



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

2/31

SUBSTANCE

OF THE

SPEECH

OF THE

RIGHT HON. GEORGE CANNING,

IN

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

ON TUESDAY, 25th FEBRUARY,

ON

SIR M. W. RIDLEY'S MOTION

FOR REDUCING THE

NUMBER OF THE LORDS OF THE ADMIRALTY.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1817.



London: Printed by W. CLOWES,
Northumberland-court, Strand.

SUBSTANCE,

&c.

MR. SPEAKER,

NOTWITHSTANDING the lateness of the hour to which the debate has been protracted, I feel myself compelled to trespass for a short time on the attention of the House. I might indeed safely and confidently rest the merits of the argument upon the speeches already delivered, and particularly upon that of my Honourable Friend who sits near me * : but, after the menace of unpopularity which has been thrown out against those who may oppose the Motion of the Hon. Baronet †, I should hold myself guilty of a base dereliction of duty, if I were to shrink from an explicit declaration of my sentiments.

* The Hon. J. W. Ward.

† Sir M. W. Ridley.

Insignificant as the Question of to-night is in itself, it acquires an importance which does not belong to the immediate subject of it, from the circumstances under which it is brought forward,—from the topics with which it has been associated,—from the consequences, of more sorts than one, to which (if successful) it must inevitably lead. Considered as a single and unconnected Question, its importance has in truth been ridiculously exaggerated. I cannot conceive propositions more nearly indifferent, than—whether an official Board should originally have been composed of five, or of six, or of seven, or of nine Members; or whether a sum of one or two thousand pounds (subject to sundry taxes and deductions) should be withdrawn from the payment of official salaries, to be applied to the temporary exigencies of the State. But this, Sir, is not my view of the present Question; it is not the view of those who bring it forward. The Motion of the Hon. Baronet is avowedly the first of a series of attacks upon that established system of political Office by which the administration of the Government of this Country is practically carried on; and by which it has been carried on for upwards of a century,—that is, during the period of our history when our laws and liber-

ties have been best guarded, as well as best understood.

The reduction of the number of such Offices may undoubtedly form a fair subject for discussion : but, to discuss it fairly, the system must be viewed as a whole. It is not by picking out details, and by putting this or that Office separately upon its trial, that the expediency of a parliamentary administration of the Government can be usefully considered, or that the number of holders of Office which may be properly and conveniently allowed to sit in the House of Commons, can be justly ascertained.

As a matter of economy, the possible saving upon the two Offices in question is by general admission too inconsiderable to be taken into account : no man has gravely insisted upon it in this debate. It has been argued, indeed, that saving, *as* saving, is good in itself,—good in principle without reference to amount ; and it has been contended, that to *this sort* of saving, among others, we are pledged by our Address in answer to the Speech from the Throne. But I must be permitted to remind the House,—and I appeal to

the general sense and recollection of all who now hear me,—that this was *not* the class of Office specifically in the contemplation of those who voted for the Address, and for the appointment of the Committee which grew out of His Royal Highness's recommendation. The reduction specifically in contemplation was unquestionably in those Offices which are called *Sinecures*.

In saying this, I do not mean to say that the House, either by the Address or by the appointment of that Committee, is precluded from carrying reduction beyond those particular Offices: but I think it material for the House to bear in mind, that the attention of the Government and of the Committee has been immediately directed to that peculiar species of reduction which had been most earnestly called for by the public; that this Motion therefore was not necessary to quicken either the Ministers or the Members of the Committee in the discharge of their duty; and that the suggestion of to-night is not (as is pretended) in furtherance of an admitted course of policy, but in recommendation of a policy which, so far from having been admitted, is

now brought before us for discussion for the first time. The new policy may be right or wrong in itself (that is matter of argument) ; but it must be examined and decided on its own separate merits.

