THE

LIBERAL SITUATION:

NECESSITY FOR

A Qualified Franchise.

A LETTER TO JOSEPH COWEN, JUN.

By G. J. Holyoake.

NO MEASURE [OF REFORM] CAN BE CONSIDERED WORTHY OF ACCEPTANCE, UNLESS IT AFFORDS A REASONABLE PROSPECT OF AFFECTING A *SETTLEMENT* OF THE QUESTION.

Parliamentary Government, by EARL GREY.

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The Liberal Situation.

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TO JOSEPH COWEN, JUN., STELLA HOUSE, BLAYDON-ON-TYNE.

MY DEAR SIR,—I address this letter to you, because since the days of Thomas Attwood (if you will permit me to say so) no English gentleman (great as have been the services of many) has taken the same personal, practical, and persevering interest in the Political elevation of the people at home and abroad, as yourself. Representatives of the Northern Reform Union, under your Presidency, visited the towns, villages, and hamlets in the two counties of Northumberland and Durham, and explained to the people the duty devolving upon them, of claiming, and never ceasing to claim, "universal" suffrage; and inculcating the sound doctrine of Major Cartwright—"that to be free is to be governed by laws to which we have *ourselves assented*, either in person or *by representatives* for whose election *we have actually voted;* that all not having a right of suffrage are *slaves*, and that *a vast majority of the people of Great Britain are slaves.*" This is the true doctrine of the franchise question, and there will be no further reform until the working classes feel this and act upon it. If the working class are slaves through ignorance, let it be corrected—if slaves through coercion, let it be resented—if slaves through apathy, let it be terminated by those who know better, and who should inspire the people with self-respect. Indifference to political rights is indifference to public duty, and is an infamy equally in those who betray this indifference and in those who connive at it. The reform question is again being reopened. Manchester is trying to do something and Bradford more. But the agitation has neither the compass nor as yet the courage in it necessary for great success. No Parliamentary party brings up the *people* to the front. Reformers act as though they were scared, and the claims of a twelfth part of the unenfranchised are all that any leader

has ventured to press upon the notice of Parliament. This shows a dangerous timidity. An honorary member of the Northern Reform Union, I have also had the satisfaction to represent it at several Conferences, may I therefore call attention to the desirability and possibility of realising our old Cartwright doctrine which gave to this Union all its value?

Recently, in the columns of the *Times*, Mr. Buxton, M.P., stated the "Liberal Dilemma." There is a "dilemma," and the way out of it is to look the Liberal situation plainly in the face.

Soon after the Reform Bill of 1832 was passed, there appeared on the walls of Birmingham a placard, put out by Cobbett, the purport of which was that the Reform Bill merely gave power to those who could help themselves, and still excluded the mass who could not. He told us that the word R E F O R M meant no more to the people than any other six letters. The Bill would give them some new masters, but any actual power had still to be won. I remember well the consternation and disgust with which the working class members of the Birmingham Political Union, of which I was one, read Cobbett's placard. We hated him as the poor Brahmins did the European philosopher when he handed them a microscope, with which to see the insects in their food; but every year since the working class have seen, with the clearness of dismay, the truth of what Cobbett said.

Earl Russell and Mr. Bright are the best regarded authors of Reform Bills. Neither has proposed other than to tread in the political footsteps of Thomas Attwood. I say nothing against Mr. Bright's Bill—I rather serve it by describing it as giving us 200,000 new masters—a democratic advantage, yet affording protection only to those who have some means, and leaving politically defenceless those who have none. The speakers at the late Bradford meeting—Mr. Stansfeld, Sir F. Crossley, Mr. Baines, and Mr. Forster—pleaded for no more (Mr. Stansfeld alone gave advice which would secure more) than the partial enfranchisement plan—a policy which palters with the popular hope—which fears to look the right in the face—which offers the least measure that can be called an improvement—settles nothing, and perpetuates the old disappointment. Reformers on principle, who hold that the whole people are entitled to a share of control over whatever affects the national interest or English renown, would acquiesce even in a partial measure, though it should add but a single voter in a century. But about these partial

plans, which contemplate to admit the few and exclude the many, there need be no alarm on the part of Tories or Whigs, and there will never be any enthusiasm on the part of the people.

The character of the working class has changed since this Reform question was agitated in 1830. The demand for the suffrage now is not alone a question of grievance, it is also one of *degradation*. The character of English statesmanship, the magnitude of our commerce, the wealth of our manufactures, the renown of our arms, are matters understood now by the common people. The Press carries information into every hut and workshop in the land; and the labourer and the artisan find themselves well used instruments without political recognition—they are no longer to be imposed upon by specious representations; they find themselves virtually a slave class with a longer chain than is commonly permitted, but the end made fast and kept secure nevertheless. They are patted with praise by noble lords and condescending gentlemen at Mechanics' Institution soirees, and elsewhere, but they are never—*trusted*. When driven abroad to seek for bread, the English working man finds himself lowered in the eyes of the two nations—France and America—before whom he inherits the wish to stand with pride. It is nothing to tell him that in both these nations the franchise is abused—were that true. He is a slave who has no privilege to abuse. The man who like the French elector has had freedom and voted it away, has a higher place than he who never even had that chance. The English workman is contumeliously kept in political inferiority as being something less in the eyes of Parliament than a Frenchman or an American. No English pride is taught to him, no sentiment of nationality is appealed to, no instinct of his race is trusted. He stands degraded abroad who is allowed no responsibility at home. There may be no howling at this exclusion, no riots, no sedition, but there ought to be an incurable resentment diffuse itself, like that which appeared for the first time when Lord Palmerston lately visited Bradford. As the Indian proverb says—even in that submissive land of the sun—"the dart of contempt will pierce even through the shell of the tortoise."

I adhere to Major Cartwright's dictum, a non-elector is a slave, and I hate to see a slave beside me. If he is a slave by political exclusion and does not resent it– if he is a slave by consent and does not feel degraded I equally despise him. And, as intelligence spreads, this feeling will spread, and the non-elector will be an object of pity or

contempt—of pity if he does not know his duty—of contempt if he does know it, and does not wish to discharge it.

The author of a warning pamphlet entitled "Look before you Leap," and who is a master in the art of stating Conservative principles, reminds the working classes "that their very numbers secure them respect and attention from the conscience as well as the benevolence of the classes above them." This is the new fraternal doctrine which the Tories have taught, the Whigs have caught, and the Radicals are learning. It treats the non-electors like children, who, so long as they stand on their good behaviour, may expect to have something done for them. The middle class would be despised if they were to submit to political inferiority and trust to the "conscience and benevolence" of the aristocracy for their welfare, and the non-electors will deserve to be despised if they continue to submit to it. These new Political Paternalists say to the people—"You are well-fed, you have comfortable homes, you have plenty of work, you have sufficient wages, you could not do better for yourselves." Why, if this were all true, it is no more than the farmer might say to his pig, or the gentleman to his horse, or the planter to his slave. Our new Paternalists, whose self-complacency is limitless, assure the non-electors that they are very well represented by the present very nice, liberal, considerate, good-natured, studious, patient, condescending gentlemen, lawyers, bankers, colonels, country 'squires, and noble lords who bestow upon the country the inestimable benefit of sitting in Parliament. There is one short, not to say contemptuous answer to all this. Every one knows that the middle class who clamoured for the Reform Bill in 1832 until they got it, were just as well represented by the Boroughmongers of that day as the working classes are by the Parliament of this day. Why were not the middle classes satisfied then? They had quite as good "*indirect*" representation as middle class members afford the unenfranchised people now, besides that valuable hold which they had upon the "conscience and benevolence of the classes above them." What were the middle class of 1832 better than the working class of 1865? Instead of being better, they were inferior. They were more ignorant, more vulgar, more noisy, and ten times more seditious. But they had one virtue, now growing scarce in England—for which they are to be honoured; and that was, they were too manly and too proud to be represented on *sufferance*. They had too much sense to be imposed upon, and too much spirit to submit to the irritating and humiliating device of *indirect*

representation. Their cry was "we are as much men as any other class and we claim and intend to be treated as equals. We are not going to be protected as an act of political condescension. We can, and will do that business for ourselves. We want no patronage. We, as well as others, pay for the State, we do our share of fighting for the State, and we will have our share in controlling it." This was the right thing to say, and the right tone to take —and it told. These middle class men got what they wanted, they have had their turn served, and they have served themselves well. They have got power, wealth, and university education for their sons, who are turning out promising students of literary and Parliamentary contemptuousness. They turn now upon the people, and treat the unenfranchised with the same impertinent patronage which their fathers, a generation ago, so scornfully and so honourably rejected when they were subjected to it. There needs now no seditious suggestion, no revolutionary action; it only needs that the people be taught to imitate their new "superiors." Let the working class show as much pluck, as much sense, and as much resolution as the middle have done, and they may become as influential and as much respected by those who rule, as the middle class now are.

