

## COMPLETE SUFFRAGE.

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I APPEAR before you with more diffidence, and yet, paradoxical as it may seem, with greater confidence than I have ever felt in addressing any public meeting. I have well-grounded fears lest I should not be able to do justice to the important subject on which I have to speak ; but, at the same time, I have the utmost faith in the soundness and excellence of the principles I am about to expound. My advocacy may be weak, but my cause is all-powerful, and I am firmly persuaded that it must ultimately triumph, in spite of the ability and influence of its foes, or the shortcomings and insufficiency of its friends—(cheers). But I wish not to declaim. My object is to appeal to your judgment, not to your passions—to make such a statement of facts as you shall find to be accurate, and advance such arguments as shall appear to you conclusive, when you have time for careful examination and cool reflection. The Birmingham Conference, of which I had the honour to be a member, originated in the necessities of the times. The condition of the country and the state of parties alike called for some new movement. Commercial crises and depressions of trade—which formerly came at long intervals, and lasted but a little while—seemed about to become the rule rather than the exception. For years, the distress in the manufacturing districts had been going on increasing without any prospect of mitigation—starvation had already reached hundreds, and stared thousands of the working classes in the face ; and, for the middle classes, there seemed nothing in prospect but bankruptcy and ruin. The general belief was that bad legislation was at the root of the evil, and this conviction at length reached the Whig Government, who, although somewhat late in the day, proposed a change in our commercial code, founded on something like sound principles. The change was opposed by the Conservatives from party motives. Parliament was dissolved—a new election came on—and the reform constituency, in opposition to the wishes and wants of the country—nay, probably, in opposition to their own real wishes—but influenced by bribery, intimidation, and other corrupt practices—returned a large majority pledged to uphold monopoly in all its integrity. It is true that an inroad has been made on monopoly, even by this monopoly-pledged Parliament. It is true that we have obtained a change in the tariff, which, as far as it goes, is good. Nay, it is true that, in bringing on his new tariff, the other day, Sir Robert Peel delivered

a speech embodying the soundest principles of commercial policy, and breathing a spirit of liberality truly excellent. But to what are we indebted for the good contained in the new tariff, or the liberal professions of the Premier's speech ? Not our representative system—not our reformed constituency. What we have got of free trade, like many other benefits realized by this country, has been got in spite of the erroneous constitution of the legislature, not in consequence of its excellence—(cheers). Do you believe that Sir Robert Peel's free-trade measures are approved of by a majority of his supporters ? Are you at a loss to interpret the ominous silence with which the noblest passages in his speech have been received by the benches behind him ?—or do you overlook the fact that, whenever any of his friends get up to speak, it is to condemn what he has done, and promise to support it on grounds altogether apart from its justice or propriety ? The truth is, that we are indebted to the shrewdness of the Premier for what has been granted. Placed in power, with all the facilities of obtaining information that are afforded by official aid, he sees plainly that something must be done—some concession made to the claims of industry, if the country is to be saved from utter ruin ; and, perceiving this—although he is the chosen champion of monopoly, and although he is upheld by a majority who have bought, bribed, and intimidated their way to the House of Commons, for the very purpose of upholding monopoly—he begins to knock down restrictions and prohibitions, as if his vocation had been solely that of a free trader. And how, it may be asked, dare he do so ?—what excuse can he offer to his monopoly-loving friends ? A man in power has many means of influencing his followers. There can be no doubt that, in this instance, Sir Robert plainly told the Tories that, if they did not accept his measures, they would, in the first instance, lose all the influence and advantage of being the party in power ; and that, besides, they would run the risk of having measures of a more sweeping character forced upon them. Nay, he would hardly hesitate to point out to them the possibility of a little anarchy, confusion, and bloodshed, in the distance, if things were allowed to go on in this way—(cheers). And would not this have its effect ? To look even at the first consideration—Do you believe that the places and influence held by the Gordon family had no weight with the honourable and gallant member for this county in making him support the new tariff in opposition to the wishes of the great majority of his constituents ? Thus you see that what good we have obtained has been got in spite of our representative system—in opposition to the views with which the majority of the House of Commons has been returned—(cheers). It has been a concession—a reluctant one, but still a concession to the unrepresented and to the necessities of the country—(cheers). Nor has it been got for nothing. The prohibitions on cattle and meat have been sacrificed