Law of Settlement and the highway management, which will benefit the rural districts of the country. No calculation of acreable diminution of charge could be made with any approach to accuracy.

“Most truly yours,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

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The attempt to alter the Bill in Committee was not

successful, and it was read a third time in the Lords on the 25th June.

During the progress of this Bill through the two Houses of Parliament, another Bill, entitled a Bill for the Protection of Life in Ireland, which at an early period of the Session had received the assent of the House of Lords, was brought under discussion in the House of Commons, and encountered every species of opposition—not only the usual impediments of direct hostility, but those obstructions of delay which the forms of the House permit to be interposed.

For an account of the proceedings which took place with regard to this Bill, I will refer to the same authority to which I have before referred with regard to the Corn Law Repeal Bill, namely, the Parliamentary Debates.

It is the most complete account in point of fulness of detail, and presents a record of the views and motives of those who took part in the discussion, less liable to objection on the score of partiality than any which could be given by one who was himself so actively engaged and took so deep an interest in that discussion.

On the 21st June, the two Bills, the Corn Law Repeal Bill, and the Bill for the Protection of Life in Ireland, were in such a position in the two Houses respectively, that there appeared every reason to calculate on the double event—the passing of the first Bill un mutilated by the House of Lords, and the rejection of the second by the House of Commons.

At that period I felt it to be my duty to submit to the Cabinet my opinion with regard to the position of

the Government, and to the obligations which that position imposed.

Those opinions were expressed in the following Memorandum, bearing date 21st June. It was sent by me in the first instance to the Duke of Wellington, and returned by the Duke with a letter, which, with its enclosure and two other letters that passed between us, immediately follow.

Sir R. PEEL'S MEMORANDUM on the POSITION of the  
GOVERNMENT, June 21.

“It is incumbent on the members of the Government to take into serious consideration the position of the Government, and to determine whether, after the passing of the Corn and Customs' Bills, it will be for the interest of the Crown, of the country, and for the honour and character of the Government, that they should remain in office.

“A weak Government, unable to carry measures of importance—unable from want of constant attendance and cordial support to conduct the daily and indispensable business of the House of Commons, in constant fear of being in a minority from the combination of opposite parties, is a great evil.

“The tendency is to lose, and not to gain strength; for daily discredit is a source of increased weakness.

“A Government ought to have a *natural* support. A Conservative Government should be supported by a Conservative party. Support from the compassion of its enemies, or even from the personally friendly feel-



ings of those who *ought* on public principle to oppose a Government, is a hollow, and not a creditable support.

“ Depend upon it that we shall not pass the Irish Bill into a law.

“ If we have a small majority on the first division, it will give us no assurance and in my opinion no hope of success.

“ We shall be defeated by concerted delay, if we cannot be defeated by numbers.

“ Let us assume that we carry the Bill by a small majority on the second reading.

“ What course shall we take afterwards ?

“ Shall we proceed with the Irish Bill to the exclusion of all other public business ?

“ This is the 21st of June. Six weeks will bring us to the 1st of August, with 18 days for Government business.

“ Take three heads alone of public business still pending :

“ The Estimates.

“ The Irish Bill.

“ The Annual Sugar Duties' Bill.

“ The first division on the Irish Bill will take place probably on Friday, the 26th of June.

“ That division, if we have a majority, will not carry the second reading of the Irish Bill. It will do nothing more than negative the amendment that the Bill be read a second time this day six months.

“ The debate will again be renewed on the motion

that the Bill be now read a second time ; and it is impossible to foresee to what extent a party, exasperated by unexpected failure in respect to the rejection of the Bill, will protract the debate on the second reading, that is, on the principle of the Bill.

“ They will do nothing palpably outrageous. They well know that without an abuse of the forms of the House they can prevent progress with the Bill.

“ If we give precedence to Estimates or a Sugar Bill, or to any other business, however urgent, the chance of success in regard to the Irish Bill (if there were any chance) would be diminished by delay.

“ If we do not give precedence, if we neglect all the other public business of the country for the purpose of engaging in a struggle which every one will know to be unavailing, we shall very soon provoke feelings, first, of indignation at the neglect of public interests ; secondly, of ridicule at our helplessness—at our virtual defeat night after night by opponents consuming the public time in speeches of two or three hours each, made solely for the purpose of delay.

“ It may be said public indignation will coerce the Irish Members into decent conduct, and into observance of the usages of debate.

“ Do not trust to this. There is an Irish party, a determined and not insignificant one, for which British indignation has no terrors. Their wish is to disgust England with Irish business and with Irish Members, and to induce England, through sheer disgust, and the sense of public inconvenience from the obstructions offered to the progress of all other business in Parlia-

ment, to listen to a repeal of the Legislative Union for the purpose of purging the House of a set of troublesome and factious members, who equally obstruct legislation for Ireland and for Great Britain.

“Now, suppose we proceed steadily with the Irish Bill, giving that Bill precedence over all other business. Suppose at the end of a month we have made no progress, what course shall we then take? Shall we then give way and withdraw the Irish Bill?

“This will be a very dangerous concession. It will be a public admission that a minority can, without infringing any form of the House, defeat a majority. It will be at least as severe a blow to the authority of Executive Government in Ireland, as if the attempt to arm that Government with power for the repression of crime had been defeated by a majority.

“In my opinion the loss of the Irish Bill, *by whatever means*, recommended as that Bill was by the Queen in the Speech from the Throne; declared to be *absolutely necessary* by the Queen’s Ministers; sanctioned, almost with unanimity, by the House of Lords—the loss of the Irish Bill, I say, will make the administration of government in Ireland impossible, because discreditable, by the present Executive.

“The loss of it will be a signal triumph over that Executive, not merely of Repealers, but of the disturbers of the public peace and promoters of assassination throughout Ireland.

“Is it becoming to demand extraordinary powers—to justify the demand for them by the allegation and proof of urgent necessity—to fail in getting them—and

yet still consent to remain responsible for protecting life and maintaining peace in Ireland ?

“ Can we say with truth, as an excuse for giving up the Bill, that the state of affairs is greatly improved in Ireland ?

“ I think that would not be the truth ; but if it were, we pronounce our own condemnation by the admission ; for surely the Government ought not to have proposed, and the Lords ought not to have sanctioned, a Curfew Bill, if a delusive calm for a few weeks is sufficient ground for the abandonment of it.

“ I think, therefore, we ought not to submit either to the rejection, or to the defeat by other means than rejection, of the Irish Bill.

“ There is an alternative, however :

“ We might dissolve Parliament, instead of relinquishing office.

“ Let us carefully consider in all its various bearings that alternative.

“ There is nothing I should deprecate more than Dissolution of Parliament on the express ground of the Coercion Bill : of all the grounds I think it the worst and the most dangerous.

“ First, it provides no remedy for the particular evil. It will ensure a worse return of Irish Members—rendered more desperate, more determined to obstruct by every artifice the passing of a Coercion Bill in the new Parliament.

“ But, secondly, let us beware for higher reasons how we make a Dissolution of Parliament turn on a question between Great Britain and Ireland.

“ I deeply feel that resignation of office—the refusal of responsibility—is a better and safer course than an appeal to the constituencies of Great Britain against the constituencies of Ireland on such a question as this.

“ Shall Ireland be subject to a severe and unconstitutional law which is not to be applied, and never was applied, to Great Britain ?

“ It will be vain to say that our object is to protect life in Ireland. The answer will be that there are scarcely 20 out of 105 Irish Members who agree with us in the necessity or probable efficacy of the measure.

“ The Irish representative body is against us—is against an unconstitutional law intended separately for Ireland.

“ The cry in England—if such a cry could be got up—or if it were decent or safe to attempt it—must be, ‘ Coercion for Ireland.’ The cry in Ireland will be, ‘ Equal law—no Coercion.’

“ ‘ No Popery ’ was a dangerous watchword for a General Election. I firmly believe that the more dangerous watchword, ‘ Coercion for Ireland,’ would shake the foundations of the Legislative Union.

“ In the present state of the Government—opposed by the Repealers—hated with blind fury by the Irish Orangemen and Protectionists—you would have nearly universal Ireland against you ; not perhaps from conviction, but from the impulse of national feeling, and the worse motives of party resentment, combining Protestant and Catholic against you.

“ I am decidedly against Dissolution on an Irish question—above all on such a question as a Coercion Bill.

“ Shall we dissolve on some other ground ?

“ First, let me observe that immediate Dissolution is not within our power. I need not discuss minor obstacles ; the Sugar Bill at present is an insuperable one.

“ We have given notice of our intention to propose the continuance for a month of the present Sugar duties, which would otherwise expire on the 5th July next.

“ If we adhere to that announced intention, we could not dissolve without another temporary Sugar Bill, for Parliament could not assemble after a General Election (if it were dissolved to-morrow) before the 5th of August.

“ Still it is possible for us (and I wish to exclude no possible alternative) to avow a change of opinion as to the duration of the temporary Sugar Bill, and ask for it for three months. This would be a very awkward, still it is a possible course.

“ It would of course imply an intention on our part to dissolve.

“ I think no Ministers ought to advise the Sovereign to dissolve Parliament without feeling a moral conviction that Dissolution will enable them to carry on the Government of the country—will give them a Parliament with a decided working majority of supporters. The hope of getting a stronger minority is no justification of Dissolution.

“ Unsuccessful Dissolutions are, generally speaking, injurious to the authority of the Crown. Following rapidly, one after the other, they blunt the edge of a great instrument given to the Crown for its protection.

“ The Dissolution of the Whigs in 1841 was, I think, an unjustifiable act. Dissolution now, if the result is likely to be the same, would be equally so.

“ On what ground shall we appeal to the country? Surely not on the mere personal one, were we justified in proposing the Corn Bill? We must appeal to it on some principle. The natural one seems to be ‘Free Trade, and the destruction of Protection.’ If we adopt it, ought we not openly to unite with those who will adopt the same cry—hoist the same banner—and to whose cordial co-operation we have been so recently indebted for our success in giving practical effect to that principle, and in carrying the Corn and Customs Bills?

“ Union seems impossible; but, not uniting, what practical course shall we take in conducting the details of the General Election? Are we to oppose Lord John Russell in London, Mr. Baring in Portsmouth, Sir George Grey in Devonport, and Mr. Cobden at Stockport?

“ Are we to be fighting under the same banner against Protectionists in half of the counties and small towns of England, and in the other half, although fighting under the same banner of public principle, to have a battle between the Government and the Liberal candidate on some narrow party ground?