It is strange to have to own that the chief politician who has seriously proposed to obviate the difficulty and discredit of partial representation, is an Earl. Earl Grey's plan, so far as relates to the establishment of Guilds, enabling the working classes to elect a certain number of their own representatives, would undoubtedly meet a defined want. The people seek no absolute transfer of power to themselves; they merely ask for such share as shall enable them to send to the House of Commons some representatives of their own feelings, interests, and ideas. There are now many gentlemen in Parliament who really sympathise with the people, and are perhaps wiser, abler representatives of the working classes than they would be able to elect for themselves. But this does not meet the case. These members are not the servants of the people. There is not a single member in the House who owes his seat to working class electors, and his vote and influence are—whatever he may wish—at the command of those who sent him there. A gentleman who, instead of engaging servants, should condescend, or be under the necessity of accepting volunteers, could give them no orders, exact no obedience, and must put up with their absence when he most needed them. Such is the nature of that "indirect" representation which

the working class seek to supersede now, as the middle class superseded it in 1832.

Let any one watch what takes place when the sitting member grants a political interview. When an M.P. receives a deputation of electors they meet as equals. The electors comport themselves as men having a right to an audience. When non-electors go up they are received as an act of condescension, or if received with frank respect, they retire with demonstrations of gratitude which mark the measure of their political inferiority. Should Earl Grey's plan prevail, there would be an end of this humiliation, and his plan of election would disturb no balance of interests in any borough nor would its results monopolise any power nor swamp the educated classes of the nation.

Mr. Buxton, M.P., brings forward a plan in accordance with Mr. Mill's suggestion of enfranchising the working class, and guarding against their preponderance by giving a plurality of votes to other classes.* There is no valid objection to this plan. It already works well in every combination in which property is at stake. It is perhaps less easy of adoption than Lord Grey's plan, but has the equal merit of covering the entire ground of political disability. Its sole difficulty lies in the adjustment of votes. At present the polling result in any borough is pretty nearly a known quantity. Every elector is ticketed and docketed; his quality and price are known to the local parliamentary agents. Mr. Buxton's plan might disturb these hopeful calculations. These electoral astrologers who make up our Parliamentary almanac will make frantic resistance to having their stars displaced, and their political nativities complicated.

Self respect can never be a national characteristic without national enfranchisement. Viewed in this light the plans of Lord Grey and Mr. Buxton are not without merit compared with the "partial enfranchisement" advocated at the Bradford meeting. No partial enfranchisement can produce direct political improvement unless large enough to effect a substantial *transfer* of power, and this the experience of the last thirty years shows cannot be effected without menacing a revolution. There is no political combination among the people able to do this, and politicians know this very well, yet treat with derision both Lord Grey's and Mr. Buxton's plans. Lord Grey's does not suit

* Vide Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform. By John Stuart Mill.

them; it would create a class distinction, although we have notoriously nothing but class distinctions in the country. We have more *castes* in England than in India, and more sharply and inexorably defined. The politicians who raise the new cry against class distinction are they who acquiesce in enfranchising only a limited portion of the people, thus perpetuating, indefinitely, the bitterest, hatefulest, and most degrading of all class distinctions—that of *a small class with votes and a vast class without.* It is only your practical politician who shudders at a nominal distinction and keeps up a real one. Nor does Mr. Buxton's plan suit them. Against this they revive a very old objection, viz., that it is better to have no vote than a proportional one—which all the thinking Chartists have long had the good sense to abandon. Every sensible mechanic knows that it is better to have one-third or one-fifth of the voting power of your neighbour than to have none at all. Let us hope that the Reform Company (Limited) who advocate partial enfranchisement and object to a proportional vote, will find that the working classes are no longer in love with the insane dignity of utter impotence, or do not know the nature of that affected unity which awards the greater part of them entire and contemptuous seclusion.

It is not an insult to offer a man a *portion* of power when the offer of it comes from members of a class who withhold *all.* But if the offer of a part be an insult, it is a much greater insult to offer *none:* and those who advise the working man to reject as an insult the offer of a part, should tell him, and encourage him, support him, and defend him, in treating as an insult his entire exclusion. If they will do this, I could admire both their policy and their consistency. But the advisers who say reject a part of a vote actually go to Parliament to ask only for a partial admission of the people to power, and profess themselves willing to accept a mere instalment of the entire claim, which will postpone again for 30 years longer (for that is the English duration of a political makeshift) the consideration of a settlement.

Is not the objection to graduated votes made in ignorance of the principles of Democracy? "The power which the suffrage gives," as Mr. Mill observes, "is not over the elector himself alone; it is *power over others also.* Now it can in no sort be admitted that all persons have an equal claim to power over others. There is no such thing in morals as a *right* to power over others, and the electoral suffrage is that power." This power, therefore, when given to *all* must be graduated. He is not a democrat, but

an anarchist, who insists that the vote of the most ignorant shall count for as much as that of the most highly educated class in the community.

Mr. Mill's plan of graduated votes would be regulated by a principle of plain reason and political fairness, and those who object to the plan evidently forget that we have always had it in operation in a state of pernicious inequality. An elector of Thetford has thirty-two times the power of voting of an elector in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and is equal to 64 electors in Birmingham. An elector of Portarlington has 289 votes more than an elector of the Tower Hamlets.* Earl Russell, therefore, who regards a plurality of votes as an insult, must own that we have the "insult" already in its offensive form, and have always had it as a "constitutional" thing. It is surely not an act of legislatorial wisdom to condemn as an alien proposal a plan for rationalising an ancient arrangement.

Taken as a *rider* to a Reform Bill, which amended the distribution of seats (a point never to be lost sight of) and increased the number of electors, one of Earl Grey's proposals furnishes another solution of the Reform question. It is feasible to create an Electoral Guild, and register all the unenfranchised having a fixed residence and permit them to elect a limited number of members. The *Spectator*, in 1861, said that "forty members such as the working class would elect, would be a great deal less obnoxious than forty members nominated by Archbishop Cullen."†

Why could not a Guild of Supplementary Electors be an *addition* to the next Reform Bill? Suppose the suffrage to be fixed at £6; it might be provided that whenever a guild elector shall become an occupier of a £6 house, that he be forthwith withdrawn and included in the National Constituency, and so on with each until in course of years the Supplementary constituency be extinguished. Such a plan would avoid the discredit of leaving five millions of the working classes entirely unrepresented; it

* Vide the Imperial Poll Book 1832-1864, by Jas. Acland.

† Indeed the "Spectator" of Nov. 23, 1861, remarked in the same article that "It has been said that it is impossible to secure a suffrage which would give the numerical majority their fair share of power while leaving theirs to the cultivated minority, but if the working men accepted the compromise, it might be secured to-morrow." I know not on what authority the "Spectator" made the statement. I had, however, already, at the request of an eminent practical politician, personally ascertained of the principal political leaders of working men of England and Scotland that their acquiescence could be counted upon, the only doubt expressed being whether Parliament could be relied upon for anything. I communicated this result to the "Spectator" in 1861, subsequent to its statement appearing.

would in the meantime provide for the *direct* representation of Industry; it would enable Labour to be heard in its own name in the House of Commons, and avoid what the governing classes fear and nobody desires—a *transfer* of power from the intelligent minority to the numerical many.

