

course received with much *éclat*, and their appearance in public was everywhere greeted with rapturous applause. But of all the honors heaped upon him on this occasion, the venerable chancellor was best pleased with an incident which he afterwards related in these words: "I will tell you what charmed me very much when I left the theatre, and was trying to go to my carriage; one man in the crowd shouted out, 'There's old Eldon; cheer him, for he never ratted!' I was very much delighted, for I never did rat. I will not say I have been right through life—I may have been wrong—but I will say that I have been consistent."

But his conservatism in politics was the conservatism of conviction, and not of fear. No minister was ever bolder in public emergencies. And in a great political crisis, with a cabinet falling in pieces around him, the country in jeopardy, and the monarchy apparently tottering to its foundation, Eldon arose to the full measure of the occasion, and marshalled his forces with the coolness and daring of a veteran general. With a consummate skill in mastering men, and a still rarer facility in mastering kings, and with a courage that in political crises was simply sublime, he was the man of all others to lead a forlorn hope in an attempt to save his party or his ministry from utter annihilation. And yet he never rose to the dignity of statesmanship. He could build cabinets, but when built he could propose no great measures of policy or reform for their perpetuation. With the boldness to defend existing abuses in the law, in the Church, and in the State, he lacked the courage and inclination to originate great measures of State to perpetuate a ministry which he had created or conserved.

In no feature of his political career is his intense Toryism more apparent than in his life-long struggle against Catholic emancipation and the removal of political disabilities from members of the Romish Church. Beginning as early as 1789, for forty years the question of Catholic emancipation was a controlling question in English politics; and for forty years Eldon was the leader of the conservative forces of Church and State in opposition to the measure. At first the odds were largely in his favor, and every bill looking toward a removal

of the disabilities was defeated by immense majorities. But during the later years of the struggle he fought the fight with constantly-waning majorities, until 1829, when the measure became a law. As indicating the intensity of his prejudice in this direction, when debating the king's message, in 1829, which contained a suggestion for the removal of the disabilities, Eldon used these words: "If he had a voice that would sound to the remotest corner of the empire, he would re-echo the principle which he most firmly believed: that, if ever a Roman Catholic was permitted to form part of the legislature of this country, or to hold any of the great executive offices of the government, from that moment the sun of Great Britain would be set!"

But his hostility to the Catholics was political rather than religious. And while his leadership in opposition to Catholic emancipation gained for him a degree of reverence from the followers of the Established Church which has been accorded to few laymen, he was far from being a religious man. Byron relates that on one occasion, when the House of Lords was nearly tied on one of the debates upon the Catholic question, he was sent for in great haste to a ball, which he reluctantly left to emancipate 5,000,000 of people. He came in late, and stood just behind the woolsack. Eldon turning around saw Byron, and said to a peer who was sitting beside him on the woolsack: "Damn them! They'll have it now! By God! the vote that is just come in will give it to them."

Few men who have been trained for the bar, and whose ambition has been professional, and not political, have attained so great an ascendancy in politics, or have been so positive a power in the State for so long a period of time. For thirty years Eldon was the autocrat of the House of Lords. He ruled them in all matters of law, in all questions of Church, and in most matters of State and of politics. From his first entry into the Cabinet he became a positive element in English politics, and during the long and exciting period embracing the State trials, the Napoleonic wars, the Orders in Council, our War of 1812, the final overthrow of Napoleon, the contest for Catholic emancipation, and even down to the passage of the Reform Bill, his ascendancy in the House of Lords, and his