

SPEECH  
OF  
LORD HAWKESBURY,

IN THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS,

Friday, April 25th, 1800,

ON THE  
INCORPORATION OF THE PARLIAMENTS  
OF  
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. WRIGHT, PICCADILLY.

1800.

On Friday the 25th of April, Mr. Grey made the following Motion: " That it be an Instruction to the  
" Committee, appointed to consider of His Majesty's  
" most gracious Message respecting the Union be-  
" tween Great Britain and Ireland, to take into their  
" consideration the most effectual means of providing  
" for, and securing, the Independence of Parliament."  
The Motion being seconded, Lord Hawkesbury rose,  
and spoke nearly as follows:

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. WRIGHT, MIDDLESEX.

1800.



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# S P E E C H

OF

LORD HAWKESBURY,

*&c. &c.*

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MR. SPEAKER,

BEFORE I proceed to state my objections, and the principles on which they are founded, to the Motion with which the Honourable Gentleman has concluded, I am anxious to return him my thanks for the fairness and candour with which he has opened the subject. I heard, with the greatest satisfaction, the beginning of the Honourable Gentleman's Speech. I fully and entirely agree with him, that this is a practical question; that it would be mischievous and absurd to ground a Reform in



Parliament on any fanciful idea of proportion, or on a disposition to acquiesce in the wild projects of men of speculative minds or heated imaginations ; yet though he states, and very properly enforces, this proposition in the commencement of his Speech, I cannot help thinking that in the progress of his arguments, and when he comes to the detail, he falls into the very error which he condemns; and that he treats the question rather as a speculative than a practical one.

The Honourable Gentleman states, that the operation and tendency of his Motion, are to bring back the Constitution to its original principles and practice. Before we can form our opinion upon this part of the subject, we ought, I contend, to have some date and period fixed, to which we can refer for these principles and this practice. I wish to know what is that æra in our history to which the Honourable Gentleman would direct our attention, that we may judge of the Representation of the Commons of England in its pure and unadulterated state. I have no hesitation in saying, that, if

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he will come fairly to that inquiry, he will find that, from the earliest period of our history to the present day, the popular influence in our government, so far from having decreased, has been gradually increasing. The inequality in our Representation, of which the Honourable Gentleman complains, is not of modern date; it has subsisted at all times. If we recur to the early periods of our history, we shall find that there were some places of great extent, of large population, and in a very flourishing condition, which did not return any Members at all; and that there were other places proportionably small and inconsiderable, which were allowed to send Representatives to this House. It may be true, that, in some instances, towns which once were populous, and sent Representatives to Parliament, may have fallen into decay, and that some villages, to which this privilege was not accorded, may have become great and populous towns. But are these the only innovations, which time and circumstances have made in our Constitution? Let the Honourable Gentleman take into the account what changes have arisen, and what alterations have occurred in



the distribution and division of property. At present we all know, that the right of voting at the election of Members to serve in Parliament for counties is vested in every person possessing a forty shillings freehold: that right has undergone no change since it was first established; but the difference between the value of money then and now is so great, that forty shillings a year at that time is equal to twenty pounds a year at present. We should consider likewise, that from the increase of population, of commerce, and of wealth of every description, many towns which did not contain one hundred electors formerly, contain at the present time thousands. I state these things to show, in answer to the arguments of the Honourable Gentleman, that if the popular influence appears to have lost in some instances, it has gained in a much greater proportion in others. There are, I know, many persons, who entertain very erroneous notions upon the origin of this House. Representation was originally no part of our Constitution. The Great Council of the Nation consisted solely of tenants in capite from the Crown,



Crown \*. When, in consequence of the division of property, the lesser Barons became too numerous to attend conveniently in person, they were allowed, *out of their own body*, to send representatives: this is the origin of the Commons of England; so that the principle of our Representation is property. At a subsequent period of our history, when commerce had in some degree revived, charters were granted by the Crown to corporations, and summonses issued to certain towns and boroughs to send Members to Parliament. This prerogative was principally exercised for the purpose of counteracting the influence of the great Lords; but these charters do not appear to have been