The labours of the Committee, are, as is well known, active and unremitted: and the fruits of those labours have been neither small nor slow in growth. In one short week they are understood to have resolved on the abolition of all those great *Sinecure* Offices (those of the Exchequer, I mean) which have long been held out to public view as the great blots and stains in the official appointments of the State. I will not here examine whether it is a just or unjust view that has been taken of these Offices. Undoubtedly I think there is much of unfair prejudice, much of misapprehension and misrepresentation in the attacks which have been made upon them. Undoubtedly, I think, they could not be abolished without the substitution of something in their room. It may, however, be true, that being (whether justly or unjustly) degraded in the public estimation, they have ceased to be the most fit rewards of honourable public service, and have thus lost the charm by which their nominal existence was prolonged.

My own sentiments on this subject are indeed already recorded. The House may possibly recollect that I have twice voted for a Bill of an Hon. Friend of mine*, which went to abolish *Sinecures* on an extensive scale ; substituting for the abolished Offices other means, to be placed at the disposal of the Crown for the reward of public service.

The details of that Bill (for I believe it was the same Bill which passed this House in the two successive years 1812 and 1813), my Hon. Friend may remember, I thought in many particulars faulty and ill-digested. I would willingly have had these errors mended, if I could have prevailed upon my Hon. Friend to concur in the alterations which were proposed :—nevertheless, approving of the principle of the measure, I voted for it with all its imperfections on its head. To a Bill of the same kind I am now ready, in common with my colleagues, to lend my cordial support, and—if my Hon. Friend will now accept such aid—to assist him in moulding and shaping his measure, in such manner as may best tend to ensure its ultimate success.

* Mr. Bankes.

Let me not, however, be supposed visionary enough to imagine, that such a concession, although involving nine-tenths of all that is professedly demanded, will satisfy those who clamour most loudly for retrenchment and reform, and who inflame the imaginations of the multitude with the expectation of impossible relief. *Their* purpose is not to amend what is really amiss in our Establishments, but by cavilling alike at everything that exists in them, and at every proposition for amendment, to feed and keep alive the discontentment of the times, and (if they can) to ripen it into disaffection. It would be vain to look for any other effect from this concession upon such men, than that their complaints and remonstrances may perhaps be transferred from the point conceded to some other on which concession is known to be utterly impracticable.

What is the main grievance of which the clamourers of our day have been complaining?—Sinecures. Against which branch of the Constitution have their clamours been directed?—Against the House of Commons. Would it not then naturally be supposed, by any person ignorant of what had been passing during the last few

years, that the Crown had recommended the abolition of Sinecures, and that this House had disregarded the recommendation? or that the House of Lords had passed some Resolutions to that effect, which the House of Commons had refused to adopt?—But what are the facts? Why that the House of Commons has twice abolished Sinecures, so far as its decision could abolish them; and that this decision of the House of Commons has twice been frustrated by the House of Peers!

Such are the grounds upon which these equitable dispensers of public favour heap obloquy upon the House of Commons, whilst the House of Peers stands blameless in their estimation. But fond indeed would be the fatuity which should imagine that there was any more of sincerity in their approbation than there is of justice in their censure. The House of Peers is unblamed only because its time is not yet come: the House of Commons is vilified because these men are wise enough in their generation to know that this House alone stands between them and the ruin which they meditate;—that, the House of Commons once destroyed, the road lies open, without impediment, to the overthrow of the Peers and of the Crown.

On every such matter, therefore, as is this night propounded for our deliberation, our judgement should be guided not by the loudness of the demand, but by the propriety and expediency of the thing required. Clamour is not a reason for refusing what it may be right to grant :—but let no man flatter himself that clamour is to be appeased by granting what it would be right to refuse.

I must be permitted, Sir, to deal with the Hon. Baronet's Motion not as a single and insulated proposition, but in connection with others of which it is obviously, and, I think, avowedly, the forerunner. In any other view I must take the liberty to say, that the Committee, and not this House, would be the proper place for entertaining it. I do not mean to dispute the right of any Hon. Gentleman to bring forward any specific proposition that may strike his fancy ; but it is for the House to decide, whether, after having appointed a Committee systematically to examine our Establishments with a view to all practicable reduction, it is either regular or expedient to take particular parcels of the assigned work out of their hands, and, day after day, to debate them separately in this

House; thus resuming in detail the power which has been delegated in the aggregate.