“ What is *our* candidate?—not, observe, a Protectionist or Old Conservative, but a Conservative with new lights on the Corn Laws, and the principle of Protection. What public reason is he to give why in Portsmouth he should be preferred to Mr. Francis Baring, or in Devonport to Sir George Grey?

“ But let me ask this one question—what is this candidate of ours to say about Sugar?

“ The banner of our Liberal opponents will bear upon it

the plain, intelligible motto of 'Free Trade without Restriction;' our motto will be 'Free Trade—but not in Sugar.'

"Is there a hope that, opposed on the one hand by Protectionists, on the other by the advocates of Free Trade—of Free Trade without qualification and reserve, we can obtain a majority? Could we hope for it even if we were hampered with no other difficulty whatever than that with which the single question of Sugar will embarrass us?"

"But Sugar is an insuperable difficulty. It might be solved by those who felt they could, consistently with honour as Ministers of the Crown, consent to and propose the admission of slave labour Sugar.

"To that I cannot be a party.

"It is because I feel the Sugar question to constitute in itself an insuperable difficulty, that it is hardly necessary to enter into further details.

"Even if that difficulty were out of the way, I should fear the result of a General Election. If we had a majority, it would be a majority a great part of which would support us, not from concurrence in general political principles, but from a short-lived sympathy with us on account of recent events connected with the Corn Bill and our commercial policy.

"A Dissolution now would throw the Crown—acting under our auspices, and by our advice—into concert with Free Traders—with (for there is no use in disguising it) the Anti-Corn-Law League. If we are to succeed, we shall succeed by an unnatural combination with those who agree with us in nothing but the principles of Free Trade.

"A short time only would pass before this com-



bination would be dissolved, and we should be at the mercy of our new allies.

“ The Protectionists and the political Whigs would be more than ever exasperated against us. Our future position would be no better than our present. Direct, avowed combination with the allies by whose aid we hope to carry on the Government would be a more honourable and more constitutional course than an unavowed, undefined combination between men of different principles for a temporary object.

“ I have said nothing about the House of Lords. What hope should we have of reconstituting a Conservative party in the House of Lords after a Dissolution on the grounds on which we should dissolve at this moment; and after a great political conflict with the aid of such allies as those with whom we must necessarily be brought into contact?

“ I offer these suggestions for the deliberate and dispassionate consideration of my colleagues, with a strong opinion on my own part that it will be for the credit of the existing administration—for the permanent advantage of a really Conservative party—for the interests of the Crown and of the country, that we should not fall into the errors of the last Whig Government—retain office after we have lost power, or advise a Dissolution with little prospect of securing a majority of members honestly and cordially concurring with us in great political principles.

“ ROBERT PEEL.

“ June 21, 1846.”

Duke of WELLINGTON on the POSITION of the  
GOVERNMENT.

“ London, June 21, 1846 ; at night.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I have just now received your box, with your note and Memorandum enclosed.

“ In considering the situation and prospects of the administration, I conclude that the Queen is desirous of retaining in her service those who are now her servants ; and I proceed then to consider the means of attaining that object.

“ The business of the Session is greatly in arrear ; the Sugar Bill requires immediate decisive attention, and measures to relieve that Bill from the pressure of time under which it appears to labour. I say appears to labour, because I understand that the Government would be supported in its proposition in relation to the Sugar duties of the year, not by those who supported, but by those who opposed its propositions on Corn and the Tariff Bill.

“ If this be true, the question is whether there is time between this and the 5th of July to carry the Sugar Bill? If not, there will remain to be considered the proposition for a short Sugar Bill, that is for one month, or for three months.

“ If the administration cannot carry any of these questions in the House of Commons, and carry the Irish Assassination Bill, I entertain no doubt that it must retire from the service of Her Majesty, or take steps in order to acquire such strength as to enable it to carry

on the Queen's service in Parliament. Nay, I am convinced that if the servants of the Crown should persevere, and should not retire, the parties combined in opposition will join in a vote of want of confidence in one or other, if not both Houses of Parliament.

“ But I am certain that there are many opposed to the Government upon the Corn Law who do not like these courses of proceeding, and who would be desirous of being relieved from the necessity of persevering in them.

“ It is for this reason that I suggest to take a vote upon the Sugar Bill, if it should be possible, between this and the 5th of July ; and at all events that you should take up with a high hand the proceedings of the House of Lords on Sir Henry Hardinge's Bill. You must carry the House of Commons and the public with you upon this question.

“ This will make a turn in the current of affairs ; will give men time to reflect upon the courses into which the endeavour is made to lead them, which must have an effect in enabling you to bring to a conclusion the current business of the Session.

“ I don't think that such a course will relieve you from the necessity of choosing whether you will resign, or adopt some measure to acquire the strength to enable you to conduct with certainty and with honour the affairs of the Queen's Government in Parliament.

“ But this course will give you time, and enable you to take such course as you may deem advisable, with credit to yourself, and satisfaction to your friends.

“ I now come to consider that important point in your paper, the Dissolution of Parliament.

“The first point which I think essentially necessary previous to the adoption of such a measure is, that not only it should be approved of, but desired by the Queen, after all the consequences should have been clearly explained to Her Majesty, and Her Majesty should have had an opportunity of considering them. Upon this point it must always be borne in mind that there must be a new Parliament in 1847.

“The next point which I think that it would be absolutely necessary to have well considered before a Dissolution of Parliament is determined upon, is the prospect of the returns. It must be very difficult to form a correct estimate upon this point; but something may be done, and every information on a point on which those who are to decide are ignorant must be of use.

“I confess that I have no feeling upon the point on which the Parliament should be dissolved.

“The Queen’s servants will be placed in the situation of advising Her Majesty to dissolve the Parliament because, on account of the combinations against them in the House of Commons, they are no longer able to carry on the Queen’s service. They may lose the Irish Assassination Bill, or the Sugar Bill, or a necessary item in any one of the yearly estimates, or a vote of want of confidence will be carried against them.

“The question for the country will be, not the particular question on which the vote will have been taken, but in reality, whether you are to continue the Minister, and to be supported as the Minister, or the Queen is to look for other servants?

“Considering your services to the public, your restor-

ation of the revenue and finances of the country, your regulation of the banking trade, your restoration of the manufacturing prosperity of the country, and your final settlement of the Corn Laws, there is no friend of yours who can hesitate in letting this question go to the public, notwithstanding the prejudice which has been excited by some, and exists in some quarters against you.

“ In this view of the case I put out of the question all cries and nicknames, and the effect of them, however much they may be used at the Elections; nor do I think that there will be much difficulty in deciding whether Sir George Grey, Mr. Baring, Mr. Cobden, or Lord John Russell shall be opposed.

“ The question at the Elections will be the support of your administration. Many will oppose it whose support I wish you had.

“ But I am very much mistaken if you should not be supported by a majority of the thinking men of the country.

“ I confess, however, that if it were necessary, I should feel no objection to go to the country on the single question of the Irish Assassination Act.

“ Sooner or later the people of England must be informed of what is really going forward in that country, and must make up their minds to govern it as people in a social state ought to be governed. The Whigs in December 1845 were to have had a Coercion Act; they voted in the House of Lords, in January 1846, for this very Assassination Bill which is now opposed with party views.

“But while writing upon this subject, I draw your attention to a military report which I have this night received from Ireland.

“I am aware that the facts therein reported could not be prevented by the Assassination Bill, but they tend to show the state of society in Ireland, which is in fact worse than it is in any of the wildest parts of Asia, Africa, or America.

“The people of England must sooner or later be made acquainted with this state of things, and must provide means for the protection of the lives and properties of those living on the same soil.

“Believe me, &c.,

“WELLINGTON.”

(Copy as enclosed.)

LETTER from Col. Sir CHARLES O'DONNELL to the  
MILITARY SECRETARY, Dublin.

“Cavan, June 15, 1846.

“SIR,

Cavan.  
Belturbet.  
Killeshandra.  
Arna.  
Carrigallen.  
Newtown Gore.  
Ballinamore.  
Fenagh.  
Mohill.  
Drummod.  
Roosky.  
Strokestown.  
Roscommon.

“Portions of the counties of Cavan, Leitrim, Roscommon, King's County, Westmeath, and Longford, especially the places mentioned in the margin, have been visited by me since my monthly report of the 28th ultimo.

“Upon the whole, outrages have probably decreased both in number and in the seriousness of their character during the past period, and the general state of

Athlone.	most of the country above mentioned
Shannon-bridge.	may be considered tolerably peaceable ;
Ballymahon.	but in the wild parts of Leitrim and Ros-
Longford.	common, and their adjacent districts, the
Newtown Forbes.	state of things is not altogether so satis-
Drumlish.	factory.
Ballinamark.	

“ Here Ribbonism is still in force ; intimidation by means of threatening notices and visits from armed and disguised ‘ Molly Maguires ’ is persevered in ; way-laying, assaults, and robberies of arms and money take place ; and all these arising, for the most part, from what is termed agrarian causes.

“ A man of the name of Donohue was, about the beginning of the month, fired at in the open day in the neighbourhood of Killeshandra, by several men, merely for having taken a farm in preference to another person, whose relative had previously held it. This man is marked for assassination, and will probably suffer.

“ A man and his wife, of the name of Tuthill, residing between Drummod and Mohill, were, on the morning (early) of the 7th instant, visited by a party of six men, armed with guns and bayonets ; and having beaten the husband till he was senseless, they stripped his wife, and placed her on her back over some fire which they raked out of the fireplace for the purpose. This was also for the same agrarian cause ; and so intimidated are the sufferers that, although it is supposed they know perfectly well the perpetrators of the offence, they refrain from giving evidence.

“ Some few days ago, Bryan Kenny returning to

Mullingar on a car, with a labouring man, while passing some cottages and a public-house, was fired at and wounded by a man who walked deliberately away unmolested by several persons who witnessed the event. Sir John Nugent had given Kenny some land, from which he had ejected another tenant for non-payment of rent; and though Sir John had given the ejected tenant compensation, and Kenny had paid him and taken a receipt for his 'goodwill in full,' the transaction was not considered satisfactory.

"The day before yesterday, about 2 o'clock A.M., a party of nine or ten persons, some of them armed, went to the house of John Hazard, residing near Mil-town. On gaining entry by force they wounded the man's wife in the breast with a sharp instrument, and then dragging Hazard outside, after beating him, endeavoured to induce him to swear he would not accept a situation as herd, from which another man had been dismissed.

"Petty robberies and depredations continue to be committed in many parts of the country.

"The Repeal movement goes on, but I have observed little energy with regard to it of late. Dissensions and mistrust are apparent amongst the members of this Association.