Democracy is, we know, in the eyes of the governing class, a Frankenstein kind of product. They think it a possible monster, wilful, irresistible, with a ravaging intellect, and devoid of all sense of moral or political responsibility, and they fear to breathe into it the breath of life. It is no answer to them to say they are wrong, that their fears are futile, that they ignore the established habits, good sense, and almost perilous docility of the English people. These fears are strong upon the governing classes. Like cattle who smell blood on the threshhold of the slaughter-house, those who have the upper hand have morbid noses, and smell "Sheffield outrages" and "American Democracy" in every Reform Bill, and you cannot force them under the axe of the Franchise. This is how they regard it, and it is folly to ignore the fact and not to act on its reality. It is of no use to tell them that "on one side of the Alps Democracy consecrates Despotism, on the other it inaugurates Liberty," and that in England it would, with the working class as it has done with the middle class—consolidate order. They do not believe it, and the expense of an agitation which shall make them believe it, is so costly and uncertain that every practical politician has an interest in giving heed to plans that might meet the difficulty, without disappointing the people, and enable Time, ever a better converter than force, to change their opinion.

In justice to the governing class, who to their honour manifest a far fairer disposition now than in former years, it must be owned that "nearly the whole educated class is united in uncompromising hostility to a purely democratic suffrage—not so much because it would make the most numerous class, the *strongest* power; *that* many of the educated classes would think only just. It is because it would make them the *sole* power: because in every constituency the votes of that class would swamp, and politically annihilate all other members of the community taken together.*" The real "Dilemma," indeed, is that all Radical orators reason in favour of universal suffrage, without arming themselves with any plan which meets this for-

* Mr. Mills' Review of Mr. Hare's plan. "Fraser's Magazine."

midable objection. After Mr. Gladstone's late intrepid and conscientious speech, one would think that he might find one.

Were it agreeable to the will, it is quite possible to the wisdom of Parliament to devise and *annex* to any Bill of Reform a plan which will enfranchise all honest men without thus swamping the votes or influence of gentlemen; which no Englishman wishes to neutralise or diminish. Whoever of political influence may advocate a plan of this description may count upon the enthusiasm of the nation; since no workman could, without baseness, rejoice in a partial enfranchisement which included himself, while it left his less fortunate brethren to renew the old struggle, branded by the old exclusion. This would be to manifest that spirit of politics *without conscience* which the Orleanists of France displayed when they had placed Louis Phillippe on the throne, and the middle classes of England since they won the Reform Bill. There may be no reason to refuse even a partial enfranchisement, but it would be as indecent in the working classes to exult in it as it would be in ten men who were taken from a wreck by choice of the captain, and who should throw up their caps in the face of all those left to their fate.

If it can appear that the greatest mass of reformers can be united in favour of the partial plan, and no other, it will be the duty of all to support *that* with such energy as can be commanded. The political experience of the last thirty years has shown that reformers should persist in saying what they want—maintain what is right—and unite for what they can get. For myself, I do not write as an obstructionist: while I plead for what I believe to be possible and know to be necessary, I would work for whatever may diminish the discredit of our present representation.

I belong to that class of Reformers who hold it to be discreditable to exist without rights, and infamous to rest under their refusal. It can never be too often repeated that not to seek enfranchisement is not to deserve it. I never look without contempt on any who submit to political exclusion; I never see without resentment those who advise or excuse, or connive or countenance it. The franchise is more than a right—it is the means of discharging a public duty. And those who stand in the way of discharging that duty degrade me, and I resent the act, however veiled or explained—justified it never can be.

Many generous politicians represented at the Bradford platform, desire the enfranchisement of the whole people. I know that the limited measure they deem practicable is forced upon them by the enemies of Reform. Let, how-

ever, the people who shall accept such measure, do so with their eyes open—and let it be seen that their eyes are open. Let those who accept it, do so as a pledge to use their power on behalf of their countrymen excluded; and then their acquiescence in the measure will have consistency, if not honour, in it.

The opponents of Reform exult in the apathy of the people. The exultation is as indecent as the existence of the apathy is a reproach. There are six millions of adult men swarming our streets and workshops, lanes and alleys, towns and villages, peopling our mines and lining our shores—hard-working, patient, and honest, whose toil goes to swell our wealth, and who are content to have no voice in expending the taxes they raise, or in controlling those wars in which their blood is spilt; who are satisfied to be counted as the "swinish multitude," whose interest no member of Parliament is elected to consult, whose opinions no statesman regards, whose voices at a public meeting no one counts, whose expression of opinion is sneered at as so much impotent, popular, ignorant clamour; a people whom the governing class

> "Holds when its pride has spent its haughty force
> As something better than its dog, a little dearer than its horse."

It is a national humiliation when there exists thus a vast out-lying population without active unrest under this state of things. The unenfranchised classes owe to Mr. Bright an infinite debt of gratitude, whose single voice, when all others were silent, has been heard in the ignominious years that have passed, urging their rights and recalling them to self-respect. If Mr. Bright counsels that on the whole the best thing now is to unite in favour of the partial enfranchisement programme, his decision ought to be accepted as final, for he alone has earned the right to determine the policy of the Reform party.

It shows in a very striking manner the ascendancy of aristocratic and conservative influence in England, that the governing classes have contrived not only to beat back, but to break down the reform spirit—that after the lapse of 30 years, Reformers come up asking for a meaner and shabbier bill than they were able to carry 30 years ago, for none of the Bills of late years introduced will produce anything like the change which the old Reform Bill effected, inefficient as it was. Indeed the value of the proposed reform bill of Mr. Baines is so small that no one can feel more than a theoretical enthusiasm about it. Every measure of

reform introduced or contemplated takes the poor-rate as a basis for the franchise. Lord John's bill did this—Mr. Baines' does it. The *Newcastle Chronicle* has shown that the number of houses compounded for by landlords of the annual value of £6, £7, £8, £9, and £10 respectively, amount altogether to 8,000 houses in the four boroughs of Gateshead, South Shields, Sunderland, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Mr. Baines' Franchise Bill would not give a vote to any one of them. The compounding system has probably disfranchised more people than any Reform Bill, at present talked of, proposes to add to the electoral constituency. From a note to the returns published by Government it appears that in Birmingham alone there are upwards of 7,000 male occupiers of £10 houses who compound with their landlords for their rates, and who prefer losing their votes to becoming personally liable to such rates.

One is compelled to admit, with the *Economist*, that the question of Reform is treated generally in a commonplace spirit, which excites surprise and bodes no good. Every scheme, it appears, is to be derided except those that run in old ruts. This was the old Chartist error, and cost us dearly. Reformers, if this policy continues, will be the prey of infinite delays and disappointments. It is quite time that political questions in England were adjusted by political reason, rather than by the exigence of necessity and party strife. If no such supplementary plan of Reform as that of Earl Grey's guilds, or Mr. Buxton's proportional voting, should be adopted, why could there not be added to Mr. Baines' Bill an Intelligence Franchise, as an *addition* to the utmost extension of the suffrage he can obtain? Then one satisfactory termination of the question would be made. Politicians of all parties admit that the franchise may be trusted to the intelligent. Let them decide what knowledge a man ought to have to enable him to vote, and if he does not acquire it his exclusion will be *his* discredit and not the State's. Practical mastery of some sound popular book on Political Economy and one on Constitutional History would secure the requisite intelligence. Government school examiners might attend at mechanics' institutions (which would then have some vitality, interest, and use in them), and give certificates of electoral fitness, the holders of which should be entitled to be placed on the list of electors.*

* A sketch of the machinery existing, and probable results of a plan of this description, appeared in letters addressed to

This species of franchise would have dignity in it, it would make education a political necessity, and in another generation would enfranchise a large proportion of the people, and ultimately transmute the English working class into the noblest electoral constituency in the world. Such a plan, *not as a substitute* for any contemplated present extension of the suffrage, but as an addition to it—providing for a continual increase of the electoral body in proportion to the ascertained intelligence of the unenfranchised—would satisfy the best friends of the people.*

In pleading for an Intelligence Franchise, I do it for the sake of the progress it ensures. I am well aware, and so are those who exclaim against the want of Intelligence in the people, that Ignorance never has been in this country a political disqualification. England has always been largely governed by privilege and ignorance. If an Intelligence Franchise were to be universally enforced in England, we should disfranchise more than half our present electors, and many magistrates: and perhaps some members of Parliament would fall under the rule. No one can deny the suffrage on the ground that an elector might make a fool of himself. The right of making a fool of himself is a sacred thing in this country—and a privilege of which many avail themselves. Indeed, if such a right was disputed, it would be defended by a greater number of persons interested than any other right that could be threatened.

