

(A Communication from a Working Man.)

A CONSERVATIVE working man! What a wonderful specimen of the *genus homo* he must be, surely. Conservatism, as a political creed, may be suited to any other class, but wherein its suitability for the working-classes lies, remains to be discovered. And so, when we hear of a Conservative Working Man's Association, or a meeting of Conservative working men, we are inclined to look pretty closely at it, to see if it is indeed what it professes to be. And if we are to judge of the Conservative working-man from the newspaper reports (vide the *Scotsman* and *Free Press* of Monday) of the great Conservative meeting which was held in Glasgow, on Saturday last, he must be strangely at variance with the working-men we are accustomed to meet with in this less favoured part of our northern island. For these reports in effect say, that amongst the hundreds that thronged the City Hall of Glasgow, on Saturday—professedly consisting of the members of what is now called the "Glasgow Conservative Association," but what, until a short time ago, went under the name of "The Conservative Working Men's Association," or some such appellation, conveying the same idea—scarcely one could be seen answering to the conventional idea of the working-man. And when there appeared on the platform what appears to have been a veritable specimen of the *genus*, he was received with such manifestations, by his fellow Conservative working men, as must have made him feel somewhat out of his element, alongside the great Conservative leader. What may have been his feelings, on being greeted by the jeers and laughter of his political friends, it is not for us to say; but we think, if he is endowed with the usual amount of common sense, he will think twice before he again appears before an audience of *Conservative working men*.

These Conservative working men that composed the "great majority" of the assembly in the City Hall, Glasgow (vide the report of Mr. T. A. Campbell's speech in the *Scotsman*), appear to have been men of broadcloth and tweed; the proverbial fustian being conspicuous, from its absence. And to judge from the appearance they presented, they not only dressed well, but they also lived well; and even in these dear times, could have their three rounds and dessert, for dinner, and a glass of something stronger than water to wash the whole down. And we have not the least doubt, but the working-men of Aberdeen wish they were only half as well to do in the world as the majority of the assembly in the City Hall appeared to be.

For the last few years, there has been a great ado about forming Conservative working men's associations, throughout the country; but so far as they have gone as yet, we are safe to say there has been a great cry, but little 'oo'. In fact they appear, in most cases, to have ended in smoke. And where they have been kept up, all accounts go to show, that it is not working-men at all that form their membership, but the usual rank and file of the Conservative party, in which real working-men are few and far between. But, seriously, our experience has not been so great as some, yet we have had a good deal to do with working-men, and have had considerable opportunity of learning their opinions on political and social questions; but in all our experience, we never met with a really Conservative working-man—that is, a Conservative from a conviction arrived at, after having mingled the pros and cons of Conservatism and Liberalism. We do not say that such men does not exist, but from all we have seen and heard, we are convinced that they are but few, and of small note. And in truth, to associate Conservatism with working-men, appears to us little else than a contradiction in terms, so far at least as Scotland is concerned. How can working-men be Conservative? Are not the traditions and policy of the Conservatives directly antagonistic to the interests of the working-classes? Is it not a fact, that had the Tories had their way, we would have been little, if any, better than serfs, at the present day? And although Tories have, of late, become more liberal than the Liberals themselves, it has been for a purpose. They saw, that unless something was done to turn the tide in their favour—the current of public opinion being directly against them—they, as a political power in the State, would soon be numbered among the things that were past. So, under the leadership of Disraeli, they, for the time being, threw aside their principles, and brought in the Reform Bill of '68; but the bait was too palpable, the concession too sudden to be genuine, so they did not receive that amount of support which they had counted upon, and had to retire from office before meeting the Parliament that they had been instrumental in calling into existence; and since then, have had to be content to live in the cold shade of opposition.

Whatever it may be in England, if the Conservatives are depending upon the working-classes of Scotland for support, at next general election, they are depending on a broken reed. And Disraeli himself shows that he has no dependence on them, by his shuffling with the question of the assimilation of the burgh and county franchise. Well he knows, that where the working-classes are in the majority—be it in large or small burghs—they, without exception, return, if not Radicals, at least pretty advanced Liberals, to represent them; and no doubt Disraeli fears, that if the county franchise were the same as the burgh, his dependence on them might be gone also; but he is far too acute a leader to allow this to appear, but instead, endeavours to show, that were this done, he might expect that the Liberal power would be wounded in the burgh constituencies, and that the Conservatives would have a greater strength in the counties; for well Disraeli knows, that all his hopes lie in keeping up the spirits of the rank and file of his followers in the House of Commons. Let him but once betray any doubts as to the future of his party, and anarchy and confusion would be the result.

Whatever we, working-men, may get from the Liberals, we need expect nothing from the Conservatives, unless it be in some such way as we got the Reform Bill; and we are afraid that they have got a lesson from that leap in the dark, that they will not readily forget. So we better not put our hopes in anything of that kind occurring again. At the present time, the Conservatives are prepared to promise almost anything, that they may get into power; but once put them there, and we may rest assured that they will return to their traditional policy of do nothing, but feather our own nest.

What working men could gain by turning Conservative we are at a loss to understand, and we are persuaded that if such a thing as a Conservative working-man is to be found in Scotland, he will be one who has taken his political faith at second hand; and has never taken the trouble to think it out for himself.

Were the working-men of Scotland to begin and turn Tory, we would be inclined to think that they had taken leave of their senses, that they had forgotten the tradition and history of their country, and were begun in a cause that would soon land them in serfdom, if not slavery.

But of this we have little fear. Working-men cannot afford to be Conservative, they cannot afford to stand still, they have not, as yet, got into that position in which they can look and rest and be thankful. There are many grievances to redress, many reforms to be brought about, and much to be done, both politically and socially, before they can rest and be thankful. Until then, let us not talk of Conservative working men, they have as yet got little to conserve, and, should they put their trust in the Conservative party, and pin their faith to them, they will soon have less.

If, as Disraeli says, the policy of our present government has been one of "plundering and blundering," place him and his party in power, and they are bound to undo what has been done by the present government; so if we are prepared to see this done, by all means support the Conservatives; but if not, let us, at next general election, send such a parliament to represent us, such as has never graced the walls of St Stephen before. A Parliament that will legislate with reference to no class; but with a determination to right what is wrong, and do justice between man and man.

This we need not expect from the Conservative party, nay, the very opposite, is what we have to look for from them, unless they deny their tradition and policy altogether, a thing we have but little reason to expect.