

LORD CRANWORTH.

SELECTIONS.

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Within two years of fourscore Lord Cranworth died suddenly on Sunday last, the 26th ult. The plain record of his birth, education, and subsequent career is this: Robert Monsey Rolfe, first Baron Cranworth, was the eldest and only surviving son of the Rev. Edmund Rolfe, of Cranworth, Norfolk, who was first cousin of Horatio, Viscount Nelson. He was born Dec. 18, 1790; educated at Winchester and Trinity College, Cambridge, 17th Wrangler in 1812, going out as M. A. He was called to the Bar at Lincoln's inn 1816; made a K. C. 1832; was Solicitor-General 1834 and 1835-39; a Baron of the Exchequer 1839-50; a Vice-Chancellor 1850-51; one of the Lords Justices 1851-52; and Lord High Chancellor 1852-58, and again 1856-66. He was M. P. for Penryn 1832-39; was also a governor of the charterhouse. He married, in 1845, Laura, youngest daughter of T. W. Carr, Esq., of Frognel, Middlesex, but leaves no issue.

"It was just one year after Waterloo," observes a contemporary critic, "that he was called to the Bar and took chambers in Lincoln's Inn; having made up his mind to 'eat' his way to the Woolsack. For many years it did not seem as if his ambitious dream were at all likely to be realised and he had shown himself for many seasons in Westminster Hall—appearing chiefly in the equity courts—before briefs came in to him in any remunerative number. But he was patient and laborious, steady and sound, and in due course of time, as his merits became known among the solicitors, things began to change for the better. He had good connections among the members of the Liberal party, and some of the business which more talented men declined came to his hands. In this he showed such patience and good sense, and such sound knowledge of the intricacies of the law, that the little brook of fees gradually became a stream, and the stream had increased to the dimensions of a tidy-sized river in 1832, when he was honoured with a silk gown. He was already Recorder of Bury St. Edmunds. Like many another ambitious brother of the wig and gown, he made in the mean time one or two unsuccessful efforts to get into Parliament, but he did not achieve his object until the general election in Dec. 1832, when he was returned in the Liberal interest for the Cornish borough of Penryn, for which he continued to sit, without interruption, until his promotion to the bench."

The same writer also faithfully relates the conspicuous features of Lord Cranworth's judicial life. "A seat on the judicial bench was held by him in one capacity or another, without a break, for nearly twenty years, first as a puisne Baron, then as a Vice-Chancellor, then as a Judge of the Court of Appeal in Chancery, and ultimately as Lord Chancellor; but through these twenty years there is scarce-

ly any one very great and important matter of public interest with which his name as a judge was mixed up. He presided, indeed, at the Norfolk assizes in 1849, when Rush was tried for the murder of Mr. Jeremy, and kept his temper and presence of mind with exemplary firmness when browbeaten by the hardened villain who stood before him as the 'prisoner at the bar;' and in memory of this occasion he was often called by familiar friends, 'My Lord Killrush.' Firmness, steadiness, soberness, patience, dignity, wide knowledge of points of law, and of the relative value and weight of scattered pieces of evidence—these were legal and judicial virtues for which he deserved all praise; but to the masterly grasp of legal principles which marked Lord Eldon in the days of our fathers, and Lord Mansfield in those of our grandfathers, he could not, and did not, ever prefer a claim. Among legal circles his name will be associated most intimately, perhaps, in future years, with the removal of the sittings of the equity courts from Westminster to Lincoln's-inn. He held the great seal a second time, from the resignation of Lord Westbury until the recent return of the Tories to office. Sir Robert Monsey Rolfe, as Solicitor-General, and as a judge, it was often said, had a kind heart and an ever-smiling face. His looks did not belie the real nature of the man within. As an advocate in the courts, indeed, and as a member of the House, he showed no symptoms of fancy, or even of liveliness: and he seemed as if he could not for the life of him imagine what anything light or playful could have to do with either side of Westminster Hall. His speeches were even dull and somnolent; and often must both the judge and the audience have desiderated a little bit of vivacity or wit. But it never came. There was nothing but an even flow of dull and dry, but correct, legal matter, unrelieved by the shadow of a joke or jest, even when the subject invited it; and yet his ever-pleasing countenance was radiant with smiles. When, therefore, he sat upon the bench as a judge and became Lord Cranworth, he had no jocose habits to unlearn, no impaired dignity to regret. Somewhat under the average height, rather feebly made, and with a pale complexion, his slightly angular and prominent nose and light grey amiable eyes made his personal appearance prepossessing, and their owner a favourite with all who were brought into contact with him."

We have not adopted the practice of giving contemporary opinions of great lawyers, considering that an opinion of a lawyer upon a lawyer, as a lawyer simply, is almost valueless. The opinions of contemporaries in the press and in the senate on the other hand may be well preserved. Lord Cairns thus speaks of the deceased ex-chancellor, before commencing a speech on the Bribery Bill:—"I must commence by responding very sincerely to the statement made by the noble earl with reference to the great loss your lordships have sus-