

NATIONAL REFORM UNION PAMPHLETS.

SPEECHES

ON THE

COUNTY FRANCHISE

BY

THE RT. HON. G. O. TREVELYAN, M.P.

(Arranged and Revised by the Author.)

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SPEECHES OF G. O. TREVELYAN, M.P.,

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COUNTY FRANCHISE.

ON the 26th of April, 1872, Mr. TREVELYAN moved in the House of Commons the following Resolution :—"That this House would be more likely to devote due and adequate attention to the wants and interests of our rural population, if householders outside the boundaries of Parliamentary boroughs were in possession of the franchise; and that it is expedient to extend to counties the occupation and lodging franchises now in force in boroughs."

The motion was seconded by Mr. FAWCETT, in a very thoughtful and telling speech. Upon a division, it was defeated by 148 votes to 70.

On the 4th of June, 1873, Mr. TREVELYAN addressed a meeting in the Mechanics' Hall, at Halifax, under the auspices of the Halifax Liberal Association. He said :—

Mr. Chairman, ever since the defeat of the Ministry on the Irish University Bill, and still more since the elections at Bath and Gloucester, those announcements of a Conservative reaction, which have never been entirely silent during the lifetime of the oldest politician here present, have begun to be louder, more frequent, and more confident than ever. At a time when the country is echoing with Tory pæans and steaming with Constitutional banquets, it is satisfactory to be able to retire into this ancient stronghold of Liberalism, and ask ourselves quietly what it all means. In Halifax, at any rate, we have a sanctuary which, whether the tide is ebbing or flowing, will always be left high and dry, and will continue to provide every successive Liberal Cabinet with a statesman in the person of its representative. But though you yourselves are out of the way of the storm,

the thunder has been rolling all about you. A man is lucky if he can open a country newspaper without lighting on the report of a Conservative demonstration, with a lord in the chair and a good dinner on the table. It is rather difficult to get through the speeches without the aid of the dinner; but it is worth while now and again to read what is said on these occasions, in order to ascertain, at first hand, what reasons are given for calling upon the country to reverse the verdict of 1868, and send a Conservative majority to the benches of the House of Commons. There is, for the most part, very little diversity in the proceedings. The gentleman who answers to the toast of the Queen commences with the unwarranted and, to my mind, very disloyal assumption, that it is the special mission of his party to protect the monarchy as by law established. Then comes the Church, which is described in the same breath as a great national institution, and the appendage of the Conservative party. Indeed, the speaker generally gets sadly confused between his attempts to prove that the Church of England is both the foster-mother of the entire people, and the private chapel of the Carlton Club. Then we have the ordinary expression of gratitude to Heaven for the existence of the House of Lords, and representatives of the people, oblivious of the proverb about birds who foul their own nest, tell us that, whenever the two Chambers differ, the House of Commons is in the wrong. Indeed, an honourable gentleman in this Riding went so far as to say, on a recent occasion, that it was for the nation to bring the Lower House into union with the Upper, in order to preserve what he was pleased to call "that illustrious House" from the disagreeable duty of counteracting those mischievous measures which his own obscure assembly sent up for consideration. There is a grand task for the people of the United Kingdom! There is a vocation worthy of the energies of a nation which supplies the model for the free constitutions that exist in every corner of either hemisphere! After so many centuries of popular election, the highest mission of the English constituencies is that they are to choose a representative assembly which shall not clash with an hereditary Chamber. And so it goes on through the established list—the Throne, the Church, the Lords, the Army and Navy, the Prince of Wales and the rest of the Royal Family; the existence of property, of trade, and of order being, with the most flagrant and gratuitous assumption, identified with Conservatism, until we almost begin to wonder whether the earth would continue to grow crops, or the sea to float ships, if the country were to fail in its duty of returning a Tory majority at the next election. But it is a very different matter when the speakers have to pass from these delicious generalities to the details of practical politics. Then it begins to be evident that the planks which are to form the Tory platform have not been sawn, and that the Tory policy is a policy of criticism and negation. The Alabama Treaty, the San Juan Treaty, the Royal Warrant which abolished Purchase, the sale of England's honour and the dockyard at Deptford, the Licensing Act, the Irish Land Act—everything,

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good, bad, or indifferent, that has been done by the Government at any period of its existence, is mixed up in one hotch-potch of highly-flavoured invective. And in taking this line the opponents of the Ministry are guided by a just instinct. It is impossible to carry great measures without doing some real or supposed injury to great interests. In an old country like ours, you cannot move ahead without treading on somebody's heels; and in reviewing our recent history, the party averse to change are always sure of a measure of success, because they appeal to political resentment, which is a keener and more enduring sentiment than political gratitude. The Conservatives know what they are about when they confine themselves to the past. They are on their own ground. If we are to hold our own against them, we must meet them with the future. We must go to our constituents with something better than self-gratulation as to our achievements during the last four Sessions, or the election of 1874 will be a very painful contrast to the election of 1868. The Irish Church Act and the Irish Land Act are very fine things, but they do not in themselves constitute a reason why an elector should put his mark to one name on the polling card rather than to another. The condition of our party is, that when, in carrying measures through Parliament, we have strained every nerve, and been called every name under heaven—when we have gone to bed by daylight, and walked for miles round the division lobbies—we return to those who gave us our mission to be greeted as unprofitable servants, who have done that which it was our duty to do. “What has he done?” was the question which Napoleon asked about an applicant for his favour. “What is he going to do?” is the question which, at the first sight of a Parliamentary candidate, presents itself to the lips of a Liberal elector. And such, I hope, will always be the question, as long as there remains one remediable abuse to be cured, or one attainable blessing to be accomplished. At Bath, they say that the Permissive Bill men refused to vote for the Liberal candidate, and I can well believe it if it be true, as stated in the papers, that he did not declare himself in favour of extending household suffrage to the counties. Why should a voter, whether he be a Permissive Bill man or anybody else, take the trouble to cross the road to vote for a candidate, however honourable or public-spirited a man he may be, who, calling himself a Liberal, is averse to giving the suffrage to the householders in the country six years after a Conservative Ministry had given it to householders in towns? What are called test questions have been ridden a little too hard of late. But, without wishing to exact advanced pledges from candidates, Liberal politicians are beginning to ask themselves whether it is worth their while to canvass, and speak, and quarrel with their neighbours, and form committees, and get up meetings, in order to return members pledged to nothing but a retrospective approbation of the Irish policy of Her Majesty's Ministers. I wonder what figure our party will cut in history, if we have so little confidence in our principles that we are afraid of giving votes for a member of Parliament to the ratepayers of Yorkshire. I saw

lately an interesting account of the educational undertakings which are going on at Keighley. It is satisfactory to any Englishman to read about the Reformed Grammar School, and the Mechanics' Institute, and the Trade School, thronged with students learning the theory and the scientific aspect of those industries for which their country has so long been famous, and the working men's club with its lecture hall, and news-room, and reading-room, and library, and savings' room, and conversation-room; but at the same time it is humiliating to any Englishman to reflect that all these appliances for study and reflection do not qualify the inhabitant of Keighley to exercise those rights of citizenship which are enjoyed by every full-grown negro in the United States. Why, as fast as the Red Indians settle down into decency and civilisation, they all obtain the franchise. The Cherokee goes to the ballot box, and no doubt looks down with genuine transatlantic contempt on the voteless and voiceless operative of Heckmondwike, who made the blanket in which he struts to the polling booth. But not only is the extension of household suffrage to the counties demanded by common sense, common justice, and common consistency. There are the gravest political reasons why it should not be withheld for another Parliament. At the present moment, not very far from one-half of the House of Commons is elected by a limited class of voters; and, when questions which touch the interests of the many as opposed to the interests of the few come on for decision, this section of our Legislature forms a dead weight in the scale of privilege. Some instances, taken at hazard, will illustrate my meaning. Perhaps the most unpopular law that has been passed during the last ten or twelve years was the Poaching Prevention Act, which, rightly or wrongly, was regarded by the great bulk of the inhabitants of country districts as equally oppressive and offensive. If those non-electors, who, for want of legitimate methods of expressing their views on the question, were reduced to the unconstitutional expedient of pelting their county member with rabbit skins,* had had anything to say in the matter, we may safely aver that the Act would never have been passed. In the Session of 1870, a Bill was introduced repealing the Poaching Prevention Act, which was defeated on the second reading by a majority of 142 to 64. No one who knows the rural districts can deny that a stronger and more permanent sense of the severity of our game laws exists there than in the towns; and yet 62 of the English and Welsh county members voted for maintaining the most obnoxious of all the game laws, while only six voted for abolishing it. I say nothing of the rights and wrongs of the question; but it is idle to pretend that this proportion of one to ten in any sense represents the public opinion of our counties. And the other day we had a still better test. The question arose whether or

* This is a reference to an incident which occurred at a Shropshire election in 1865.

not the catching of trout with rod and line should be restricted by penalties, which, enforced as fishing penalties are enforced, are cruel, demoralising, and ineffective from their very severity. The division was sudden and most unexpected, and men voted according to their natural sympathies. Nineteen English county members voted in favour of subjecting every lad who catches a trout out of season to a fine of £5, and a penalty of £1 for each additional fish, with the jail behind the fine in case his parents could not pay it. Only six voted against the penalties. It is monstrous to call such a state of things by the name of representation. Take religious privilege. Look at the division list on that measure, which seeks to confine sectarian bitterness to this life, and to allow those Nonconformists who wish to bury their dead with their forefathers to have the comfort of worshipping over the grave according to their custom and conscience. This is a Bill which especially affects the rural districts, for towns have long been driven to provide public cemeteries, while many country parishes cannot afford any other burial ground than the churchyard; and yet, in 1871, only 30 English county members voted for the Burials Bill, to 92 against it. We have taken religious privilege; let us take administrative privilege. If I am not mistaken, the best division which our economists have got during this Parliament was when 111 members voted against the honorary colonelcies. As to the merits of the question, it is sufficient to say that the Secretary at War of the late Conservative Administration allowed, in the debate, that the existence of these colonelcies was absolutely indefensible, and the Liberal Secretary at War defended them only on the ground of guarding vested interests, which, by the way, the assailants of these sinecures never proposed to injure. Condemned by logic, condemned by experience, by their effect upon the national expenditure and upon the true efficiency of the army, they were protected only by those sentiments which induce men to postpone considerations of public welfare to individual interests and personal susceptibilities. Only 18 representatives of English and Welsh counties voted for abolishing these posts, while 78 voted for preserving them. But the unfair preponderance which the state of our county representation gives to the party of resistance on those questions which are actually brought before Parliament is only a part of the matter. A more serious reflection is that the feelings and opinions of a very numerous and deserving section of the community never find expression at all. As far as the agricultural labourers of this country are concerned, our present system amounts to an absolute denial of representation. Under the protection of the ballot they may, perhaps, contrive at the next election to obtain a preponderance in two or three demi-rural boroughs, but their voice has no more chance of being heard in the present Parliament than in the National Assembly at Versailles. Some fifteen months ago, on the very eve of the outbreak of the labour agitation in the rural districts—an event which in the magnitude of its ultimate issues will probably

rank with almost any in our day—there was no mention whatever in the House of Commons of any exceptional discontent among the labourers. Indeed, no one seemed more surprised at the notion of such discontent existing than the county members, who are conventionally supposed to be the mouthpiece of the agricultural population. I think there are few things more pathetic than the efforts which the people of our villages have employed to lay their case before their fellow-countrymen. Counting for no more in the calculations of electoral tacticians than the horses that they drive or the sheep which they feed, these poor political pariahs have displayed a sagacity, a patience, and a regard for legality and propriety which give the clearest indication of the value which they attach to the rights of which they are deprived, and of their capacity to exercise them.

