

parties, it is one that is purely arbitrary, and must be defended not as any abstract principle, but simply because, under all the circumstances, it is the most eligible. It was thus that I agreed to the practical definition of the extent to which the suffrage ought to be demanded. I had my own view—others had theirs; but, at the Birmingham Conference, we found that the greatest amount of opinion was in favour of that limitation which included in the constituency all males above twenty-one years of age, and excluded females and minors; and, submitting to the sound doctrine that, wherever there is a difference not involving principle, the minority should give way to the majority, I readily consented to adopt male adult suffrage as the practical recognition of the right affirmed by the Conference. This was the settlement of the question of *expediency*, but it left the question of *right* untouched. That question I believe, after careful examination, to stand thus—that every person on whom society makes any demand, be it only to obey a police regulation, is entitled to claim a share in making the laws that regulate society—(cheers); and, adopting this wide definition of the term “member of society,” I confess that, in justice, I am not entitled to refuse the suffrage to minors, if they demand it, nor to women, if it be their wish to have it—(cheers and laughter). Such as it is, they possess the right equally with ourselves. I do not say that it can be established positively, but I am fully satisfied that it is susceptible of a complete negative demonstration. I may not be able to prove, incontrovertibly, that I have a right to a share in the management of the affairs of others, but I can make it exceedingly plain that others have no right to manage my affairs without my leave. Now, this is the real question. Supposing myself one of the unenfranchised, I can say truly that government—law making, taxation, and calls for obedience—is my business, so far as it affects me. Nobody has a right to do my business without my leave, directly or indirectly obtained. But I have not given my leave to any one to do these things for me; therefore, any one who attempts to do them is an usurper. In using this argument, I presume that I am speaking to professed Liberals; for, if I had to deal with the supporters of the divine right of kings, aristocrats, or priests, I would have to begin a little farther back. I would have to show that they have no authority for their assumptions. But, believing, as I do, that I am addressing men who took part in the agitation for the Reform Bill, and who have adopted the doctrine that “the people are the legitimate source of power,” I feel my task much lightened. With such, the argument that the parties on whom it is proposed to confer the franchise would make a bad use of it, can have no weight; for they must recollect that the nineteen men who possessed the whole franchise of this town before 1832, could have urged the same reason; and that, at the present day, the King of Prussia professes

to have exactly the same reason for refusing to give any constitution whatever to his subjects. The truth is, that *now*, as in 1832, it is not the parties who *have* the power that are allowed to judge; it is those who are without. And any of us who have the franchise, and refuse to confer it on those who are excluded, stand in exactly the same position as the possessors of the franchise, who, in 1832, would have refused to give it to us. Let it be recollected, however, that the right which is unassailable is not male suffrage at twenty-one years of age, any more than it would be female suffrage, or suffrage at any other age; it is the right of every member of society—that is, every person on whom society makes any demand—to have an equal voice in determining what society should do. The Birmingham Conference affirmed this principle, but they felt the necessity, in the nature of things—the same necessity that makes *nine* submit to *ten*—of adopting a practical limitation; and they adopted that limitation which at present promises to give the greatest satisfaction, which most surely precludes objection from the excluded (that being the great matter), the male adult suffrage, in favour of which such a mass of public opinion had already been combined—(cheers). But there are parties who, admitting, or at least not denying the right of all to be represented in the legislature, contend that some should have greater influence than others. They contend that it is unfair to give the man of £20 a-year as much to say as the man of £20,000 a-year. Now, if the legislature had merely to do with money, with the protection of property, and the allocation of taxes, there might be some force in the objection—although, even then, it might be argued that the poor man's all was as valuable to him as the rich man's—(cheers)—and that he had as much need of power to protect himself from over-taxation—(cheers). But it is not so; the legislature has to deal with many things in which all men are not only really but ostensibly equal—(cheers). Do not the peasant and the nobleman value their life equally?—(cheers.) Is not the chastity of a poor man's wife as important to him as is the chastity of her Majesty herself to Prince Albert?—(cheers.) Have not all an equal interest in the criminal law? Are not all equally interested in the defence of the country, and are not all called upon—the poor first, indeed—to take up arms for its defence?—(cheers.) It is folly, then, to clamour about “a stake in the hedge.” All have a stake in the hedge, and, under a good state of things, all would be equally ready to defend their stake, whether it were great or small—(cheers). Even in commercial companies, where money alone, and a part only of the money of the individual, has to be dealt with, the partners never get a share equal to the proportion of their capital. Thus, even where nothing but pecuniary matters are dealt with, the man—the human being—is counted as overbalancing thousands of pounds. What, then, should