"There is still abundance of provisions in the country. The markets, considering all things, are well supplied and reasonable; and the forethought and wise measures of Government with regard to the Indian meal are daily producing their desired effects.

"At the present interval between the seeding time and



the hay harvest, a more than ordinary distress is beginning to be felt by the cottiers and the poorer classes in certain remote, thickly-peopled, and impoverished districts ; but this is not as yet general. In many places this want has been already anticipated and met by the management of Relief Committees in donations, &c., and in the employment of the poor population at public works. Where such arrangements have been made, crime has been known to decrease, and the relief and advantages to the poor have been incalculable ; and as the coming crops look favourably, and promise a more than average harvest, a continuance of this system of relief for the next six weeks or two months will ward off the distress, famine, and destitution at one time so much apprehended.

“Some little alarm was created here the day before yesterday, in consequence of a report that a number of persons meant to attack the stores in the market-place, where the meal was deposited. The magistrates were on the alert and the troops in readiness during the morning ; but the report proved to be a false one, for no indication of the sort was made.

“I have, &c.,

“C. R. O'DONNELL, Col.”

Sir R. PEEL to the Duke of WELLINGTON.

(Secret.)

“Whitehall, June 23.

“MY DEAR DUKE,

“If you have no objection, I will send the letter you were good enough to write to me on Sunday night

in circulation with my Memorandum. The whole question will thus be brought fully under the consideration of our colleagues.

“You observe that the people of England must, sooner or later, be made acquainted with the state of things in Ireland. But what step can be taken to make them more fully acquainted with it than they are now ?

“For a long time past there has been scarcely a week, if so much, without the occurrence of some diabolical murder or frightful outrage. These have been reported and commented upon in the newspapers.

“Many political events are imperfectly known to the great mass of people in this country, but there is one fact that is perfectly notorious—for it is in the mouth of every one—that there are many districts in Ireland in which no man’s life is safe, except, indeed, the life of the assassin.

“These facts being notorious, what has the Executive Government done ?

“It has asked to have the aid of those measures of protection and precaution which other Governments have proposed, which were in force from 1835 to 1840, and with which the Whig Government would not part.

“If we are refused these, shall we remain responsible for the government of Ireland ?

“It is said, Dissolve Parliament ; but I see no reasonable hope that a new Parliament to be elected now will pass a Coercion Bill.

“From Ireland you will have a worse return than you have at present.

“ You will have no material alteration of parties ; and in the new Parliament, Whigs, Protectionists, and Freetraders will again unite against a Coercion Bill. Even if you could get a small majority for the Government, you would not, in my opinion, pass a Coercion Bill in the new House of Commons.

“ I feel that we have done what it was our duty to do.

“ I suppose you have seen Lord Heytesbury’s letter, reporting the acquittal of the editor of the ‘ Nation ’ newspaper, from the determination of certain of the jurors not to convict.

“ That editor was prosecuted for a seditious libel, pointing out in what mode the action of the Queen’s troops might be defeated in the event of insurrection, by destroying portions of the railroads.

“ We appeal to Parliament for increased powers to protect life—we are defeated (I am arguing on that assumption). We appeal to the law for the punishment of sedition, or rather treason—we are defeated.

“ Under any circumstances this state of things is intolerable—intolerable by the strongest Government ; but I must say that, in the present state of parties in the House of Commons, in the House of Lords, and in the country, it would in my opinion be discreditable to us, and dangerous to the authority of all Government, to acquiesce in it.

“ Most truly yours,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

Duke of WELLINGTON to Sir R. PEEL.

“ London, June 23, 1846.

“ MY DEAR PEEL,

“ I have received your letter of this day's date, and I request that you will dispose of that which I wrote to you on Sunday night, and sent to you yesterday, as you may think proper.

“ I quite concur with you in thinking that the temper in both Houses of Parliament is as bad and as unfavourable to the existing administration as it is possible. I have never known it so bad as last night ; but I hope that we shall on Thursday and Friday have a majority on the third reading of each of the Corn Bill and Customs' Bills.

“ Ever yours, &c.,

“ WELLINGTON.”

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The Memorandum, together with the Duke's first letter, was communicated by me to the other members of the Government ; and I do not recollect that there was the slightest difference of opinion as to the course which it would be our duty to pursue in the event of our failure to carry the Irish Bill.

All doubt on that head was speedily removed.

On Friday, the 25th of June, in consequence of a concerted union between the Protectionist and Whig parties, for the purpose not only of defeating the Bill, but displacing the Government, the Bill was rejected on the second reading by a majority of seventy-three.

On the Monday following it was announced in the two Houses of Parliament, by the Duke of Wellington and myself, that Her Majesty had accepted the resignation which had been tendered to Her Majesty by her official servants.

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From the private letters of Sir Robert Peel, on his retirement from office, the Editors have selected the following:—

Sir R. PEEL to Lord HARDINGE, in India.

“ Drayton Manor, July 4, 1846.

“ MY DEAR HARDINGE,

“ You will see that we are *out*—defeated by a combination of Whigs and Protectionists.

“ A much less emphatic hint would have sufficed for me.

“ I would not have held office by sufferance for a week.

“ Were I to write a quire of paper, I could not recount to you what has passed with half so much detail and accuracy as the public papers will recount it. There are no secrets. We have fallen in the face of day, and with our front to our enemies.

“ There is nothing I would not have done to ensure the carrying of the measures I had proposed this Session.

“ I pique myself on never having proposed anything which I have not carried.

“ But the moment their success was ensured, and I

had the satisfaction of seeing two drowsy Masters in Chancery mumble out at the Table of the House of Commons, that the Lords had passed the Corn and Customs Bills, I was satisfied.

“Two hours after this intelligence was brought, we were ejected from power; and by another coincidence as marvellous, on the day on which I had to announce in the House of Commons the dissolution of the Government, the news arrived that we had settled the Oregon question, and that our proposals had been accepted by the United States without the alteration of a word.

“I have just got your letter of the 5th of May. You had not then heard of our reception in England of your closing exploits on the Sutlej. I would have sent Johnny\* out to you by the first packet if it had not been for recent events—and I am not at all sure that I will not do so still; for I dare say you will have to remain some time.

“Lady Peel and I are here quite alone—in the loveliest weather—feasting on solitude and repose, and I have every disposition to forgive my enemies for having conferred upon me the blessing of the loss of power.

“Most truly and affectionately yours,

“ROBERT PEEL.”

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Thus was brought to a close the administration which had conducted public affairs since the month of August, 1841.

\* One of Sir Robert's sons.—(*Eds.*)

On the general course of policy pursued by that administration, I shall abstain from all comment. This Memoir has exclusive reference to the events which led to its dissolution. It has, I fear, been unduly protracted; but, as I have before observed, I have thought that the unreserved publication of every document in my possession which appeared to throw light on the transactions of which I have given the narrative, was a safer course than the attempt at condensation or selection—that it incurred the least risk of doing injustice to any of the parties concerned in those transactions, and afforded the best means of forming a judgment upon their motives and conduct. It will be for those who pronounce that judgment to consider these questions:—

First. Was there, during the autumn of 1845, so much reason for apprehension as to the scarcity of food as to justify the Ministers, chiefly responsible for guarding against the consequences of that scarcity, in advising the suspension of the import duties on corn and other articles of subsistence?

Secondly. Supposing the suspension of duty to be conceded, was there sufficient ground for declining to give a pledge that, after the expiration of the period of suspension, every effort should be made to maintain in operation the pre-existing duties?

Might not a Minister, reviewing the position of the Corn Law question in the autumn of 1845, the temper of the public mind, and the state of public opinion as influenced by the progress of discussion, considering the effect which the systematic removal of so many

other protective duties, continued for successive years, had had upon the import duties on corn—considering, above all, the effect which the act of suspension on the first occasion of a severe trial of the principle of the Corn Law infallibly would have upon the policy of reviving and continuing that law—might not a Minister have been justified in the belief that at that time and under those circumstances there was less of public evil in the final settlement of the Corn Law than in the undertaking, after its suspension, either to re-establish or modify that law?

On the policy of the measures recommended, light will have been thrown by subsequent experience, by a certain knowledge of events the probabilities of which could be only imperfectly calculated at the time when such measures were advised.

Those who would impartially judge of his motives must place themselves in the situation of a Minister on whom the responsibility of giving advice rested. They ought to exclude all that has since elapsed which ordinary sagacity could not have foreseen, and pronounce their verdict after mature reflection on the means which a Minister possessed at that time for forming a satisfactory judgment on the comparative advantage or risk of the different courses of action between which he had to decide.

If, indeed, subsequent events could fairly be taken into the account, the sufferings that ensued from the deficient harvests of 1846 and 1847—the various measures taken by Parliament to mitigate those sufferings—the hurried suspension of the Navigation Laws, and of the remaining



duties on articles of subsistence, would exercise no unfavourable influence on the opinion which might be formed on the precautionary measures of 1846. Nor would that influence be diminished if the aspect of affairs in this country, subsequently to the revolutionary movement in Paris in February 1848, were included within the review. Many of the men who had been the loudest in the condemnation of the measures of 1846, and the least scrupulous in imputing dishonesty and treachery to the advisers of them, openly rejoiced on the 10th of April, 1848, that provision had been made (by a lucky accident, of course) for the total repeal of the Corn Laws. On the removal of all danger from popular disaffection, or, I should rather say, on the signal proof of general contentment and devotion to the cause of order, the admissions made as to the casual good-fortune of the measures referred to were speedily retracted. They were retracted without due reflection on the causes which had conspired in the hour of danger to promote loyalty to the Throne and confidence in the justice of Parliament.

I seek, however, no advantage from the reference to subsequent events for the policy which I am vindicating, excepting in the degree to which any of those events, having been foreseen as probable contingencies, may justly be appealed to in confirmation of the prudence of the precautions that were taken.

For instance, in the cases which had occurred in other countries wherein the disease had affected the potato plant, it had uniformly extended beyond the crop of a single season, and had given cause for just appre-

hension that the failure, either from the use of diseased roots in planting or for some other reason, might not be merely temporary.

That circumstance was adverted to, and had its due influence, when the measures proposed to Parliament at the commencement of the Session of 1846 were under consideration. That there was sufficient cause for adverting to it will be seen by reference to what passed in the House of Commons on the 20th of February, 1846. On that day the following question was put to me, and the following answer returned.

(FROM 'HANSARD,' February 20, 1846.)