My Hon. Friend * opposite has mistaken the nature of the objections to this practice which have been stated by my Noble Friend † near me;—or at least he has not (as it appears to me) satisfactorily answered those objections by asserting, that in the Committee up stairs my Noble Friend has himself proposed to proceed on the same plan. My Noble Friend, it seems, objects in the Committee to the laying down of those general principles which he requires to be laid down in the House. To be sure he does,—and where is the inconsistency of doing so? Is not the House the place where general principles ought to be proposed and considered? and is it not peculiarly the province of a Committee to regulate the application of those principles, and to discuss the details which their adoption may involve?—This proceeding of my Noble Friend's is not only perfectly consistent in itself, but exactly conformable to parliamentary rule. Not so the course adopted by my Hon. Friend, who insists on laying down general propositions in the Committee, and on examining the

* Mr. Bankes.

† Lord Castlereagh.

details in the House,—thus inverting the order of parliamentary proceedings, and interchanging the natural and proper functions of the Committee and the House.

One word, and only one word, more upon this part of the subject. It appears to be one purpose of this day's Motion, to throw discredit upon the Committee;—and the consideration that such would be the effect of carrying the Motion, is one sufficient reason with me, and I should hope with the House, for resisting it.—Give the Committee fair play, and I am convinced that its labours will redeem it in the eyes of the Country, from the gross aspersions and misrepresentations with which it has been assailed from the hour of its creation.

To come now, Sir, to the question immediately before us;—I have already declared that in my way of viewing it, the expediency or in expediency of abolishing or preserving one or two lay Lordships of the Admiralty is not the point really at issue; but I will not altogether omit to notice the arguments which have been applied to this point by the Hon. Mover, and by those who have supported him.

In doing this, I shall not attempt to go back with the Hon. Mover to the early and obscure times of the infancy of our naval administration : it is sufficient for all practical purposes that the present system is as old as our present mode of administering the Government, dating that mode from its establishment at the Revolution. Since that time the Board of Admiralty has been formed on its present scale ; and Parliament, in every succeeding year of that period, has confirmed by its vote the number of the Members of the Board, as existing at the present day. For there is this peculiarity belonging to these Offices, that they have not continued to exist from want of the cognizance and observation of Parliament,—as is the case with Offices, which do not require parliamentary sanction for their continuance. These Offices are voted yearly in the Naval Estimates : and the blot, therefore, if it be one, has been missed every year for upwards of a century.

The Hon. Baronet I know has stated that the number of Lordships of the Admiralty has occasionally varied. He has quoted some instances in which the Board appears not to have been full. But I assure him that he is misled by those printed authorities (and I

think I know what they are) which induce him to suppose that there has been any such variation.— And though I do not hold practice and precedent to be altogether conclusive when sound reasons are assigned for change, yet they do constitute (and the Hon. Baronet has confessed, by his anxiety to disprove them, that they do, in his opinion, constitute) a *prima facie* case in favour of any establishment or usage;—especially when they are the practice and precedent of good times. The *onus* of shewing a valid cause for departing from them, rests upon those who propose the innovation.

Not only has the number of Commissioners remained invariable from 1688 to the present day, but the composition of the Board has always admitted a proportion (not uniformly the same,—but a proportion) of lay Members, mixed with those of professional habits and experience. I know, Sir, that the advantage of this mixed constitution has long been a mooted question, and that advocates have been found even for each of the exclusive extremes of *all sea Lords*, and *all lay Lords*; but more frequently for that of *all sea Lords*. The Hon. and Gallant

Admiral* who spoke last is amongst the advocates for the latter plan ; but, without meaning any disrespect to the gallant Officer, I must confess that I do not consider his as altogether an unprejudiced opinion.— His prejudices in favour of the profession of which he is himself so distinguished a member naturally influence his judgement. Even he will, I am sure, agree with me that the weight of authorities preponderates in favour of the present practice ; and I confess I am myself strongly persuaded that the present practice is the best.

The Hon. and Gallant Admiral is also one of those who think that the number of the Board might be reduced ; but I entreat the House to observe, that, with all his zeal for retrenchment, he does not think that the public service could spare, without detriment, more than *one* of the present number ; thus going but half-way with the Hon. Mover, and curtailing of half its efficacy a proposition not very effective in itself for any beneficial purpose either of constitutional reform or of economical retrenchment.