I have seen on a single page of a newspaper the report of fifteen separate meetings of district Labourers' Unions at which resolutions were passed in favour of the extension of the county franchise. And recollect that a meeting on a village green is a very different affair from a meeting in the Mechanics' Hall at Halifax. Political demonstrations in the country districts are not so free from inconvenience to those who attend them, that a man is likely to be found there who has not a very strong motive for going. This spring the agricultural labourers at Littleworth, in the county of Berkshire, had occasion to meet for discussion. I suppose there was no one interested in the cause who owned land enough to contain the people who were assembled, so the proceedings took place on the high road. Ten days afterwards seven of their number, a schoolmaster and six labourers, were brought before Petty Sessions at Faringdon on the charge of obstructing the highway. According to the evidence for the prosecution, the road was at least 19 yards wide, there were only 150 persons present, and the meeting was perfectly orderly. One speaker after another, beginning with the schoolmaster, addressed the audience from a stool which was placed on the pathway, and the proceedings ended by singing a song. The strongest evidence given in support of the charge was that it would have been impossible for a carriage to have passed without some of the people moving out of the way. The end of it was that the defendants were fined, with jail in default of payment. On hearing of this decision, some public-spirited men, whom I hope the agricultural labourers with votes for Woodstock and East Retford will remember at the general election—Mr. Cox, of Belper, Mr. Mackenzie, and Mr. Joseph Arch—went down to Faringdon to vindicate the right of public meeting. They were indicted before Petty Sessions with four others. The Bench was differently constituted from what it had been on the last occasion. A member of Parliament, a man of sense and feeling, was in the chair. A most eminent lawyer, Mr. Fitzjames Stephen, defended the prisoners, and showed that the Act under which the Littleworth people had been sent to prison was incapable of bearing the interpretation that had been placed on it, and the Bench, after a careful con-

sideration, unanimously dismissed the charge, amidst demonstrations of satisfaction, which proved that the seven prisoners were regarded at Faringdon very much as the seven Bishops were regarded at a great crisis of our history. It is high time that so important a class of the population should have some other means of making their wishes and their thoughts known than off a three-legged stool in the high road. In the conflict of a legislative assembly, unrepresented interests are sure to go to the wall. That is the leading argument for the extension of household suffrage—the argument to which no answer can possibly be framed. I feel sure that much as you in Halifax value the franchise, you would esteem it still more if it were shared by your brethren in the counties. Unless our people are very much changed since the time when the unselfish exertions of the ten pound voters rendered it impossible for our statesmen to refuse the franchise to the householder in the towns, the time cannot be far distant when the work of 1832 and 1867 will be completed by the admission to political rights of our county population. In spite of all fine flourishes about freedom and popular control, half the county is in a state of servitude and dependence. While the towns manage their own affairs, county business is in the hands of magistrates who are the nominees of the Lord Lieutenant. While the towns manage their own education, in the rural districts irresponsible and private individuals have the command of the funds which are contributed by the taxpayer for the maintenance of our public elementary schools. And yet, in the county, as well as in the town, the national instinct for self-government exists, if only our leading public men were bold enough to appeal to it. Let Mr. Gladstone proclaim that he is in favour of county boards of administration and the vote for the rural householder ; let him make half-a-dozen such speeches as he so well knows how to make when his blood is up and his back against the wall ; and he will accomplish a public service that will throw into the shade all that even he has previously achieved ; or, at the very worst, if the Ministry is doomed to fall, it will fall with dignity, and will not fall for long.

On the 23rd July, 1873, Mr. TREVELYAN introduced into the House of Commons a Bill providing for the extension of household suffrage to the county constituencies. On this occasion he spoke as follows :—

Sir, when a private member rises to introduce a Bill which proposes to enact changes that will seriously modify the character of our electoral bodies, and through them may ultimately affect the composition of the House itself, he must, indeed, be presumptuous if the magnitude of the task which he has undertaken, as contrasted with his own abilities and his own personal standing and reputation, does not weigh upon his mind far more painfully

than can be expressed in words of conventional apology. It is fortunate, therefore, that every great constitutional measure which has in the end been carried into law by the action of a responsible Ministry, has been preceded by Bills and resolutions, and in most cases by a long succession of Bills and resolutions, brought forward by unofficial members of Parliament. But it is, as far as I am concerned, a piece of still greater good fortune that the most important of all such measures—the Reform Bill of 1867—was, as far as the reduction of the franchise was in question, prefaced by Bills introduced by two hon. gentlemen who are still amongst us, and whose character for disinterested and unpretending devotion to public ends is so well established and so fully recognised on both sides of this House, that it may serve at once as an example and a protection to all their imitators and successors. Henceforward, anyone who directs the attention of Parliament to a question of first-class importance must earn his excuse by doing his best to copy the hon. member for East Surrey (Mr. Locke King) and the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Baines) in subordinating himself to his work, and in endeavouring to compensate for his deficiencies by sincerity of purpose. The two hon. gentlemen were successful, but were successful in different measures; for while the hon. member for East Surrey got something, but only something, less than he asked, the hon. member for Leeds had his cup filled to overflowing, for he not only enlisted on his side the leaders of his own party, but obtained from the late Government much more than he demanded—I will not say more than he desired. But the thoroughness with which the work of enfranchisement was accomplished in one half of the country has placed the other half in a position relatively so disadvantageous, that probably no man believes that the present state of things will continue for another generation, and very few that it will continue for another Parliament. The Reform Bill of 1867 gave every householder in towns, or rather in some towns, the prospect of a vote. It gave the householders in the counties nothing but a sense of grievous inequality. It is hardly too much to say that, as far as England outside the boundary of Parliamentary boroughs is concerned, there would have been less discontent, and less desire for further legislation, if there had been no Reform Bill at all. For by the manner in which it dealt with the franchise in boroughs, the Legislature sanctioned the principle that any man who can by manual labour pay his way, and keep a house over the head of himself and his family, is entitled to a voice in the government of the country. And, having declared that opinion in the solemn and unmistakable language of the statute book, Parliament then, by way of a boon to the country population, proceeded to increase by some twenty-five or thirty per cent. the number of electors of the class which had always possessed the franchise, but refused to go beyond that point, and did not intentionally and of design impart the suffrage to a single member of the class which it was enfranchising wholesale in the boroughs. I say intentionally, because in the

year 1866, when introducing his Reform Bill, the present Prime Minister (Mr. Gladstone), who was then most deeply interested in detecting and consulting the intentions of the House, made some remarks which are in a high degree authoritative, coming as they did from him at a time when his mind was full of a mass of electoral statistics such as never was collected before, and such as we may safely venture to say will never be collected again. Wishing to reconcile a somewhat reluctant audience to his £14 rental franchise, which was pretty nearly the equivalent of the £12 rating occupation which now exists, he said: "The county constituency, when thus enlarged, will be a middle-class constituency in the same sense—nay, rather more strictly than under the present system. The number of persons properly belonging to the working classes, and having a £14 rental franchise, will be so very small in number as not to be worth taking into calculation. Or, at the least, I may say that such portion of the newly-enfranchised body as may belong to the labouring class will be tenants of small holdings in land in immediate connection with the landed class." Sir, those words will never be forgotten until the day that household suffrage in the counties becomes the law of this land, for they mean that, while in a borough a man who has no ambition beyond that of doing his duty in the station to which he has been called may enjoy the full privileges of a citizen, his neighbour on the other side of an imaginary line must forego those privileges, unless by a series of efforts, which the vast majority of honest, hard-working men do not feel themselves called upon to make, he can contrive to struggle out of his own class into the class above him. Now, sir, it is this contrast of political status between persons whose social rank and whose calling is precisely the same, the special product and manufacture of our recent legislation, which is apt to escape the notice of those who criticise by anticipation the Bill which I have the honour of laying before the House. Almost every article which I have read in the Press, almost every conversation which has been addressed to me in the lobbies, turns exclusively on the fitness of the agricultural labourer for the exercise of political power. But, sir, the question of the county franchise never was a question exclusively of the rural labourer, and is becoming less and less so as years go on. In the year 1851 the population residing in the urban districts outside the boundaries of Parliamentary boroughs amounted to 1,700,000. Much was done to correct this state of things by the Reform Bill of 1867. Many large towns received members of their own. Many populous suburbs were incorporated in existing borough constituencies. And yet, in spite of all that was effected by means of the creation of new seats and the extension of boundaries, the population of urban districts within the counties had risen at the last census to hard upon 2,250,000. But, more than that, the Registrar-General bids us remark that even among the districts nominally described as rural, many, as indicated by their rapid growth, are assuming the character of towns. I am speaking below the mark in asserting that there are 3,000,000 of the

inhabitants of England and Wales who are not country folk, but townspeople, in their habits, their character, their circumstances, in their ways of thought, in everything, in short, except in the possession of the ratepaying household suffrage. Why should an operative who spins cotton at Bury have a vote, while the operative who spins cotton at Heywood is without one? Take the case of the population who live along the high ground that lies to the west of the valley of the Irwell. Why should a man be deprived of a voice in the government of the country because he happens to live in that portion of the long street which happens to be called Pendlebury or Farnworth, instead of in that portion which happens to be called Bolton or Manchester? Take the case of the coal districts of Durham and Northumberland; and it is more important to take their case, because among the miners in that part of the country there is arising a very genuine dissatisfaction at their exclusion from the franchise—a movement which has spontaneously grown from among themselves, and is in no manner due to suggestion or provocation from without. I know a colliery where, if a man lived at one end of a tramway down which he runs coals to the quay, he would vote as a householder, and if he lived at the other he would only vote by turning himself into a landowner. These are difficulties which it requires no great ability or observation to start, but which it will take a great deal of acuteness to answer. It is all very well to say it is only a part of the question. It is a very large part indeed. We have to meet the case of what is virtually a town population of 3,000,000, who are labouring under a disqualification always irksome, and now made intolerable by comparison with others—a disqualification for which it is simply impossible to give them any reason, except that it is there, and they must put up with it. That is not the tone which the House is at present accustomed to use towards the working classes; and I, therefore, look forward with much interest to know how it will deal with a matter affecting a population larger than that of Canada, four times as large as that of Victoria, and ten times as large as that of Cape Colony, for which we have been painfully elaborating a constitution replete with all the latest notions of political justice and civil equality. There is one method of dealing with it to which resort has already been had more than once, which is sure to be recommended in the course of this debate, but to which it is earnestly to be hoped that the House will refuse a favourable hearing, and that is, by redistribution of seats, to gather our whole town population within the limits of Parliamentary boroughs. It is a remedy which has already been carried much too far; but to carry it further would be to expose the nation to positive peril. It is bad to draw a hard-and-fast line between districts where political power rests with the masses, and districts where it rests with the upper and middle classes; but it would be much worse if that line exactly represented the boundary of town and country. In the long run, the countries in which government is least stable are those where the idea has become rooted that

the public opinion of the nation rests exclusively in the great cities. Any one who has carefully watched the political difficulties in neighbouring countries will know that there are weighty objections against turning men into voters by means of a wholesale creation of boroughs. A much safer remedy lies in the pages of this Bill. But hon. members will no doubt answer that, though they are willing to enfranchise the urban population of the United Kingdom, they shrink from opening a door which would let in the entire body of agricultural labourers. Now, sir, that is an objection which will come with a tolerable good grace from this side of the House, but of which, I am sure, we shall hear nothing from the other. There are, speaking broadly, two theories of local government in this country, both of which have had and are having the fairest of all trials; because at this very moment half the nation is living under the one and half under the other. In the rural districts justice is administered by magistrates in whose nomination the community has no voice, direct or indirect. County finance is managed by an *ex officio* Board in England and an *ad valorem* Board in Scotland.* Education is in the hands of benevolent and zealous men, who are under no responsibility, except to the central government. In the towns the representatives of the people have the absolute control of finance and administration; the representatives of the people, under the Privy Council, are entrusted with the care of elementary instruction; and it is not too much to say that the community at large has an indirect means of expressing a preference in the choice of some at least among their magistrates. It is this latter system which finds favour with the party to which I have the honour to belong, and from time to time we endeavour to introduce certain features of it into the government of the rural districts, an attempt which is resisted by the other great party in the State, whose members maintain that the existing state of things is the best suited of the two to the circumstances of our rural population, which under it continues to be prosperous, moral, and contented. But, sir, hon. gentlemen opposite have granted the franchise to the householder of the towns, who is living under a system which I will not say they disapprove, but which, at any rate, they do not regard with any special predilection. I am therefore justified in taking it for granted that they will with greater satisfaction, and a stronger sense of public security, give the franchise to the rural householder, who has existed for centuries under the influence of a system of which they are the admirers and defenders. But on our side of the House there is a good deal of uneasiness as to the results of admitting the peasantry into the electoral ranks. Now I hope to be able to show hon. gentlemen that there is no sufficient foundation for this feeling. To begin with, a very