\* See Magna Charta. The twelfth article states that "no scutage or aid shall be imposed, except by the Common Council of our kingdom, but for redeeming the King's body, for making his eldest son a Knight, and for once marrying his eldest daughter." The fourteenth article states, "that to have a Common Council of the kingdom to assess an aid or scutage otherwise than in the three before-mentioned cases, We will cause to be summoned the Archbishops, Bishops, Earls, and greater Barons, personally, by our letters; and besides we will cause to be summoned in general by our Sheriffs and Bailiffs *all those who hold of us in chief.*"

granted,



granted, nor these summonses issued, upon any uniform principle, but solely according to the will of the reigning Monarch; and from the commencement of the Borough Representation to the present day, it does not appear, as far as we have any lights upon the subject, that the Representation was more popular in principle at any period than it is at present. Sir, the Honourable Gentleman has alluded to a Proclamation of King James the First, commanding the Sheriffs not to summon Members from decayed boroughs. The conduct of King James in the case alluded to, has, I believe, always been considered to have been unconstitutional: it was the opinion of Lord Chief Justice Coke, and it has been the opinion of every great constitutional authority from his time to the present, that though the Crown could give the right of Representation, it could not afterwards take it away; that all political rights existed *pro bono publico*; and that, though they might originate from the Crown, they were ever after independent rights; and No act of the Crown; No act of the parties, No usage even could affect them—nothing short of an Act



Act of the whole Legislature could abrogate them. This was decided in a memorable instance in the Peerage, in which it was maintained that a Peer could not resign his Peerage; because it was a right not granted to him for his individual use, but that he held it *pro bono publico*, and that the collective voice of the community, acting through the Legislature, could alone deprive him of it.

Sir, the Honourable Gentleman has stated that it is not fair to condemn principles, such as those which have of late been established in France, because they may have been abused. I perfectly agree that there is no principle in morals or politics which is not capable of abuse; but I cannot think this observation applicable to the principles of the French Revolution. I contend that the principles of that Revolution, the Rights of Man, as conveyed and explained by the leaders to the people in France, and as afterwards acted upon, are fundamentally false. What were these principles? Equality was publicly held out to the lower orders of the people; Equality in rank and in power; Equality even almost unlimited in property. Little indeed



indeed has that person observed of human nature, who does not know that men are unequal in talents, strength, activity, and, in short, in every quality of the mind and body. Government is not founded on the equality, but is a regulation of the natural inequalities of man. Artificial inequality has always been considered as the corrective of natural inequality. The object of Government and of Society is not to counteract that order of things which Providence has established, and which, do what we will, we cannot avoid ; but its object is to prevent those convulsions which, in a state of nature, could not fail to arise from the diversity of the characters, and the violence of the passions of men ; to secure to every one the fruits of his own industry ; to maintain all the gradations in life, from the prince to the peasant ; to restrain the powerful ; to assist the weak ; to relieve the distressed, and to afford to each class of the community the greatest degree of happiness which it is capable of enjoying. Sir, I thought it necessary to say thus much on this subject, because I have heard frequent arguments founded upon this difference, between the abuse of the principles



principles of the French Revolution, and the principles themselves; and in this case, it is against the principles that I am desirous of entering my protest.

With respect to the question of Parliamentary Reform, we, who have been at all times most adverse to it, have always admitted, that if a practical grievance to a considerable extent could really be proved; if it could be shown that this House, virtually representing the People, were not generally in unison with their sentiments and wishes; and that the popular feeling was not impressed upon it; we, I say, have always admitted, that if all this could be proved, it would be a proper ground for some Parliamentary Reform. I likewise agree that there may be cases, where the expectancy of an evil may be ground for Reform, though the evil itself has not been felt. But such cases should be acted upon with extreme caution, for by an unnecessary change we may frequently create an evil where none exists, and where our only object ought to be to avoid one. The only really safe ground of Reform is a practical



tical grievance, which, if it is not now considerable in itself, should appear, at least, to be progressive. It will not then be thought surprising, when we consider all the effects of good government; when we feel and observe, that this Country has for so long a period enjoyed every blessing which any country has ever enjoyed, and which, perhaps, any one is capable of enjoying, that we should entertain a strong prejudice against any alteration in the frame of our Government.

