

Commons; but the House of Lords rejected the bill, and Earl Grey resigned with his colleagues. Public indignation was so highly excited, and there was such a storm, that the Duke advised the recall of Earl Grey, and persuaded the peers to allow the Reform Bill to become law.

Our space will not permit us to follow the career of Lord John in all his struggles for Reform. Suffice it that he and his colleagues abolished slavery in the British Colonies; carried the Church Temporalities Bill of Ireland; and amended the English Poor Laws.

In 1835 Lord Melbourne became for the second time Premier, and entrusted Lord John with the leadership of the House of Commons and the seals of the Home Office, and succeeded in carrying through Parliament a measure of Municipal Reform. In 1839 he exchanged the seals of the Home for those of the Colonial Department, which he held until 1841, when Sir Robert Peel returned to power. Lord John was elected member for the city of London, and as leader fought for his party for four years; but the persuasive address of Peel, the vehement eloquence of Stanley (now Lord Derby), and the conversational oratory of Sir James Graham, bore down all opposition. In July 1846, when the Corn Law question was settled, and the parliamentary tact of Disraeli placed Sir R. Peel in a humiliating minority, Lord John accepted the post of Premier, but was too weak for the place; the ministry he formed was weak, and he employed no means to add to its stability. They neither redeemed the pledges they had given, nor fulfilled the promises they had made; so that when the sugar question had been settled, and the Navigation Laws repealed, the more advanced Radicals began loudly to express their discontent. In February, 1851, Lord John's celebrated "Durham Letter" raised inseparable difficulties in the way of satisfactorily dealing with the Papal aggression, nominating Roman Catholic Bishops to English sees; he found himself placed in a minority by his own party, and he resigned; but as no other statesman was willing to incur the responsibility of the crisis, he retained his office, and when Parliament met in 1852 he made an effort to retrieve his popularity by the introduction of a new Reform Bill. But ere this measure could be discussed, Lord Palmerston, whom he had previously expelled from the Cabinet, and between whom there was no great cordiality, overthrew the ministry on a clause in the Militia Bill, and Lord Derby was again invested with the robes of office. Scarcely had he been installed when Lord John formed what was called the "Chesham-Place Alliance," which succeeded in ousting Lord Derby. Then came the Coalition Ministry of Earl Clarendon's, in which Lord John received the office of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which he did not keep long, but was raised to the eminent position of President of the Council, and while holding that office in 1854 he introduced his Reform Bill. He was compelled to withdraw it; neither the Commons nor the public would listen to it—their attention was monopolized by the Russian war. In 1855, as soon as the conduct of the war was converted into the great question of the day, and the Coalition Ministers were threatened by Mr. Roebuck with an enquiry into the condition of the army before Sebastopol, Lord John hastened to escape from the Cabinet, the conduct of whose members he could not conscientiously defend. He was subsequently entrusted by Lord Palmerston with the seals of the Colonial Office, and sent as Plenipotentiary to the Vienna Conference; but the part he took with the negotiations for peace with Russia proved utterly distasteful to the country, and Sir E. Bulwer Lytton gave notice of a motion condemnatory of his proceedings, a motion which Lord John would not face, and he resigned. The assembled Commons witnessed the strange spectacle of a statesman who for well nigh forty years had stood in front of the parliamentary battle as the avowed champion of "civil and religious freedom" banished to the obscurity of the back benches, amidst the derision of foes, the vituperation of former friends, and the contemptuous expressions of a too mutable public.

Notwithstanding this mortifying reverse, he has been raised to the Peerage, again made Prime Minister, again forced to make way for Lord Derby, and his friends do not despair of seeing him again, though now in his seventy-sixth year, leading on the van of Reform, and fighting for the principles, whatever their worth, for which Hampden died on the field, and Russell and Sydney laid down their lives on the scaffold.

THE LION IN THE PATH

(From the Publisher's advance sheets.)

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CHAPTER LXXXVIII.—THE REBEL AND THE KING.

To the earl's sinister cry of "Treason!" and the movement that accompanied it, showing that he was half-prepared to give the signal to the soldiers to fire, the king responded by "Hush! my lord. We stand here to listen to him. Let him go on."

"But," continued the stranger, again disregarding the interruption, "if I do not now pay the homage due to a sovereign, I hope I best show my profound individual respect by avoiding to pay those other tributes which, belonging only to persons inferior to kings, might be esteemed from me insulting. I disclaim from my heart—from my inmost soul—the smallest desire to do that!"

"Proceed!" said the king, with a slight change of tone, as if the last few words had in some degree modified the feelings produced by the previous ones.

"I am ready when these soldiers have been marched out. There can be no listeners—none, at least, other than your most intimate adviser, and such I presume this gentleman to be."