“ Mr. Horsman begged to call the attention of the Right Hon. Baronet at the head of the Government to a statement which appeared in the public prints relative to the disease in the potato. From that statement it seemed to be the opinion of Dr. Lindley that the disease would not be confined to this year's crop, but would affect the potatoes of next year, through the seed employed for their production. The statement to which he referred was as follows :—

“ ‘ *Potato Disease.*—At the ordinary meeting of the Horticultural Society, held on Tuesday, Dr. Lindley exhibited some specimens of new potatoes grown at the gardens of the Society and Lady Rolle at Bicton. In many the disease of last autumn was very apparent, and in some cases it was very extensive. They had been produced from sets of potatoes which had been but slightly affected, but showed that wherever the vitality

had been influenced the disease would be perpetuated—a fact which could not too generally be made known amongst growers. In many the brown and blighted haulm and the decayed tubers were quite as perceptible as in any of the old specimens. In the specimens fresh dug up no appearance of fungus could be detected by the most minute microscopical examination; but this was very apparent in those from the country, showing that it was a consequence and not the cause of the disease.’

“Such was the statement which had appeared in the newspapers; and the question which he had to put was, whether the Right Hon. Baronet had received any communication from Dr. Lindley in corroboration of the facts narrated in the paragraph he had just read to the House?

“SIR ROBERT PEEL.—I stated upon Monday night that I was not without apprehensions that the dangers likely to result from the failure of the potato crop would not be limited to the present season; but upon Monday night I spoke without having had any direct personal communication with Dr. Lindley. I had received communications of a general nature inducing me to fear that such would be the case. On the following day, however, on the Tuesday, I received a direct communication from Dr. Lindley. He stated to me that he had felt it to be his duty to forward an immediate statement to the Government, acquainting them with the fact, of which he no longer entertained any doubt, that the plant produced from diseased seed was and would be diseased itself; and that when at first fungi

could not be seen by the most minute microscopical examination, operations had taken place to test the soundness of the plant, and that, in the progress of the test, the disease became quite apparent. Professor Lindley had, therefore, impressed upon the Government the necessity of precaution with regard to the use of diseased potatoes as seed; and I do trust that every caution will be used throughout the country to prevent the disease making any progress in our next year's crop."

My answer was founded on the following communication addressed to me by Dr. Lindley two days before that answer was given.

Dr. LINDLEY to Sir R. PEEL.

(Private.)

"London, February 18, 1846.

"SIR,

"I feel it my duty to apprise you, at the earliest possible moment, of the following alarming facts in regard to the potato crop of *next* season.

"It has now been ascertained beyond all doubt that *diseased sets will produce a diseased crop*. Evidence in confirmation of this was yesterday produced before the Horticultural Society, in the presence of Sir Charles Lemon, Sir Philip Egerton, Lord Grey, and others; and for your own information I enclose you some proofs of it, in the form of some haulm of new potato plants, grown at Bicton in Devonshire. They were perfectly

healthy in appearance in January, and now they are advanced beyond the first stage of decay.

“I lament to add that it is to be feared that *apparently* sound potatoes from diseased fields are unfit for seed. What appears to be proof of it was also received by me yesterday from Bicton; and although I would not rest an opinion upon a solitary instance or two, yet I do feel that such cases are a very serious warning. The instance to which I allude is that of a very fine potato, in which, after the most minute examination, I can find no trace of disease, yet the murrain has already manifested itself in the leaves and stem, with *unequivocal* symptoms.

“I would have communicated this information to you yesterday if I had not wished for leisure to re-examine and re-consider the evidence in my possession, so that all possibility of error or misconception might be guarded against. I have now spent some hours in re-examining the evidence, and not a doubt remains in my mind that *next year's crop is in jeopardy*; because it is impossible in practice for labouring men to distinguish sound from unsound potatoes; and because, if they could, it has become doubtful whether those which seem to be healthy are really so.

“I trust you will excuse the liberty I have taken in making this unofficial communication, which, although marked private, is at your disposal in case you should wish to make public use of it.

“I have, &c.,

“JOHN LINDLEY.”

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There are, I know, many who have freely admitted that a Minister was fully justified in the adoption of the measures of 1846, and who do not blame the resolution taken, but consider that some better mode of giving effect to it might have been devised—who are of opinion that a needless reserve was maintained towards a powerful party, and that a degree of irritation was thereby produced which more frank and unreserved communication would have prevented or mitigated.

I wish to give some explanation upon this point. I am the more desirous to give it because it was my intention—but for the unforeseen events of the autumn of 1845—to enter into that friendly communication, the omission of which is blamed and lamented, to apprise the Conservative party, before the Corn Law could be discussed in the Session of 1846, that my views with regard to the policy of maintaining that law had undergone a change, and that I could no longer undertake as a Minister to resist a motion for the consideration of the whole question.

Had I been enabled to act upon this intention, I should, I presume, have fulfilled every obligation which party connections can impose, unless it be contended that a Minister may safely disregard the various circumstances which, even within a brief interval of time, may alter the character and position of many questions of public policy, and that, having once adopted a certain course, he is so committed to a blind perseverance in it that he must steel his mind against the influence of argument, the result of experience, the conviction of his own deliberate judgment.

That unreserved communication which I had thus contemplated—which is possible and most desirable under ordinary circumstances—was in this case unfortunately precluded by the peculiar character of the unforeseen emergency for which it was necessary to provide, and the peculiar position of the Cabinet in respect to the measures to be adopted.

There was no period between the first alarming indications of the failure of the potato crop, and the resignation of the Ministers on the 9th of December, 1845, at which I could with propriety have given the slightest intimation to the supporters of the Government with regard either to my own course or to the probable decision of the Cabinet. I could not have alluded to the differences which prevailed among the members of the Government without extinguishing whatever degree of hope there might be that those differences would be ultimately reconciled.

The course of events subsequently to the resignation of the Government on the 9th of December equally precluded any confidential communication on my part with the supporters of the Government, which would have had a tendency to soothe irritated feelings or to mitigate hostility to the measures about to be proposed.

It was a matter of public notoriety that the Government had resigned on the 9th of December in consequence of differences on the subject of the Corn Laws—that Lord John Russell had attempted, and had failed in the attempt, to form a Government—that the Queen had thereupon appealed to her former servants, and that

they had resumed power with the full intention of proposing measures with regard to the import of food to which Lord Stanley had refused to be a party.

To assemble the supporters of Government under such circumstances, for the mere purpose of communicating to them facts which were notorious to the whole world, would have given offence rather than have calmed irritation.

Had a meeting taken place, there would naturally have been the demand for a full explanation, not only of the grounds on which the decision of the Government had been taken, but of the peculiar character of the measures which it was intended to propose.

Explanation could not have been given on the first point without serious prejudice to the Government by anticipating the Parliamentary discussion which must shortly follow. It could not have been given on the second, namely, on the precise mode in which the duties on corn were to be dealt with, without disturbing all commercial operations connected with the corn trade, and incurring the risk of giving to some parties an unfair advantage over others.

There is no security against these evils in cases wherein the imposition or repeal of duties is concerned, excepting entire silence and reserve on the part of a Minister until the hour when the intentions of the Government can be publicly declared in Parliament.

For these reasons I found it necessary to abstain on this occasion from those communications with the friends and supporters of the Government which under ordinary circumstances might to a certain extent have taken



place, and to reserve for the meeting of Parliament a full explanation of the grounds on which the Ministers of the Crown had formed their decision, and of the measures which they felt it to be their duty to propose.

On this subject, I mean the omission of conciliatory communication with the supporters of Government, I wrote a letter to Lord Aberdeen in August, 1847, in consequence of one from him, in which I advert to the difficulties under which I had laboured in respect to such communication.

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ENDORSEMENT (MADE AT THE TIME) ON THE LETTER  
WHICH FOLLOWS.

“ Lord Aberdeen sent me, in August, 1847, a letter from Lord ———, blaming, not the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, but the mode of proceeding with regard to that measure. Lord ——— thought the object might have been equally obtained without offending the Conservative party. He thought there should have been confidential previous communications with certain Peers and other leading members of the Conservative party, meetings of the whole party to receive explanations, &c. &c. My letter in reply to Lord Aberdeen’s gives my reasons for totally dissenting from Lord ———’s views.”

Sir R. PEEL to Lord ABERDEEN.

“ Drayton Manor, August 19, 1847.

“ MY DEAR ABERDEEN,

“ Lord —— has made a calculation which I have not taken the trouble to make—namely, the number of *Peelites*, as they are called, in the new House of Commons. I know not whether they are sixty or six, and rather hope they may be the latter in preference to the former or a larger number.

“ This feeling is quite consistent with regret for the fate of any one who, having agreed with me and wishing to remain in Parliament, has lost his seat.

“ I totally differ from Lord —— as to the mode of proceeding in 1845 in reference to the Corn Laws. In December, 1845, I thought their repeal indispensable to the public welfare, and to the real interests and security of the Protectionists themselves. Being of that opinion, every consideration became subordinate to the carrying of repeal. I was determined to carry it, for failure after proposing it would have involved this country in most serious evils.

“ It was impossible to reconcile the repeal of the Corn Laws by me with the keeping together of the Conservative party, and I had no hesitation in sacrificing the subordinate object, and with it my own political interests. It is a very difficult matter under any circumstances to convey information to a political party as to the intention of a Minister in regard to questions which are intimately connected with great commercial speculations and great pecuniary gains and

losses: it is ten times more difficult to make such a communication to a selected few. Times are changed since a Prime Minister, after ascertaining the sentiments of the Marquess of Hertford and the Duke of Rutland and the Earl of Lonsdale, could form a pretty good guess of the inclinations and probable conduct of a whole party. I will venture to say that an exclusive confidential communication to the fourteen or fifteen to whom Lord —— refers would have insured very general dissent.

“ This would have been true of all questions and of all times since 1833.

“ But in the particular case, *when* was this communication to have been made by me?

“ Was it to have been made during that interval after the 1st of November, 1845, when you and two other members of the Cabinet were the only ones who agreed with me? There is not one of Lord ——’s fourteen or fifteen who would not have sided with Lord Stanley and the dissentients.