* In Scotland, the management of the county finances lies with the Commissioners of Supply, whose qualification consists in the ownership of landed property above a certain value.

considerable proportion of the new electors will not be peasants at all but will be townspeople to all intents and purposes, of exactly the same class and character as the present borough electors. And however high our opinion may be of those borough electors, it would be the basest and most culpable flattery to our own constituents to pretend that our northern counties the labourers who till the soil are less enlightened than the labourers who work in the factories. The exclusion of the Northumberland labourer from the pale of citizenship on the ground of personal unfitness is a standing practical libel. In solid material comfort the Northumberland hind need envy no operative in any part of the world. As to his interest in public affairs, read the daily newspapers which you find in every cottage, and see what sort of intellectual and political nourishment he is accustomed to. Compare them with the farrago of murders and divorce cases which make up the *Weekly Budget*—that which goes by the name of news in some of our southern towns—and then say why the habitual reader of such trash is more able to give a reason for the political faith that is in him than a shepherd or drover who takes in the *Daily Newcastle Chronicle* and the *Weekly Scotsman*. The hon. member for South Norfolk (Mr. Clare Read) and other hon. gentlemen are bringing in a Bill for extending the principle of the Factory Acts to the agricultural districts. I honour them for it; but as far as Northumberland is concerned, their labours are superfluous, for the Northumbrian parent is a factory law to himself. There, employers and employed alike tacitly agree that no child shall be set to work before the age of ten. And the Northumbrian gives a fair indication of his fitness for his having a voice in the affairs of the country by the common sense which he shows in the management of his own. A recent complete re-arrangement of the labour question in a large part of the county not only proves that the objects aimed at by the men were of a far more solid and honourable nature than the grasping of more money to spend in the public-house, but that the negotiation was carried through successfully with the perfect goodwill of the farmers themselves. And, as in Northumberland, so it is, with slight variations, in Cumberland, Durham, and the other northern counties. In Yorkshire, the physical comfort of the labourer in the rural districts is fully equal to that of the South country artisan; and Yorkshire alone contains more than one-tenth of the population which this Bill proposes to enfranchise. After reading the report of Mr. Portman, the agricultural sub-commissioner, on the state of education in Yorkshire, I was interested in observing the answer made by one of the members for a division of the West Riding to a question put to him at a public meeting. A constituent asked why a householder who lived in the country was not as fit to vote as a householder who lived in town; and the hon. member, with great discretion, said that he objected to having the question put in that shape. But that is the shape in which Yorkshiremen, and Northumbrians, and people in other counties too, are beginning

to put it, and some answer will have to be found. And that answer must be a better one and more founded on justice and the facts of the case than that, in giving the franchise to Northumberland and Durham, we shall at the same time be under the necessity of giving it to Dorsetshire and Wilts for, so far from the extension of household suffrage to Dorsetshire and Wiltshire being an evil and a danger, there are weighty reasons which may be adduced to prove that it is a good in itself—good for Parliament, good for the State, best of all for the interests of the agricultural labourer. It would be good for Parliament, because, as matters stand at present, there is a permanent danger of our rendering ourselves liable to the most serious charge that can be brought against a representative body—a want of knowledge of the people whom it professes to represent. Let me refer for a moment to the movement among the agricultural labourers which began about a twelve-month back. On the very eve of the commencement of that movement there was no mention in this House of the existence of any general discontent in the rural districts. You may read our journals during the first part of last Session without finding any symptom whatever that within a few weeks every tongue and pen would be employed in discussing the grievances of the agricultural labourer. If so general and spontaneous a movement was brewing among the artisans of the towns, we may be sure that we should not be left to learn about it from the newspapers. It is not that Parliament has a less kindly feeling towards the country than towards the town population—I am inclined to think it is rather the other way—but whenever you give the vote to any class of men, you constitute their Parliamentary representative into an unpaid commissioner for inquiring into their wishes, their opinions, and their condition; and, as we refuse the vote to the agricultural population, we must try to get at those wishes through the medium of a paid Commission, which is the same thing as saying that, except in a superficial manner, we shall not get at them at all. But such little as we are able to ascertain respecting the real sentiments of the classes who have no vote, proves to us how seriously they are misunderstood. If there is one statement more than another which has been dinned into our ears, in season and out of season, it is that compulsory education cannot be applied universally, because the cottagers are averse to sending their children to school when they might be at work. But that statement, so disheartening to all who have the interest of the country at heart, is expressly contradicted by the Bishop of Manchester, when sub-commissioner, who tells us officially that it is the almost unanimous opinion of the labouring men that continuous school attendance up to the age of twelve or thirteen would be no detriment to a boy with a view to his future career as a farm labourer. We have been told that in the West country labourers like to be paid part—I am sorry to say a very large part—of their wages in cider. On the other hand, one of the first resolutions passed by Labour Unions in country districts is that no part of a man's wages shall be paid

in spirituous liquor.* Nor need there necessarily be anything incompatible between the two statements. A man is often a higher being in the exercise of a public function than as an individual ; and the same poor fellow who will drink away his wife's and children's bread in selfish gratification, if you give him the franchise will only be too glad of the opportunity of rising above himself, and will send to Parliament a member pledged to remove from him the temptation of the Cider Truck. There are indications which prove to hon. gentlemen that we may safely give the franchise not only to such places as Barnsley, and Keighley, and Croydon, and Luton, and Wallsend, and Accrington ; not only to such counties as Cumberland and Cheshire,

* The continued existence of the Cider Truck affords a remarkable instance of the extent to which the interests of the agricultural labourer are neglected by Parliament. While Truck has been abolished wherever the town artisan is concerned, absolutely nothing has been done to check the most deleterious, the most oppressive, the most indefensible of all forms of Truck—the payment of wages to the agricultural labourer in the shape of spirituous liquor ; and that not only at harvest time, but all the year round. When we consider the consequences to the man himself of having a large daily allowance of strong drink poured down his throat—when we reflect on the privation which such a system inflicts upon his family—we must allow that the Cider Truck is a machinery for the week-day preaching of self-indulgence, selfishness, and debauchery, more effective than anything which the clergyman can do to counteract its influence from the pulpit on a Sunday. All the well-known objections against the Truck system apply with ten-fold force to the Cider Truck. One objection was that the men used to exchange the shop goods, or the tickets which represented the shop goods, for drink. In the case of the Cider Truck they are paid in the drink itself. It was objected against the Truck system that the Truck prices always remained the same, however much the market prices might vary. But the market price of cider varies more than that of any commodity in common use. Sometimes the labourer is receiving 10 per cent. of his earnings in cider ; sometimes 20 per cent. He has been known even to receive 50 per cent, when cider was at a shilling a gallon. Were cider as harmless as water, what folly and waste would this imply ! A man of the upper classes, who spent half his income on his cellar, would end in the lunatic asylum, as surely as the labourer who is in that position is destined to the workhouse. Such defence as may be made for the ordinary Truck system does not apply to the Cider Truck. The Truck Commission reported that, in days when locomotion was difficult, and facilities for obtaining the necessaries of life were less common than at present, “the period was when Truck was a blessing.” But there never was a period (and there never will be) when it was a blessing that a father and husband should be forced to spend in drink for himself the money which should go in food, blankets, and schooling for his household. There is no hope that this evil will be removed as long as the voters in the rural districts are almost exclusively the farmers, who think, most erroneously, that they profit by the Cider Truck. We are told that household suffrage would not mend matters, because the labourer likes to be paid in drink. It is fortunate that we have the strongest evidence to the contrary. At meetings of Labour Unions in the rural districts, the resolution which meets with the most ready and universal assent, next to that in favour of household suffrage, is almost invariably a resolution protesting against the payment of wages in spirituous liquors.

where wages are good and education high ; but that even in what may be called the depressed districts of England there would be a great deal more to be learned than to be feared from the new voters. And the qualities in which they are deficient the possession of the franchise will give them, for there is no such potent instrument of education, whether we look to its direct or its indirect influence. The experience of all countries is that public instruction follows fast on the heels of the suffrage. In Canada, the first consequence of the institution of universal suffrage was universal and obligatory education. And the impulse which the extension of the vote gives to popular education does not confine itself to the passing of a single law. In countries where the popular element is supreme, the richer and more influential part of the community have the strongest motives to see that the people are fit to govern themselves ; and the consequence is that for many years past those classes across the Atlantic have been devoting themselves to this task with a persistency and an energy of which we had no idea till the year 1867 had come and gone, and till the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Lowe) told us that it was high time to see about educating our masters. It is therefore in the character of educationists, as well as in that of politicians, that we may press forward this Bill ; and, in fact, still more so, for I feel far more certain of the effect the household suffrage will produce on the education of the people than upon the composition of this House. We do not know on which side of the House members returned under the new system will sit ; but we do know the representatives would continue to be chosen from much the same class which provides them at present. If this Bill becomes law, the representatives for the counties will be the same men, but they will be actuated by new ideas and new motives, for they will have the strongest of all incentives to ascertain and express the feelings of great masses of men who at this moment have absolutely no constitutional method whatever for making known their wishes and their grievances. Some hon. friends of mine have urged me to postpone the Bill until we see the effect of the ballot upon the existing county constituencies. They point to the recent elections in Scotland, to the increasing boldness of the resolutions passed by farmers, clubs and Chambers of Agriculture, and prophesy that, if we let the leaven work, within ten years we shall have fifty tenant farmers sitting on these benches ; but that by bringing forward this measure on our side of the House, we frighten and alienate the farmers, who consider their interests as opposed to those of the labourers. But, sir, so far from the interests of the farmers and labourers being opposed, I believe that Mr. Cobden never uttered a truer word than when he said that the welfare of the tenantry and the labourers is identical, and that the former can never be prosperous where the last is degraded. And, sir, if it was indeed the case that the interests of the two classes are opposite and their feelings hostile, then the fact that the farmers were beginning to choose class representatives for the