* Sir C. Pole.

Sir, without conceding any part of the argument founded upon long usage, in favour of the present number and composition of the Board, as best adapted to the due execution of the business of the Admiralty,—I must, after all, honestly confess, that this is not the consideration which weighs with me in my estimate of the question that we have to decide. I consider the Motion of to-night as the *punctum saliens* of successive and sweeping confiscations of efficient Office. Such a change may, or may not, be just, or wise, or necessary; but the expediency of it, if made out at all, is to be made out by far other reasoning than any that we have heard to-night; by reasoning systematically applied to the whole system and scale of parliamentary Office, not to the miserable economizing of one or two thousand pounds, or to the dismissal of two, or (according to the Hon. Admiral) of one single individual.

If, Sir, his Majesty's Ministers could take so narrow a view of this Question, as to be influenced by any calculations of their own immediate interest, then undoubtedly they would at once withdraw all opposition to the Hon. Baronet's Motion. Every temptation of

personal ease and public favour lies that way. The trifling sacrifice of direct official strength or influence which the proposed reduction involves, would, in the present state and temper of the Country, be repaid to them tenfold in an accession of temporary popularity.

Nay, Sir, had we been disposed to indulge that species of malignity which delights in catching an adversary in his own trap, we should at once not only have assented to the present proposition, but should have hastened to take the lead of the Hon. Gentlemen opposite in the whole train of their projected reductions, and to out-bid them by the suggestion of others still more comprehensive. For, situated as we happen to be, the loss would really be unfelt by us in carrying on an established administration: but far different would be its consequences to those who look to succeed to our situations. When they had routed and driven us from the field,—when the happy hour had arrived for distributing their spoil and satisfying the claims of their numerous and expectant followers,—they would find, that without these Offices which they are now assailing, and other Offices such as these, a

new Administration could not be formed with strength enough to carry on the ordinary business of this House for a single day. I protest, Sir, that even on this account, I am,—most disinterestedly,—hostile to the present Motion, or rather to the projects of which it is the sample and the harbinger. If I think that the Crown ought to have the means of forming and sustaining an Administration, I do not the less think that it ought to have the means of changing one: and I am well persuaded, that, if we swept away these political and parliamentary Offices, changes of Administration could not only not be so easily effected, but could not be effected at all without material detriment—certainly not without most inconvenient interruption—to the business of the State.

I know, Sir, that we are told in pamphlets, and in speeches both within and without these walls, that not the smallest influence of the Crown in this House ought to be tolerated, because it is not recognized in any theoretical scheme of the Constitution. But I maintain,—and in doing so I only speak what every man feels and knows, nay, avows, whenever the purpose of the moment does not require the denial of it,—that, in

practice, the Government of this country could not be carried on without some proportion of such influence. The amount of it, I am far from denying, is matter of fair constitutional jealousy.

Suppose the theory—such as it is contended for—carried to its full extent;—suppose a complete separation between the Ministers of the Crown and the Members of the House of Commons;—the result would assuredly be an endless struggle between this House and the Crown. I may be told, perhaps, that few persons are in fact so much misled by an uncalculating attachment to abstract theory as to desire that complete separation. Even my Hon. Friend over the way*, jealous as he is of a preponderating influence in the Crown, allows that the persons holding the highest Offices of State ought to have seats in Parliament. But while my Hon. Friend admits this principle, he, in a great degree, nullifies his admission by the limits which he would prescribe to its operation. Is it to be believed that half a dozen insulated Ministers could withstand the assaults of that numerous body always to be found

* Mr. Bankes.

within these walls,—the systematic opposers, the designated successors, of any existing Administration,—deprived, as those Ministers would be, of the aid and comfort, of the official knowledge and practical experience of Gentlemen filling the secondary Offices of the State?