“ There is not time for a Minister to hold separate communications with Lord This and Mr. That, and go through the whole series of facts and arguments, the combination, the general result of which has led him to form a settled but still debateable conclusion. Nothing but that full and ample detail which can be made once for all in Parliament will do justice to the case, and gain the assent of reluctant supporters. I am perfectly satisfied that if at any time between the 1st of November and the day on which (having resumed the Government, on which neither Lord John Russell nor

Lord Stanley would venture) I announced in the House of Commons the intended repeal of the Corn Laws, I had tried to gain acquiescence, either by belabouring individuals separately, or by summoning the party generally, I should have received scarcely one promise of support. I should have had on the part of the most moderate a formal protest against the course I intended to pursue; to the most violent I should have given facilities for organised opposition; I should have appeared to be flying in the face of a whole party, and contumaciously disregarding their opinion and advice after I had professed to consult them; but (what is of infinitely more importance) *I should have failed in carrying the repeal of the Corn Laws.*

“ Now I was resolved *not to fail*. I did not fail; and if I had to fight the battle over again, I would fight it in the same way. Lord ——’s way was certain of defeat.

. . . . .

“ Ever most truly yours,

“ ROBERT PEEL.”

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I have now completed the task which I have undertaken.

One word before I bring it to a final close.

In the course of this Memoir I have acknowledged the deep obligation which I owe to the colleagues with whom I acted in the administration of public affairs—to those in particular who were united with me in the

service of the Crown after the failure of Lord John Russell's attempt to form a Government.

But I should do injustice to one of those colleagues, with whom, from the nature of our respective offices, my intercourse in regard to the transactions which form the subject-matter of this Memoir was the most frequent and the most intimate, and whose responsibility was equal to my own, if I did not express, in the strongest terms, my grateful acknowledgments for the zealous support and able assistance which I uniformly received from Sir James Graham.

The correspondence which I maintained with him (whenever there was not the opportunity of daily personal intercourse) during the whole period of our official connection contains ample proof of the unrestrained confidence which subsisted between us, and of the obligations which I owe to him for that cordial co-operation which is the most valuable and most effectual when it is prompted by warm feelings of personal regard as well as by the sense of public duty.

Sir James Graham has had his full share of the obloquy with which I have been assailed; and I close this Memoir with the hope that the evidence incorporated with it may serve to rescue his name, as well as my own, from some degree of unjust accusation and unmerited reproach.

ROBERT PEEL.



## APPENDIX.

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In the preceding Memoir (pp. 99 and 100) Sir Robert Peel has stated his reasons for desiring to append to it the two Memoranda on the subject of the Corn Laws which he drew up and read to his colleagues soon after the appointment of his second administration, in September, 1841. The Editors accordingly insert them at this place.

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### CABINET MEMORANDUM.—No. I.

(WINTER OF 1841.)

THE first question for the Cabinet to determine in reference to the subject of the Corn Laws is, whether they will, as a Cabinet, undertake the consideration of those laws, and propose to Parliament a legislative measure re-adjusting the duties which regulate the import of foreign corn.

I shall assume in this Paper that, if there is to be a re-adjustment of those duties, the principle of the present law, that is, a scale of duty varying inversely with the price of corn in the home market, is to be adopted in preference to a fixed duty.

I apprehend that there are few persons who would maintain that the present scale of duties is perfect, and

admits of no amendment—that of those who think the protection it ensures to home produce is not, upon the whole, too great, the great majority would feel that the mode in which the protection is afforded is defective ; and that, on account of the rapid and sudden diminution of the duties when the price of corn is rising above 67*s.*, there are great temptations to tampering with the averages ; that there is great risk, in consequence, of unnecessary loss to the revenue, and of injury, at certain seasons and under certain circumstances, to domestic agriculture, from the sudden admission into home consumption of a considerable and needless quantity of foreign corn at a low rate of duty.

It is evident, from a simple reference to the present scale of duties, that when there is a tendency in corn to rise to high prices in the home market, the inducements to hold back foreign corn from the market, and to practise on the averages, are very great.

When the price of wheat is 66*s.* the quarter, the duty is 20*s.* 8*d.*

If wheat should rise to 70*s.*, there is a difference of profit of 14*s.* on a quarter of foreign corn, viz., 4*s.* increase of price and 10*s.* diminution of duty.

If it rise from 66*s.* to 71*s.*, there is a difference of profit of 19*s.* the quarter between the sale at 66*s.* and 71*s.* At 72*s.* the difference of profit is 24*s.* ; at 73*s.* the difference is 26*s.* 8*d.*, viz., 7*s.* increase of price, and 19*s.* 8*d.* difference of duty.

It may be said that one of the purposes of the law is to encourage the holding back of corn until the period of severe pressure shall arise ; but after allotting all due weight to this consideration, is there not abundant



reason to apprehend that a difference of duty of 1*s.* and 20*s.* 8*d.*, when wheat is at the respective prices of 66*s.* 11*d.* and at 73*s.*, does and must operate as a temptation to an undue holding back of foreign corn, involving unnecessary loss to the revenue, and fraudulent practices with regard to the averages?

Then, again, is there not practical proof that the variations in the amount of duty may be so rapid, within a very short period of time, as to prevent, even in seasons of high prices, any regularity and steadiness in the admission of foreign corn to home consumption?

What has occurred in this respect within our own very recent experience? On the 18th of August, 1841, the duty on foreign corn was 20*s.* 8*d.* per quarter; on the 16th of September it was 1*s.* per quarter; on the 14th of October it was again at 20*s.* 8*d.*—this range of variation having occurred within the period of seven weeks.

If it be admitted, as I think it must, that, looking to a series of years, the domestic supply of corn will not be sufficient for our own consumption; that we must contemplate a deficiency, and the supply of that deficiency from foreign importation; it must be important to every interest of the country that the amount of that importation (whatever it may be) should be admitted under regulations ensuring more steadiness in the supply, and preventing the possible influx of many hundred thousand quarters within a week, not on account of the necessities of the market, but in order merely to gain the advantage of admission at a duty of 1*s.*

These are imperfections in the law which can, I think, hardly be denied.

They might possibly be remedied in some degree without diminishing the actual amount of protection given by the existing law to domestic produce.

The more important consideration remains whether that protection can be safely diminished—whether you can make such alterations in the existing Corn Laws as shall widen the range from which you draw the foreign supply that you require, shall introduce more regularity into the foreign corn trade, ensure more steadiness of prices at home, and shall, at the same time, be compatible with the due protection and encouragement of domestic agriculture—with a due regard to the interests of those who have applied their capital to the cultivation of land under the sanction of the existing law, and to those relations between landlord and tenant which could not be suddenly disturbed without injustice and wrong to the parties themselves, and grievous injury to the community at large.

These are most important considerations, and this is the time, in my opinion, for maturely and dispassionately weighing them, and for giving that advice and taking that course with respect to them which our reason and conviction, after mature deliberation, dictate to us to be the safest and the best.

The warmest friend to the agricultural interest of this country—the man who feels most strongly that there are social, and political, and moral, as well as mere pecuniary and trading interests connected with the protection of agriculture, will feel most strongly the force of this obligation.

He will admit that in the present temper of the

public mind, and in the present condition and with the future prospects of the country, to insist on any *superfluous* protection for that portion of our domestic produce which constitutes the necessaries of life, would be manifestly unwise with reference to the permanent welfare of the interest which he desires to protect. It would be pure uncompensated loss to incur the odium of unnecessary protection.

Under the existing law, when the average price of six weeks for a quarter of wheat is from 50s. to 51s., the duty on foreign corn is 36s. 8d.

Now, it appears to me, that in whatever degree that amount of duty exceeds the duty *bonâ fide* necessary for the protection of home produce, there is positive injury to the agricultural interest, and positive proportionate risk that it may not be enabled to retain the protection which is really and truly requisite.

I will proceed to submit to the Cabinet those considerations which appear to me chiefly deserving of attention in determining the preliminary question, whether the Government shall or shall not undertake the revision of the existing law.

We must assume, I think, that the import of foreign corn is necessary for the subsistence of the people, excepting in years of extraordinary abundance, or after a succession of favourable harvests.

The increase of population has been more rapid, taking a long series of years, than the increase of food—of that portion of food at least which consists of corn.

It may be well worthy of consideration, whether the advance of civilization and the improvement of agri-

culture are necessarily accompanied by a proportionate increase of the production of corn. It may be that the total produce of the land may have increased, and may be increasing, more rapidly than the population; and yet that the produce of wheat and corn generally may have relatively diminished.

The population of Great Britain was, in

1821	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	14,071,000
1831	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	16,263,000
1841	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	18,531,000

Up to the year 1773 this country exported wheat.

It is stated in the Report of the Agricultural Committee of 1821, that from the year 1695 to the year 1773 the excess of exports over imports of grain was 31 millions of quarters. Since the commencement of the operation of the present Corn Law, that is since July 1828, there have been admitted into home consumption 11,271,000 quarters of foreign wheat, and 3,724,000 cwt. of foreign wheat flour.

This is sufficient, I think, to show that notwithstanding the immense improvements in agriculture, the tendency of population is to increase more rapidly than the internal production of corn.

In six of the twelve years which have passed since the operation of the present Corn Law, the import of foreign wheat has in each year exceeded one million of quarters.

In the three years before the present (1838, 1839, 1840), there were admitted into home consumption of wheat, exclusively of wheat flour,—

In 1838	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,700,000	quarters.
„ 1839	..	..	..	..	..	..	2,500,000	„
„ 1840	..	..	..	..	..	..	2,020,000	„

being an average annual admission of foreign corn for those three years of 2,070,000 quarters.

It may be said that the harvests of those years were unfavourable; but a review of the average annual imports of foreign corn for successive decennial periods will conclusively show that population has a tendency to increase more rapidly than the production of corn; and that, notwithstanding the improvements in agriculture, our demands for foreign supply are advancing.

Taking consecutive periods of ten years from the year 1760 to the present time, the average annual importation of foreign and Colonial wheat has been as follows:—

					Average Annual Importation.
From 1761 to 1770	..	..	..	..	94,000 quarters.
„ 1771 to 1780	..	..	..	..	101,000 „
„ 1781 to 1790	..	..	..	..	143,000 „
„ 1791 to 1800	..	..	..	..	470,000 „
„ 1801 to 1810	..	..	..	..	555,000 „
„ 1811 to 1820	..	..	..	..	429,000 „
„ 1821 to 1830	..	..	..	..	534,000 „
„ 1831 to 1840	..	..	..	..	908,000 „

The facts as to the supply of wheat and wheat flour from Ireland are important.

Contemporaneously with the increase of population in Great Britain, and the increased demand for foreign wheat, there has been a diminution in the supply of wheat from Ireland.