Lord John Russell and the "Daily News," reprinted under the title of the "Workman and the Suffrage," 1858. The Council of the Northern Reform Union afterwards adopted a memorial to Lord Stanley, as one of those statesmen reputed to treat politics as the science of public justice, praying his attention to this subject.

* Nothing could be more remarkable or conclusive than the following remarks from a pamphlet which, though not published until 1859, was written, in greater part, at an earlier date;—"No Conservative needs object to making the franchise accessible to those [the working] classes at the price of a moderate degree of useful and honourable exertion. To make a participation in political rights the reward of mental improvement, would have many inestimable effects besides the obvious one. It would do more than merely admit the best and exclude the worst of the working-classes; it would do more than make an honourable distinction in favour of the educated, and create an additional motive for seeking education It would cause the electoral suffrage to be in time regarded in a totally different light. It would make it to be thought of, not as now, in the light of a possession to be used by the voter for his own interest or pleasure, but as a trust for the public good. It would stamp the exercise of the suffrage as a matter of judgment, not of inclination; as a public function, the right to which is conferred by fitness for the intelligent performance of it."—J. S. MILL. "Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform."—pp 30-31.

For reasons which had better be confessed, the people are not in a condition to carry Reform themselves. Their political education has been so much and so long neglected, that they are now generally uninclined or incapable of self-organisation—without which they are powerless. In the re-action which will surely come they may amend this deficiency. Besides the working class of England prefer to be led by gentlemen, and there are not as yet a sufficient number of gentlemen who care for Reform sufficiently, to incur the time, labour, cost, and obloquy of leading them. The sympathy of our Liberals is not, as a class, with the people, so much as with the aristocracy. I know many who would give £30,000 for an estate not worth £10,000, if by its possession they could live near a duke—while they would not give five shillings to enfranchise their countrymen. The Radicals have let a whole generation slip out of their hands. They began with the treacherous dogma that "Truth is great and will prevail"—not knowing that it is the very worst thing to fight with, and is always beaten unless stoutly and expensively supported. Thus for twenty years there has been scarcely a single political union in the country, with funds to secure it three months' existence. The result is that the children of the Radicals of the last generation are not Reformers now. In the best towns in the kingdom you can find but scant successors to the men who once made popular politics wholesome. Reason in the multitude is a very small quantity, and needs persistent cultivation to keep it influential. All the machinery for doing this has been suffered to die out. For years after the last Reform Bill there were hundreds of electors in every constituency whose votes could be relied upon. No one needed to canvas them; they were not to be diverted, bribed, or intimidated. This class of electors has nearly disappeared. The other week I looked through the poll books of the best instructed constituency in the kingdom. There was a nominal majority of 500 Liberals, but no Parliamentary agent could predict how they would vote. The landmarks of principle are no longer discernible. It is said that "when a Tory government succeeds to this we shall see what the opposition will do?" There will be opposition to act unless the deterioration of politicians is stopped. Both parties have behaved so much alike of late years that the people do not know which is which, and have been so demoralized by the exhibition, that as far as the franchise is concerned, it does not matter to them which party rules.

The fact is we have a middle-class Parliament and not a

Parliament of the people at all. The tone, the talk, and the interests consulted in the House of Commons, are essentially middle class, tempered by a deferential regard for the views and comforts of the "upper ten thousand." The voice of the people, the busy struggling life of the nation, is practically ignored in that "Rich Man's Club." Now and then some piece of legislation is executed for the benefit of the people, but it is the act of *patrons* and not of *delegates*. The people have the humiliation of knowing that they have no power to exact it, and in consideration of having some attention paid them, they are expected not to make themselves troublesome, or to endeavour to meddle with governing, which they are told is no business of theirs. A member of Parliament is a gentleman who enjoys the joint dignity and luxury of spending 70 millions a year, and the diminishing handful of licensed persons called electors, have the exclusive privilege of authorising these members to assess and collect from the great body of the nation, who have no voice in the matter, this enormous sum. This is the scale in which gentlemen spend money who find themselves in a condition to command it. A Parliament of the people would have an interest in altering this.* It is nothing to the purpose to say that the money is judiciously expended. Those who furnish the money should have the right of an opinion upon its expenditure; and a power of checking it, without which the opinion is of very little value. If a servant should seize his master's cheque book, and proceed to administer his master's affairs, it is just possible that he might prove a better administrator, and more economical manager, than the original owner of the funds, but no consideration of this kind would induce the master class to submit to this arrangement. This is precisely what the governing classes say to the people. "We govern you very well, we allow you a good deal of liberty, quite as much as is good for you, and we put your means to good account. You are very ill advised not to leave well alone." The working class one day will wonder at the effrontery which addressed this language to them, and be ashamed for that want of self respect which has led them so long to submit to it.

Sometimes it is alleged that the working classes are disqualified for electoral power because they are capable of

* The Financial Reform Association has shown, as did James White, M.P., lately in a conclusive speech in Parliament, that the Incidence of Taxation requires further adjustment in favour of the people. Vide also Letters on Taxation by S. C. Kell, Esq., of Bradford.

corruption. The Northern Reform Union made the costliest experiment ever made in this country to put down bribery at elections. They found that all that was wanted to suppress it in Parliamentary or Municipal elections, was that bribery should be made a misdemeanour punishable by summary conviccion before a magistrate, and that the briber should be given in charge like a pickpocket. Bribery would soon disappear under this treatment, but we had all soon reason to see that there was no intention or wish to interfere with it either by judges or Parliament.* Men of great fortunes are increasing in England. Parliamentary honours are important to them. Engaged solely in the accumulation of wealth, they have rendered no public service entitling them to that distinction, but they can buy their way to it. They can afford the cost, and bribery is their sole means of attaining distinction. It is an instrument which enables the rich to over-ride any claim of personal merit on the part of less wealthy candidates. Bribery is a rich man's convenience, and is valued in England every year more and more, and will never be put down by a rich man's Parliament.

Sometimes this paternal management of the governing classes is sought to be justified by telling the people that they are not taxed disproportionately. If they were not taxed at all the humiliation put upon them would be as great. It is every man's duty to contribute his quota to the support of the state, and those who affect to relieve him of the honourable burden mean him ill. They degrade him. He is intended to pay dearly for the exemption, the price to be exacted is that of his independence.

Mr. Stansfeld, M.P., in the well-calculated speech he delivered at Bradford a few weeks ago, warned the outside public "that Reform was only to be dealt with now by the force of a persistent and overwhelming national will." But to create this the re-education of the people has to be entered on afresh, which will take time. The machinery of agitation has to be replaced, which will require means. The dying Parliament will do nothing for Reform. The next Parliament will do nothing until its days are nearly numbered, so that we shall have no Reform for years. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, with apparently fair intentions, gives new currency to the latest political error that "Reform must come in time." Those who believe this

* These results were stated, on the part of the Union, at the Conference at York, (convened by the Social Science Association) at which Lord Brougham presided, when Sir Fitzroy Kelly made his statement, September, 1864.

will never see it. The only people worth listening to now are those who mean *to make* Reform come. Wearied and incensed with Radicals playing the game of Whigs, and Whigs that of Tories, an immoral indifference towards the return of the Tories to power has taken possession of everybody. The probability that Tories may be better, and the belief that they cannot be worse, will give us at the next election a strong Tory Government. The people will find out the difference then. The right thing is to vote for Reformers only who can be relied upon, and take measures to secure the choice of those likely to keep their word. The difference between a Whig and a Tory is very clear :— The Tory will rob you of a pound and give you a shilling back, in a patronising way—the Whig will rob you equally and won't give you even a shilling back, but he will give you the means of earning two for yourself. The Whig, stingy as he is, is greatly to be preferred. He promotes self-help and self-respect. The Tory represents the comfortable principle of authority and the graciousness of patronage—the Whig troublesomeness of reason and the harshness of self-exertion—the Tory sufferance and submission—the Whig independence and progress.