Suppose then, I say, that the Crown were to take the theorists at their word,—and rejecting my Hon. Friend's kind but utterly useless concession in favour of the Ministers themselves, were to determine to carry its self-denial still farther, and not to suffer any of its servants to sit in either House of Parliament: in other words,—were to select its Ministers from amongst men not having seats in either of the two Houses of Parliament. Suppose, we were to find at the beginning of a new Session, that the Crown, thus impatient of the imputation or suspicion of influence, had appointed—for its First Lord of the Treasury—for its Chancellor of the Exchequer—and for its Secretaries of State—Gentlemen of perfectly unexceptionable character, if you please, but wholly unknown to the nation; and that out of extreme reverence for the purity of Parliament, none of these Gen-

tlemen possessed, or would accept, seats as Members of the Legislature.—There would be nothing in this arrangement contrary to the theoretical Constitution,—nay, it would be exactly conformable to that construction of it which has been of late so loudly claimed as the right of the people of England, and towards the practical adoption of which the Motion of this evening tends. It would be only pushing to excess the principle of jealousy in which this Motion is founded. But will any man say, that, if such an arrangement were adopted, the practice of the Constitution would not be at an end?—Would not a facility be given for arbitrary selection, and unfit appointments, over which this House has always watched with peculiar jealousy?—Would not a road be opened to Court favour, which the parliamentary administration of the Government is particularly calculated to close?—Would not Office and Parliament be equally degraded by a choice which separated their functions?—And would not this separation infallibly lead to incessant jealousies, collisions, and conflicts?

It is no reply to this argument to say, that it *does* push the hypothesis to an extreme. I admit that it

does so. But, if that be objectionable, it is objectionable *only* on this ground—that *some* mixture of official men in the Houses of Parliament *is* allowed to be highly expedient (if not absolutely necessary) in practice;—although the letter of the Constitution is silent as to that practice, and although the theory of the Constitution is asserted to be adverse to it. If *some* there *must* be, the controversy is reduced from a question of *principle* to one of *degree*; and this reduction cuts off at once as altogether idle and irrelevant those general declamations against the influence of the Crown in Parliament, which constitute all the eloquence, and almost all the argument, that have been employed on this and similar subjects of debate. Once admit that *some* official men *must* sit in Parliament—and away at once with all those brilliant and animating generalities which denounce as corruption the very name of Influence, and demand its radical extirpation as indispensable to the well-being of the State! All such fine flights are by this single admission commuted for the much tamer task of measuring the *quantum* of that influence which it may be safe and convenient to allow. The controversy once brought to that issue, I am confident I can shew that there

never was a period in our history when the *quantum* of influence was so low as it is at the present hour.

Sir, the theoretical principles and the practical operation of the British Constitution are necessarily to be taken into view together, as explaining and modifying each other. The separate provinces of its several powers are easily described in theory: but it is not so easy to describe their actual workings, to trace the play of all the parts, and to delineate not only the structure of the mechanism, but its complicated movement and operation. The theory modified by the practice, forms in reality the Constitution under which we live. The prerogative of the Crown, the high functions and authorities of the House of Lords, and the rights and privileges of the House of Commons, are capable of strict definition. But, when the definition is given strictly, the wonder is how the government goes on. With such a system of checks and balances,—of opposite tendencies counteracting each other,—it should seem that if each were to exert its specific power to the utmost, the whole machine must stand still. According to the theory of the Constitution, the Commons and the Crown are armed against each other,—the

Commons with the right of granting or withholding the Supplies, the Crown with that of interposing its *Veto*. In practice, how often have the supplies been stopped?—how often or how lately has the *Veto* been interposed?—The fact is, that the consciousness in each, of the other's power operates reciprocally as a check upon both; and the march of the Government proceeds unimpeded in a middle course, the result of contrary and combined impulses. The Crown, aware of the ultimate and irresistible strength of Parliament, proposes nothing that can call for or justify the putting forth that strength into full action. But, for the purpose of counterbalancing this irresistible strength in Parliament (or, to speak plainly, in the House of Commons) and for preserving its due weight in the Constitution, what efficient force does the Crown possess?—What—but a certain degree of Influence in Parliament?

