SHORT REMARKS

ON THE

STATE OF PARTIES.

SHORT REMARKS ON THE STATE OF PARTIES AT THE *CLOSE OF THE YEAR* 1809.

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SHORT REMARKS,

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THE Marquis of Wellesley having, as is generally understood, expressed a cordial acquiescence in the principles upon which the present administration was formed; and having also signified a perfect readiness to take upon himself the duties of one of its most important departments; it may be fairly said that the ministry is completed, and that the public now knows to what description of persons the conduct of affairs is to be trusted. It seems, therefore, to me,

that the present is a fit time for making observations on the state of political parties in the kingdom; nor can I think the discussion of such a subject at this period without its use, because men appear to judge very superficially concerning the general topics of political conversation, and to adopt lines of conduct which are justifiable, and even wise, with reference to the object immediately in their view, though utterly destructive of the great system of policy which, I believe, a very large majority of the nation continues to hold (as it long has held) to be of the greatest importance to our prosperity.

Of the ministry itself little need be said: the leading members of it are known to be men of great talents, but they have never yet acted with their powers concentred under one head; nor has the gentleman to whom the pro

minent situation of prime minister is now trusted, ever yet had the unfettered exercise of his own discretion, either in respect to his conduct in parliament, or in respect to the general administration of national affairs: so that our judgment, as to the degree of wisdom with which we shall see the government carried on, must rest altogether upon our opinion of what is *probable;* not upon conclusions drawn from the experience of past events: and the only way in which we ought to suffer those opinions to influence our actions in the supporting or opposing his majesty's government, is by maturely weighing the reasonableness of any hope which we may entertain of Mr. Perceval's efficiency, according to the lights thrown on his character by those parts of his prior conduct which are to be attributed solely to himself; and by comparing such *probabilities* with

the *facts* afforded by Lord Grenville's administration, as a criterion of the degree of efficiency to be expected from him, if he should ultimately force himself into that situation alone, which he has refused to occupy jointly with Mr. Perceval.

The principal view with which I offer the following remarks to the public, is, to see how the different political parties, whether generally in the habit of opposing, or generally in the habit of supporting the Pittite connexion, bear upon the vital point in difference, the essence of every question which will be put from the chair in either House, in the next session of parliament; viz. whether Mr. Perceval or Lord Grenville is to be the king's prime minister. It strikes me that many persons are not sufficiently aware that this is the real end to which all political discussions at the present

period lead; and even this may be defined in more explicit terms than I have used, when stated to be a question, whether the sovereign, in the exercise of his legitimate prerogative, or any one combination of political men, shall appoint the ministers responsible to the nation for the conduct of public affairs.

We know that the party which is commonly called the Old Opposition, is divided into two squadrons, strengthened by such of Mr. Pitt's *eleves* as adhered to Lord Grenville, and by the personal connexions of Lord Sidmouth, avowing their object to be the vesting of the government in Lord Grey and Lord Grenville; the other rather unequivocally expressing their conviction that things will never go on well in England, while there is any government at all, constituted according to the forms, and supported by the means which have now for

centuries been in use. It appears singular that two sets of men, acting upon principles so directly opposite, should in the main concur in their parliamentary conduct, namely, in seeking by all means to displace those ministers on whom the judgment of his majesty relies: but perhaps it is not difficult to account for the fact. They who wish to preserve the fabric of government, and would have no other change than that of the men who are to fill the offices of the state, are glad to swell their numbers on divisions, by the accession of those who would oppose Lord Grenville if in power, just as much as they have opposed the Duke of Portland, and will oppose Mr. Perceval; knowing that they can throw off such allies at any time when it may suit them to do so, exactly as they did throw them off, when they attained their object a few years ago.