Sir, if I was called upon to state what in my idea constitutes a good government, I should say, that the best evidences of its excellence are, the Existence of internal Tranquillity—Civil Liberty—the Power of Defence against a Foreign Enemy—and progressive and increasing Wealth and Prosperity. If I look to the first point, internal Tranquillity, and I consider with how few, and with what small interruptions this Country has enjoyed this blessing for a century, I see, on this ground, no plea for Reform. When I look to Civil Liberty, and observe that no country in the world ever  
 enjoyed



enjoyed it in such a degree or to such an extent, so pure, so unrestrained, as this country has done from the time of the Revolution; I see, here, the strongest argument against Parliamentary Reform.—If I consider the Power of Resistance and Defence against an Enemy, which our Government possesses; if I review the energy which it has displayed in all wars, but more especially in the course of the present contest; if I reflect upon its great and successful efforts in defending its own territories and liberties, and its exertions for the salvation of Europe, surely I see, on this ground, a strong argument against Parliamentary Reform.—If I look to the last point, to internal Prosperity and Wealth, I look at our situation in this respect, not only with satisfaction and pride, but with emotions of astonishment and surprise. Sir, no man's expectation, however sanguine—no man's hopes, however confident—could make him suppose that possible, which he sees verified by fact in the progressive wealth and prosperity of the Country. Here then I find likewise the strongest argument against Parliamentary Reform. If the present Constitution,



tution, practically considered, secures internal Tranquillity, Civil Liberty, the Power of Resistance and Defence, and the Wealth and Prosperity of the Country ; if we have the evidence of experience, that it secures all these objects in a higher degree, and on a more solid foundation, than ever has been done by any other government in any other country, where or what can be the practical ground of argument for introducing any Change or Reform in the Constitution of the Country ?

The Honourable Gentleman has asked us, whether the House of Commons, in point of fact, has been found to be in unison with the sentiments and feelings of the people ? In answer to this, I will aver, that, with very few exceptions, it will be found, that the Parliament for the last century has spoken the sentiments of the nation ; and that during no period of the century has the Parliament been so completely in unison with the feelings and sentiments of the Country, as during the last eighteen years. Sir, I will not go into any detail of any former period ; but I will contend, that all the wars

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in



in which we have been engaged, have been popular in the commencement; that the American war in the beginning was decidedly and unequivocally approved of, by the great body of the nation, and that when the ill success which attended it, created a change in the public opinion, that change was communicated to this House. With respect to the present war, the Honourable Gentleman has alluded to the Speech of a Right Honourable Friend of mine\*, to prove that the Ministers were forced into a negotiation by the unequivocal opinion of the People, against their own opinion, and against the opinion of this House. Sir, I do not recollect what were the expressions of my Right Honourable Friend, but I positively deny the inference which the Honourable Gentleman would draw from them: I believe it will be admitted by every one, that no war was more popular at its commencement than the present. I agree, that at a certain period of it, when some changes had taken place in the internal state of France, and when the system of terror was supposed to be overthrown, I agree that at that time dif-

\* Mr. Dundas.



ferent shades of opinion existed, amongst those, who had supported the war, respecting the policy which, under those circumstances, it would be most prudent for this Country to adopt; but I am confident, that a great majority of the Country, as well as of this House, placed full and entire confidence in His Majesty's Ministers. I do not admit, that there was, on that occasion, any discordance or disagreement between the People and Government, on the subject of the Negotiations which were entered upon at Paris and at Lisle: it was impossible indeed, that His Majesty's Ministers should not feel the risk to which the successful termination of those negotiations would have exposed the Country, but they were reduced to the necessity of choosing between two evils; and both the Government and the Country felt, that as the state of Europe at that time would allow them to expect no assistance from any of those powers who had been our allies at the commencement of the contest, and as the war could only be carried on by extraordinary exertions; so that great and unusual sacrifices must be demanded from

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the People for that purpose, it was wise in the first instance to try the effect of negotiation, by an offer of fair and moderate terms of peace; yet so far were Ministers from differing with the People on this occasion, that they anticipated the sense of the People, and I believe, in my conscience, that they entered into negotiation, as soon as the majority of the Country could have wished.