The deplorable impotence of the people was never so conspicuous as now. Mr. Gladstone has made a speech in favour of Reform which ought to entitle him to the active gratitude of every non-elector in the kingdom. Before this time every town and village in the empire ought to have sent him an address. How powerless, how spiritless, how wanting in political penetration, how incapable of taking advantage of this merciful political circumstance, are the people now. Mr. Gladstone is the first minister in England who might, to use Mr. Thornton Hunt's remark, "become the Premier of the working classes"—who are yet unable to see or use the rare and priceless opportunity. On the other hand, how humiliating is the attitude of Parliament! There are at least 300 gentlemen in the House of Commons who profess to represent the people of England, and they turn towards Mr. Gladstone with an infantine gaze. It is a proud and honourable thing for him. In them it is something contemptible. Mr. Bright is by genius and service the natural leader of the people's party in Parliament, and he, and about a dozen other members, are all who seem capable of national imitation or of standing alone, or show proof of possessing an active conscience in their work. Mr. Stansfeld, in the speech previously referred to, most usefully said "that constituencies should invite no pledge nor accept any from a membe

unless they were prepared to support him in fulfilling it, and warned by the past he trusted that no candidate would enter into a pledge of Reform unless he is determined that as far as in him lies his party shall redeem it." There would be no apathy among the people if members did their duty in this spirit.

As to apathy there exists no more of it than is natural under the circumstances which have been allowed to operate upon the people. Mr. Mill, in those brief but compendious sentences quoted by Mr. Taylor, M.P., at Leicester, says:—"Wherever the sphere of action of human beings is artificially circumscribed, their sentiments are narrowed and dwarfed in the same proportion. . . . Let a person have nothing to do for his country and he will not care for it. It is a great discouragement to an individual, and a still greater one to a class, to be left out of the Constitution—to be reduced to plead from outside the door to the arbiters of their destiny, not taken into consultation within."

Of causes which have contributed to produce political apathy in the minds of the people I should name:—

1.—When they found themselves left out of the Reform Bill of 1832, having merely obtained a new set of masters, and that they were not masters of themselves notwithstanding that their new rulers were more considerate than the old ones—disappointments and discouragement set in.

2.—Those who were not worn out by the old struggle, became indignant and disgusted. Indignation, some years later, led to the disastrous policy of breaking up the meetings of the middle class engaged in the Anti-Corn Law struggle, which robbed the Reform cause of funds and friends, among those best able to make it efficient by pecuniary support.

3.—The disgusted portion also set their faces against all petitions to Parliament, in which they had lost confidence. This policy diminished political action, kept Parliament ignorant of popular feeling, and diffused a fatal conviction that it was of no use doing anything.

4.—Judicious enemies of the people, denounced as "demagogues" or "hired orators" every advocate who made it his business to endeavour to instruct and plead the cause of the people. This treacherous daintiness, though it proceeded from tongues and pens venally retained to support things as they were, was actually listened to, until the people were entirely disarmed of all who, in their rough and necessary way, could keep up public spirit among those,

in whom it must die, unless sustained by wholesome agitation.

5.—Then came the influence of the well-meaning but mis-calculating Communists and Co-operators recruited from the ranks of the disappointed and disgusted politicians. These preached material comfort as a substitute for political rights; forgetful that a fat material prosperity, purchased at the expense of political duty is more despicable and morally disastrous than the leanest discontent united with self-respect and public spirit.

6.—Afterwards set in the reign of dangerous philosophers who, like Thomas Carlyle, diverted the intellect of the young men of the nation from political pursuits, by covering Parliament with pungent ridicule and mocking at the ambition of possessing the six millionth degree of participation in the "national palaver." Other philosophers more serious, as Professor Newman, sincere friends of the people, but representing the unfortunate indifference of gentlemen and scholars to a political privilege, such as the franchise, which their high position and great personal influence enable them to do without, but which is the sole protection of the multitude against absolute oppression or abject acquiescence in patronage. These influential publicists have taught that the personal, commercial and other liberties are more precious than the mere right of voting, not feeling that every liberty is in peril or is held on sufferance by those who have no control over public affairs.

7.—The American war has had a disastrous influence on the enfranchisement question. Sir John Ramsden's indecent exultation in the House of Commons, when he announced that "the Republican bubble had burst," proclaimed how fatal to the liberty of the people everywhere is the expected triumph of tyrants anywhere. If the South could set up a slave empire, the working class in England would be told to be thankful that they are allowed the liberty they have instead of seeking for more. It was the success of the French Revolution in 1831 that precipitated the Reform Bill in England, and the *coup-d'etat* of Louis Napoleon in 1851 has thrown back every question of progress in England since. It was this conviction alone that helped to justify in many eyes the famous attempt of Orsini. Liberty is never safe in this country with a despotism flourishing in sight of our shores, appealing to the sympathies of our aristocratic classes, always unfriendly to popular liberty. Agricola well understood this principle, for Gibbon relates that his reason for determining the conquest of Ireland was "that the ancient Britons would wear

their chains with less reluctance if the prospect and example of freedom were on every side removed from before their eyes." Deep is the interest of the working classes of England that tyranny should be overthrown in every state near them, and in every country with which England has near political relations.

8.—The apathy, and what is worse, the impotence of the people has been much brought about of late years by the false promises of Cabinets and Parliaments. Reformers have been told that they had the word of gentlemen (and that gentlemen never lie) that Reform would take place. The people believed this. When gentlemen in high political position make a public promise nobody doubts its fulfilment. It is naturally supposed that they mean what they say, and that they will take trouble to redeem their word, within a fair and reasonable period. These promises put an end to agitation. It became unnecessary if these gentlemen were to be trusted—an impertinence if their word was to be believed. Reformers were told the time was come when legislators would do an act of justice because it was reasonable, and the vulgar methods of out-of-door coercion might be safely and honourably laid aside. This fatal counsel prevailed. Nobody foresaw that year after year no earnest effort would be made to fulfil the promises given, and that ministers of the crown would plead that though they promised the *fact* of Reform, they did not promise the *time*, and that Mr. Milner Gibson would have on their part, reluctantly to confess, by way of excusing them, "that no Government having once laid a bill upon the table of the House would have dared to recede from their position if the great body of the electors of England had shown that they were determined to keep them to their promises"—which was in effect saying that the Cabinet coming forward to fulfil their promise and finding they were not watched, took advantage of the circumstance and "skedaddled." Mr. Milner Gibson forgot to confess that the promise was made to *non-electors*, who were powerless "to keep the Government to their promise," with whom it was therefore doubly disgraceful to break their word. Mr. Mill has observed "there are but few points in which the English as a people are entitled to the moral pre-eminence with which they are accustomed to compliment themselves at the expense of other nations; but of these points, perhaps, the one of the greatest importance is that *the higher classes do not lie*, and the lower, though mostly habitually liars, *are ashamed of lying*." It is difficult to think that some future political historian will not have to admit that on the question of

Reform the "higher classes" have lied and are *not* "ashamed" of it.

From these combined causes the political education of the people during the past twenty years has been disastrously neglected and affected, and they have gone back in political knowledge and in public spirit. Notwithstanding this unquestionable deterioration the people are not wanting in appreciation when a public man, whom they can trust, goes among them. When Mr. Gladstone (whose merciful intervention has since given the people the Annuities Bill) visited the North, you well remember how when word passed from the newspaper to the workmen that it circulated through mines and mills, factories and workshops, and they came out to greet the only English minister who ever gave the people a right because it was just they should have it; and gave it them when there was no power to force it from him. Without him a Free Press in England was impossible. The organisation seeking it was the smallest that ever won a great measure; its funds were limited, its clients were poor, its friends in Parliament were a hopeless minority. Had it not been for Mr. Gladstone there would have been no cheap newspapers in England for years to come. He made himself the advocate of the unfriended; he put into the hands of the poor man the means of political knowledge. Sir George Cornewall Lewis, the only minister from whom we had a right to expect it, would have given a hundred conclusive Whig reasons why it could not be done. If not the only Chancellor of the Exchequer who ever had a conscience, Mr. Gladstone was the first who was ever *known* to have one, and when he went down the Tyne, all the country heard how twenty miles of banks were lined with people who came to greet him. Men stood in the blaze of chimneys; the roofs of factories were crowded; colliers came up from the mines; women held up their children on the banks that it might be said in after life that they had seen the Chancellor of the People go by. The river was covered like the land. Every man who could ply an oar pulled up to give Mr. Gladstone a cheer. When Lord Palmerston went to Bradford the streets were still, and the working men imposed silence upon themselves. When Mr. Gladstone appeared on the Tyne, he heard cheers which no other English minister ever heard. He had done great things for commerce, and the commercial people were proud to tell him so; but the people were *grateful* to him, and rough pitmen who never approached a public man before, pressed round his carriage by thousands. All the distinctions of rank were obliterated in their gratitude, and a

thousand arms were stretched out at once, to shake hands with Mr. Gladstone as one of themselves. If there is a political apathy in England the gentlemen who hold the destinies of the country in their hands are themselves the cause of it, and have themselves to thank for it. The English people are not constitutionally prone to "rest and be thankful"—they never did it yet; and Lord John Russell, who said it, never meant it. He never rested himself, it is not in his nature, and his son, Lord Amberley, bids fair to yet farther illustrate the serviceable unrest of his race. True he has eaten his words on the platform at Leeds, but had he been a member of Parliament he would have preferred eating his pledge in the House.