The following have been the imports into Great

Britain from Ireland of wheat and wheat flour since the year 1829:—

				Wheat.		Wheat Flour and Meal.
1830	..	..	..	337,000 qrs.	..	672,000 cwt.
1831	..	..	..	407,000 „	..	524,000 „
1832	..	..	..	552,000 „	..	831,000 „
1833	..	..	..	541,000 „	..	1,059,000 „
1834	..	..	..	462,000 „	..	1,110,000 „
1835	..	..	..	340,000 „	..	1,124,000 „
1836	..	..	..	260,000 „	..	1,182,000 „
1837	..	..	..	253,000 „	..	983,000 „
1838	..	..	..	209,000 „	..	1,168,000 „
1839	..	..	..	98,000 „	..	559,000 „
1840	..	..	..	93,000 „	..	282,000 „

This diminished import of wheat from Ireland suggests some important matters for consideration.

Irish wheat is admissible into the English market free of duty; and yet, notwithstanding the cheapness of labour, the comparative lightness of taxation, the facility of transport, the richness of the soil, and the rapid improvement in agriculture in Ireland, the export of Irish wheat is on the decline.

The causes of this may be various, or doubtful.

The climate of Ireland may not suit the growth of wheat, or the improvement of agriculture may itself suggest more profitable modes of applying the land than to the growth of wheat, or the improved condition of the people and increasing prosperity may induce a greater consumption in Ireland of the wheat grown in that country; but whatever be the cause for the diminished export of wheat, the fact appears certain that there is a tendency to diminution, and that Great Britain must not place that reliance, which it was for-

merly supposed she might place, on the produce of Ireland for the supply of her own deficiency so far as wheat is concerned.

Since I wrote the above, I have received the Reports of the Constabulary officers in almost all of the several counties of Ireland, on the subject of the produce and of the consumption of wheat in Ireland. The substance of their Reports is appended to this Memorandum. Their general purport is, that the growth of wheat in Ireland has decreased, and the consumption increased. I believe Louth and Meath are the chief wheat-growing counties in Ireland. The Report of these is—

“ *Louth*.—Growth of wheat diminished one-third. Consumption increased.

“ *Meath*.—Growth of wheat decreased one-third. Consumption greatly increased.”

The general conclusion which I would draw from the several facts above referred to is, that we must calculate on the necessity (excepting in seasons of extraordinary productiveness) of a considerable annual import of grain from foreign countries; and that, this being the case, it is politic so to regulate the admission of that which it may be necessary to import, that the trade in foreign corn may be as little fluctuating as the circumstances of the case will admit of.

If an annual import of a million of quarters be necessary, it is surely better for all interests, better for commerce, better for the revenue, better for the monetary system of the country, better for agriculture, that the supply of the quantity required should be regulated, as far as possible, by the ordinary principles on which com-

mercial intercourse is conducted, than that there should be those inducements to fraud, or even to the sudden influx of foreign grain into the home market, which great risks and the chance of exorbitant profits hold out.

It is important, with reference exclusively to the agricultural interest, to observe the mode in which the present scale of duties operates in respect to the release of foreign corn in bond, and particularly with reference to the season of the year at which the release has of late taken place, and to the effect it has had upon the prices of home produce.

At the end of August, 1838, there were nearly a million of quarters of wheat in bond. The six weeks' average of the last week in August was 72*s.* 11*d.*, the duty was only 2*s.* 8*d.*; but no bonded corn was taken out: the holders waited until the duty was reduced to 1*s.*, and then 1,261,000 quarters were suddenly liberated.

What was the consequence? Prices in the home market were depressed, and before the end of September, 1838, the duty was 16*s.* 8*d.*

Again, in 1839, 812,000 quarters were admitted at the lowest point to which the duty fell in that year, namely, 6*s.* 8*d.* in the month of September.

Again, in 1840, in the first week of September 1,217,000 quarters were admitted to home consumption at a duty of 2*s.* 8*d.*

The time at which the lowest point of duty was reached in each of the last four years was as follows:—



1838	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	September 13
1839	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	„ 5
1840	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	„ 3
1841	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	„ 10

That time is of course chosen for pouring in the supply of foreign corn. The holder of it takes the double advantage of highest price and lowest amount of duty. The consequence is an immediate depression of price in the home market, occurring just before the farmers' supply of new wheat can be thrashed out and offered for sale.

The farmer of the Northern counties is exposed to peculiar disadvantage on this account.

If it be admitted that the present law ought to undergo consideration and revision, the important question will remain to what extent alteration shall be made, and what shall be the *degree* of protection afforded to grain the produce of this country.

Into that question I do not propose to enter in the present Paper. I shall be prepared to enter into it if the Cabinet decide that the present law must undergo modification.

In reference to the question of the degree of protection, there are some general considerations to which I beg earnestly to call the attention of the Cabinet.

There have been three occasions in late years when, on account of the prevalence of agricultural distress, Committees have been appointed to consider the causes of it—in 1821, 1833, and 1836.

In none of those periods could the distress be attributed to the competition of foreign produce.

The distress in each case was most severe, but the protection from foreign competition was complete.

The Committee of 1821 observes, "Protection cannot be carried farther than monopoly. This protection the British grower has enjoyed for the produce of the two last harvests."

In 1833 the average price of wheat was 53*s.* 1*d.*, being lower than the average price of 1821; but the lowness of price was not caused by the competition with foreign grain, inasmuch as the total quantity of foreign wheat brought into consumption in 1833 was only 82,000 quarters, and in the preceding year, 1832, did not exceed 325,000 quarters.

In 1836 there had been for the three preceding years almost a total exclusion of foreign grain, the imports of foreign wheat having been—

In 1833	..	..	..	..	..	..	82,000 quarters.
„ 1834	..	..	..	..	..	..	64,000 „
„ 1835	..	..	..	..	..	..	28,000 „

It thus appears that at those times, within the last twenty years, when Parliament has been appealed to on the subject of agricultural distress, the distress was attributable to other causes than the competition with foreign corn, and existed at the periods when foreign corn was excluded from the British market.

It is material to bear in mind, in considering the question of protection to agriculture, that there have been effected of late years some important alterations of the burdens and disadvantages under which the proprietor and occupier of land laboured.

In the Report of the Agricultural Committee of 1833, special reference is made to two subjects of great importance, namely, Tithes and Poor Laws.

Tithes are described in that Report as a burden which materially affects the outlay of capital in the improvement and condition of the soil.

It states that a permanent commutation of tithes on moderate terms is a national object of the highest importance; that while it would be a benefit to the tithe-owner, it would exempt the tithe-payer from collection in kind, and from the discouragement of industry inherent in a system which gives a certain share of the produce to a party who partakes neither in the risks nor in the losses of production.

In speaking of the Poor Rate, the Report of 1833 observes, “the Poor Rate is heavier, the County Rate is heavier, the Highway Rate is heavier;” and “that the administration of the Poor Law in England affects so directly the condition of every class in society connected with land, that it is impossible to leave the subject unnoticed.”

Now, we must not forget that since this Report was made, there has been a very extensive permanent commutation of tithe upon terms, perhaps not unduly favourable, but still very advantageous to the landed proprietor; and that, in a short time, that commutation will extend over the whole land of the country.

With respect to the Poor Law, a great change has also taken place both in the principle and in the administration of the law; a change the effect of which upon the Corn Laws, and upon the laws generally which

affect the cost of articles of prime necessity, deserves the serious and timely consideration of the Government.

There are attached to this Memorandum two papers, one of which shows the amount of money levied under the denomination of Poor Rate in England and Wales in each year from the year 1821 to the year 1840; the other contains a comparative statement of the total expenditure in each county for relief to the poor, law charges, &c., for the years ending 25th of March, 1834, and 1840.

From the first of these papers, it appears that the average of the six years before the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act was 8,266,718*l.*; the average of the six years subsequent to the passing of the Poor Law Act was 5,972,974*l.*, being a difference of 2,293,744*l.* in the annual amount of expenditure.

The second paper will show that the total decrease of expenditure on the poor in 1840 as compared with 1834 has been 32 per cent.; and that in eleven counties, including the principal agricultural districts, viz.—

BEDFORD,	LINCOLN,	NORFOLK,
SUSSEX,	SUFFOLK,	OXFORD, and
BUCKINGHAM,	NORTHAMPTON,	HERTFORD,
KENT,	LEICESTER,	

the saving has been upwards of 40 per cent.

It appears to me that the combined considerations to which I have adverted are sufficient to prove that it would be unwise on the part of the Government to insist upon the maintenance of the existing law; that, on the contrary, it will be consistent with true policy, and with true regard for the agricultural interest, as the most

important of all interests, that we should, as a Government, while we maintain the principle of that law, consider its details with a view to a re-adjustment of the scale of duties which is applied to the import of foreign corn; and that we should at the same time turn our attention to the state of those other laws which affect the import of articles constituting, with grain, the chief subsistence of the people.

Considering the patience with which, speaking generally, the severe distress of many parts of the country has been borne, and the fruitlessness of the organized efforts which have been made by men of great wealth and local influence to exasperate and inflame the minds of the people—considering also the prospects of the future, the probability that from an unfavourable seed-time, and the continued wet that has prevailed since the seed-time, that the next harvest may be a very deficient one—that there may be an absolute necessity for even the increased import of foreign grain—there are, as it appears to me, special and peculiar reasons—reasons affecting the permanent and comprehensive interests of agriculture, at least as much as any other interests, why we should on the meeting of Parliament propose as a Government those measures in reference to the import of grain and other articles of subsistence, which we shall, after mature deliberation, believe to be conducive to the general and permanent welfare of the country.

ROBERT PEEL.

## CABINET MEMORANDUM.—No. II.

(WINTER OF 1841.)

IN considering a revision of the existing Corn Law, I shall assume that it is the opinion of the Government that the principle of a graduated duty ought to be maintained, and that in any amendment of the law we ought to reconcile, as far as possible, the following objects:—

A due consideration of the circumstances under which capital has been applied to the cultivation and improvement of land.

Due encouragement to our own domestic produce, and the growth of wheat in particular, in such quantities as shall ensure the great bulk of our supply being derived from our own soil.

Such an arrangement of the duties on the import of foreign corn as shall diminish, as far as possible, temptation, either to the undue holding of grain for the mere purpose of profit, or to fraudulent or combined dealings in the home market for the purpose of influencing the averages and the duty dependent upon the averages, and shall at the same time provide that such amount of foreign corn as may be requisite to supply the deficiency of our own produce, either in seasons of ordinary production or in cases of unfavourable harvests, shall be introduced gradually, and in the way of regular commercial intercourse, rather than by

the means of sudden and unforeseen demand, involving the export of bullion for the purchase of corn, and the alternation of complete exclusion and sudden influx at a nominal duty.