I am not saying—I am not bound to say, in arguing the question of to-day—whether this change, from prerogative to influence, from conflict to compromise, is for the better or for the worse. I state the fact as it exists; and I know of no advantage in stating

it otherwise. I know of no advantage in shutting our eyes to what is evident, and notorious. As things now stand,—as they have stood since the Revolution,—the effective Monarchy of this Country cannot be upholden without a just share of influence in Parliament. I say “a *just* share,”—because I speak,—and I desire to be understood as speaking,—of that avowed, direct, legitimate influence, which arises from having, in this and the other House of Parliament, a certain number of the political servants of the Crown ;—or (which is the same proposition in other terms) from the Crown’s choosing its political servants among the Members of the two Houses of Parliament.

The *more* or the *less* of this influence is unquestionably, as I have acknowledged, matter of fair inquiry : and it remains therefore to examine whether the Crown now possesses that influence in a greater proportion than formerly, or in a degree excessively too preponderant for the general interests of the State. Try this question by comparison. A reference to former times,—to what are considered as the brightest periods of the Constitution,—will shew that the di-

rect influence of the Crown in the House of Commons has, at every former period, been greater than it is at the present day; and the more remote the period, the larger the excess. Immediately after the Revolution the number of Members of this House, holding Offices under the Crown, was double, and frequently triple, the present number. During the Whig Administration in the reign of George II.,—in Sir Robert Walpole's time,—it appears, from authentic lists of divisions on great questions, that there were about *eighty-five* persons holding Offices *during pleasure* under the Crown who had seats in the House of Commons. In the present House the number of persons holding such Offices amounts to no more than about *forty-five*. In such a degree has the direct influence of the Crown actually decreased; but proportionally the decrease is infinitely greater. For be it remembered, the House of Commons then consisted of one hundred Members fewer than since the Union with Ireland. Ireland had, till the year 1800, its separate Parliament. The comparison is therefore to be instituted between the proportions of *eighty-five* placemen in a House of Commons of *five hundred and fifty-eight* Members,

for the government of Great Britain alone ; and of *forty-five* in a House of *six hundred and fifty-eight*, for the government of the whole United Kingdom. If any such direct influence is to exist at all, surely no man will assert that the present proportion of that influence, as compared with the past, is one that requires diminution.

It is argued, however, that the influence of the Crown, though its direct operation may be diminished in this House, has an increased indirect operation. In answer to this argument, I repeat the opinion which I expressed on a former night ; meaning now, as I meant then, to speak of the influence of the Crown as operating within the walls of this House for the effective purposes of government.—*Positively*, no doubt, the influence of the Crown has increased, with the extent of our Establishments—with the augmentation of our Revenue : but only just as the nominal rental of every landed estate has *positively* increased within the last century, without augmenting in a degree at all proportioned to its nominal increase the effective power of the proprietor. *Positively*, the Crown may have more to bestow—as the proprietor

of an estate may have more to receive, and to lay out—than formerly; but the value and effect may in both cases be less. Power is not merely positive:—to form a true estimate of its efficacy, you must compare it with that by which it is opposed.

If I am told that the Crown has now double the number of Offices, civil and military, at its disposal, which it had some time ago, I answer, that the power of the Crown, is, in these latter times, controuled in the disposal of Offices, by a degree of moral influence such as was never exercised over it before. It has been well and truly said, by my Noble Friend, that the Army and the Navy, large as these Establishments have been, are far less available, as sources of patronage, than in times when their numbers were infinitely less; when—as is notorious—preferences were given, without scruple and without shame, on account of political opinions or connexions; when—as is notorious—a vote in this House given against an existing Administration, would not only stop the preferment of the Voter, but possibly strip him of his Commission. What individual in our times has found his adverse politics stand in the way of his preferment in the

Army or the Navy?—In how many instances, that must be in every body's recollection, has the direct contrary been fairly to be inferred?—I answer, then, that against the increase of patronage must be set off this mighty increase of the power of public opinion:—a power which, since the Revolution, has grown from a pigmy to a giant,—a power which watches over, and governs, and controuls, not only the actions, but the words, of every public man;—which, drawing its chief aliment from the publication of the debates in Parliament, holds a warning terror over every Member who speaks in this House;—a power, under the influence of which I, Sir, now address you, knowing that to-morrow, whatever I now say, will be submitted to a thousand eyes, and criticised by a thousand tongues,—that every word I utter, even every accidental verbal inaccuracy, will be held up to public notice, perhaps perverted and misrepresented, and fixed upon me as a reproach for ever.