Sir, the Honourable Gentleman has alluded to the state of the influence of the Crown in the American war, and to the Resolution voted by the House at that time, "That the influence of the Crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished;" a vote which the Honourable Gentleman seems to think was not attended with those consequences which ought to have resulted from it. In the year 1782, however, a Bill was introduced into this House, and passed by the Legislature, for reducing the influence of the Crown; and a spirit of internal Reform has prevailed in the Government, from that time to the present. I hold in my hand a paper, which shows that, in the year

1778,



1778, the number of Members in this House possessing places under Government, including Contractors, amounted to 118 : in the year 1800, the number of Members holding places, amounts only to 52 : so that within these twenty years there has been a diminution of the influence of the Crown, in this House, arising from places and contracts, of more than one half.

I come now to the application of this question to the Union with Ireland ; and I am ready to agree, that I should act inconsistently with the principles I have stated, if I did not confess, that, looking to the subject abstractedly, I regret the necessity of making any change at all in the Constitution of this House. As long as the question respected Great Britain alone, no man could be more hostile to any innovation in the Constitution of Parliament than myself : but the peace and security of Ireland, the integrity and strength of the British Empire, makes it necessary to have recourse to measures, which on any other ground I should think highly objectionable. If then, to incorporate the two Countries, it becomes indispensable that some  
change



change should take place in the Constitution of Parliament, it is important to provide that that change should be as small as possible, and should be made on the least objectionable grounds. It is a strong presumption in favour of the Resolution now proposed, and the principles on which it is founded, that many great authorities, who have been inimical to every other species of Parliamentary Reform, have been of opinion that it was advisable to increase the number of County Members, or Landed Representatives ; and I have never talked with any person, who was the greatest enemy to Reform, who did not prefer, of all the plans suggested, that which tended to increase the number of County Members, without affecting the present state of the Borough Representation. Parliamentary Reform is certainly a wide expression : it may signify, when used by some, only a small modification in the manner of election ; and it may signify, when used by others, a total change or subversion of the present constitutional Representation of the kingdom ; hence even those, who, generally speaking, profess themselves the friends of Reform, have differed as essentially from



each other, as any of them differ from those who have been constantly inimical to it. Some of the Reformers have proposed universal suffrage; some have been desirous of giving the right of suffrage to all householders: a system, which, if not equally extensive, is in principle equally dangerous and repugnant to the Constitution as that of universal suffrage: I say, that it is equally dangerous and repugnant to the Constitution, because both these plans would have the same effect of establishing Population as the basis of Representation, and not Property. With persons who entertain either of these opinions, I have no ideas in common, and to these therefore I can have nothing to say; I wish to address myself to those who have been supporters of more moderate plans of Reform. What has been the great argument, which they have adduced, in favour of County, and against Borough Representation? First, they have said, that the Representatives of Counties must (except from accident) be persons of considerable property and influence in the Country, a security which you cannot have for Borough Representatives;



atives ; secondly, that though many very opulent, respectable, and independent Members, may be found amongst the Representatives of close Boroughs, yet, that the situation in which they are placed in this House, is very different from persons of the former description. County Members owing their elections to large bodies of men, must feel themselves dependant upon them for the continuation of their seats in this House, and are liable to be influenced in consequence by the sentiments, feelings, and opinions of those whom they represent : these are the most weighty arguments used by the moderate Reformers, in favour of what they have proposed. Those who have opposed all Parliamentary Reform, have always urged that no practical evil was experienced from the present state of Representation, and that though in theory the inequality of our Representation might be considered as an objection, no grievance in fact arose out of it ; and a great and celebrated author\* has observed, that this very inequality might have the effect of making us what we are and ought to be, a deliberative Council and Assembly, and not an Assembly

\* Mr. Burke.



of Deputies speaking only the sentiments of the districts by which they were elected. Let us now see what is the Plan of Representation proposed for Ireland: sixty-four Members out of one hundred are to be elected by counties: two by Dublin; two by Cork; one by the University of Dublin; four or five by boroughs where popular elections prevail; the remainder by the principal towns, in many of which however the election is confined to a small number of persons. It appears then, that three fourths of the Representatives from Ireland at least will be elected in such a manner, as to meet the ideas of every moderate Reformer, by securing the election of persons who are of the greatest property and independence in that kingdom; and who will be chosen by large bodies of men, and consequently subject to popular influence and control:—I leave it therefore to the House to determine, whether it is not rather to be apprehended, that this measure will have the effect of adding to the influence of the People in the Constitution, and not to that of the Crown. I agree that the influence of the Crown ought certainly to be kept within bounds: but