purpose of pushing their own views, would be a contingency which would lay upon us a moral obligation of passing this Bill without the delay of a single Session. Representative government is a rough-and-ready method of doing justice all round by providing all contending interests with a fair field and no favour; and the more we extend its limits, the harder it is for those who are excluded from the competition. I do not wish to renew the debate of last Session, and to show how—with regard to the three great classes of measures which are devised for the benefit of those who look for their comfort to legislative enactments to an extent which the rich find it hard to realise—the country is already, on average, a generation behind the town. The Truck Acts, the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Acts, and the Acts for preserving the children of the poor from premature and excessive labour, have not even arrived at the dignity of being a dead letter in the rural districts. They do not even profess to apply there. No one can deny that in some parts of rural England there exists misery, pauperism, and vice, disgraceful to the country and the century; and if we can have the advantage of hearing those who suffer speak for themselves through the mouth of their representatives; if, by the magic power of the suffrage, the labourer of the country can attract to his sad condition some part of the interest that has hitherto been lavished almost exclusively on the workmen of the towns, I, for one, would gladly purchase that result by the sacrifice of not a few votes in a party division in this House. And now, sir before sitting down, I will answer a question, which has frequently been put to me, as to the number of householders who will probably, or approximately, be enfranchised by the clause. There are nearly 2,500,000 inhabited houses in the counties of England and Wales, at the rate of one in five of the population. There are nearly 1,850,000 inhabited houses in boroughs, at the rate of one to six of the population. The 1,850,000 houses in the boroughs provide about 1,200,000 electors who vote as householders, or about 65 per cent. on the houses, and in the same ratio the householding voters in the counties would amount to 1,625,000. But there are already 800,000 county electors on the register who have to be deducted from this number, with the exception of those residing within the boundaries of boroughs, who amount to about one in ten of the number. Deducting, then, the householders in counties who already possess votes, we arrive at the conclusion that this Bill would increase the constituency in round numbers by 900,000 names. These are large figures, but in matters relating to the franchise we have become accustomed to deal with large figures. We have learned by a happy experience to look, not at the number of the electors, but at the character of the representatives whom they elect; and we rely on the authority of the right hon. member for Buckinghamshire (Mr. Disraeli), who, speaking with just pride of his own work, tells us that members of Parliament are not worse citizens, and not more reckless legislators than they were, when one

elector voted for them where three vote now. And now, sir, I shall stand no longer in the way of a discussion which cannot fail to command great and general interest. Last year my hon. friend the member for East Devon (Sir John Kennaway) upbraided me with having started a subject which would be an obstacle in the way of more pressing questions already ripe for legislation. Sir, you might as well propound the theory that by increasing the horse-power of a factory you would diminish its production. Anyone who compares the legislative out-turn of the last four Sessions with the four years, aye, and the twenty years that preceded them, will, whatever his opinion may be as to the nature and the need of that legislation, allow that the time we spent over the Reform Bills of 1867 and 1868 has borne fruit many times over in the magnitude of our undertakings. The hon. friend to whom I refer has put his name to a Bill for regulating the employment of children in agriculture. That Bill is very good as far as it goes; but if he came here speaking in the name, not of 10,000 farmers and freeholders, but of 20,000 householders, I am confident that he would be asking us to give him direct instead of indirect compulsion, enforced by an effective, and not a feeble and uncertain, machinery. Whether the consideration of this question is, or is not, to delay public business for years is a matter which the House has in its own hands. It is impossible to saddle any individual with the responsibility of a measure which the nature of things is rapidly and irresistibly bringing to the front. We draw a distinction almost unknown in any constitutional country, or in our own colonies, between the inhabitants of the towns and the inhabitants of rural England. We brand our village population as if they were political pagans, just as their class were accounted religious pagans, in the days of the Roman Empire. At a time when we must soon be debating questions nearly concerning their welfare, bodily, intellectual, and religious, we cut ourselves off from all acquaintance with their own opinions as to their own affairs, except such as comes to us filtered through the medium of the speeches and resolutions of self-elected politicians, responsible to no colleagues and to no constituency; and all this we do, not because there is any reason for it in logic, in justice, or in common sense, but because it was so ruled by the wisdom of our ancestors—that is to say, because 400 years ago one of the worst Parliaments that ever sat in this country robbed the county inhabitants of their votes on the ground that—to use the very words of the Act—“being people of small substance and no value, they pretended a voice equivalent with the most worthy knights and esquires.” There is a story told of Napoleon, who, in the park at Fontainebleau, noticed a sentry walking to and fro in the middle of a grass plot. On inquiry he ascertained that in the time of Louis XIV. some young trees had been planted there, and a soldier was placed to keep off the cows. The plantation had grown up, and withered, and all traces of it had disappeared, but the sentry walked there still; and so we keep up a difference between the

town and county franchise, because in 1429 a Parliament of Henry VI. was afraid of our rural population. That fear has altogether passed away. What danger is there for us in giving the franchise to the householders? They are the heads of families, the industrious stationary population of the country. We are accustomed to assert that the mass of our people are loyal to the Queen, tender of the rights of property, attached to the institutions under which they have the happiness to live. Well, then, by voting for the Bill we shall prove that we believe what we say. By voting against it, we shall show that we use this language from the teeth outwards. In the hope that I have said nothing to damage a cause with regard to which my desire is that the day may come quickly for me to deliver it over to more potent and responsible hands, I beg to commit the Bill to the earnest consideration of the House.

Later on in the debate, the Right Hon. W. E. Forster, then a member of the Cabinet, spoke in favour of the Bill, and read a letter from Mr. Gladstone, who announced that, in his opinion, the extension of household franchise to the counties was a measure just and politic, in itself, which could not long be postponed. On this occasion the Bill was talked out.

On the 13th May, 1874, Mr. TREVELYAN re-introduced his Bill into the new Parliament. Mr. Disraeli, speaking on behalf of the Government, opposed the Bill, and it was defeated by 287 votes to 173.

On the 7th July, of the ensuing year, Mr. TREVELYAN brought forward the Bill once more, and spoke as follows:—

Sir, on all previous occasions when I have had the honour of introducing this question to the notice of the House, it has been with doubt and diffidence, and my remarks have been couched in the language of apology. As far as that diffidence is personal, it is still as strong as ever. I was never more painfully and sincerely impressed with my own inadequacy to undertake so weighty a task, and to champion a cause fraught with such numerous and momentous interests. But my feeling of distrust stops there. I may not be the proper person to bring in this Bill, and I shall not quarrel with any hon. gentleman who says so, but the events of this Session within this House, and still more, other events to which I shall presently make reference, which have occurred outside it, have

endered it a matter of pressing necessity that someone or other, the most eminent amongst us if we can get him, but even the most insignificant if no other can be found, should without further delay call upon his brother members to proclaim that confidence in the mass of their fellow countrymen, confidence in the theory of self-government, confidence in tendencies which have actuated our legislation over the period now of nearly half a century, sentiments which, though discouraged and depressed, are not dead within these walls, but which, as I trust the division of this afternoon will prove, are entertained by the immense majority of a party that is still true to those popular principles and sympathies without which it cannot continue to be respected in the present, and assuredly need never hope to be powerful in the future. Sir, the grievance which this Bill is intended to remove is one which exists in no country but our own, and which even here has existed in its present aggravated form for a period of only seven years. The Reform Bill of 1832 brought to an end a system which hardly deserved the name of a representative system at all, and set up both in boroughs and counties an excellent and effective machinery of middle-class representation. I am well aware that before 1867 there was a difference of opinion as to the proportion of working men in the old borough constituencies, as those of us who were in the Parliament of 1866 have only too good reason to remember. But although during some weeks of that Session a fresh return was laid every day on our breakfast tables, analysing the voters of every borough in the kingdom, and classifying and tabulating them under every conceivable head and every imaginable category, still the result always came out the same in the end, and it was quite evident that previously to 1867 the working class were outvoted in all the counties and in 90 per cent. of the boroughs. The Bill introduced by the right hon. gentleman now at the head of the Government, as far as the urban population was concerned, put an end to this state of things at once and for ever. From the day that Bill became law, every man in every one of our boroughs who had the industry and the self-command to pay his way, and keep a house over the head of himself and his family, became entitled to a share in the government of his country. But, while the legislation of 1867 gave the town householders what some will call a boon and others a right, it gave the county householder nothing but what everyone will acknowledge to be a grievous and intolerable wrong. For, having enfranchised every man who was fortunate enough to occupy a residence within the boundaries of a Parliamentary borough, it dealt with all who resided outside those boundaries by the simple and summary process of ignoring their claims, of leaving them in the lurch, of announcing by a silence more expressive than the language of the most eloquent preamble and the most accurately worded clause, that the county householder was unfit for the privilege and unequal to the responsibilities of a citizen. To the inequalities of class which had existed hitherto, it now added the new and not less invidious inequality of locality. The multitude of our country

men who suffer under this inequality is very great. According to a calculation which I had the honour of laying before the House in the year 1873, and which the Prime Minister did me the still greater honour of adopting for his own in 1874, they number upwards of 900,000 in England and Wales alone. If their grievance was any other than exactly what it is—that is to say, if, possessing a vote, they suffered under any injustice one-half as great as exclusion from the pale of citizenship, I will venture to say that were the Session never so late, or the notice-book never so full, not one month, not one week would elapse before they would have a pledge and a promise of redress in the shape of a measure laid before the House by the Prime Minister himself; and because these men, instead of being voters are only suppliants, instead of being our constituents are only our countrymen, are we so deaf to justice that year after year we are to refuse them rights, which if they did not eagerly desire to possess, we should hardly deem them worthy of the name of Englishmen at all; and are we to add a sting to our refusal by not even taking the trouble to base that refusal on any show of argument or pretence of reason? For the most remarkable feature in this controversy, ever since it has been a controversy, is, that not only has no argument been offered against the principle of this measure, but that its opponents themselves admit that no such argument exists. No one has been found to maintain that a Scotch shepherd would make a worse voter than a Scotch weaver, that a man who spins wool at Barnsley would make a worse voter than a man who spins it at Bradford, or that a man who digs iron in Cleveland would make a worse voter than a man who puddles iron in Middlesborough. Everybody allows that the county householder may be turned into an elector with advantage to himself, and, to say the least, without any danger to high national interests. And having made this capital admission, having conceded what is the root and substance of the whole matter, hon. gentlemen who dislike the Bill are forced to resort to incidental objections which I cannot but venture to describe as irrelevant, though I fully admit them to be ingenious. The objection which is always first brought to the front is this, that it is impossible to approach the question of the county franchise unless we are prepared entirely to recast the distribution of seats throughout the kingdom. The representatives of the smaller boroughs warn their electors that the passing of this Bill will inevitably lead to their extinction as a separate and self-contained constituency; and the right hon. gentleman at the head of the Government has summed up these fears and these warnings in a proclamation in which he informs the country that the extension of the county franchise will bring about the disfranchisement of all boroughs under 40,000 inhabitants. Sir, a House which has in the course of this very Session been told that it is to sit till it has passed all the Government Bills, and has since witnessed that alarming announcement softened down by successive degrees until it has ceased to be too much for the nerves even of the most timid members, may be supposed to