For the purpose of being enabled to effect these objects it becomes necessary to consider, first, what may be fairly regarded a remunerating price for wheat in this country; and secondly, what is the cost at which foreign wheat can be delivered here in ordinary years, and in quantities sufficiently considerable to influence materially the home market.

As the cost of production and the profit derivable from the growth of wheat vary with circumstances which it is impossible duly to estimate, no very specific meaning can be attached to the term remunerating price.

By this term I mean the price at which, with reference to the general production of the whole country, wheat can be grown with such a profit as shall ensure a regular supply of about an equal amount with the present, and shall preclude any serious disturbance of the relations between landlord and tenant, or of those arrangements which have been made under the sanction of laws on the assumption that there would be no material variation in a series of years in the average prices of corn.

Whatever you may assume this remunerative price, so understood, to be, no amount of protection from foreign import will ensure its permanency.

With the absolute exclusion of foreign corn we have seen wheat in the year 1835 so low as 39s. 4d.

For four years consecutively—1833, 1834, 1835, and 1836—the average price of wheat for the whole period was under 47s.

All that law can effect is, to provide that so long as corn the produce of this country shall not exceed a certain price, there shall be no serious danger from competition with corn the produce of other countries.

The question then is what that price should be.

There appears to me a greater concurrence of opinion on this point than could have been expected on a point in respect to which no very accurate calculation can be made.

The prevailing opinion is, I think, that 56s. the quarter is a price which may be considered remunerative to the British farmer, and the point at which foreign corn should be admitted into a qualified and regulated competition with British.

The selection of that particular price (56s.) may have been influenced by a consideration, first, of the average of price for seven years, which forms the basis of the commutation of tithe; secondly, by the average of the price of wheat for the ten years ending with 1840.

In the first case the average was 7s. 1¼d. per bushel for wheat, that is, 56s. 2d. per quarter; and it must be remarked that the first average price of wheat for seven years, taken under the Tithe Bill, that is for the seven years ending 31st December, 1835, was higher than any septennial average since, with the exception of the last year, viz. that ending December, 1841.

The following are the septennial averages ending 31st December:—



								Wheat, per bushel.
1835	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7s. 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.
1836	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 8 $\frac{1}{2}$
1837	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 6 $\frac{1}{4}$
1838	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 8 $\frac{1}{4}$
1839	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 9
1840	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 11 $\frac{1}{4}$
1841	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7 3 $\frac{1}{2}$

In the second case, namely, that of the last ten years, the average was 56s. 11d.

The average of this latter period has of course been influenced by the high prices of corn in the three years of deficient harvest, 1838, 1839, 1840.

Take the first seven years of the ten, that is from 1831 to 1837 inclusive, the average price of wheat did not exceed 52s. 6d., the existing Corn Law being in force during the whole of that period.

The average of the three years 1838, 1839, and 1840 has been 67s. 2d.

I must repeat again, that when we are speaking of 56s. as a remunerative price, we speak of the country generally.

In cases where land absolutely unfit for the cultivation of wheat is applied to its cultivation, or where there is an inveterate habit of slovenly farming, and a refusal to adopt improvement, 56s. will not be a remunerating price, but surely there is no claim for protection in such cases.

The consumers ought not to pay a penalty for the neglect or want of skill of bad farmers. If fair competition should compel improvement, it will be an advantage to agriculture and to the public interests generally.

In assuming 56*s.* to be the price at which foreign competition may begin, the facts before referred to should be always borne in mind, namely, that for four successive years of the last ten, under the operation of the existing law, the average price of wheat did not exceed 47*s.* per quarter, and that in the seven first years of the ten it did not exceed 52*s.* 6*d.*

There is another consideration that must not be overlooked. It is said there have been great frauds in the averages—that the prices published in the Gazette have been unduly raised in consequence of the combinations and fraudulent dealings of corn-factors and speculators in corn—that they far exceed the prices received by the farmer, and that the farmer has been thus defrauded of a portion of the protection which the law intended to give him.

Now to whatever extent the averages have been unduly raised for the purpose of procuring the outlet, at a low duty, of foreign corn, to that extent a deduction ought to be made in inferring from the corn returns the necessity of a given price as a remuneration to the farmer.

If the average of the last ten years, 56*s.* 11*d.*, has been raised by combination and fraudulent dealings, the farmer has been receiving proportionately a less amount of protection under the existing law, and a less amount of profit, than the averages would indicate.

These various considerations being duly adverted to, together with the improved state of agriculture, and the rapidly increasing population, it appears to me that the assumption of 56*s.* as a remunerative price for the

growth of wheat is an assumption not unfavourable to agriculture.

I now advert to the second and equally important question—What is the cost at which, under ordinary circumstances, any considerable quantity of foreign wheat could be delivered for consumption in this country?

I am sure it will be admitted that we may reject from our consideration the occasional sales of small quantities of corn at prices which appear extravagantly low.

There must have been many cases in which absolute loss has been submitted to in effecting sales of this kind. No safe inference could be drawn from the mere prices at which foreign corn may have been sold in any particular instances, without minute information in respect to the date of the transaction, the quality of the corn, the state of it in respect to keeping, and the circumstances of the vendor.

We are concerned with comprehensive calculations and general results, the only ones by which domestic agriculture can be seriously affected.

The paper No. 3 of those which have been recently printed gives the average price of wheat free on board at the several places which are named in it.

The general average of the price of wheat free on board is 37s. 2d. It appears in the paper to be 40s. 6d., but I have thought it fair to omit from the calculation Riga, where the price is 49s. 7d., Rotterdam, where it is 55s., and Antwerp, where it is 56s. 5d., because the *quantities* of corn exportable to England are not given.

The average cost of freight is 4*s.* 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ *d.*, making therefore the general average cost of wheat on arrival here 42*s.*

It will be more satisfactory, however, not to take the general result, but to refer to this paper in detail, and observe the price and cost of freight from those places, such as Odessa, Hamburg, Stettin, Elsinore, Dantzic, &c. &c., from which the chief export of wheat to this country takes place. At Dantzic, for instance, the cost of wheat on board is 40*s.*, the freight per quarter 3*s.* 6*d.*

It will be desirable also to look at the column which gives an estimate of the probable quantity of wheat which could be exported to England at moderate duties, and on these points I beg to refer to the paper itself.

The price of wheat given in that paper is, I apprehend, the price of wheat for the last year (1841), when prices were above an average.

In the pamphlet lately published by Mr. Hubbard (who speaks very confidently of his source of information as to the prices of foreign corn) there is a statement of the average prices of wheat free on board at Dantzic, Petersburg, and Odessa, for each of the ten years ending with 1840.

The average price for the ten years is—

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
At Dantzic .. .. .	37	7
„ Petersburg .. .. .	36	0
„ Odessa .. .. .	27	9

The expense of importation from

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	Total Cost.	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Dantzic .. .. .	6	10	..	44	5
Petersburg .. .. .	8	0	..	44	0
Odessa .. .. .	13	3	..	41	0

The latest information as to prices abroad is that which we have from Mr. Meek. He gives the following statements:—

	Average price of Wheat free on board. Per Imperial quarter.	Rate of Freight, and other charges.
Ostend .. ..	50s. .. ..	from 2s. to 2s. 6d.
Rotterdam .. ..	55s. .. ..	.. .. 4s.
Dantzic ..	from 40s. to 45s. .. ..	.. .. 5s.

The prices of wheat in the United States, and the cost of freight, would, I apprehend, preclude the possibility of the delivery of wheat in this country at prices so low as those from which it can be delivered from Dantzic.

No quantity of wheat could probably be delivered here from the United States at a less cost than 45s.

It appears to me that, taking into account the information as to prices above referred to, and making due allowance for any encouragement to the agriculture of foreign countries which might be given by increased demands from this country, we cannot calculate that any very considerable quantity of foreign wheat could be delivered in this country, with a profit to the importer, at a lower price (freight, commission, allowance for waste, all charges included) than 45s. per quarter.

The question of course immediately arises, what is a considerable quantity?

To this and many other questions connected with the subject no satisfactory answer can be given. We must legislate on speculation and conjecture, and on assumptions which rest on no satisfactory data.

Small quantities of foreign corn may probably be delivered here at very low prices.

Considering the relation of the proprietor to the serf who cultivates the land in Poland, and that the proprietor receives his return from the land in corn, that proprietor may occasionally have no alternative but to sell at a price extremely low; but I should think it very improbable that such a quantity as two millions of quarters of foreign wheat could be brought to England, with a profit to the importer, in the course of a year, at a less cost, freight and all charges included, than 45s. per quarter, or that one million of quarters could be brought here at a less cost than 40s. a quarter.

If it could be assumed that there was a permanent deficiency in the home production of wheat, and a permanent necessity for the annual introduction of a given quantity of foreign wheat, say one million or two million quarters, it would be a comparatively easy matter to arrange the duties on foreign corn.

The argument in favour of a fixed duty would in that case be almost irresistible.

But from the uncertainty of seasons and variation in amount of domestic produce, we have to provide for cases which will probably occur, and which have occurred within our recent experience. First, the case of an abundant supply of our own wheat. Secondly, the case of a deficient supply, and the absolute necessity for extensive importation.

In the first case, we wish effectually to secure the British farmer against competition with foreign corn.

What amount of duty will suffice for this purpose? It ought to be efficient for the purpose; but it would be unwise to take a superfluous amount of protection.

When corn is very low in the British market, the lowness of price operates, in all ordinary cases, as a main security against foreign import. High price in England is the temptation to import foreign corn. Let us look to the last period of low prices in England—the years 1833, 1834, 1835, and 1836. The average of the four years, as I have before observed, was 47*s.*; the average of 1835 was 39*s.* 4*d.* Considering the increase of population, we can hardly calculate on the return of a series of lower prices than the above.

Now, what were the prices abroad at the same period? According to Mr. Hubbard, they were:

## FREE ON BOARD.

	Dantzic.		Petersburg.		Odessa.		England.				
	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>			
1833 .. ..	31	0	..	33	2	..	31	4	..	52	11
1834 .. ..	27	4	..	32	1	..	33	2	..	46	2
1835 .. ..	26	0	..	32	3	..	25	7	..	39	4
1836 .. ..	28	6	..	35	0	..	22	0	..	48	6

It must be recollected that these foreign prices were influenced by the cessation of all demand from England. English demand would have immediately caused a rise in the foreign prices.

During this season of low prices, what amount of duty would have secured the English farmer against foreign competition?

Take 1835, when the price of British wheat was 39*s.* 4*d.*, and the price of wheat at Dantzic 26*s.* a

quarter free on board. You cannot estimate all charges of freight, &c., from Dantzic at less than 6s.