If proper trouble is taken to revive, or rather re-create the interests of the people in political rights, it may be done with less trouble than formerly and more effectually than ever. Formerly the people were politicians from impulse, next they will become so from conviction, and such men never go back. The working class have no longer the prejudices which formerly rendered them impracticable. They may manifest the possession of special views—they may desire a complete and generous measure—they may maintain their preferences for what they consider honest and just; but they will offer no opposition to, and are generally disposed to help all who go in the direction of the enfranchisement they seek; and if to the Political Unions of Bradford, Manchester, and the Northern Reform Union of Newcastle, are added Unions in Birmingham and other great towns, and a sufficient Metropolitan Union in London, the Reform Members might be called upon to hold meetings among their own constituents, and take their places as the natural leaders of the people; but agitation must be revived professedly and avowedly, and kept up as an independent department of popular government. The expectations that a Reform Parliament will carry the work of political progress forward and lead opinion, is a delusion. They show no disposition of organisation among themselves—no more capacity for forming a people's party than workmen themselves would show—nor so much. Representatives manifestly require to be looked after like any other servants. It is very discreditable, but it is true.

It shows how little thought has been bestowed on the actual nature of the Liberal situation, that one may constantly hear Members of Parliament lament, as something unexpected and unfortunate, the indifference of the people as to Reform. What else is possible, what else is to be expected? Is it likely that six millions of persons can

maintain a perennial attitude of indignation for 30 years? Every two or three years they are called out, as it serves the purpose of one party or other in the state, are promised Reform, and when interest or hope is re-awakened and the purpose is served of those who evoked it, they are dismissed with—nothing. Why, the shepherds in Æsop grew tired at last of rushing forward at the cry of wolf. No men will continue to pursue an object unless they can fight for it, or agitate for it, or buy it, or reason their way to it. The people have been counselled to lay aside all ideas of physical force, the only ideas which ever permanently interest the great body of Englishmen—agitation has been discountenanced, and even the right of meeting in the open air has been interfered with, restricted, and made so expensive as to be impossible to working men. Agitation has become so costly that only rich men can employ it—and since workmen have not wealth to buy attention, and reason has long failed to win it—what is to be looked for but that men will turn away in apathy and quiet hate, which answers no summons and which only accident and opportunity may stimulate into resentful action?

Even Members of Parliament excuse themselves for doing so little, saying the the people do not care for Reform. No people ever do care for liberty unless stimulated to do so. Liberty is like knowledge—the ignorant do not care for it, while those who have it will never part with it. Russian serfs, negroes, and French peasants do not care for liberty. The desire of liberty is the result of education in using it; and those who wish to see the many manifest this noble desire, must put them in a condition to exercise freedom. It is not from the neglected and untaught many—not from the ignorant, the selfish, or supine, from whom the apostolate of enfranchisement should be expected, but from the educated few—from the informed politician, from the gentleman and member of Parliament. Mr. John Stuart Mill, the one great exception among English philosophers, who has ever lent the weight of his name to the cause of the people, has given reasons to thinkers, and the governing classes, which, were consoience allied to politics, would infuse enthusiasm into the advocacy of those who now ignobly wait on others.

"It is important," says this writer, "that every one of the governed should have a voice in the government, because it can hardly be expected that those who have no voice will not be unjustly postponed to those who have. It is still more important as one of the means of *national education.* A person who is excluded from all participa-

tion in political business is not a citizen. He has not the feelings of a citizen. To take an active interest in politics is, in modern times, the first thing which elevates the mind to large interests and contemplations ; the first step out of the narrow bounds of individual and family selfishness, the first opening in the contracted round of daily occupation. The person who in any free country takes no interest in politics, unless from having been taught not to do so, must be too ill-informed, too stupid or too selfish, to be interested in them ; and we may rely on it that he cares as little for anything else, which does not directly concern himself or his personal connexions. Whoever is capable of feeling any common interest with his kind, or with his country, or with his city, is interested in politics ; and to be interested in them, and not to wish for a voice in them is an impossibility. The possession and the exercise of political, and among others of *electoral rights, is one of the chief instruments both of moral and of intellectual training for the popular mind ;* and all governments must be regarded as extremely imperfect, until every one who is required to obey the laws, has a voice, or the prospect of a voice, in their enactment and administration."

One who is as keen to see as feeling to describe, * asks of the British labourer, whose days are worn out in mine or factory—

What end doth he fulfil ?
He seems without a will,
Stupid, unhelpful, helpless, age-worn man.

And this forsooth is all !
A plant or animal
Hath a more positive work to do than he:
Along his daily beat
Delighting in the heat
He crawls in sunshine which he does not see.

What doth God get from him ?
His very mind is dim,
Too weak to love, and too obtuse to fear
Is there glory in his strife ?
Is there meaning in his life ?
Can God hold such a thing-like person dear ?

He hath so long been old
His heart is close and cold ;
He has no love to take no love to give:
Men almost wish him dead
'Twere best for him they said
'Twere such a weary sight to see him live.

* The Rev. Dr. Faber.

He walks with painful stoop
As if life made him droop
And care had fastened fetters round his feet;
He sees no bright blue sky,
Except what meets his eye
Reflected in the rain pools in the street.

To whom is he of good?
He sleeps and takes his food.
He uses the earth and air and kindles fire:
He bears to take relief
Less *as a right than grief;*
To what might such a soul as his aspire?

Because the working class try to save, the harassing uncertainty of their efforts is overlooked and under estimated. In a letter—if I may be permitted to quote it—which was addressed to Mr. Gladstone, when his Annuities Bill was before Parliament, it was testified "that the English mechanics are, as a rule, prudent where they have hopes. They will save at any cost. I go into the houses of thousands where the wan cheek of the wife, and the early asthma of the husband, tell that it is an immoral thing to save,—they ought to eat every halfpenny they can earn." It is impossible to get public spirit out of this condition of things. A yet worse condition remains.

During a quarter of a century that I have been accustomed to address public meetings, and to witness them addressed by others, I declare that I never once heard an audience of working men, applaud or personally respond to any appeal to the glory of their country, or manifest any feeling of pride in it or about it,—while there is not a backwoodsman, a pedlar, or a workman of the lowest degree, who comes to Europe from America, who is not a proud man when he speaks of his country. He has a personal interest in it. Its power and renown are part of his life. The Englishman driven from his country, to better his condition, has never felt a proud man on his own shores. Pride in his country as being a part of its renown, as being an agent in it, actually influencing its home government and foreign policy—is a dead sentiment in an English working man. He may toil, he may fight, he may shed his blood in his country's battles in every part of the world—he may defend its power with his life, but he knows that his father at home will not be allowed a political vote.