view with tolerable complacency any bugbear which the right hon. gentleman may think fit to hold up for its contemplation. How much his threats are worth we may judge by comparing what the right hon. gentleman said when he was an irresponsible candidate at the last general election, with what he did as a responsible Minister of the Crown. In 1874 he tells the Buckinghamshire electors, and through them the country at large, that you cannot make the county and the burgh franchises identical without disfranchising all towns under 40,000 inhabitants—that is to say, without destroying by one and the same operation 217 seats. But in 1859 he himself introduced a Reform Bill, of which the leading principle was that the borough and county occupation franchises were to be made exactly identical, and the amount of disfranchisement which he thought necessary in order to effect this object was limited to this, that he proposed to deprive fifteen boroughs of their second members, and to transfer eight of these members to large counties and seven to large towns. But, sir, those boroughs have actually been for the most part deprived of their second members by the Act of 1870, and those large counties and large towns by that same Act received their additional seats. All that the right hon. gentleman thought it necessary to do, in order to enable himself to make the franchises identical, has been already done, and therefore I am justified by the strictest law of logic in claiming the right hon. gentleman as an authority in support of the doctrine that in order to lower the county franchise to the level of the boroughs, so far from its being necessary to make a root and branch redistribution of seats, it is right, proper, and sufficient to make absolutely no redistribution at all. But there is another objection, which comes from our own side of the House, to which I must for a moment refer. Some hon. friends of mine—would it be breaking the seal of private intimacy if I go so far as to say some right hon. friends?—are apprehensive lest, by pushing this question too warmly, we should give the present Ministry an excuse for re-arranging the representation of the country on a plan favourable to their interests and unfavourable to ours. A Conservative Government, so the train of thought runs, will catch only too eagerly at the opportunity of making a redistribution of seats in a Conservative sense. Sir, my political experience has not been so protracted as that of my right hon. friends, but I have observed enough to make me certain that it is not by any arrangement of electoral districts that one Government can be brought in or another driven from office. In 1867 the present Prime Minister had a very great, though, from the circumstances of the then Parliament, not an overwhelming influence over the local re-arrangement of our representation. Boundaries were altered, towns enfranchised, Universities endowed with members, often in strict accordance with, and seldom in direct opposition to, his wishes; and the very first use the country made of this electoral machinery, which he had himself re-arranged, was to place him in a minority of a hundred votes. Five years passed, and that very same electoral body sent him again into

power with a majority at his back, which, whatever may be its nominal strength, is, I will venture to say, for practical purposes not very much smaller than the majority which turned him out. And the cause was that in the course of those five years, during which we lived, perhaps, somewhat faster than usual, a change which some of us regret, and which some of us welcomed, came over the mind and the inclinations of the people. The last two general elections teach us a lesson which every one but a professional electioneering agent will gladly learn, for they prove that even if he wished it, (which the right hon. gentleman did not), no Minister can manipulate or jerrymander a great country into expressing his will at the polling booth, instead of expressing its own. Last year my hon. friend the member for Stafford (Mr. Salt) contrived to find an argument against this Bill in the different results of the elections of 1868 and 1874. He asked me which of these opposite and inconsistent results I recognised as the voice of an enfranchised and therefore an enlightened people. My answer to him is short and simple. I recognise them both, because from their very diversity they prove that the nation thinks and judges for itself. He must not imagine that we shall accept it as an objection to this measure if he can show that it will not necessarily lead to Liberal triumphs. We have no taste for triumphs which are won by keeping out of the pale of citizenship many hundred thousands of our fellow-countrymen, who, I will make bold to say, are as fit to be within that pale as the average of those who are there already. It is an error to suppose that the poor man, if he be honest and respectable, has a smaller stake in his country than the rich. So far from that, he has in one sense a larger stake dependent upon the wise administration of our national affairs. If, owing to bad fiscal or commercial laws trade becomes unduly depressed, the merchant diminishes his ventures, and the stockholder diminishes his expenditure; but the working man has to drain his account at the savings bank, and may end by having his roof sold from over him and his bed from under him. If a country is invaded and its industries ruined—if a series of revolutions disturb that permanent order and tranquillity under which alone prosperity can exist—the rich man who has foresight can secure to himself at least the means of life by investing part of his possessions in foreign countries. In 1832 it is said that certain great peers, who apprehended that the £10 franchise would bring with it anarchy and confiscation, made themselves safe by buying largely into French stocks. But the poor man must stand and fall with the fortunes of the territory on whose soil he lives, and he has the most stringent reasons for watching and checking a foolish course of foreign policy which may bring about an unnecessary and therefore a dangerous war, or in guarding against a foolish course of home policy, which may bring about disaffections, sedition, and disturbance. There is no political caution like the caution of the French peasant, and no political conservatism more healthy and rational than the conservatism of the small rural voter in the more favoured of the Swiss cantons. And again, the class of

persons who would be admitted by this Bill have other reasons to make them earnest and careful voters, for they depend to a degree the rich cannot realise upon legislative enactments for almost everything that makes their lives worth having. All the Factory Acts and Truck Acts and Adulteration Acts and Education Acts that are in the statute book of the last ten years (and there probably never was a period so fruitful in that class of legislation) have had no perceptible effect upon the well-being of the upper classes. There is not one of us who, in consequence of all that multitude of laws, will ever eat a meal the more or work an hour the less, whose home will be healthier, whose food will be more wholesome, and who will see round his table children with rosier faces and with more disciplined and enlightened minds. But it is not so with the working people. To them a good law means happiness, health, and moral elevation, and to be excluded from the operation of such a law means discomfort, degradation, and disease. And it is not in human nature, it certainly is not in political human nature, that these men who are without their share of the suffrage should obtain their share of the laws. Your doors are besieged, Session after Session, by manufacturers and landowners and shipowners and farmers and shopkeepers and officers, military and naval, and clerks and clergymen and artisans,—all of them clamorous for justice or what they think to be justice,—all of them armed with a vote, and therefore, if neglected in the present, only too certain to make themselves disagreeable in the future. When these armies of powerful claimants are making such encroachments upon your limited time, and your energy which is not inexhaustible, how can you spare any adequate attention to the modest demands of poor unenfranchised people who come before you provided with no more formidable weapon than the humble language of an unread, and possibly even a not unrolled, petition? The Session, sir, which is now drawing to a close affords ample proof that, in a representative government, the more you extend the representation, the classes which still remain excluded from the suffrage go only the more hopelessly and the more rapidly to the wall. Of all the Bills which our labours of this year have turned into Acts, there is none about which members of both political parties will speak with more pride and satisfaction in the course of next autumn and winter than the Artisans' Dwellings Bill. That Bill provided the means of destroying and rebuilding, according to the laws of health and decency, dwellings that were manifestly unfit for human habitation. Sir, the county districts contain at least as many such dwellings as the towns, unless the report of the famous Agricultural Commission of 1867 is from its first page to its last an elaborate libel and fabrication. One Assistant Commissioner,* who now sits on the Opposition benches in the House of Commons, tells us that in a certain great

* The Hon Mr. Edward Stanhope, now Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade.

county the cottages must be described as generally bad ; and, when we consider that the county in question contains in its rural districts 150,000 inhabitants, I leave hon. gentlemen to imagine for themselves what an amount of misery and barbarism is implied in the few words of that simple statement. Another Commissioner who sits in the House of Lords as a bishop,* speaks of the cottages in the less prosperous parts of England as miserable, deplorable, detestable, a disgrace to a Christian community, deficient in accommodation, deficient in drainage and sanitary arrangements, bad to begin with, and long ago dilapidated and out of any pretence to repair. Relying on such facts as these, my hon. friend the member for Newcastle (Mr. Joseph Cowen) proposed in committee on the Artisans' Dwellings Bill to extend the operation of the Bill to all sanitary districts as defined by the Act of 1872, so as to include in the blessings which Parliament was showering upon the great cities some few portions, at any rate, of our country districts. He was told by the Government that as regarded small towns the Act of 1868 would effect all that was required ; but that suggestion is no consolation and no assistance to the neglected cottagers of country districts, because, as hon. gentlemen are well aware, the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Act of 1868 is confined to towns over 10,000 inhabitants. My hon. friend went to a division, and carried into the lobby with him not one single Scotch or English county member. Sir, if a county member, instead of representing three thousand well-to-do electors, living in airy, water-tight, well-drained houses, represented, as I maintain he ought to represent, ten thousand electors, of whom half were housed in the manner described by the Bishop of Manchester and the hon. member for Mid-Lincolnshire, what do you think would under those circumstances have been the number of my hon. friend's supporters, and how many years more would cottages in rural England continue to be a disgrace to a Christian community? And again at a somewhat earlier period of the Session, my hon. friend the member for Hackney moved a resolution to the effect that it was undesirable that a less amount of school attendance should be secured to children employed in agriculture than to children employed in other branches of industry. In the course of his speech—in my opinion one of the most weighty and thoughtful speeches to which this Parliament has had the privilege of listening—he asked why children in towns should not be sent to work before the age of ten, while children in the country may be turned from babies into labourers at the age of eight. He asked why children in towns should continue their education up to the age of thirteen, and under certain circumstances up to the age of fourteen, while the education of children in the country may stop at the age of eleven, and under certain circumstances at ten and a quarter. Those were the questions which he asked, and what answer did he get?

* The Bishop of Manchester.

He was outvoted, by a very large majority, chiefly composed of county members; whereas not a twelvemonth before, when the Government brought in a Factory Bill for the purpose of extending the school hours of children in the towns, the members for the boroughs rallied in support in such numbers that the lobby was hardly large enough to contain them. Where must we look for the key to such a strange diversity of view between the members for counties and the members for towns, except in the fact that borough members represent the parents of the children whose fate is at stake, while county members represent, not the parents, but only the employers? How much longer is this state of things to continue? For how many more Sessions are we to go on debating labour laws without consulting those who are to be bound by them; debating education laws without consulting those who are to benefit by them; discussing army questions without hearing what is thought by the men whose sons fill the half of our battalions; discussing Church questions without a word from the men whose families make the great majority of our congregations? See the position in which these people are placed. They pay the taxes which they never voted; they keep the laws which they have had no hand in making; they do the country's work; they bear the country's burdens; they fight the country's battles. They are Englishmen in all respects and for every purpose except during the progress of a general election. Then, at the very moment when a citizen's privilege is best worth possessing, they fall from the rank of citizens to the level of aliens. They see men who have only a nominal and fictitious connection with their neighbourhood flocking up by special trains from every quarter of the compass to vote in those booths from which they themselves are ruthlessly excluded, and then hurrying off in order to be in time to swamp, by means of faggot and plural suffrages, the real public opinion of some other unhappy locality. They, meanwhile—the native, the genuine, the resident inhabitants—stand in the market-place, waiting patiently and helplessly to hear who are to be their members during the next seven years; and, forsooth, they are told to be content because their interests are sufficiently represented by the farmers, the landlords, and the freeholders. But the very essence of the theory of representation is that the represented shall be able to call the representatives to account; and how is it possible for non-electors to influence electors,—to criticise, to encourage, to remonstrate with them on the manner in which they exercise the suffrage,—when, under a system of secret voting, no one can tell on which side that suffrage was given? The Ballot Act of 1872 cut away the very ground from beneath the feet of those who relied upon the already worn-out theory of vicarious representation; and, if any shred of that theory still hung together, it would have been finally disposed of by certain events which have taken place since this measure was last discussed in Parliament. The notion that the agricultural labourers are sufficiently represented by the farmers cannot hold water in the face of what has occurred in Cambridgeshire and in West