Is it possible to deny that such a power as I have described more than counterbalances the so much dreaded influence of patronage and favour?—Is it possible to suppose that any Minister could venture, in times

like these, to stand solely upon the favour of the Crown, and to rely solely upon its patronage for support,—independent of public opinion?

It has been truly said, Sir, that “ words are things ;” and mere names are often found to be indicative of the bias of popular feeling. Forty or fifty years ago, a Minister was habitually spoken of as the “ servant of the Crown :” at present, the “ servants of the Crown” are, in common parlance, the “ servants of the Public.” Trifling as this instance may seem, it is a genuine symptom of the ascendancy which the popular part of the Constitution has been daily and hourly acquiring. This popular spirit does indeed pervade and vivify all our political institutions. But, on the other hand, to preserve the soundness and strength of the Monarchy is not less essential to the conservation of our happily tempered form of Government ; and I cannot believe that any thinking man, who considers the signs of the times, will imagine that the danger of the present day is from such an inordinate growth of the monarchical branch of the Constitution, as shall be likely to overshadow and to blight the liberties of the people.

So much as to the Influence of the Crown,—which forms one of the alledged grounds, for demanding the abolition of two Lordships of the Admiralty. But it is not from this negative defence alone that I would argue the expediency of preserving them.

The business of the Country is transacted in this House; and by the practice, as has been shewn, if not in the theory of the Constitution, the character of a British Statesman is compounded from the union of parliamentary and official duties. Foreigners often ask, “by what means an uninterrupted succession of men, qualified (more or less eminently) for the discharge of these united duties, is secured”?—First, I answer (with the prejudices perhaps of Eton and of Oxford), that we owe it to our system of public schools and universities. From these institutions is derived, (in the language of the prayer of our Collegiate Churches,) “a due supply of men, fitted to serve their Country, both in Church and State.” It is in her public schools and universities that the Youth of England are, by a discipline which shallow judgments have sometimes attempted to undervalue, prepared for the duties of public life. There are rare

and splendid exceptions, to be sure; but in my conscience, Sir, I believe, that England would not be what she is without her system of public education; and that no other Country can become what England is without the advantages of such a system.

After education at the University comes that education in this House which is the fruit of a sedulous attendance upon the business of Parliament; an attendance quickened by the ambition of one day sharing, or being thought qualified to share, in the administration of the Government. To fit men for the duties of the higher departments of the Government is one of the uses of such Offices as those under discussion. I know, Sir, how obnoxious this part of my argument is to ridicule. I know too that here, as in the case of preparatory education, there are splendid but rare examples of men who have leapt at once to the highest pinnacle of official situation. Such men (if such there be among those whom I see opposite to me) can afford to strike the lower rounds out of the ladder of ambition. But exceptions are not rules: and, generally speaking, it is in such Offices as these that young men are trained for higher stations. And

how are they trained? By "signing their names"?—Idle sneer!—No. By learning (if nothing more) at least the habits and the punctuality of business; by associating with men of business—a description of society to which young men are not usually prone;—and by being induced, through motives and duties of more constant and certain operation than their mere duty as Members of Parliament, to give to this House much of that time which might otherwise be wasted in frivolous, and, it may be, not in harmless pursuits.

My Hon. Friend near me * has justly stated this argument as applying with peculiar force to men, who, in the outset of life, hesitate between professional and political pursuits; but it is not applicable to them alone. I apply it also to those very cases which I know are thought to be the most untenable,—the cases of young men of ancient name and family, whom the temptations of rank and affluence might lead far out of the road of official labour; but who, by being brought into these Offices,—and being mixed in them with others of humbler fortunes, who have names to build for them-

* Mr. Ward.

selves,—continue, through a more advanced period of manhood, in that wholesome equality of intercourse which schools and universities have taught them : an equality which mainly contributes to maintain in the British Constitution the animating and active vigour of a Democracy, corrected and restrained but not subdued, by an hereditary Aristocracy and an hereditary Crown.