On the other hand: the Reformers, or Revolutionists, suffer no compunctious delicacy to restrain them from availing themselves of the eloquence and numerical strength of those who are labouring to be ministers, though they are prepared to turn their artillery against their associates when the first out-work shall have been carried; thinking the carrying that out-work, or (to speak without metaphor) the effectuating a direct invasion of the king's prerogative in one instance, too great an advantage to their cause to hesitate at any means which may be convenient to its execution. Thus it is, that these two component parts of the Old Opposition play each other's game, while each has a distinct interest to promote its own: thus, like wild beasts of different species uniting to run down their common prey, they contribute their several properties during the chace,

though prepared to worry each other as soon as ever the game is killed.

Upon this view of the motives and conduct of the Old Opposition, one does not wonder at their concurrence in general measures which are calculated to deprive the king of his present servants. They act in character, and their very undermining each other is perfectly reconcilable to their coincidence in the main point. But when this conduct and these motives are so apparent that they cannot escape the reflexion of any man who considers the subject, it is a little singular, that any, whose political feelings are different, should be found so short-sighted as to contribute to the event so much desired by both the parties of which that aggregate body is made up; for it is clear that all persons do so contribute, who co-operate with the Old Opposition in any attack, which,

however insulated in its ostensible object, cannot but be reckoned as one link in an extended chain of operations calculated to produce ultimately a change of ministry, either as the sole *desideratum* or as the first step to a total change in the constitution of the country.

Unaccountable as it seems that thinking people should be so drawn in to promote that which they labour to avert, certainly the number of persons who at the present time talk of objecting to certain parts of the late ministers' conduct, and of assisting any steps which may be taken to throw censure on them in particular instances, is by no means trifling: I am, however, persuaded that these persons have not at all reflected that the matter in discussion is not now, as it used to be, whether the choice of the King shall be on one efficient man, or on another efficient man; but that it

is now, whether the King shall have any choice at all; and that further, it is not whether, in the event of an unconstitutional forcing of servants upon the King, any one *efficient* set of men shall be so forced upon him; but whether he shall, at all events, be compelled to confide the energies of the country to the disposition of men, who have proved themselves as torpid in administration, as they are industrious in opposition, and who have abused his confidence when formerly extended to them.

These are considerations which never can have entered into the minds of men who love the constitution, if they feel disposed to throw weight into the scale of opposition in any question (be its apparent bearing what it may) which tends to displace the present ministers. Even if it were admitted that the conduct of the late cabinet in foreign politics was

reprehensible; that no prospective trust ought to be reposed in the present cabinet, because some of its members were, and particularly because Mr. Perceval was a member of the late cabinet; that the conduct of the *whole* cabinet, with regard to Lord Castlereagh, was improper; and that the separation of Mr. Canning from his majesty's councils does operate in the most detrimental manner to the nation: still it appears to me, that under all these admissions, no ground is laid for such a breach of the constitution, as would ensue if Mr. Perceval were driven from the helm by a majority in the House of Commons; and consequently that no reasonable pretext is afforded for adding weight to opposition, unless the person so joining it be prepared to go along with Lord Grenville to the length of his establish-

ment in power, or to the much greater length proposed by some of that party.

It may be open to doubt whether the plan of the expedition to Walcheren were well laid or no: but had the event of a decision of that doubt in the negative unquestionably led to the establishment of Lord Grenville in power; it would not have been wise for those who deprecate such an establishment to urge the question, even as against the Duke of Portland: how much more unwise then is it for them to ground on such a question, any inclination to withdraw (even for a time) from the support of another minister, who shares nothing more important with that noble Duke than his resistance of the violence which Lord Grenville would offer to the King and the Constitution, and whose promise of future deserving is not at all darkened

by the ill-success of the expedition to Walcheren.

It may again be open to doubt, whether the execution of that expedition were able or no: but if any censure of the conduct of those who commanded, should by implication contribute to the dissolution of the present cabinet, and the introduction of Lord Grenville to power, it surely would not be wise to press a point which is connected with a misfortune merely temporary, so as to affect the essential welfare of Great Britain, and inflict a vital wound on the constitution. Persons who wish well to the King, and for the most part approve his government, may possibly think the affair of Flushing requires explanation: but before they urge that explanation, they should be sure that the benefit arising from it will not be counterbalanced by evils of the most

alarming magnitude to the army, to the navy, and to the kingdom at large.

