

LORD REDESDALE—MODERN ENGLISH LAW.

got warm in my bed in the house of Dr. S—, in Coleraine, where I was serving my apprenticeship, when I was roused out of my sleep and ordered to saddle the doctor's horse and my own pony, and bring them round to the door immediately. When I got there the doctor was ready, and we rode to the village of Bushmills, seven long miles, in an awful night of rain and storm. The doctor alighted at Peggy M'Parland's inn, which he entered, leaving me outside to take care of his horse, where I remained for four long weary hours, walking his horse up and down Bushmills-street, and not a dry thread on my back. When the doctor came out of the inn he told me that a gentleman and his wife had been travelling along the coast, and stopping at Bushmills the lady had been taken suddenly ill, and had just been safely delivered of a baby. My lord, I am glad to see that baby before me now as Chairman of the House of Lords; but pardon me if I say that the pleasure would have been greater if your lordship had not differed from me on a point of great importance to my constituents of Coleraine. As I proceeded with my story I saw a quiet smile spreading gently over his Lordship's features; and ever after when I happened to meet Lord Redesdale in the lobbies at Westminster, he would approach me in the kindest manner, and say, 'Well, Dr. Boyd, glad to see you; sorry you had so much trouble with me the night I was born.'—*Irish Law Times*.

MODERN ENGLISH LAW.

The history of modern English law is the history of a gigantic revolution produced by the ideas of one man. Under the influence of Bentham, half a century or more of stagnation has been followed by half a century of innovation. It is a little difficult for those who live in the midst of incessant legal changes to appreciate the extent of a revolution of which the force is still unspent. Something may be achieved by the aid of a comparison. Any one, for example, who examines the English statute book for the century and a quarter which precede 1825, will see that the changes which it includes are not equivalent to a tenth part of the

alteration, which have been effected within the last half century. Hardly a single portion of English law has, since George the Fourth came to the throne, escaped the influence of reform. The constitution of Parliament has been changed, the laws of treason has been modified, the criminal law has been transformed from a system of indiscriminate inhumanity into a system under which capital punishment is, except in cases of murder, practically unknown. The laws of debt have been fundamentally modified; the whole law of evidence has been freed from the artificial rules by which it was defaced; the expression of opinion has been freed from all the shackles imposed by the law and from nearly all the checks imposed by opinion; all the forms of monopoly supported either by statute, or by judicial decisions have been swept away, and the principles summed up under the vague formula of "free trade" have been embodied in the legislation of the last fifty years. Other changes might be easily enumerated, but one crucial instance of the readiness with which modern English law admits of alteration or improvement may stand for a hundred examples. The institution of the Divorce Court effected not merely a change in legal procedure but an alteration in the theory of marriage. It touched one of the most sensitive points of private life. It involved the national renunciation of ecclesiastical dogmas which had been more or less respected for centuries. Yet the Divorce Court was instituted not only without revolution, but without exciting any strong popular emotion. In 1859 it was more easy to alter the law of marriage than it would have been in 1759 to abolish capital punishment for shoplifting. The extent of the legal revolution of which Sir R. Wilson is the historian may also be measured by comparing not century with century but country with country. France has, since 1826, passed through at least four revolutions, but the legislative changes introduced into French law since that period fall far short, it may be conjectured, of the innovation carried out within any given ten years by the English Parliament. France it may be said, did all her innovation at a stroke. The first revolution effected such fundamental alterations that nothing was left for later reformers to accomplish.