

## THE LORD CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND.

is well known that he has had a host of enemies, some envious of his talents and success, others made so by the gigantic reforms which he has successfully carried out in the Ecclesiastical, Probate, and Divorce Courts, and particularly in reforming the abuses of the Bankruptcy laws. He is cursed, moreover, with about as bad a son as ever fell to the lot of an unfortunate father, and it is no amelioration of his sorrows that this reckless unprincipled scapegrace is almost wholly the author of his father's misfortunes.

He is, moreover, a man that is personally unpopular, a man of stern and unyielding exterior; but as it appears of too little strength of mind, or too careless to resist persistent appeals to his organ of benevolence. He also trusted too much, like nearly all public men, to the representations of those who were in positions of confidence about him, and whose duty it was to guard him from the devices of hungry applicants for office.

We are aware that these excuses, as applied to a man of the well known character and disposition of Sir Richard Bethell, are scoffed at by certain of the press in England, who, in the slashing manner so taking to the general reader, but so often devoid of sound thought, write in this way:—

“From what the world knows of the Chancellor, either at the Chancery bar or on the woolsack it hardly suspects his placability, his easy temper—so capable of being imposed upon, his softness of heart and excessive amiability, his liability to disregard caution, his readiness to be made a tool of by the designing and corrupt, his constitutional incapacity to detect, or even to suspect, jobs, intrigue, and double-dealing. The world has taken the Chancellor to be possessed of the keenest of tempers, the hardest of heads, and the most searching of judgments; and it has thought that his success in his calling is to be attributed to these gifts of character. \* \* \* If, as we are told, he is so good and guileless as to become so frequently (twice in a twelvemonth) the unsuspecting victim of the designing and the corrupt, then, to speak coarsely, we want somebody with more devil in him—less pliable, more suspicious, less gentle, less easy to be got over and got round, and taken in by vulgar rogues, less ‘hasty,’ and more ‘cautious.’ We want somebody more suspicious of human nature, with ‘motives’ equally unassailable and conduct less ‘calculated to excite the gravest suspicions.’ We want some one whom we can understand, whose character can be

brought under common types, and can be judged by an ordinary standard. We can understand the man of oil, and we can understand the man of vinegar, and we can in his way respect either; but the oil-and-vinegar man puzzles common folks—the man who keeps all his oil for his own family purposes and his own apparent interest, and all his vinegar for the public. In anybody but Lord Westbury, we should be tempted to say that either his private virtues were a sham, or his public character for sharpness an imposture. This the two select committees declined to believe; they can understand and appreciate Lord Westbury. It is, of course, the world's fault, or it may be the world's misfortune, if it fails to estimate this complex and certainly rare ideal.”\*

But, strange as it may seem to the writer of that article, more curious compounds of human nature have existed than have appeared in Lord Westbury. It cannot be denied, moreover, that political influence had something to do with the vote on the question. The party opposed to the Government took advantage of the strong feeling which had, rightly or wrongly, been raised against the Lord Chancellor, or rather against the system of nepotism which has been lately brought to light. But it does not follow that because this corrupt system has been brought before the public during the official career of the late Lord Chancellor, that he is to be held personally responsible for all the evils of that system. Is he not in fact the first victim of the improved tone of public feeling with reference to that system? Is there not much truth in the assertion made in another periodical,† that

“The House of Commons affirmed the vote of censure because the country is tired of seeing all the best Church livings in the hands of the sons and sons-in-law of bishops; every snug mastership filled by the son or nephew of a chief justice; every well-paid and non-responsible office of every kind in the possession of the family or friends of the patron?”

Whilst however heartily hoping that time will prove that he was more “sinned against than sinning,” it cannot be denied that the course which the House thought fit to take in the premises, is strong evidence of the wholesome view taken of the subject by public men in England.

The loss to the country of such a man at such a time, is incalculable. He was in the

\* *Saturday Review*, July 1, 1865.

† *S. icitor's Journal*, p. 703.