It may further be open to doubt, whether Lord Castlereagh may not have been harshly treated by some or most of his late colleagues; but I much mistake that noble Lord's turn of mind, if he would (even in that case) wish to have the nation suffer with him, or to avenge his own wrongs upon the people of England, by making his vindication an instrument in the hands of his political adversaries, to enable them to repeat those aggressions upon the throne which he was one of the foremost to repel on a former occasion. That Lord Castlereagh should wish to have the true state of the extraordinary dissension, which ended in his resignation, and the real grounds upon which the late expedition was undertaken, known, one must take for granted: but it by no means

follows that he would wish to shake the present cabinet, because he has grounds of complaint against some of its members. Nor can I persuade myself that he can exclude from his perception the obvious truth, that any question, which on being agitated in parliament, produces a powerful division against Mr. Perceval (however patched up of discordant persons, uniting on any given subject, that division may be), must contribute to the main ends of the Old Opposition; namely, either the substitution of Lord Grenville for Mr. Perceval, or the creating of so much discontent abroad, as may sap the foundation of all legitimate government whatever.

The same reasoning applies in its full force to those who look with distrust at the administration which his Majesty formed, because Mr. Canning is not a member of it. The whole kingdom

must regard the abilities of Mr. Canning with admiration: but it is not a consequence of that admiration, that the reins of government must be entrusted to Lord Grenville. If any member of parliament, out of affection to Mr. Canning, should, by a species of reasoning, which to me is inexplicable, think it his duty to abstain from supporting Mr. Perceval's government, he by so doing lends all the aid in his power to Lord Grenville's pretensions, unless the premises which I have assumed be without foundation. It is impossible to suppose that Mr. Canning alone can administer the affairs of the nation; and it is clear that he does not enjoy that diffused good opinion which would enable him to form a ministry: so that any separation from his Majesty's government, resting on an expectation of Mr. Canning's becoming prime minister,

rests on a basis of air. But the consequences of such a separation would by no means be as insubstantial as its origin: for if it should have, or tend to have, the effect of weakening Mr. Perceval, exactly in the same proportion it strengthens Lord Grenville. Therefore, they who were friendly to Mr. Pitt, and to the late government as the successors of Mr. Pitt, will virtually, though not nominally, enlist themselves under the flag of those who maintain principles directly adverse to Mr. Pitt's, if they carry their preference of Mr. Canning so far as to withdraw from the support of any administration in which Mr. Canning is not included.

I am aware that my remarks hinge upon a supposition that Lord Grenville's becoming prime minister is a circumstance to be guarded against by every man who loves his country, and there-

fore that they must be considered as futile by all persons who maintain a contrary opinion. I however address myself solely to those *parties* who concur in sentiment with me on that leading point: for I anticipate an opposition to the government now formed from those two bodies whose views I adverted to in the outset of these observations, and only mean to offer my reflections to the different parties, who, deprecating the accession of Lord Grenville to power, feel nevertheless disposed to act in a manner, which (as I think) is calculated to bring about that event, and that only.

Of these parties, setting aside the adherents of the present government and the Old Opposition, there are three. First, that set of men who make the vindication of Lord Castlereagh their primary object; secondly, they who are

dissatisfied with the arrangement on account of Mr. Canning; thirdly, they who declare for measures and not men, and will have investigation of the failure in the Scheldt, cost what it may.

I am one of those who do not wish to withhold from all these descriptions of politicians full credit for acting conscientiously: I only lament that they are all blind to the necessary result of their adhering (in any numbers) to the lines of conduct which they have severally chalked out for themselves. One would fancy that they had no notion of the control which parliament exercises over a ministry, and how much the stability of a ministry may depend upon the event of a division. I am far from going so much the other way as to suppose, contrary to repeated examples, that a minister's being in a minority and quitting his place are synonimous; or that

it is in any case proper for him to sacrifice his sense of duty so totally to the opinion of others, as to give way in that manner: but I do think, and upon grounds deducible from the acknowledged frailty of human nature, that one majority on the part of opposition often harbingers another, and that the measures of any administration must be subject to much embarrassment when their support in parliament is so precarious as to leave them *often* on the losing side of a question.