Suffolk. It cannot have escaped the notice—it may possibly have begun to fade from the memory of hon. members—that a long contest between the Labour Unions and the farmers recently took place in the Eastern counties. Both parties in the struggle were possessed by an earnest and impassioned, though, as I believe, a mistaken conviction that their interests were directly opposed the one to the other. All the incidents which usually mark a contest between employers and employed took place here. There were speeches, processions, subscriptions, handbills, meetings, and manifestoes. The public at large was appealed to through the local and the London papers, and it will be remembered that the case of the farmers was powerfully stated by a gentleman of high standing in the legal profession. The struggle came to an end, and very shortly afterwards a vacancy occurred in the representation of Cambridgeshire. A Conservative candidate was put forward who commanded the support of a large majority of the landowners in the county; but, though he was an irreproachable candidate, whom we have known for years in this House as a respected colleague, the farmers would have none of him. They resolved to take so excellent an opportunity of proving their gratitude to the legal gentleman who had acted as their champion; they rallied round him almost to a man; they sent him to Parliament, and no one here holds his seat by a more honourable tenure, because his constituents, be they few or be they many, have at any rate proved that they have a mind of their own. But, sir, what is the relation of that hon. and learned gentleman to the non-electors of Cambridgeshire? The better he represents the farmers, who regard the Labour Unions as a nuisance which must be put down at all sacrifices and who think a certain lockout in the present a lesser evil than a possible strike in the future, the worse he represents the agricultural labourers, who look upon the power of combination as a right, and a right which in the long run may prove a valuable guarantee for their prosperity and independence. And, again, in the recent election for West Suffolk, a gentleman whose chances had at first seemed not unfavourable, was beaten out of the field as soon as it began to be put about that he was what was called “Arch’s candidate;”—that is to say, that he was willing to give a respectful consideration to the claims and wishes of the non-electors. It is a very serious reflection that, in order to have a hope of sitting as representative of a county, a candidate is under the necessity of carefully concealing the fact that he has any sympathies or opinions in common with the vast majority of the inhabitants who live within its borders. And, as with the agricultural labourer, so it is with other numerous and powerful sections of our people. Take the miners of Durham and Northumberland. They are in the most extraordinary position of any population in the civilised world. They have a voice in choosing the guardians of their poor; they have a voice in choosing the members of the body which looks after their highways; they vote for the School Board which superintends the education of their children; they vote

for the Board of Health which dispenses the enormous taxation which modern sanitary requirements are supposed to demand ; they exercise all these high trusts, and they exercise them well and wisely ; but when it is a question of electing a member of Parliament, they have no more part or power in the matter than the horses which drag the coals along the tramways of their mines. These men, who take an interest in general politics quite as keen as in the affairs of their own locality, have already begun to see this anomaly clearly and to protest against it vigorously. And while they feel acutely the contrast between their own position as municipal electors and political non-electors, they feel still more acutely the contrast between themselves and those of their own class who live within the boundaries of Parliamentary boroughs. From all our great northern seats of industry there run in every direction almost interminable suburbs, covering whole tracts of country with communities which are towns in all but in name. Thousands upon thousands of acres in South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire team with a vast population, which is not rural but urban in its habits of life, in its occupations, in its interests, in its ways of thought, in everything except in the possession of the ratepaying household suffrage. That population, large as it is, is growing with almost portentous rapidity. At every successive Reform Bill we turn many hundreds of thousands of these people into voters by the creation of new boroughs, but their rate of increase keeps far ahead of our puny efforts. In this Island at any rate, whatever might be possible to an Oriental despot, you cannot draw an arbitrary line between town and country. You cannot confine commerce and manufacture within the imaginary limits of a Parliamentary borough. Still less can you stand upon the boundaries of such a borough, and say to the veins of iron and the seams of coal beneath your feet, "Thus far shalt thou go and no further." You may arrange your political districts as you will, but wherever the metal or the fuel is to be found, the miners' cottages will spring up by scores and hundreds. Wherever a convenient stream runs, the wool weavers and the cotton spinners will swarm along its banks. And while this great unenfranchised multitude, nominally of country folk, but in reality of townsmen, already equal to the population of many an ancient and famous European State, is growing daily in numbers, it is growing likewise in its appetite for political power and its aptitude for political life. When any of those social questions to which our Wednesdays are devoted is approaching discussion in this House, there is no class of our people from whom petitions come more thickly, and among whom public meetings are more frequently held and more numerous attended, than the non-electors of such places as Barnsley and Barrow and Croydon and Heywood and Accrington. You have there, whether you like it or not, a vast latent force of opinion and energy, ay, and of passion too, which, according as we decide to-day, will be powerful for good or most formidable for evil. It lies with you to say whether that force, the strength of which no man would deny,

is to be employed in adding authority to the debates of the House and vigour to its legislation, or whether it is to be allowed to waste itself in desultory efforts until the day when some clever, unscrupulous agitator shall arise, who shall divert, to the peril and disadvantage of the State, those elements which, if properly directed, might so largely contribute to its welfare and security. The strange prosperity which we have enjoyed of late years cannot last for ever. Bad trade must come—unless recent symptoms are singularly deceptive, it is coming already. The Continent is in a state in which, from month's end to month's end, war is something more than a possibility—and that no ordinary war, for it will be complicated by cross issues, social and religious, for a parallel to which we must go far back into the annals of history. When the time of trial arrives, as sooner or later arrive it must, it would add not a little to our national strength if that great section of our population for whose benefit this Bill has been placed upon the table, shall not, as now, be reduced to follow any irresponsible, self-appointed leader who may choose to place himself at their head, but shall look for guidance to representatives elected by themselves, and sent to Westminster to speak for them after the old constitutional fashion—representatives who, unless all previous experience is falsified, will not be one whit inferior in character, in position, or in ability, to the gentlemen whom I now see around me. And, in conclusion, I may perhaps be allowed to address myself for one moment to the members of my own party and entreat them not to take counsel of any petty considerations of Parliamentary strategy and electioneering expediency, but to ask themselves the plain question, whether this Bill is in accordance with Liberal principles, or whether it is not. Whatever hon. gentlemen opposite decide to do, it undoubtedly concerns the good fame of us who sit on these benches that we should not wait till this question is forced on our acceptance by pressure from without, but that now when our fortunes are at their very lowest, now in this our day of disaster, depression, and defeat, we should, acting from broad views of justice and national advantage, freely and unreservedly cast in our lot with the excluded and neglected householder of the counties.

On this occasion the Bill was rejected by 268 votes to 166.

On the 30th May, 1876, Mr. TREVELYAN laid before the House of Commons the following Resolutions:—

I. "That in the opinion of this House, it would be desirable to adopt an uniform Parliamentary franchise for burgh and county constituencies."

2. "That it would be desirable so to redistribute political power as to obtain a more complete representation of the opinion of the electoral body."

MR. TREVELYAN said : Sir, I hope that hon. members will allow me to express the feeling of hesitation with which I rise to call their attention to the subject of the Resolutions which are on the paper. Having been unavoidably and most reluctantly prevented from that daily and assiduous attendance on the proceedings of the House which alone can entitle any one, except members of the highest standing and reputation, to a favourable and attentive hearing, it is with unfeigned diffidence that I now appear as an advocate of a question of exceptional importance, and—as I think, and as many around me think—of exceptional urgency. I should never have ventured to put myself forward on this occasion except in obedience to numerous and urgent representations from my colleagues on these benches, and to the frequently and strongly expressed wishes of many who are outside these walls, and especially of those who on this point have, of all others, the best right to be consulted—that large class of our fellow-countrymen who by the unwisdom, or, as I am willing rather to believe, by the negligence of a previous Parliament, have been wrongfully excluded from any share whatever in the government of their native country. It is the opinion of these men that their case cannot wait, with justice to themselves or with advantage to the nation ; and I trust and hope that such will to-night be the opinion of no slender or uninfluential portion of the House. The unrepresented householders of the counties have long believed that no business on which the House has been engaged—I will almost say that no business on which the House can be engaged—is of sufficient moment to stand in the way of the consideration of their immense grievance, and the redress of their intolerable wrong. And there has been nothing in the events of this Session to alter their belief. What must have been the feelings of these men as they followed the course of the debates which this year have occupied the attention of the House, and watched us day after day, and week after week, disputing with apparently inexhaustible zest over a measure which in its very name and designation, claims to be nothing more than the selection of an empty title ? Is it not, they ask, an anomaly that Parliament should consume so much time and energy over an alteration in the verbal style by which we are to describe an august personage whose effective power and influence in the Constitution the one party does not propose in the least to augment, or the other party in the least to diminish ; while we turn a deaf ear to that great multitude who ask us to change for the better, not their political title, but their political status ; to rescue them from the humiliating position in which they now stand, possessing, as they do, the name, but unendowed with the rights of Englishmen ? I

suppose that we shall be told that we should not recall the attention of a House of Commons to a question upon which, by a large majority, that House of Commons has already decided; but that is a charge which we shall have no difficulty in meeting. It has always been the wise custom of the British Parliament, in contradistinction to other national assemblies, to give free opportunity to private members to introduce Bills and Resolutions, and to initiate debates. And though this custom has sometimes led to a waste of public time, it has brought about one most beneficial result. Whenever any large section of the nation have set their minds upon an object which Parliament does not feel itself justified in granting, at any rate those who have that object at heart feel that they have had the means of fully ventilating their grievance. They have had their say. They have not been condemned unheard. Above all, they have had set before them those reasons and grounds on which Parliament, acting in the general interests of the community, thinks itself bound to refuse their particular request. But that is not the case here. Whenever the householders of the counties have come to us to ask for their political rights—and this now is the fifth time—they have met with a treatment which has a superficial appearance of being courteous and respectful, but with which we should indeed be sanguine if we expect them to be satisfied. As soon as ever their claims are mentioned, there at once arises from every corner of the House a chorus of eulogy. From the front benches, from the back benches, from below the gangways, from behind the table, we hear nothing but high praises of their virtues as men, and their excellence as citizens; and the only point at which we are at issue among ourselves appears to be, that while gentlemen on this side of the House are content with asserting that the rural labourer is as fit for the franchise as the town artisan, gentlemen opposite will insist upon it that he is a great deal fitter. But when the moment comes to put these brave words to the proof, and when the House is cleared for a division, then those advocates and representatives of the agricultural labourer who sit under the gallery to listen to our debates go forth with the praises of themselves and their clients ringing in their ears, and return at the end of twenty minutes to learn with astonishment that these rural householders of whom we are all so proud—these models of industry, and loyalty, and patriotism, and frugality—these Cincinnatuses of the pasture and the plough, have by a majority of 70, 80, or 120 votes been adjudged unworthy of a privilege which every peasant in France has enjoyed for a generation, and every male inhabitant of the United States has enjoyed for a century. We have, then, no resource except to persevere until the House thinks fit to decide their case upon its merits, and either to confer the franchise upon the householders of the counties, or give them an intelligible explanation of the grounds upon which their title to the franchise cannot be recognised. In a matter that concerns three-fifths of the population of the United Kingdom, it is certain that sooner or later they must