"That is the Earl of Bridgeminster," said the king.

"He is welcome!" said the stranger, with an air as lofty and self-assured as if doing the honours of his own house and receiving a distinguished guest.

"Why do you object to the presence of the soldiers?" demanded the earl.

"I shall not object if the demand that Lady Hermia made, and which was refused, be now granted."

"What was that?" demanded the earl.

"That I am to be at liberty to warn the men concerned in the business of which I have to speak of their danger, so that they may give up the scheme if they will."

"Impossible! Quite impossible!" said the earl.

"The soldiers' presence, then, is equally impossible."

"Why?"

"They may overhear; and, as I desire and demand that at least the men I am about to denounce shall be at liberty to retire from their guilty scheme, should they do so of their own accord and without warning—as I yet trust they may before it is too late—they could not do so if their names become known to various persons."

"You come, then, prepared to specify the men by name?" said the earl.

"I do, but solely because I find it impossible otherwise to secure myself, my king, my cause, from the ineffaceable stain that such an infamous crime would fix on us all."

The king and the earl now conversed for a brief space in low tones—too low and too distant for Lord Langton to distinguish what they said.

The king was inclined to let the soldiers go away.

The earl conjured His Majesty to do nothing of the kind.

Did not the wonderful boldness, he asked, and fearlessness of the man show how dangerous he must be if he were playing them false?

Let the king look at it a moment in that light. Suppose this man to be himself a fanatic—an assassin, what a superb stroke of policy, was it not?—that brought him there to-night within a few feet of the king, possibly armed with a loaded pistol, possibly prepared, besides, to leap the

frail barrier of the red cord, and plunge a deadly weapon into the royal breast?

Again the earl strove, by the king's permission, to persuade the black masker to yield the point, reminding him that he might be armed, and that whether two or a dozen persons knew of what he was about to reveal, it could make little difference, for every one should be bound over, under the heaviest penalties His Majesty could inflict, to keep silence.

"My lord," said the stranger, "time passes. I wish to disburden myself of this perilous secret; I wish to be outside these walls; I do not breathe freely within them. No Jacobite can!"

"You, sire, are fairly warned," whispered the earl. "No more desperate rebel have I ever encountered in the course of a long life."

Seeing this private communion, the stranger said suddenly, as if guessing its meaning—

"What is it you fear? Me? Come, then! I will vouchsafe to the Earl of Bridgeminster, for Lady Hermia's sake, what I had refused and would still refuse to any but him and his princely master."

"You mean——?" began the earl.

"I submit myself to your search, on the understanding you do not touch my mask; that I should resent."

Strange to say, this seemingly fair offer did not please the earl at all. So again he whispered—

"Sire, I must, in devotion to you, absolutely refuse to be a witness or accessory to your being left unguarded in the presence of a man whom I believe to be dangerous."

"Do you still believe that?" demanded the royal lips, with something very like unroyal trepidation.

"It is not till now I have really felt a serious fear. Pray, sire, let me speak to him!"

As the king made no sign, the earl said aloud.

"What you ask is clearly inadmissible, whatever your motive may be. My royal master stands here King of England, and, as king, having duties that he is not permitted to put aside for purely personal reasons. The king desires me to say that he earnestly wishes to interpose no obstacle to your performing your duty in your own way; but I, as one of His Majesty's advisers, say I cannot consent; nor do I think that you, as a man of sense—as a man of the world—ought to ask it. I am sure your own king, if I may, under protest, for a moment, use such a phrase, merely to put myself on your ground—I say your own king would not, I am certain, under similar circumstances admit an avowed enemy to a conference with all his natural guardians shut out."

"Your king, I see, is unarmed," said the stranger. "Let him arm himself. You are armed, my lord: two to one. Do you still fear?"

"I will not discuss with you! you grow insolent!" said the earl, as if eager to quarrel.

The earl's eyes began to turn to the gallery, and there was a dangerous light in them, as if he were saying to himself—

"Now or never!"

But a moment's reflection showed him he must at least temporise a few minutes longer till he could secure the secret of the plot and afterwards create sufficient excuse—sufficient provocation—for the meditated blow, which grew only the more attractive the more he dwelt on it.

This very thought changed his manner when he saw the stranger did not answer the provocation. It gave even a suavity to his manner and voice when he next addressed the stranger:—

"Do not mistake me. I quite recognise in your tone what ought to be the tone of an honest man——"

"It is an honest man, earl, who speaks to you!" said the stranger, with almost rude interruption.

"Yes, I am willing to believe it. Why, then do you not help me over these preliminary difficulties, instead of planting yourself immovably upon them?"

"I wish to deal in that spirit," said the mask.

"Why, then, not content yourself with my assurance that the soldiers in the gallery cannot possibly hear you?"