In Guildhall, London, I have witnessed a middle class orator turn to the statues there, and heard him invoke regard for that national renown which these warriors and statesmen built up. Naturally the merchants and electors responded to the appeal—they were a conscious part of

that renown. In a meeting in which working men and *others* (of the middle class) are present, slmiliar appeals may be, or appear to be responded to by contagion of cheering—but among working men, or by them, these appeals are never introduced. Nobody thinks of them. No one feels pride in that of which he has had no part, and from the glory of which he has been designedly and contumeliously excluded. An American is *a part* of his Republic. He owns some of its soil. He is one of its recognised citizens. He has something to say as to who shall be Governor of his state or its Senator, and even President of his nation! The American boasts of his country with a personal pride—he brags of it—but his very "brag" has something wholesome in it. In England a workman is nobody. The utmost political privilege accorded to him is that of hooting at a hustings while some one is elected who shall tax his earnings in spite of him, and dispose of them without his consent. He is not within the pale of the constitution. Six millions are thrust outside of it and kept outside of it. If workmen assume as much manliness as to clamour about it, the governing class say, "Oh, let them clamour—they are only non-electors— they can't do anything," and with a political contempt, that is neither disguised nor concealed, they turn away from them. The country, its government, its wealth, its power, its noble constitution, its historic renown, its aristocracy, its middle class, are things apart from the people—who exist by a sort of sufferance—who are free by permission only—having no recognition and no power. They receive at the utmost the praise of useful cattle—their industry sometimes wins them such commendation as might be bestowed on clever monkeys, or they obtain the paternal approval given to political children. If any one thinks this an overdrawn picture let him remember that all praise of the people has this sting in it—it is given to those who are never *trusted* and never *meant* to be trusted.

We are accustomed in this country to allude to the condition of the slave, who, when he sets foot on English soil, becomes free. In the same way and yet more honourably, the Americans, the Canadians, and our Australian brethren boast that the English labourer so soon as he becomes a resident in those lands, becomes enfranchised—

> "If his lungs breathe their air, that moment he is free,
> He touches their country, and his shackles fall."

He is admissable for the first time to the duties and dignity of citizenship.

As to the effect of the Franchise in England, if extended

universally without conditions, there is not the slightest ground for fear except on the part of those who seek to extend it. The Englishman is Conservative down to the Costermonger. The very populace are Tory in heart. The first effect of universal suffrage in England would be that we should have more gentlemen and Lords returned to the House of Commons than ever. Colonels and persons of wealth and title would at once go up in the Electoral scale. For a time constitutional prejudice and bigotry would prevail. The clergyman and the squire would reign, and liberty would very likely go back in England—but it would be for the last time. National education would become a political necessity, experience in freedom would be acquired, and liberty would one day rest on broader and surer foundations than in any country in the world. There would arise an aristocracy of merit whom all would honour, and wealth instead of looking like a fraudulent exception would be regarded as a sign of the common triumph of competence. The moment an Englishman is endowed with power he becomes a new creature. Pipeclay a country boor and pronounce over him the magic shibboleth of "duty"—catch a wild mechanic or a turbulent prize-fighter, and buckle a policeman's strap round him, and henceforth he personates devotion to the death and becomes possessed of a ludicrous and inconvenient passion for propriety and order. The English nature which yields only thistles on the exposed common of exclusion, is no sooner admitted to cultivation, in some authorised enclosure, than it is fruitful in flowers of established tints. The riotous Radicals enfranchised in 1832, have for years set up a more dismal and protracted shriek against Reform, than ever the Boroughmongers set up against them. He who scratches a Radical in power will find a Whig under his skin. Half of them are screaming out against a transfer of power. The thing is perfectly impossible in England. Universal suffrage would neither disturb nor desire to disturb the influence of family, wealth and learning. And when it attains to intelligent action (if it should ever be permitted to exist) the multitudinous collision of its interests and opinions will effectually prevent the people acting as a class.* But it is idle for the people thus to argue their right to enfranchisement. You may find in the invaluable writings of Toulmin Smith historical arguments irrefutable, to prove that we ask merely for the

* See a letter on this point by Mr. S. C. Kell, of Bradford.—"Daily News," Feb., 1865.

restoration of ancient rights. Those who now garrison the constitution care nothing for what *was*. They don't like Democracy and don't intend to pass any measure in favour of it—and there's an end of it. After 30 years of failure in reasoning with successive Parliaments he must be logic-mad who thinks to win Reform by it. A woman's reason "I will have it, *because I will*" is, if accompanied by a woman's resolution, worth all other arguments now. And if intelligence proceeds among women, they are likely to insist with more zeal than men, upon being included in the franchise to which they have undoubtely an equal right. An aristocracy of sex is quite as offensive and more injurious than an aristocracy of rank.

Professor Newman, whose sympathies and position naturally connect him with the higher and cultured classes, has witnessed of late years such complicity of sympathy on the part of the aristocracy and governing class of England with the despots of Europe, and those who seek to ally Republicanism *permanently* with slavery in America, that he has borne the important testimony that the best interests of liberty, morality, and progress, are most likely to be promoted by the Democracy, and may be advantageously and safely entrusted to them.*

It will be well when constituencies set their faces against mere rich men or men of title as such, but who have never done anything. The only ground on which any one ought to be permitted to enter Parliament is that he shall have done some service or acquired some distinction showing interest in and capacity for national affairs. Now a man who has a title or great wealth, but who never did anything for the people, who does not know how to do it and does not wish to know, is preferred by constituences to those who by thought, or toil, or sacrifice, have regarded the public welfare as higher than their own. Until the people set their faces against these showy, worthless, and base candidates, and personally and publicly despise every elector who votes for them, there will be no Reform in this country.

So long as the tread of a foreign master presses the soil of Italy, no Italian thinks himself free. The Unity of his country is his first thought. His trade interests as a workman are subordinate to his efforts after national independence. So in England the first thought of all workmen should be enfrachisement. Until a man is one of the nation—has a voice in its affairs—is one of those whose

* Vide—The Permissive Bill more urgent than Parliamentary Enfranchisement, by F. W. Newman.

views must be counted—who is taken into the national consultation—he is enslaved.

Earl Russell has just told us in his *Essay on the English Constitution*, that he differs from those who hold that "the right of voting is a personal privilege possessed by every man of sound mind and years of discretion as an inherent inalienable right." He holds that "the purpose to be attained is good government, the freedom within the State and their security from without," and he would stop the suffrage at the point which promised this. This is the pure paternal theory, very benevolent, and very offensive. There requires no enlargement of the suffrage to accomplish this—for good government here may mean merely that sort of government which those who govern deem good: anyhow, should those who are governed differ in opinion as to what is good for them, they will have no power to help themselves under the operation of this theory. There is no popular party now who rest its claims on Whig words of "personal privilege," or talk of "inalienable rights." The people having given up banding the terms of political metaphysics. They look at the matter of enfranchisement in a far more practical way. They do not ask for the vote as a "personal *privilege*," they seek it as a means of discharging a public *duty*. Every person in a state is responsible for what goes on in the state, whether good or evil is done it comes home to him and to his children, and it is his interest and duty to see that what is done is what it should be. There is but one right, that of doing one's duty. Whether the right of voting is "inalienable" or not is of no consequence. The right of governing is not "inalienable" in any Whig, nor in the middle class who have all acquired it. Let the people acquire the same thing and no one will raise the "inalienable" question.

No politicians, with few exceptions, now care for anybody but themselves. Their whole skill consists in giving reasons why they should hold the privileges or places they have, and why no one else could be safely entrusted with them. That member of government is deemed most valuable who finds out the most plausible reason for doing nothing, or who can best delay the fulfilment, or best defend the breach of a promise, and this is the whole art of English *statesmanship* which we are called upon to reverence as good government.

It is quite true we have a great edifice of liberty in this country—we have a certain amount of good government, and I can sympathise with and respect those who

are reluctant to risk it. The whole force of these reasoners would be given on the side of enfranchisement were it accompanied by protective conditions. "Good government" would not and need not be risked.

