

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY- Saturday, November 8th 1834

Northampton Mercury

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8.

It is with no less regret than surprise that we find among the declaimers against the Poor Law Amendment Bill the Noble Member for Buckinghamshire. In the report of a speech made a fortnight ago, by the Marquis of Chandos, at the Farmers' ordinary at Buckingham, his lordship is represented to have applied the following strong expressions to this important measure.

* * * * * *"In my humble judgment, the Poor Law Bill will not relieve us. (Hear, hear.) The poor of all classes and all ages are to go into the workhouses. Who are to build these workhouses? You: and your rates are to support them when built. The 43rd of Elizabeth, the best act that ever was framed to meet the just claims of the pauper, was never intended to be so misapplied as it has been, and I will tell you fairly, that, in my opinion, this new law, which is to do wonders, will never be fully carried into execution. As a magistrate, I say that I do not know how to carry it into effect. If we apply to the Commissioners we are told to go on a little bit with the old law until all the arrangements are definitely decided on. What is the consequence? Why, that every parish is more or less placed in a difficulty, and we are all at a standstill, not knowing what to do. I shall be glad to have the bill explained clearly to me, and if anyone now present will enlighten me thereon, I shall be most happy to receive his information; but I tell you candidly that I think that the government cannot put this law into execution, and if they could I believe they are disinclined to do so, and we shall have Christmas here before one clause of that bill be put in force throughout the country. This I most firmly believe. I am sure that as honest and honourable men you will never lose sight of the real and just interests of your poor, but support the high character of this county by enabling the poor to subsist comfortably – by finding employment for the able-bodied, and giving sustenance to the aged and infirm. (Cheers.) I am sure that the farmers of Buckinghamshire will never grind them down "by act of parliament", or "as the law directs".*

We are unable to collect from the preceding passage with any distinctness what are the reasons which have led his lordship to

pass so strong a condemnation upon the new bill; and we feel no inclination to combat mere assertions. Before many months have elapsed, experience will, we trust, have furnished a far more decisive refutation of Lord Chandos's opinion, than we could at present adduce. But we cannot help expressing our astonishment that the language which we have quoted should have fallen from the lips of a Member for Buckinghamshire – a county distinguished by some of the most objectionable practices which disgraced the late administration of the Poor Laws. Lord Chandos is in the habit (we mention it to his credit) of frequent intercourse with his constituents. He cannot surely be ignorant, that through nearly the whole of his county the industrious labourer and the rate-payer have been “ground down” by the allowance or bread-money system in its worst shape – that among the parishes of Buckinghamshire is to be found – on the one hand Cholesbury, where the whole land, with the exception of sixteen acres, was absolutely thrown out of cultivation by the overwhelming pressure of the rates, and the poor supported by a rate in aid; and on the other Great Missenden, where so beneficial a change has been effected by anticipating the very plans which it is the object of the new Bill to extend over the kingdom. Of all persons, we should have expected to find the representative of Buckinghamshire converted by the facts and arguments so ably brought forward in the Poor Law Report.

We cannot help adding, that in a speech composed in a great measure of attacks upon the present administration, it is hardly candid to bring forward as a subject of severe censure the Poor Law Amendment Bill, without distinctly stating that the political party with which Lord Chandos usually acts is scarcely less responsible for its enactment than the ministers. His Lordship knows, that in the House of Lords it was supported no less warmly by the Duke of Wellington and the leaders of the Conservative party than by Lords Melbourne and Brougham. We cannot call to mind whether Lord Chandos's name is to be found in the small minorities of 20 or 30 by which the Bill was feebly opposed in the Lower House; but unless our memory is at fault, his Lordship never took any prominent part during the discussion, or denounced, as it became him to do, during its passage through the Commons, a Bill which, out of the walls of Parliament, he pronounces unintelligible, incapable of being carried into execution, and calculated to “grind down the poor”.

While alluding to the alterations in the Poor Laws, we will express our satisfaction at the intelligence that the appointment of several of the assistant commissioners has actually taken place. We trust that not a moment more than is absolutely necessary will be

allowed to elapse, before the Central Board issues the rules and orders by which the relief of the poor is to be regulated. In some instances – especially in such parishes as by the 54th section of the act are already exempted from the control of the magistracy – we fear there is a disposition to introduce hasty and ill-digested alterations in the management of the poor, and that, without the speedy interference of the commissioners, serious errors will be committed, and not a few cases of real hardship occur. Independently of the immediate evils which such errors will produce, they will inevitably create strong prejudices against the more salutary changes which will hereafter be prescribed by the Central Board. We would strongly urge upon all who are engaged in the administration of the Poor Laws, to attend to the suggestion of the circular of Sept. 4; and not to attempt any material alterations in the modes of affording relief, which have hitherto prevailed, till they have submitted their plans to the commissioners.