

posterity is not one of the virtues of the peerage. The House of Lords remains as it is only because it is regarded as ornamental, and because it has usually stopped short of being destructive. The long list of progressive measures which the House of Lords has either delayed, or so far prevented, is a sufficient condemnation of a body instinctively reactionary and essentially alien to the spirit of progress.

Belonging also to the order of constitutional questions, there is the question of SHORTER PARLIAMENTS. The existing Parliament affords a conspicuous example of the disadvantage of the septennial period. The general election may be expected to show how far Parliament has dragged behind public opinion during the past three or four years; yet it is in the power of the Government to block the way of all progress until July, 1893. Quinquennial, triennial, and annual Parliaments have been suggested by various schools of politicians during the past century. The arguments for a period shorter than seven years are invincible; the points of dispute lie as between one, three, and five years periods. The general argument in favour of *annual* Parliaments is the sensitiveness of so short-lived a Parliament, both collectively and as regards its members, to public opinion. It is noteworthy, however, that most of the arguments of the leading advocates of annual Parliaments—first, the Benthamites, and subsequently the Chartists, were based upon the then prevalent venality of members of Parliament. No doubt offices and titles are still dispensed to reward services in support of the Government; but no doubt also political life is much purer than it was seventy years ago; and there is less necessity for devising safeguards against a corruption which no longer exists. The arguments against annual Parliaments are the great disturbance to industry which an annual general election would cause if the people were really stirred; and the political indifference which would result from annual Parliaments if the people were not stirred. As a practical issue the question really lies between triennial