It may be true,—it unquestionably is true,—that many individuals pass through these Offices as they had passed through the previous stages of education, without benefit, or at least without renown. But it is also true that these Offices have been the nursing-places of great Ministers and Statesmen : and if but one of any six Lords of the Admiralty comes out of this initiatory course the better prepared to serve his Country with advantage, I cannot but consider the cost of the whole six as wisely and economically incurred.

In all free countries a share in the Administration of the State has been the object of liberal ambition. To discredit that object, is to discredit freedom itself. To discredit it among the noble and the powerful, is

to deprive the State of its natural props and ornaments. To discredit it among those who have not these inherited advantages, is to restrict the Crown in the choice of its political servants, to the Wealth and Aristocracy of the Country.

Even with all our present official institutions, which it is now wished to maim and to curtail, politics are perhaps the least alluring and advantageous pursuit of any of those to which a young man of talents and education can devote himself. The same ability, industry, and duration of service applied to other liberal pursuits, can hardly fail of meeting with more adequate and splendid remuneration. In the army, in time of war, the highest ranks and honours are open to the young candidate. At the bar, wealth, dignity, and fame, are placed before him: and, although it may not perhaps be in the competence of many to attain, by their exertions, to the eminence of the Hon. and Learned Gentleman* opposite; yet, at the bar, that moderate degree of success which even the least sanguine might venture to anticipate as the reward of unremitting study and assiduity, will afford means of

* Sir S. Romilly.

earlier competence than is afforded by a life of secondary office, with all its chances and vicissitudes, to the average even of tolerably fortunate politicians.

Will the House then sacrifice a permanent and assured advantage to a temporary pressure, which that sacrifice could not in the smallest imaginable degree tend to relieve?—Will they, in obedience to the clamours of demagogues, destroy the power of carrying on the Government on the system which has, for more than a century, been found practically expedient and beneficial,—safe for our liberties, and conducive to our glory,—by destroying those minor Offices from which the wants of the State in its highest Departments are constantly fed and supplied?—This is the true point for the decision of the House.

The interest of the present Ministers in the question, I repeat it, is absolutely nothing,—except as their interest is inseparably connected with the public good. I have said that our personal ease would lead us to accede to the proposition; which I can sincerely declare that I oppose from a sense of duty alone. I have said that the acceding to this proposition and to those

which are announced as intended to follow it, would really not disable *us*; but would, indeed, be unpropitious to the hopes of those who sit opposed to us. If it be with any such personal views that our opponents press these reductions, they act like the impatient expectants of a dilapidated inheritance. They would pull down the building to obtain possession of the ruins. Finding themselves unable to remove us from our pedestals, they are willing to blow-up a portion of the edifice with us into the air.

But, Sir, if it be possible that the real object of the Motion is merely to turn us out, never certainly was such a compliment paid to any Administration before!—Other Administrations have been attacked for errors or misconduct of their own: we for institutions long ago established; institutions which no Ministry has ever hitherto dreamt of reforming; of which our opponents as well as ourselves have, without scruple or remorse, enjoyed the benefit; and which are now first attempted to be brought into disrepute after a quiet unquestioned usage of more than a hundred years.

Let it not, however, be supposed that we would defend these institutions merely because they are old,—if

we were not firmly persuaded that it is our duty not to suffer the interests intrusted to us, on the part of the Public no less than of the Crown, to perish or to be wasted in our hands.

Sir, I conclude therefore, as I began, with the declaration, that, unimportant as the particular Question is in itself, I am deeply and sincerely impressed with the mischievousness of its tendency,—with the danger that would ensue from its success (followed up as that success would be) to the whole frame of our practical Government. And while I acknowledge, on the one hand, that there never was a point which (selfishly considered) it would have been more convenient for Ministers to yield, I feel, on the other hand, so strong a conviction of the impropriety and inexpediency of yielding it, that,—rather than do so voluntarily,—I would, for my own part, be contented to stake the existence of the Administration upon the result of their opposition to this Motion.