

CHAPTER V.

FROM THE GREAT REFORM BILL TO THE CRIMEAN WAR.

1832-54.

THE passage of Lord Grey's Reform Bill is the central point of the political history of the nineteenth century. Never again for more than fifty years were men's passions to run so high; the unrest caused by the Chartist agitation in 1838-48 was a mere nothing compared to the excitement in 1830-32. The only time that can be compared to those troubled years is the short period in 1886, when Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill was in the air, and the Liberal party was bursting asunder. This later struggle only occupied a few months, but Lord Grey's battle with the Tories had covered nearly three years. If protracted a little longer, it would probably have led to the abolition of the House of Lords and many other sudden and destructive changes. To some people the time-honoured constitution of England seemed in danger; they prophesied that the Radicals would sweep the Whigs in their train, and carry universal suffrage, vote by ballot, and the whole programme of complete democracy the moment that the great bill had passed. There were even persons who made wagers that the United Kingdom would cease to be a monarchy before ten years were out.

Nothing could have been more ill-founded than these fears;