

it be in the case of government, where the man is almost all, and the money little or nothing? Surely equality, and nothing less than equality—(cheers). And this was the grand basis on which the Birmingham Conference laid its proceedings—the basis of equal and immutable right—restricted, but restricted only to suit the circumstances of the times—and without placing any reliance on the peculiarity of the restriction beyond what it would be entitled to claim, as the wisest, the best, the most liberal, and the most unexceptionable that could be adopted—(cheers). Having laid down this grand principle, and adopted its most eligible practical application, the Conference proceeded to consider other arrangements that are necessary for giving it full effect. The first was the *Ballot*. On this point, I need not detain you long. The ballot was adopted by the Conference, not as a good thing in itself, but as a thing rendered necessary by the corruption and intimidation that prevail. The Conference declared that they thought every man should be able to go to the poll and give an open vote. This is my opinion; I think there should be nothing to prevent this, any more than there is at present to prevent a man from going to church or chapel, whichever he likes; but, seeing that such is not the case—that there are bribery, cajolery, and intimidation—the Conference agreed that, for a time at least, there should be the protection of the ballot—(cheers). The next point was Equal Electoral Districts; and this, I think, is one that requires little argument. If we affirm the principle that every member of society is to have an equal voice in the management of society affairs, we must take care that a member in one place has not twice, thrice, or ten times the influence of a member in another. A glance at the anomalous and unjust state of things at present existing will be the best argument in favour of equal electoral districts. In England, there are twenty-three boroughs, some of them with only 150, and none of them with 500 electors, that return two members each. In these twenty-three boroughs, less than 8000 electors return 46 members; while the borough of Finsbury with 13,300, Westminster with 15,745, Lancashire with 17,754, and the western division of the county of York with 29,076 electors, return only two each. An elector in Thetford or Harwich possesses 80 times the political influence of an elector of Finsbury, 90 times that of an elector in Westminster, 100 times that of an elector in Lancashire, and 180 times the influence of an elector in west Yorkshire. In Scotland, we have similar anomalies; 177 electors in Sutherlandshire have the same influence as 3181 in Aberdeenshire. Glasgow, with 7520 electors, returns only two members; while Bute and Caithness, with only 800 electors between them, return two members. Is this fair? What superiority is there in the Bute and Caithness men, that they should each have eight times the influence of an Aberdeenshire man, and ten times the influence of an intelligent Glasgow

merchant or operative. A half-feudal serf of the Duke of Sutherland has fourteen times the political influence of our worthy chairman, and twenty times the influence of some of the ablest and wealthiest men in Glasgow—(cheers and laughter). Ireland is not much better. The borough of Lisburn, with 97 voters, returns a member; Dublin, with 7357, returns only two!—(“Shame.”) It has been argued by some of our Whig friends, that equal electoral districts would be injurious to the Liberal party, that it would give a preponderance to the counties, and, consequently, to the Tories. My answer is that, if this were true, it would be no reason against doing justice; if the majority of the people are in favour of the Tories, let the Tories get the advantage of it—(cheers and laughter). But I do not believe that it is true; on the contrary, I am persuaded that it is through these twenty-three boroughs that I have referred to, and other small constituencies, that the Tories, the people’s enemies, the enemies of liberty, by whatever name they may call themselves, get their ascendancy—(cheers). Moreover, if these distinctions between town and county constituencies were done away with, I believe that many of the petty and foolish jealousies that keep the people asunder would also come to an end—(cheers). It can never help the cause of liberty to have a large number of the members of Parliament returned through the money or the influence of the wealthy monopolist or the great landowner; yet this is all the good purpose that the small boroughs serve—(cheers). The next point adopted by the Birmingham Conference, was the abolition of Property Qualification for Members. On this I need not say much. An equal voice implies an equal choice, and an equal choice can only be had if property qualification be done away with for members as well as for voters. Besides, already we have got rid of the property qualification in Scotland, and I do not think that the members we return are worse on this account—(cheers). The Payment of Members follows next, and an exceedingly reasonable thing it seems to be. If, as we expect, all chance of payment from overpaid places, unmerited pensions, and improper monopolies, is put an end to, we must, if we really desire our work well done, give a salary to the man who undertakes it, otherwise, depend upon it, he will contrive some mode of paying himself—(cheers). Only one point remains—Annual Parliaments. On this there was considerable difference of opinion in the Conference. All agreed as to the necessity of thorough responsibility on the part of the member to his constituents, but some thought this might be effected in one way, and some in another; at last, it was resolved, by a majority of the Conference, that annual parliaments were a proper mode of securing this responsibility—(cheers). Thus, gentlemen, I have gone over the six points adopted by the Birmingham Conference, and endeavoured, to