get what they want, or must be told plainly why they cannot have it. Hitherto the only semblance of argument with which the claims of the unrepresented county ratepayers have been met has consisted in the assertion that an extension of household suffrage into the rural districts must be accompanied by a sweeping redistribution of seats. This argument has been employed frequently by the right hon. gentleman at the head of the Government; and whenever he has employed it within these walls, I have endeavoured to show that, when used by the right hon. gentleman, it is not a very alarming argument. As leader of the House of Commons, the right hon. gentleman himself introduced a Reform Bill, which provided for assimilating the county and the borough franchises; and the amount of redistribution which he thought sufficient to accompany this change consisted in the shifting of fifteen seats from small burghs to large counties and populous towns. He, at any rate, who, in 1859, was willing to effect the identification of the burgh and county franchises at such a very small sacrifice of existing interests, has no right whatever to frighten us, who, in 1876, wish to carry out the same object, by this bugbear of a wholesale, an unprecedented, an almost revolutionary up-turning of our entire electoral system. But this argument, which, as I have clearly shown, goes for very little in the mouth of the right hon. gentleman, has been used by others in whose mouths it goes for a great deal and has hitherto exercised a very considerable influence in diminishing the numbers of the minority who have supported the Bill which I on three different occasions had the honour of introducing. It has been said, and said by statesmen whose zeal in the cause of justice and of progress has been proved by a consistent public career—for that assertion may confidently be made in the case both of the right hon. gentleman the member for Greenwich (Mr. Gladstone) and the noble Marquis the member for the Radnor District of Burghs (Lord Hartington)—that in proposing to reduce the county franchise we have only touched half the question; that we are bound to say plainly out what we think about redistribution, and not to call upon hon. gentlemen to vote in the dark for a proposition whose certain and inevitable consequences we ourselves are not prepared to face. Sir, as a general rule, none but a very simple-minded politician would adopt the course of action recommended to him by an opponent; but the noble Marquis is in our eyes not an opponent, but a leader, whose name, we confidently expect, will soon be connected with this measure, which an ever-increasing majority of his followers regard as a measure demanded alike by considerations of national equity and of national expediency. And therefore it is that this old matter is now brought forward in a new shape, and, for the first time since the notion of household suffrage in the counties was seriously started, the question of electoral reform has been submitted to Parliament as a whole. Of course, I am very well aware that, as the debate proceeds, a new set of objections will crop up to meet the new contingency. Those hon. gentlemen who in 1872 voted against the principle of

household suffrage because it was asserted in an abstract Resolution, and who, in subsequent years, voted against it because it was embodied in a single-barrelled Bill, now will have the pleasure of voting against it as an abstract Resolution again. But these subtle and delicate considerations will not have much effect upon the conduct of those who, having already recorded their votes against the continued exclusion of their fellow-countrymen from the pale of citizenship, are now ready to support that protest, even when it is coupled with a declaration that the existing distribution of political power among our constituencies might easily be altered for the better. We are not so passionately enamoured of the inequalities and anomalies of an electoral system which, even after it has been twice altered, first by our fathers and then by ourselves, is still by far the most inequitable and the most anomalous electoral system that anywhere exists. So glaring and so universal are its defects, that it is difficult to say in which quarter of the United Kingdom they are the most apparent. In England, 800,000 electors, in the twenty-six largest cities, return between them seventy-three members; while exactly the same number of members are returned by 70,000 electors scattered over fifty-five little towns, or villages which are called towns only by courtesy. In Ireland, 35,000 electors, in Dublin and Belfast, return only four members; while 22,000 electors in other Irish towns return as many as thirty-three members. In Wales, the vote of an elector who happens to reside in Merthyr Tydvil has only one-tenth of the weight of the vote of an elector who happens to reside in Brecon. In Scotland, the vote of an elector who lives in Glasgow has only one-eighth of the weight of the vote of an elector who lives in New Galloway. We have taken nationalities as a whole. Let us take a single county. In Yorkshire, 3,200 electors in Richmond, Thirsk, Northallerton, and Knaresborough return actually twice as many members as the 32,000 electors of Sheffield; while Keighley, and Barnsley, and Batley, and Todmorden—towns whose population is equal to that of half-a-dozen pocket constituencies, and whose wealth is equal to that of a dozen and a-half—are not thought worthy to appear in the rank of Parliamentary boroughs at all. We have taken a single county. Let us take two counties and compare them together. There are ten times as many people in Middlesex as in Wiltshire; but, instead of returning only one-tenth as many members, Wiltshire returns fifteen members to the nineteen of Middlesex. There are ten times as many people in the West Riding as in Dorsetshire; but the members for the West Riding, instead of being as ten to one to the members for Dorsetshire, are little more than two to one. Anyone who is familiar with the talk of our lobbies knows that many gentlemen shrink from an extension of the county franchise because they are under the impression that the redistribution of seats which would follow upon such a measure would take the direction of diminishing the political power of the towns, and increasing the political power of rural, and, as they think, less intelligent and progressive districts. But an exami-

nation of our existing electoral arrangements will soon convince those hon. gentlemen that they may spare their fears. The most ingenious manipulator of statistics is welcome to spend his ingenuity on our Parliamentary returns as long and as often as he will, for, however he may turn and torture the figures that he will find in those returns, he can arrive at only one result. Wherever there is a district which, taking the county and burgh seats together, is over-represented by the number of members that it returns to Parliament, it will invariably be the case that such a district is one where, by comparison with other parts of this favoured island, trade is not the most active, education is not the most advanced, wages are not the highest, and capital is not increasing with an exceptional rapidity. On the other hand, whenever a district is greatly under-represented in proportion to its population, in such a district every symptom of commercial prosperity and social and intellectual progress will be found. Let me call the attention of hon. gentlemen to one single item of calculation which, by itself, should be sufficient to re-assure those who apprehend that a fresh redistribution scheme will be to the disadvantage of the intelligence and independence of our great national constituency. A re-arrangement of political power, strictly based upon population, will considerably more than double the number of members now allotted to Middlesex, to Surrey, to Lancashire, and to the West Riding of Yorkshire. Where will you match that list? Not in any quarter of the civilised world is now, or ever has been, collected together so much industry, knowledge, and enterprise, or so much material wealth—the natural fruit of those qualities—as in the four districts which I have named. Continental countries have regarded with admiration many of our institutions, and have imitated them with eagerness, and sometimes with success. They are not very likely to imitate a system under which political power is distributed among the different sections of a nation exactly in inverse proportion to the share which those sections contribute towards making that nation prosperous at home and powerful abroad. What would a German statesman think of a proposal to give to the vote of a Pole or East Prussian four times the weight that he would give to the vote of a citizen of Cologne, and ten times the weight that he would give to the vote of a citizen of Berlin? What would an Italian say to the notion of favouring Calabria and Sicily in the proportion of five to one as compared with Lombardy and Piedmont, or a Spaniard to the notion that the most scantily represented places in the Peninsula should be Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Valencia, and Cadiz? No, sir, my motive in bringing forward the second of those two resolutions, and of coupling it with that which precedes it, is to afford hon. members an opportunity of proclaiming that they will not be deterred from extending civic rights to the excluded population of our counties, merely because the consequence of that extension may be that we shall be under the obligation of giving to Manchester and Liverpool, to Leeds and Glasgow, to Southwark and Westminster, to the

wool districts of Yorkshire, the cotton districts of Lancashire, and the mining districts of Durham, something better than the mere shadow of representation with which they now are mocked; and that we shall not be frightened out of one act of justice because circumstances are such that it must necessarily be accompanied by another. And now, sir, having secured the ground in our rear, by assuring those whose general sympathies are with us that we are prepared to treat electoral reform as a whole, and deal with it as it should be dealt with by responsible public men, we may with renewed confidence face once more to the front, and challenge hon. gentlemen opposite to bring forward a single valid argument which may convince those who ask for admission to the franchise, that their claim, if it cannot be granted, has at the least been thoughtfully and respectfully considered. One argument which has some appearance of validity, and one only, has hitherto reached my ears. It is said that if we insist upon conferring the franchise on those who have not got it already, we shall give them something which has no tangible and material value, and which they are therefore just as well without. This argument has something about it so invidious—I had almost said so repulsive—that it is usually enveloped in a cloud of phrases which may render it a little less unattractive to an English ear. The shape in which it is usually put forward is something of this sort,—we are told that the House of Commons is a practical assembly, full of common-sense men, whose time is so taken up with useful matter-of-fact legislation that it has not the leisure to attend to a grievance which is not so much one of reality as of sentiment. Sir, it is for those who suffer under a grievance to define its nature, and not for those who obstinately refuse to redress it. It is all very well for us to be contented with the relations which at present exist between Parliament and the country. We have quite as much business as we can do. We have quite as many constituents as we want. We are, most of us, conscious that we are earnestly and laboriously striving to do our duty by the great body of our countrymen, and we honestly believe that we know quite as much about the feelings and opinions of the outside public as is required to guide our deliberations. But, sir, we must remember that this is not the first Parliament that has taken too favourable a view of the extent to which it represents the country. No one can study the debates which preceded the passing of the great Reform Bill without being persuaded that many of those who opposed Reform were sincerely convinced that the members for the old rotten burghs thoroughly understood the interests and the wishes of the great unrepresented cities. No one can study the Reform debates of 1866 and 1867 without perceiving that there were many hon. gentlemen who were sincerely convinced that the representatives of the £10 householders thoroughly understood the interests and the wishes of the unenfranchised mass of the town population. The illusion was honourable; but none the less was it an illusion; and I will venture to say that there are many burgh members in this House who will

willingly confess that household suffrage has had an unexpected influence on their political conduct, and to a most unlooked-for extent has added to their political knowledge. And if we are obliged to make this confession, and to couple it with the natural and inevitable deduction that, if household suffrage were extended to the counties, we should learn a great deal that we did not know before, what do we think must be the aspect of the situation to those who view it by the light of a great wrong inflicted upon themselves? who, standing outside the fence of political privilege, are doomed to hear their dearest interests discussed in an assembly in which they have neither part nor parcel, and their condition in this world, social, moral, and material, settled for them without their once having the opportunity of expressing their own wishes in the matter? Why, what are the questions of this Session, and what portion of our population do they especially affect? Among the first measures which were submitted to us from the Treasury bench was a Bill relating to the preservation of commons. Now, sir, for one piece of waste land which is valuable as a recreation ground of a neighbouring town or city, there are twenty which are important to the agricultural labourer, as a playground for his children and a pasture for his scanty live stock. And yet, in discussing the Commons Preservation Bill, we hear everything that has to be said by the representatives of those whom it concerns but little; while those whom it concerns most have absolutely no representatives at all. The most important matter which we shall have to decide this year is the extension throughout the country of some form or another of obligatory education, and the process by which, and the authorities by whom, the obligation is to be enforced. But already the immense majority of our town population lives under a system of compulsory education. That problem, broadly speaking, is already settled as regards the towns; it is for the rural districts that we are now proceeding to legislate, and in the rural districts not one in 100 of those whom our educational legislation will touch has the means, directly or indirectly, of making his voice audible within these walls. There is another matter which has not, indeed, been brought forward by the Government, but which has been debated so ably and so seriously, both here and in "another place," and has provoked such a large and evenly-balanced expression of Parliamentary opinion, that it cannot fairly be denied a rank among the questions of the day. The law under which burials are to be conducted in our churchyards is one which, however keenly it may be contested on the ground of abstract principles, as a practical matter concerns the smaller towns but little, and the larger towns not at all, but which gains its material importance from its bearing upon the sentiments of our rural population, and it is precisely those sentiments at which we can do nothing more than guess so long as the country householders are unrepresented here. And as it is in the present, so it has been in the past. Every succeeding Session places on the statute book a fresh crop of laws—well-meant, indeed, and often well-

