

LORDS AND LAND.

In a recent number of this high-toned journal its talented Editor complains that "while the Government have been working with a will to deserve the respect and confidence of the country, bringing forward wholesome measures of reform, the Lords who hold dignified council in the Upper House have been doing the kind of work which was certain to provoke the question: Is the House of Lords of any real service to the country?" Going on to say that "the measure for preventing useless and cruel evictions in Ireland when it had passed the House of Commons should have been allowed to become law" the Editor seems to think that the Lords of Parliament are simply to endorse the decisions of their elective contemporaries and thus, in the negative, apparently answers the question touching the utility of the Hereditary House as it at present exists: but he has not favoured the public with reasons which could be accepted as valid in support of an opinion by no means universal nor of appreciable popularity. That an effort to remodel or wholly remove the time-honoured assembly alluded to may be a possible or even a probable event of the near future is readily admitted; it is an old fashioned and favourite menace prevalent among men whose political prescience is largely due to their political predilections and who habitually affect to regard improvement and change as forms of speech indetical in meaning. Nevertheless as a matter of course, and to ease the Radical mind—the Lords having ventured to show that they not only possess convictions but have the courage to express and act on them—something must be sacrificed; something pulled down or inverted, especially if that something should happen to have stood in the way of an abortive attempt at crude, hasty, and ill-advised legislation. But it is hardly conceivable that the point has yet been attained when immoral designs, presented in the guise of "wholesome measures of reform," are to reckon among those forces which seem constantly tending toward the verge of revolution.

When the question bearing the characteristic designation of "The Irish Disturbance Bill" was last brought up in the Commons the negative but significant attitude assumed by two thirds of the overwhelming majority with which the Gladstone Government came into power—apart from the hostility of their usual opponents—is not the kind of testimony that can be accepted as showing that the country confides in the wisdom of Her Majesty's present advisers. Even including the Home Rulers and those men who, well knowing the fate that awaited the Bill in "the Lords," thought they could by voting for it afford a cheap bid for popularity, the comparatively attenuated majority by which the Government sustained a moral, and escaped an actual defeat in the Commons, in connection with the adverse and preponderating vote by which their measure was thrown out of the House of Lords, must have a meaning which may not be lightly regarded by those who profess to deserve "the respect and confidence of the country."

In these skeptical days it is worth while to enquire how a measure said to have been designed for the philanthropic purpose of "preventing useless and cruel evictions in Ireland," and which from the supposed nature of it might well have commended itself to any christian assembly, came to be abandoned by a great number of the government's supporters in the Lower House, and to be rejected in the Upper House by a sweeping majority including their oldest and staunchest adherents.

Almost every member of the House of Lords is a landowner, and in the House of Commons the landed interest is fully represented. It is therefore probable that the majority of the former by whom the Bill was rejected, and a large proportion of the minority in the latter by whom it was opposed were exclusively proprietors of land. Their hostility to a measure which they looked upon as an unwarrantable invasion of the vital interests of their class may thus furnish a plausible argument that it was founded upon principles utterly selfish in character. Selfishness—the main spring of all human actions—is, in its repugnant and commonly received form, the exercise of personal rights or privileges at the undue cost of the comfort and convenience, or in violation of the rights and privileges of others. Such a change cannot justly be laid at the door of those who opposed and defeated The Irish Disturbance Bill. As a rule the noblemen and gentlemen of the United Kingdom—the representative portion of whom the Editor refers to as "the London swell mob"—are known to be humane, chivalrous and honourable; loyal to their sovereign and country, and in purity of life quite the equals of any other class of Her Majesty's subjects. If justice be a basis of legislation, assuredly these Noblemen and gentlemen when called to decide upon a measure ostensibly for the purpose of preventing "useless and cruel evictions" in Ireland, but which they well knew to involve confiscation of the plainest rights of property in that country, and which had not even the merit of expediency to recommend it, cannot reasonably be held to have incurred the odium of cruelty or selfishness by refusing their sanction thereof in their respective assemblies. A measure producing an extensive and far reaching defection from the ranks of the Government—penetrating to and causing the resignation of some of their office holders and members of the Cabinet—must have a cause for its defeat lying deeper than a capricious or arbitrary exercise of power.