This makes 32s. for the quarter of Dantzic wheat on delivery here. The price to be got for it in the English market was 39s. 4d.

Is it not clear in that case that a duty even of 12s. would have been a complete protection?

Take another year of the four when the price of corn in England was higher, namely, 48s. 6d. The price of wheat at Odessa was 22s. Take the cost of freight, damage, &c., at the moderate sum of 12s., the total cost is 34s., leaving a difference of price without duty of 14s. 6d.

In 1833 the average price in England was 53s., the price at Dantzic—

	s.	d.
Free on board .. .. .	31	0
Freight, &c. .. .. .	6	0
	<hr/>	
Cost here .. .. .	37	0

difference of cost 16s.

If we take the prices of the last year, the average price of foreign corn for the last year,—

	s.	d.
Free on board, is .. .. .	37	2
The average freight .. .. .	4	10
	<hr/>	
Cost of delivery here .. .. .	42	0

Mr. Layton Cook's calculation is, that when British wheat is at 56s. per quarter, foreign wheat of similar quality may be introduced here at 40s. per quarter; and that when the average price of wheat in England is 47s., foreign wheat might be imported at 34s.

Let us assume this to be the case; nay, let us assume,



that from the effect of very favourable seasons affecting production generally, that when the average price of wheat here is 47*s.*, foreign wheat might be imported at 30*s.*, all charges included. Still a duty, moderate in amount compared with the present, acting in combination with low price in the home market, would give effectual protection.

Effectual protection at seasons of low prices is the object to be attained; but it appears to me impossible to resist the conclusion, that a duty of 20*s.*, combined with a price in the home market of 50*s.* the quarter, or any lower sum, is complete protection.

Suppose the price here should fall to the lowest average we have had, namely, 39*s.* 4*d.*, with a duty of 20*s.*, would it be possible to import a single quarter of wheat, when the whole sum from which prime cost, freight, and profit must be derived, would be 19*s.* 4*d.*?

Suppose the price here should be 45*s.*, would not a duty of 20*s.*, leaving only 25*s.* per quarter as the sum from which prime cost, freight, and profit must come, be as effectual as any higher amount of duty?

In my view it is a matter of indifference, so far as protection to agriculture is concerned, whether you take a duty of 20*s.* or 25*s.*, or any higher amount. I doubt the policy with reference (exclusively to agricultural interests) of taking a nominal amount of protection beyond that which can be shown by conclusive reasoning to be amply sufficient for its object.

There is, however, an advantage to distant countries, such as the United States, in knowing what is the maximum of duty you intend to propose; because,

though the speculation in sending corn here may turn out to be a failure as to profit, yet still, there being a foreknowledge of the maximum of duty, there are the means of calculating the extreme risk of loss.

For the convenience of consideration and discussion, some definite plan for a re-adjustment of the scale of duties must be brought under the notice of the Cabinet.

The one which I shall proceed to suggest is proposed by me for the purposes of consideration and of discussion, for the purpose of inviting rigid scrutiny into its details, and suggestions for its amendment.

Per quarter.	Sum, independent of Duty, left to Importer.
50s. and under .. .. .	20s. duty .. .. . 30s.
51s. „ .. .. .	19s. „ .. .. . 32s.
52s. „ .. .. .	18s. „ .. .. . 34s.
53s. „ .. .. .	18s. „ .. .. . 35s.
54s. „ .. .. .	18s. „ .. .. . 36s.
55s. „ .. .. .	17s. „ .. .. . 38s.
56s. „ .. .. .	16s. „ .. .. . 40s.
57s. „ .. .. .	15s. „ .. .. . 42s.
58s. „ .. .. .	14s. „ .. .. . 44s.
59s. „ .. .. .	13s. „ .. .. . 46s.
60s. „ .. .. .	12s. „ .. .. . 48s.
61s. „ .. .. .	11s. „ .. .. . 50s.
62s. „ .. .. .	10s. „ .. .. . 52s.
63s. „ .. .. .	9s. „ .. .. . 54s.
64s. „ .. .. .	8s. „ .. .. . 56s.
65s. „ .. .. .	7s. „ .. .. . 58s.
66s. „ .. .. .	6s. „ .. .. . 60s.
67s. „ .. .. .	6s. „ .. .. . 61s.
68s. „ .. .. .	6s. „ .. .. . 62s.
69s. „ .. .. .	5s. „ .. .. . 64s.
70s. „ .. .. .	4s. „ .. .. . 66s.
71s. „ .. .. .	3s. „ .. .. . 68s.
72s. „ .. .. .	2s. „ .. .. . 70s.
73s. „ .. .. .	1s. „ .. .. . 72s.

The important points in this scale of duties are—

A 20s. duty at 50s. price and under.

A 16s. duty at 56s.

A 12s. duty at 60s.

A 6s. duty at 66s., with a level of 6s. for a price of 66s., 67s., and 68s.

A gradual decline of 1s. duty for 1s. advance in price to 73s., and then a minimum duty of 1s.

It must be borne in mind, that if the prevention of fraud or combination in respect to the averages, or improvement in the mode of taking them, have the effect of lowering the averages, in that proportion you increase the protection given by the suggested scale, comparing it with the protection which it would give under the present system of taking the averages.

Supposing that effect to be equivalent to 2s., in that case the duty will be—

22s. at 50s.

18s. at 56s.

14s. at 60s.

My own impression is, that for correction of fraud in the averages, you must mainly rely upon amendment in the scale of duties—upon the diminution, through that amendment, of temptation to fraudulent dealing.

It will be seen, that in the scale which I propose I make the descent from 66s. to 73s. very gradual, interposing a dead level of 6s. duty on three items of price. I do this for the purpose of diminishing the inducement to hold back foreign corn until prices rise to 73s., and the duty of 1s. attaches.

If there be a moral certainty in consequence of scarcity, that prices will rise to 73s., no adjustment of the scale will prevent corn from being held back, and I see no advantage in such a case in discouraging the holding of it.

If there were a fixed duty, or no duty, the prospect of realising the high price will alone be sufficient to induce the waiting for it.

But if there be doubt as to actual deficiency, if it be a matter of conjecture and speculation, then, by a very gradual decline at the high points of the scale in respect to price, the holder of foreign corn will have good reason to doubt, under the scale which I propose, whether it will not be more for his advantage to sell at 66s. with a duty of 6s., rather than incur the risk of others selling before him, and by the effect of their sales in the market lowering the average price and raising the duty.

I should be very glad to introduce a longer level—that is, a longer series of prices at which a certain fixed duty of 6s. should apply, and thus increase the inducement to bring foreign corn into the market and pay the fixed duty, rather than wait for the highest price and lowest duty.

By these means I gain three advantages :

First. Benefit to the revenue.

Secondly. Benefit to the consumer, by giving him access to an increased supply when the price arrives at such a point as 65s. or 66s.

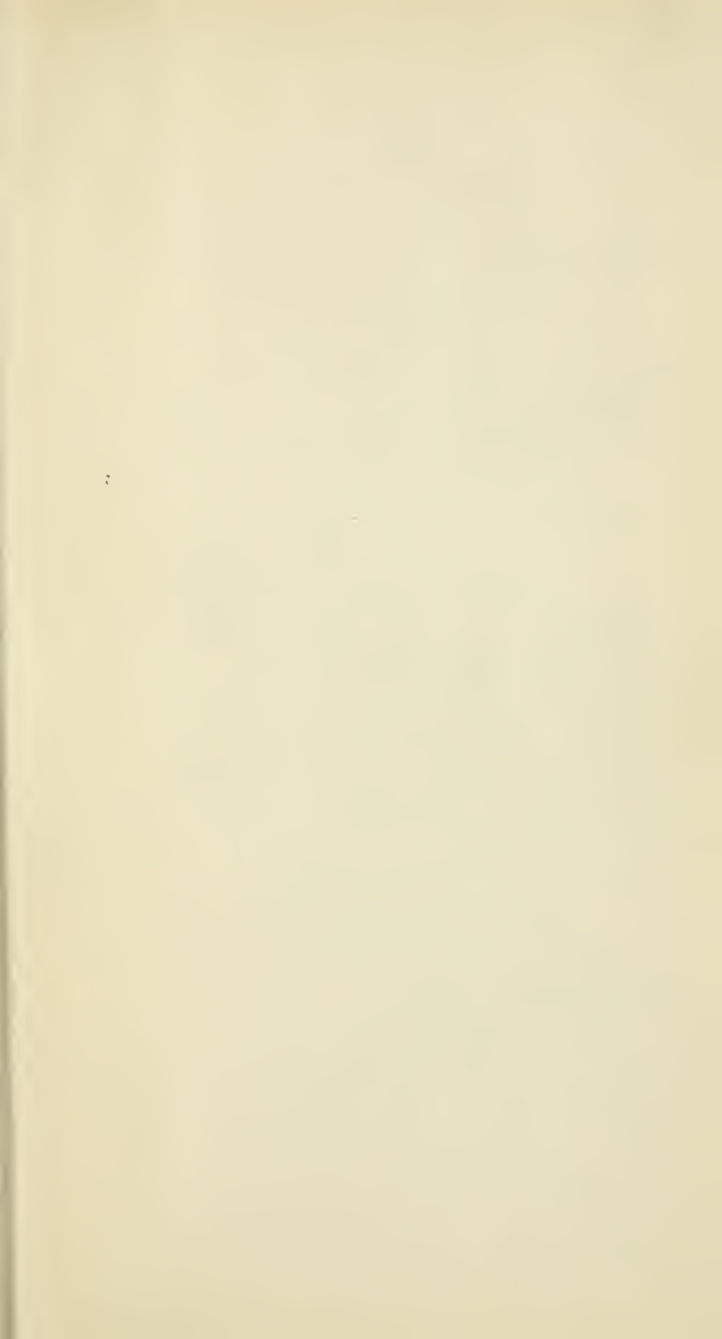
Thirdly. Benefit to the farmer, by preventing a sudden and great influx of corn at a nominal duty.

The scale which I propose might, consistently with the maintenance of the principal characteristics of it, admit of modification in the detail.

As I have before observed, it is a proposal of a scale for consideration and discussion. It is that which appears to me to afford the groundwork of a fair adjustment of a question which it is of vital importance to adjust without delay, upon principles which the intelligent and reasonable portion of the community, agricultural and commercial, shall consider equitable and safe.

ROBERT PEEL.

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OCT 25 1969

LD-URL

DEC 15 1983

APR 13 1968

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