The National Reform Union of Manchester does propose an extension of the suffrage "to every householder or lodger rated or liable to be rated for the relief of the poor." A bill which included all this, would do, and would end the agitation. But there is no such bill drawn. There is no member who would introduce it. Nor is there any probability of carrying it. The union gives no sign of preparation or persistency for carrying it. It would require a revolution to carry it. The union does not mean this. It does not even confront, nor even discuss the grounds of opposition to such a bill. Its programme runs in the old, tiresome, tame, wearying, struggling, discouraging, Radical rut. It proposes a suffrage without guarantees for its qualified action. It gives to the working class the numerical majority. I am not one who believe that the working class would ever vote down the men of property and education. But they *might* do so. No absolute guarantee can be given that they never would do so, and the men of property and intelligence would have, if this bill passed, to *trust* to this event not occurring. They would hold their liberty and interests on sufferance. They would be in the same position in which the unenfranchised now are. Objecting myself to hold my liberty on sufferance, I should be most reluctant to put this risk on the educated and wealthy class. No class ought to be put in this position. No class ought to submit to it. Now this is the real dilemma which exists. This dilemma the National Reform Union neither recognizes nor provides for. This formidable difficulty no Radical orator meets. This is why the Reform question stagnates and remains where it is. Everybody at times feels this difficulty, yet no one on the side of Radical Reform dares look it in the face, or has the courage to state it, or attempt to meet it. How can it be met except by adopting Mr. Mill's proposal of giving the wealthy and educated classes the protection of cumulative votes? or by acting on Earl Grey's suggestion of giving to the unenfranchised classes a special number of members who should share in the representation without swamping it? Liberal M.P.'s and the Liberal press appear to have set their faces against such indispensable plans, caricaturing them as "fancy franchises" as though a vast and Protective Suffrage, which obviated an overwhelming difficulty, could be so described? It has

been assumed that the opinion of the people is against any such plan, whereas the opinion of the people has never yet been taken upon it. No meeting of the people, no Reform Union has ever yet discussed anything of the kind, excepting some dozen meetings which the present writer has addressed, when very favourable attention has been uniformly given to the subject. I know towns where ardent Reformers are themselves afraid of an Unqualified Suffrage. Good Radicals, the most thorough of their class, have said to me, "There is a mob in our town [there is in every town], ignorant, selfish, venal, and reckless of principle: had they all votes, our present Liberal members would be unseated at the next election. They would vote against those who seek to raise them." This is a general feeling in Liberal boroughs. Now there is no plan of £6 suffrage which selects the worthy and excludes the base. All £6 suffrage is blind; and hence we have Radicals arguing feebly and fearing much the results of the very measure they plead for. Surely this is political imbecility. This is the real dilemma which ought to be put an end to by adopting a plan of protective suffrage, of which the only opponents are Radicals whose policy has long undergone petrifaction.

Our Liberal members, to use the wholesome language of the *Daily News*, "have done their best to emasculate politics and make it the hollow unprincipled thing it now is; a miserable game from which men are feeling that they must retire out of sheer disgust." At the request of a Liberal M.P. I went recently to the best-informed and most reliable working-class leaders of the old school to ascertain whether they would move Reform-wards. Their decisive answer was, "Let those who think something ought to be done do it. We have no more belief in Members of Parliament. If our vote could unseat a Liberal at the next election it would constitute our only interest in giving it."

Mr. Bright, Mr. P. A. Taylor, and other leaders who can be trusted, have consistently acquiesced in a demand for "manhood" suffrage. It is quite necessary that the people form their own opinions as to the kind of Reform Bill to be demanded, and ask for no blind or wild measure, but for a universal and Qualified Suffrage, and then the vexation, not to say outrage, of "partial" enfranchisement will sink into the category of "fancy" futilities. Taking care that they are practical, and sure that they are reasonable, the people may take courage and be resolute.

Mr. Baines, M.P., has injudiciously cut up the Reform Bill into pieces, with a view to introduce the "thin end of the wedge" into the House. There is no assembly in the

world with a sharper eye for thin ends of wedges than the House of Commons. You can't "dodge" Parliament, and it makes the people look foolish when they are represented as trying it. Bad as the House is, there is more to hope from its treatment of a bold and open demand, than from its acquiescence in small dexterity.

Mr. Todd, of Gateshead, has shown in the *Newcastle Chronicle*, from a practical knowledge of the working of the suffrage, that Mr. Baines' Bill based on rate-paying would be as fraudulent as Lord Russell's was. As Mr. R. B. Reed expresses it, an £8 suffrage *without* a rate-paying clause would be of more value than a £6 suffrage with it. Mr Cobden has serviceably approved Mr. Todd's proposal of basing the suffrage on moderate house-tax, which would put an end to all evasion and deception, and also to those modern nuisances---Revising Barristers' Courts.

Earl Grey is good enough to say in his volume, already referred to, that "Reform cannot be much longer delayed." It is quite a gratuitous remark. Reform can be delayed. It can be refused with more safety now than at any time since 1832. The people are disarmed, demoralised, and impotent. Gentlemen do not care for Reform. Members of Parliament have come to an understanding to frustrate it. The Cabinet intend to evade it. It can be safely disregarded, and the governing classes know it.

After the tone in which Earl Grey's work has been spoken of by the liberal press, I was surprised to find it well written, very instructive, and fair in spirit. Whoever breaks the fatal and demoralising silence on the Reform question is to be regarded. We have no apostolate of political freedom in England now. There is more honest and honourable thought for the black slave in America than for the white workman in England. The negroes will become part of the "territorial democracy" before a sixth part of our countrymen will be deemed eligible for a £6 franchise.

Both Earl Grey and Earl Russell hold to one principle, that the franchise is to be treated merely as a *means* of "good government"—a principle which renders any franchise needless, provided the governing class condescend to behave well. The Emperor of the French governs without any franchise now—for *that* he substitutes material comfort. The French people are treated in theory as political swine. Their styes are repaired—they are given clean straw, their troughs are filled with paternal wash, and they are provided with a History of Julius Cæsar to read: what more can they want—what more could the franchise

do for them? This is the actual consideration urged by the *Times* and the opponents of the franchise upon the people of England; and despicable as it is, it is the argument of the greatest force, of the most constant recurrence and popularity among us.

There was dignity in sedition, conspiracy itself was a proof of manliness compared with this base temper and inaction inculcated upon the people of England. The voices of O'Connor and Ernest Jones were far nobler and wholesomer than this. Had we had of late years men who knew how to die for freedom as they have had in Italy, we should now be in a different position. It is better to be feared than despised.

Nothing remains now but for the people to take their own affairs into their own hands, with singleness of purpose and fixed resolution to carry their own ends themselves. All hope in Parliament has long been over. Trust in members or the promises of Cabinets is a delusion and a snare. There must be advocacy and organisation. If it could be shown that violence can carry their objects it would be perfectly right to employ it. Those who are refused political recognition in a state, owe no allegiance to it. It may be imprudent, it may be disastrous to think of violence, but that is a mere question of policy. The necessity of resorting to some form of force, moral or physical, is unquestionable. There is an end of political responsibility where the right of political existence is denied. The tone of Parliament towards the unenfranchised, admits of no mistake as to its resolute defiance. If the people are found to be ignorant they are said to be unfit—if intelligent they are declared to be dangerous—if they clamour they are to be resisted—if silent to be disregarded—if feeble and without organisation to be despised– if strong they are to be put down by force. What can it matter what they do while they are thus treated. To make themselves judiciously disagreeable is their only chance of redress. After fifty years of boasted progress, the maxim of Bentham still remains true, that "there is no Reform possible in England until you make the ruling powers uneasy." Without enfranchisement not of a few merely, but of the *whole* who are honest and industrious, there is no political life; without the franchise there is no political existence; belief in it should be the one faith, and the pursuit of it the one object of the working class. No trade interest should be regarded but as secondary; any form of social liberty should be held as subordinate; mere material comfort should be despised in comparison with this. No one should

be listened to who stands in the way of enfranchisement, no workman should cease to resent as an act of personal outrage every attempt to delay the attainment of it. It should never be forgotten that no one is regarded in politics except those who possess themselves of the means, and show the intention of enforcing their own claims.

I subscribe myself a Member of the Northern Reform Union, which has never departed from the sound doctrine that it is the people of England who require enfranchisement, and that the people are not a class.

G. J. HOLYOAKE.

282, Strand, London, W.C.,
March 24, 1865.

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PAMPHLETS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE WORKMAN AND THE SUFFRAGE—Letters on An Intelligence Franchise (1858) . . 4d.

THE PUBLIC LESSON OF THE HANGMAN . . 1d.

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