In the terrible famine which desolated Ireland during the years 1846-47 a large number of its landowners were ruined by the excessive poor-rates that in

addition to those for county purposes were obliged to be raised, and which they alone—their tenants then being in a state of starvation—were compelled to provide. This they did generally by borrowing on their already mortgaged properties, the loans eventually becoming the last straw that broke the camel's back and causing their utter extinction under the judgments of the Court instituted for the sale of Encumbered Estates. Land, usually deemed the best description of security, is reluctantly parted with, and although many proprietors disappeared, as above stated, a large number, more or less impoverished, continued to retain their ancestral acres. In years of average prosperity these men were enabled to pay the interest on their mortgages, including those created during the famine referred to, as also family jointures, quit-rents, and other expenses incidental to their position. But in addition to these charges are those for Poor and County rates, which their tenants are now, and for a long time, have been unable to pay. The Bill which it was intended to make law did not actually propose to deprive the landlords of their power to evict for non-payment of rent, but threw such obstacles in their way that practically they would be obliged to submit and allow the tenants to remain. Not the least vicious feature in the ill-advised scheme was the fact that a large body of occupiers were anxiously awaiting its fate to decide whether in future they would refuse to pay rent which they had hitherto been able to pay, and had willingly paid. It is thus easily seen that in endeavouring to carry out one of their "wholesome measures of reform" the Government plainly informed the landlords that whilst good care would be taken to prevent them from getting anything they would be forced to pay everything. Had the Bill included a clause affording protection or relief to the landlords in some shape it would have worn less the aspect of a preliminary move towards wholesale spoliation. The claims of the shopkeeper, the tradesman, the whiskey-seller, the money-lender, of any one except the landlords were to be recoverable as usual, and tenants who have not been paying were to be taught to act on Mr. Parnell's advice to not pay any more rent. Amongst the landowners, as amongst any class of men, there are those who are harsh and unfeeling; but, in common with those who are humane and indulgent, their rights should be maintained to enable them to discharge their lawful obligations. Amongst the tenants are those who have faithfully paid but who no longer can pay; and it should not be forgotten that if the rights of the lords of the soil are founded on justice the tenants referred to have claims that are founded on humanity.

With regard to the Voter's Registration Bill—probably that sarcastically described by Mr. Froude as "the next best remedy to be tried to help the Irish out of their wretchedness"—the alleged unseemly treatment thereof by the Lords could hardly exceed the haste with which but a brief period previous to adjournment it was rushed into their House. But the style of its rejection described by the Editor as kicking "by lordly boots out of existence" is not quite in harmony with the proceedings of men who he tells us "hold dignified council in the Upper House."

Saxon.

FATHER STAFFORD vs. DR. MacVICAR.

The worthy priest of Lindsay and the worthy Principal of the Presbyterian College of Montreal have recently been engaged in controversial warfare. Both have excellent gifts in the way of denunciation, and have employed their gifts to the utmost. Father Stafford, it would appear, has been for some time past viewing with growing impatience the habit that Ontario people have acquired of regarding with pitying disdain, or contemptuous anger, all the doings (educational and religious) of the Roman Catholics in Quebec. Mr. Goldwin Smith, last August, laid the last straw on the camel's back in speaking, *en passant*, of the ignorance and superstition of France. The straw was not of much weight in itself, but it reminded Father Stafford of other and uglier straws, amongst which was one that was added to the load by the Rev. D. H. MacVicar, LL.D., S.L.P., in August, 1879. On that occasion Dr. MacVicar declared Roman Catholic education in this Province to be "one-sided, unsymmetrical, and unnatural to the last degree," and his utterance was applauded by the Ontario teachers who heard it. Whereupon Father Stafford girded up his loins, took unto himself a pen, and the conflict between the two ecclesiastics was begun.

As usual in controversies of this kind mistakes have been made on both sides. In the first place, the Ontario people take for granted too readily that Roman Catholic education in this Province is of a woefully inferior kind. They themselves can find no words too laudatory to apply to their own educational system, nor would it be easy for any one outside to satisfy them in this particular. As a matter of fact, however, the majority of the teachers of Ontario know nothing experimentally of the actual condition of education in Quebec, and judge entirely by hearsay and prejudicial rumours. This prejudice Father Stafford has a right to combat. Knowing that judgment is made upon insufficient or impartial evidences, the good priest becomes naturally indignant, and to this extent we sympathize with him. But his indignation once kindled, and his pen once on paper, he forgets himself. Knowing that he is rightly indignant at something, he does not keep that something in view, and rashly rushes upon dangerous ground. He exclaims in paragraph: "At the convention of