

to save the monster monopolies of corn and sugar. The influence of the landlord and the wealth of the West Indian have been great enough to prevent Sir Robert Peel from carrying out his principles; and the poor are still to refund, in the enhanced value of two of the prime necessities of life, the money that the aristocracy expended at the last election, with the view, if possible, of upholding all their monopolies—(cheers). Nor is this all, Sir Robert Peel will not, or dare not, propose a reduction of the unnecessary expenditure of the country; he dare not equalize taxation; he dare not impose the same duty on transmission of a duke's property to his heir, near or distant, as he imposes on the moveables of a widow woman of the middle classes; he dare not fully relieve the springs of industry, and, consequently, he has to resort to new taxation. In the same imperative mood in which he carries his tariff against the grumbling of the foolish squires, he carries his income tax—with all its inquisitorialness, all its anomaly, and all its injustice—in spite of the reasonable remonstrances of able and upright men—(cheers). Through this tyrannical and oppressive engine, the middle classes will have to pay dear for the little good they derive from the tariff; and in too many instances the burden will fall indirectly on the already overloaded working-man—(cheers). Now, granting that Sir Robert Peel has done some good—granting, as I believe, that he has done more than the Whigs durst have attempted—I ask you if it is a proper state of things to have that good despotically accomplished by the fiat of one man, in opposition to what ought to be a representation of the wishes of the country?—nay, more, is this good a counterbalance for the new evil, to say nothing of the abuses that are still left to vex and oppress the people? I believe you will answer, No; and this was the answer that the men who originated and have hitherto carried on the Birmingham movement gave. They saw that things were wrong; they saw that there was no hope from either of the two great political parties, so long as the representation remains in its present state. They saw the Whigs defeated—broken, dispirited, rendered useless—so soon as they attempted to turn the legislative machine they themselves had contrived to a really good purpose; and they felt that relief must be looked for from some other quarter. They naturally turned their eyes to the large and increasing body of Parliamentary reformers. They looked not merely to the Chartist movement, which had been labouring for years, and which had effected much good in so far as it had spread among the people a knowledge of their political rights, and a desire to obtain them; but they looked also to the large portion of the middle and working classes who had retired from political conflict in disgust at what they regarded as the pusillanimous conduct of the Whigs, and in despair of seeing any movement that they could depend upon being carried on peacefully, rationally, and with hopes of success. To

bring the moral weight and influence of these parties into play, and to produce a friendly feeling, if not a cordial union, between them and the working classes, so that an effectual agitation for political and social amelioration might be begun and carried out, was the grand object of the Birmingham union. Such being the aim and end of the movement, the question was, What ground should be taken up? and here, luckily, large and liberal views prevailed. The Birmingham Conference set out by affirming the grand principle that every member of society has an equal right with every other member to a voice in the management of the affairs of society—(cheers). And having affirmed this abstract principle, they resolved to define the extent to which they desire to see it presently applied, by the well-understood and popular plan of male adult suffrage, or an extension of the franchise to "every man of twenty-one years of age, who is not deprived of the rights of citizenship in consequence of the verdict of a jury of his countrymen." Now, I am aware, Mr. Chairman, that the assertion of the right of suffrage has been much cavilled at, and that many witty and clever people have attempted to sneer down every one who upholds it as an abstract principle. I trust I shall be able to show that the objections are fallacious, and that those who have adopted the opinion from an instinctive belief in its soundness, may also, if they be so inclined, bear it out by strict logical reasoning. I admit that to vest the right of suffrage in males of twenty-one years of age is an arbitrary arrangement. Nay, representation itself is a clumsy mode of giving every member of society an equal share in the management of the affairs of society, for it is hard that *nine* men shall be obliged to submit to the *dictum* of *ten*. Yet, as it is better that the nine should submit to the ten, than that the ten should submit to the nine; so it is much better that we should have the nearest practicable approximation to the abstract right, than an arrangement which makes no approximation whatever to the abstract right, and which is the cause of general dissatisfaction and loudly-expressed discontent. The reason why our opponents have been able to take hold of us is, that there are ignorant men, who have been foolish enough to declare that the extension of the franchise to every man of twenty-one years of age, and of sane mind, is *justice*. Now, it may be answered, and truly enough, that there is nothing more just in giving the franchise to men of twenty-one years of age than in giving it to women, or to males whom we are accustomed to look upon as minors. The real question of right is to be separated from the question of expediency. There is nothing more in twenty-one years of age, speaking abstractly, than there is in eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty and eleven months, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, or twenty-five; there is nothing more in manhood than there is in womanhood; and, so far as we lay down a distinction between these