

Much progress was made in the written evidence of this charge, and at five o'clock the Court adjourned to Friday.

HOUSE OF COMMONS, MARCH I.
ROMAN CATHOLICS.

Mr. MITFORD moved the order of the day for the House resolving itself into a Committee to consider of exempting, under certain restrictions and regulations, the protesting Roman Catholics from the pains and penalties to which they were now liable.

The House immediately resolved itself into a Committee. Mr. Stanley in the chair.

Mr. MITFORD said, he should not trouble the House at any length, as he on a former day had an opportunity of fully explaining to the House his intention in bringing in this bill. He should not enter into the question how far government ought to interfere, either with the political or religious opinions of men. The government of this country had thought fit to interfere both with political and religious opinions. The sole ground on which he thought the Roman Catholics entitled to be relieved from a number of the heavy penalties under which they now laboured, was by giving the inhabitants of this country the most perfect security, that they professed no principles inimical to our government and constitution, and that they had the warmest attachment to his Majesty and the Royal Family. It was for that reason that his object was to exempt them from those laws which pressed most severely upon them. They would be bound by their oaths and their honour; and they must be considered as good Christians and good subjects, altho' they differed in some things from the established church.

He concluded by moving, That leave be given to bring in a bill to relieve, upon conditions and under restrictions, persons called Protesting Catholic Dissenters, from certain restrictions and disabilities which Papists or persons professing the Popish religion are by law subject to.

Mr. Fox lamented that the motion rendered it necessary for him to make any objection to its being carried as it now stood; as far as it went, he readily admitted it was good and just; but, as on a former day, he considered it not to go far enough, and could not give it his concurrence until an amendment should be made, by inserting after the words "Protesting Catholic Dissenters," "and others." His opinion was known to be against all tests in religion and politics, except the oath of

allegiance; for all others appeared to him to be absurd, impolitic, and unwise. He admitted though he was as strongly against the Corporation and Test Acts, as many could be, that in the present application there was a material difference; for the Roman Catholics solicited to be admitted to no place of trust; they asked only permission to worship God Almighty in their own way, without being subjected to bloody and sanguinary laws; they solicited for that toleration which was one of the greatest rights of man, and of which they ought never to be deprived. It gave him pleasure in recollecting that in consequence of his having brought forward a proposition for the repeal of the Test Act in a former Parliament, the rights of every man to an unlimited toleration in religion had been admitted by the highest authorities in that and another House; and that it had been also admitted in every part of the country where Assemblies had taken place, of which, however, he was far from approving on the question of the repeal of the test. He wished then to ask, whether it was fit and honourable in the country to profess so much, and to act so little up to their professions, by permitting acts to remain in force, which were disgraceful to the nation, and unfit to exist in any country professing to permit toleration? He declared his opinion to be, that the acts against the Roman Catholics were not made for the suppression of religious opinions, but that they had originated in the time of Queen Elisabeth, from a fear of the power of the Pope; in the reign of King James, from the fear of a popish King and a tyrant; and subsequent to that time from a dread of the schemes of a Pretender. His opinion was, that even were all those fears well founded, a wrong mode had been adopted to quiet them; for in the two first persecution was ill calculated to defeat either the intention of the Pope, or of Charles; and in the time of James, other means might have been successfully adopted for defeating the plans of a Popish King. But now no reason whatever existed for a continuance of those laws; toleration was admitted to be the right of every man, and we had nothing to fear from a Pope, from a Popish King, or from the Pretender; for the Pope had now no power—from the King it was unnecessary for him to say the people had nothing to dread, for he was revered and beloved by all, as a common father to his country; and as to any fear from a Pretender, he knew not where one could be found, nor did he believe the most zealous Jacobite would know where to go in search of his

idol. When all these reasons were gone, was it fit for the House any longer to maintain on their statute books acts that every man of sense would be ashamed to maintain before the House, and which could no sooner be stated, than they would be scouted? The maxims of toleration were now, he was happy to say, acted upon more or less in every country throughout Europe; where then was the danger of adopting them in this? It was true, that in the year 1780, disgraceful tumults had taken place in consequence of a partial relief to the Catholics; but, if that was feared, and should be urged as a reason against the general relief he suggested, the danger would be equal in the partial relief proposed, for those who were guilty of the tumults in 1780 were not a description of persons calculated to distinguish between the nature of the oaths proposed by the hon. gentleman (Mr. Mitford) or the oath that would be taken if his proposition should be agreed to of making the relief general. In 1778 though some of the laws were repealed under certain restrictions, others of a severer nature were left in force. The Catholics had, however, from that time to the present, both protesting and non-protesting, invariably shown themselves to be perfectly loyal and good subjects meriting every indulgence that could be granted them, not partially but generally. For thirteen years since the taking off a trifling part of the grievances they laboured under, they had behaved themselves as the best citizens; a continuance of the laws against them would therefore be no encouragement for future good behaviour. In a few years he was confident a general toleration would be adopted; for the times were too much enlightened to suffer men's minds to be shackled. There was a plain and safe road for such a toleration to be immediately adopted; let the statute books be examined; keep in your statutes for the maintenance of the Establishment, and even the Test and Corporation Acts if you please, but strike out all the others that any way relate to religious opinions. The Acts against the Roman Catholics in Ireland were nearly all repealed, and no danger had arisen; on the contrary, the Catholics there had given the most substantial proofs of their loyalty and attachment to government. He considered the statutes against toleration to be impious; for who, he said, gave the House a right to decide upon the religious opinions of any man? Some Catholics admitted the Pope to be infallible—others the Pope and Council—and others the Pope, Council, Church;—but he had never yet heard that