I never yet heard any person assert in this House, that, to a certain extent, it was not necessary : the Honourable Gentleman has stated, that he should have been satisfied with the Constitution as it subsisted during the first fifty years of the century ; yet during more than twenty of those years, a Ministry were in possession of power, who, whether justly or not I will not pretend to say, have been stigmatized more than any other, for having introduced a complete system of corruption, and for having increased the influence of the Crown, to the prejudice of the rights and privileges of this House : and yet this Government was opposed by the greater part of the Scotch Members, who have been represented by the Honourable Gentleman as the universal supporters of all Ministers. It is singular that the Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, to which I have alluded, is to this day proverbial for influence and corruption ; and this is the period to which the Honourable Gentleman would refer us, as to the golden age of the Constitution. It should be considered, however, that the influence of the Crown, whether it be more or less, carries  
always



always an antidote along with it. If there are those, who may be supposed to support Government from having places, there are others who may be supposed to oppose it, from having been refused places. Indeed, Sir, if the history of these transactions were known, I believe it would be found, that the proportion of the latter class to the former would be much greater than is commonly imagined: I state this as one antidote to the influence of the Crown; and if, as the Honourable Gentleman says, possession and expectation tell for something, disappointment surely ought not to be forgotten in the account.

Sir, I repeat, that when we consider the description of persons who will be introduced by the Union into this House—when we consider their fortune, their independence, and their subjection to popular control, we cannot suppose, that such an addition will in any degree affect the popular influence in the Constitution. I have already said, that I should prefer, that no change whatever were made in the Constitution of this House: but we must weigh and  
compare



compare evils : we must recollect that a great good can rarely be obtained, without running some risk : an increase of numbers to this House is certainly an inconvenience : but an increase to a limited extent, appears to me to be in itself a less evil than any other change, which could be proposed ; and such was the opinion of many wise men, even at a time when no necessity of the present nature existed for it. I am sensible that Government is a machine of so delicate a structure, that it is impossible either to add or take away the number of one hundred Members without some apprehensions. But when we consider that an addition of Members of one description, necessarily grows out of the measure of Union ; when we reflect on the manner in which these Members are to be chosen, and how impossible it is to form beforehand any decided opinion of the precise effect which their introduction into this House will produce ; it is surely more wise, with the experience we have of the conduct of this House, with the knowledge of its character, and the proofs of its wisdom, to leave it, in other respects, constituted as it is, and to take our chance



chance of the inconvenience of an increase of our numbers, rather than make an alteration so complicated as that which the Honourable Gentleman has proposed \*. I am not surpris'd that the zealots for Parliamentary Reform should take this opportunity to make a motion in its favour ; but I think that this very measure of Union will be considered, by those who are friends to Reform only on moderate principles, as a ground for renouncing or suspending their opinion ; and I am perfectly convinced, that every person, who entertains the same sentiments with me upon the subject of Reform, and who considers the great benefits which the Country enjoys under the Constitution of Parliament, as established at present, will feel it desirable, that the change which must be made in our Constitution, on this occasion, should be no greater than is indispensably necessary.

The Honourable Gentleman is fond of talking of the Constitution of the Country as it

\* Mr. Grey proposed, that only 85 Members should be received from Ireland, and that 40 of the most decayed boroughs in this country should be disfranchised.