It is fit, therefore, that men should weigh very well the importance of those reasons which incline them to be lukewarm, before they risque the consequences which they may entail upon the nation: it is fit that men should consider gravely whether it be worth while to blow up the only rampart which now remains against Lord Grenville's unconstitutional system of governing, merely for the sake of appropriating the blame which results from what we know of the treatment of Lord Castlereagh; merely for the sake of ascertaining the precise cause of an acknowledged misfortune at Walcheren; merely for the sake of proving to the public how much they admire the talents of Mr. Canning. Certainly no national benefit can arise from the indulgence of any of these wishes: an investigation of the failure in the Scheldt will not demolish Antwerp, nor can it more thoroughly guard against similar misfortunes than the notoriety of the failure itself does:—I mean, if the present ministers are not so totally destitute of abilities, that even the elevation of Lord Grenville would be preferable to their continuing one day in office. It is equally clear that a discussion respecting Lord Castlereagh would not cancel the

breach that has occurred; and still more clear, that an addition of Mr. Canning's friends to the number of those who vote against Mr. Perceval, would have any other effect sooner than that of raising Mr. Canning to the head of affairs. Lord Grenville and Lord Grey would profit by the union; their return to power would be accelerated; but it requires no great penetration to foresee that Mr. Canning would in that case be excluded more effectually by the act of others than he is now by his own choice; and that he would have the mortification of knowing that he had contributed to the establishing of measures, which Mr. Pitt regarded as fundamentally pernicious, and which may in their effects convulse the empire.

Looking at the present state of parties in this point of view, I cannot but earnestly wish that these observations may awaken others to a sense of the evils

which are likely to arise from the prevalent diversity of opinions. It is a well-known maxim, that when any great object is to be attained, individual bickerings ought to cease among those who are interested in the attainment of it. Now, in the present case, the object to be gained is no less than the preservation of our constitution; whereas, the differences which weaken the means of attaining it, are such as affect only the personal feelings of individuals, without either bearing on the general object, which is thought desirable by all, or opening any other mode by which it may more easily be compassed. If a diminution of Mr. Perceval's strength would make the balance preponderate in favour of any other man who acts on similar principles, a preference of the one or the other would fairly influence every man which leader he would follow; but where a diminu-

tion of Mr. Perceval's strength can have no other effect than that of injuring the cause of the country, and giving power to men who are energetic only against the ligitimate prerogatives of the king; then I must think it no proof of patriotism to insist on little differences, to embarrass future provisions, by measuring and allotting among those employed unsuccessfully the quantum of culpability due to each.

I have purposely avoided saying any thing of the merits of the present government, because I am only urging an oblilivion of what I conceive to be matters of a comparatively trifling consideration, with a view to an opportunity of fairly trying what those merits may be. I have endeavoured to establish that a perseverance in that sort of neutrality which is regarded as probable, may very

possibly be a means of bringing back that wonderful assemblage of talents whose government struck the nation and the whole world with amazement; and that it cannot possibly substitute for those ministers whom the king has selected, others who will conform generally to the same principles of conduct: so that, if my premises and conclusions are right, there is no alternative between Mr. Perceval and Lord Grenville. As to the latter we know the *sine quâ non* of his return to power, and we have experienced how far the nation will prosper under his management: of Mr. Perceval we know that his principles are strictly constitutional, that he is attached to the person of his sovereign, and watchful over the liberties of his fellow-subjects; and if we are at liberty to deduce from the part he had in the last cabinet, any inferences

of his future acts, we may safely say that they will be biassed by no personal consideration, but directed altogether to the real good of the country.

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