

THE GREVILLE MEMOIRS.

"After all, Brougham is only a living and very remarkable instance of the inefficacy of the most splendid talents, unless they are accompanied with other qualities which scarcely admit of definition, but which must serve the same purpose as ballast does for a ship. Brougham has prospered to a certain degree: he has a great reputation, and he makes a considerable income at the bar; but as an advocate, he is left behind by men of far inferior capacity, whose names are hardly known beyond the precincts of their courts or the boundaries of their circuits. As a statesman he is not considered eligible for the highest offices; and, however he may be admired or feared as an orator or debater, he neither commands respect by his character nor confidence by his genius, and in this contrast between his pretensions and his situation, more humble abilities may find room for consolation and cease to contemplate with envy his immense superiority."

Brougham never submitted his versatile mind to the steady and plodding discipline which every man must go through who aspires to be a truly great lawyer. With his extraordinary powers he found no difficulty in getting up enough law *pro re nata*, but when Chancellor he often provoked a smile by his startling dicta from the men, deeply read in the lore of their craft, who practised before him. If he had been for any length of time in the Court of Chancery he might have mastered the whole theory and practice of equity; but his short sojourn there and his want of special knowledge have caused his performances as a judge to be looked upon with light estimation. It is as a law-reformer that he has real claims to the reverence and gratitude of posterity. Lord Eldon had sat in the Court of Chancery for twenty years and had never lifted a finger to remedy abuses that had caused his court to be imprecated as a den of iniquity. Brougham had hardly been an hour on the woolsack before he brought down a bill to reform the practice, one effect of which was to diminish his own emoluments. The difficulties of the task he undertook in the reform of the

Court of Chancery, would have daunted a spirit less resolute than his. He approached it with all the fire of his enthusiastic nature, and persevered in the dry details of the work till he had effected great and lasting improvements. The changes he brought about in common law procedure were even more radical and beneficial. At this day few people, perhaps, remember that to Brougham we are indebted for the abolition of fines and recoveries, and the pernicious subtleties of special pleading, and for such familiar statutes as the Act respecting the limitation of actions at present in force, and the Act permitting parties in a cause to give evidence on their own behalf. But there is hardly a measure of Law Reform which has been brought about in England within the last fifty years which is not either due directly to the exertions of Brougham, or was not at least suggested in the germ by his enlightened mind.

"Great and important," he himself writes, speaking of the work done by the 'Reform' Administration, "were the changes in almost every department of the law; vast improvements in pleading and procedure were introduced, not in the Common Law Courts only, but largely in the Court of Chancery, in which department alone offices were abolished effecting a saving of not less than £100,000 a year. By the issue of commissions the way was paved for an entire reform of the municipal corporations; and, although I mention it last, not the least important of the measures we carried was the Poor Law Act. To Lyndhurst's mischievous opposition we owed the loss of my Local Courts Bill. But that could only be postponed; a measure so obviously for the benefit of the whole community must pass some day in spite of attorneys or future Copleys. I wish I could look forward with the same hope to an Act for the