stood at the Revolution. Sir, the principles of that glorious event I admire and adore. I admire them not only for the vigour, the firmness, and the spirit, which our ancestors displayed in going the length they did, but for the prudence, the wisdom, and the caution they evinced, in not going farther. The principles of the Revolution have been brought forward in defence of general resistance: our ancestors, however, were cautious that those measures should not be adduced in justification of any but such an extreme case as that of the Revolution itself. They endeavoured to word the famous Resolution, by which the Throne was declared to be vacant, in such a manner as to make it no precedent for future ages. They showed in the whole of their conduct on that memorable occasion, that the case before them was that, which alone occupied their attention, and that their object was to reform practical grievances, and not to lay a foundation for dangerous speculative improvements. The Honourable Gentleman says, that he is satisfied with the Constitution as it stood at the Revolution. Does he think, I would ask, that the influence of the People was one



tenth part so great then as it is at present ? I do not mean to trace the progress of the Constitution from distant periods ; but we all know that the powers of Parliament were, in former times, rather occasional, than permanent ; and I think it will be allowed, that it is only since the Revolution that this House has become a constantly operative and constituent part of the Government. It was the opinion of a very great, and wise man, who formerly filled the Chair, which you now fill with so much honour to yourself, and advantage to this House and the Country ; I say it was the opinion of Mr. Onslow, whose situation peculiarly enabled him to form a correct, and impartial judgment on the subject, that the Septennial Act, however objectionable it had been in principle, had tended most materially to increase the power of the House of Commons in the Constitution. If the power of the House of Commons has increased, the influence of the People over the House of Commons has not increased in a less proportion ; this influence has increased from many causes, which are accidental ; from the general diffusion of wealth and knowledge, and from the facility of

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communication between the most distant parts of the country ; but it has increased very peculiarly of late years, from causes to which, on any other occasion, I could not very regularly allude ; from the doors of this House being open to the People, and from the constant publication of your debates. These last circumstances have had the effect of making the People parties as it were, to all the measures of Parliament, even before they are decided, in a degree and to an extent, which many wise men have thought objectionable.

If the Honourable Gentleman will reflect on all these things, if he will sum up the total, he will find that the influence of the People upon this House, and upon all the branches of Government, and the influence of the House upon the Crown, is much more considerable than it was at any former period. This increase of popular power I am far from regretting. I feel the privileges of this House to be the best security of the liberties of the People ; I know them to have been a principal cause of our glory and prosperity, and the great source of



that energy and strength, which have enabled us to support the present arduous contest. Under the existing constitution of the House of Commons, we have experienced, during the last eighteen years, the greatest increase of prosperity and power: look at the ten years of peace that preceded the present war; you will find a period of tranquillity, prosperity, and commercial improvement totally unexampled in the history of any other country:—Look to the last eight years, you will see what gigantic exertions the Country has been able to make; what energy, what vigour it has displayed; how, by means of its internal strength and resources, it has risen in spite of all the attempts of its enemies; and how it will yet save the world, if the world will be saved. We have seen these things; and can we then refrain from cherishing the Constitution, and from feeling a repugnance to any change, which circumstances do not render unavoidable?

I agreed very much with what was stated by the Honourable Gentleman on a former night, that the evils resulting from factions, and party spirit,



spirit, were the necessary consequence of a free Government, and that we could not expect to enjoy the blessings, without, at the same time, partaking of the inconveniences of such a system. No good in this world is pure and unmixed. Factions are the evils of free governments; but experience has proved to us, that with a people of the reflecting character, and the sober sense of the People of England, the evils are inconsiderable in proportion to the benefits. There may, however, be countries differently circumstanced, where the disadvantages may more than counterbalance the advantages, and may even make the enjoyment of those advantages, or of any other good, impracticable (for we must not give into the principles of the new philosophy, which, as they assume that all men are equal, seem also to assume that all nations are the same). Ireland appears to be in a situation somewhat of this kind; the religious feuds that have subsisted there for so many years, the state of the public mind in that country, the jealousies on the subject of property, the recollection of the past, and the apprehensions for the future, make it impossible for Ireland to bear the col-



lision of contending factions, without ruin to her peace, and ultimate destruction to her Government. Let this Union take place, all Irish party will be extinguished ; there will then be no parties, but the parties of the British Empire. The strength of Great Britain, the Constitution of her Parliament, will, I am persuaded, enable her to keep all such parties in subjection, and to secure to every member of the Empire, the possession of its religion, its property, and its laws. Such a Union will give integrity and harmony to our whole system, and will make Ireland, in any future contest, if ever we shall be engaged in one of so arduous a nature as the present, which God avert ! a source of incalculable energy, strength, and support to this Kingdom.

THE END.



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