devised—which regulate the lives of our rural population, but on the scope and the details of which their opinion is never so much as asked for. One year, by our system of short enlistment, we entirely altered the conditions of our military service, without consulting the class from whom the recruiting agent draws the largest part, and the best part, of our rank and file. Another year we dealt, for good or for evil, with the licensing system of the country, without consulting the class from whom the village publican draws his customers or his victims. Sanitary laws are passed for the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases, which entail on the agricultural labourer trouble, and worry, and expense, but to the framing of which he has just as little to say as the cattle have to say to the circulars on the foot and mouth disease which the Privy Council may judge fit to issue. Game laws, enclosure laws, vaccination laws, poor laws, registration laws—from the cradle to the grave, the rural householder lives under the dominion of enactments which are passed for him, and not by him, and in which, freeman as he is called, he has no part except to obey them. Surely it is high time that Parliament, recognising those disadvantages in his position which I have feebly and briefly endeavoured to indicate, should, by giving its adhesion to these resolutions, hold forth to him at least a pledge that, at the first convenient opportunity, he shall be raised to the same political level as the peasantry of France, of Germany, of Switzerland, of the United States—of every nation, in short, which can for a moment compete with his own in the race of enlightenment and civilisation. Sir, it has been said that there is no demand for this measure; but I shall leave that allegation to be answered by those hon. gentlemen who were present at the meeting at Exeter Hall on Wednesday last, and at the conference which preceded it. Never, I will venture to say, has there been a demonstration in favour of any public object which, in one sense, so merited the respectful notice of the Legislature; for never perhaps before was so large a body of men collected together at such cost and inconvenience to themselves. When we remember how slender are the finances of a cottager in a rural village, even when they have been eked out by the sixpences and shillings of the neighbours of his class whom he has been chosen to represent, I think we shall allow that this assemblage of agricultural labourers, who have travelled at their own charges from Dorsetshire, Cheshire, and Lincolnshire, deserves at least as much consideration as those troops of well-to-do gentlemen in broad cloth who flock up to London for public business on the eve of the Derby Day. It is a very hard thing that we should force these poor men to leave their work, which is not overpaid to that degree as to give them much margin for political leisure, in order that, Session after Session, and Parliament after Parliament, they may hang about our lobbies and haunt our galleries, pressing us to grant them a demand the intrinsic justice of which none of us disputes. The peasantry of this country have not the time or the taste for being members of these

annual deputations. Their object is to have a permanent deputation, which may watch their interests and speak their mind at Westminster, in the old constitutional shape of county members, whom they have had their share in sending to Parliament. That is what they want. That is what they have a right to get; and I am sure that, whoever may think fit to refuse them this boon on the ground that there is no call for it, such a response will never be heard from the members of that great party whose historical policy it has been to anticipate the demands of justice, and to grant, in obedience to reason and equity, concessions which must sooner or later be yielded to political expediency and political pressure. On the 4th of March, in the year 1790, it was proposed to amend the representation by a scheme, the essential part of which consisted in extending the franchise to the resident householders of the counties; and on that occasion Mr. Fox pronounced that "he thought the outline of the present proposition the best of all which he had yet heard suggested." Such, nearly three generations ago, was the view of that great statesman, the father of modern English Liberalism; and we, on this side of the House, may feel confident that, by assenting to the resolutions before us, we shall be faithful to the interests of our country, and true to the traditions of our party.

These Resolutions were seconded by Sir CHARLES DILKE. On a division, the first Resolution was lost by 264 votes to 165, and the second Resolution was withdrawn.

On the 16th May, 1877, a Conference of delegates from all parts of England was held in Exeter Hall, London. The Right Hon. John Bright, who took the chair, pronounced that there had been, to his mind, no more remarkable public meeting or conference held in his time. The opinion of one who was so eminently qualified to form a judgment was fully justified by the composition of the meeting. More than thirty members of Parliament were on the platform, and the audience included upwards of 2,500 representatives of the unenfranchised county householders from every quarter of England. Mr. Bright's most eloquent and powerful address has already been reprinted by the National Agricultural Labourers' Union. The first Resolution called for the extension of household suffrage to the counties. In support of this Resolution, Mr. TREVELYAN spoke as follows:—

Gentlemen, it is surely in the fitness of things that this great and representative gathering, to which in coming years men will look back as the turning point in the course of a momentous controversy, should be presided over by one who, as long as England has a history, will be remembered as the statesman who best knew how to obtain public reforms by the legitimate employment of popular influences. And, sir, I hope I may be permitted respectfully to congratulate you that you have to-day the opportunity of enjoying what, I am sure, in your eyes must be the most valued reward of your lifelong and, in some sense, unparalleled labours—that of lending the reputation and authority which those labours have earned for you to a cause which is not unworthy to rank with those famous and now historical causes with which your honoured name will for ever be connected. Not your Parliamentary Reform campaign of 1858 and 1859; not your four years' protest against an alliance with the slavery party in the then dis-United States; not your unceasing contests against religious privilege, extravagant expenditure, and unnecessary war; hardly even that struggle for the establishment of the principles of Free Trade which, with Mr. Cobden at your side, you fought out on the platforms of a hundred market towns and manufacturing cities, would surpass in national importance the object which has collected under this roof, from every quarter of the island, between two and three thousand men, every one of whom is the recognised and deputed agent of several hundreds of his neighbours and fellow-workmen. The time, the energy, and the money which have been spent in organising this demonstration are as great as in time of war would suffice to turn the fate of a decisive battle on the field; but that time and money will have been well laid out if the proceedings of this afternoon bring home to the world at large the fact which has long been familiar to all here present—that the householders of our counties are not unworthy of a citizen's privilege, and are not indifferent to the injustice and inconsistency of a Parliamentary majority which turns a deaf ear to their petition for enfranchisement. The members of that majority last Thursday night, when it was mentioned in the House of Commons that 2,000 and more of our working population, at the sacrifice of a day's or even two days' wages, and of the expenses of their double journey (no light matter in these hard times), were coming up to town from every county in the kingdom to ask for their political rights, thought it becoming to receive the announcement with a loud burst of contemptuous laughter. It would be well if those honourable gentlemen were here to study the composition of this assembly, which represents their respective counties much more fairly and completely than they represent them themselves. A knight of the shire in the House of Commons can claim to speak in the name of only two-fifths of our county householders. You speak in the name of the other three-fifths, and I venture to say, looking to the state of the political horizon that this time, at any rate, you will speak to some purpose. There are signs abroad, signs each minute in itself,

but which in their collective aspect are unmistakable, that the great party to which I have the honour to belong,—loyalty to which (I am not ashamed to confess it) is in my breast second only to loyalty to our common country,—is determined to seek for strength where strength alone can be found, in the bold and timely assertion of those principles on which our very right to exist as a party is founded. We are sick and weary of this talk about the distinction between the two wings of a party, which will always be an united and unanimous army when its leaders call upon it to storm one of the strongholds of political privilege. Nine out of ten of us are getting tired of the very appellations of Whig and Radical, and long for the day when we may all stand shoulder to shoulder in behalf of a cause which will rally in its support every Liberal who deserves the title. To trust the people; to welcome into the pale of citizenship all who are worthy of it, without regard to the effect which their admission may have upon the balance of parties; to do what is right for the sake of right; to think little of personal consequences and much of public principles—that is the policy by which the Liberal party has been great in the past; that is the policy which will make us respected in the present and powerful in the future. I care not how long we are out of office, I care little how small is our minority, as long as we are true to each other and to ourselves. Great objects are not obtained without great sacrifices, and we shall be content to sit a little longer on the cold side of the House of Commons, if only, when we come in, we bring in with us the householder of the counties. Who are you that you should be stigmatised with a mark of political inequality absolutely unknown in any other country in the world, since the days when the distinction between the serf and villein of the rural districts, and the free burgher of the towns, went out with the feudal institutions of the Middle Ages? Who are you that you should be excluded from rights which the people of France and Switzerland have employed for a generation, and the people of New England have enjoyed for more than 200 years? Are you enemies of order and religion, conspirators against established government, people imbued with wild and socialistic ideas? Or, on the other hand, are you ignorant and stupid, indifferent to the welfare of your country, willing to leave in the hands of others the care of your own social and political interests because you are too dull and lazy to understand and to manage them yourselves? Such questions may need an answer in the House of Commons, but they do not need it here. One great section of you (a much larger section than people are generally aware) live in great centres of industry like Keighley, and Accrington, and Luton, and Shipley, and Barrow-in-Furness. You are townsmen just as much as my constituents, or the constituents of any other borough member here. You attend lectures, you frequent reading-rooms, you subscribe to chapels, you have shares in co-operative stores; you vote for guardians, members of the School Board, Police Commissioners, members of a Local Board; but when

the time comes for exercising the most valued duty of a citizen, that of choosing a member who is to speak in your name in the assembly of the nation, your only share in the matter is to stand outside the door of the polling booth, and wonder who on earth the gentleman will be who, during the coming seven years, will have the honour of misrepresenting you. Another large class of you dwell in the suburbs of great cities; and because you have the good taste to prefer to live at a distance from your work, in a purer air, and because you have the foresight to save the money which enables you to indulge in that taste, you are deprived of the franchise which you possessed as long as you continued to live with your fellow-workmen in the smoke and dust of the city. Others of you come from the mining districts of Durham, Staffordshire, and Wales; and what sort of men our miners are is now known far and wide through a nation which, during a week of anxiety, awaited the news of what was going on in the valley of the Rhondda with an intensity of eagerness for which we should in vain seek for a precedent. I will not attempt to comment upon that story. Even the eloquence of your chairman could do little to enhance the valour, the constancy, the simple piety, the noble humanity of the rescuers and the rescued in that tale of peaceful heroism. But I will only say this, that unless popular government is altogether a delusion, there is no justification whatever for a law which prevents the miners of Pontypridd from taking their place among the self-governing classes. And half of you, I am told—and here we have a proof of the care and skill with which this demonstration has been organised, for the number of delegates from each class corresponds pretty exactly to the proportion in that class of unenfranchised householders—half of you belong to that body of men of various callings who are generally known by the title of agricultural labourers; that is to say, you belong to an order which has not only no direct, but has not even any indirect representation. It is an injustice that the artisan of Croydon or Barnsley should have no vote; but the artisan of Croydon and Barnsley is in some sort represented by the artisan of Southwark and Leeds. But who represents you? You depend, not on the self-interest, but on the charity of Parliament; and when beneficent laws are passed for the protection and elevation of the working classes, you too often are left out in the cold. Such Acts as Artisans' and Labourers' Dwelling Acts are for others, and not for you. The farmer may oblige you to take in beer and cider the money that you had far rather spend in meat, and milk, and clothes for your wife and children. The law which ordains that a dwelling unfit for habitation shall be pulled down and rebuilt at the expense of the owner is confined to towns over 10,000 inhabitants. The non-voter in the rural districts is left to the mercy of the proprietors of such horrible hovels as were described by the Bishop of Manchester, when he was a Government Commissioner, as a disgrace to a Christian country. And if you have much to gain from us by your admission to Parliament, we have very much to gain by

you. We want your opinion on the thousand and one questions which concern your interests and affect your sentiments. We want to know from those of you—and many there are—who belong to the Church of England, whether your feelings are so much shocked by hearing a party of Wesleyan Methodists singing and praying over the grave of a departed relative, that you are prepared to rate yourself to the tune of five shillings in the pound in order to provide cemeteries where, withdrawn from your observation, they may perform their unhallowed rites. We want to know from those of you who have sons in the navy, whether the use of the lash is regarded with approbation by well-conducted sailors, because at present we are under the impression that it is one of the attractive features of our service. We want to know whether you care to have a voice in managing the education of your children, or whether you are content that the taxes which you pay for the support of your public elementary schools should be expended for you by the nominees of the National Society. We want to know whether you desire to have a voice in the management of your local affairs, or whether you prefer to leave them in the hands of a board of irresponsible magistrates, who are the nominees of a nominee of the Government. We want to know what you think of a system of law under which an embarrassed or ruined landowner is practically unable to transfer his estate into hands which are capable of doing justice to the property, and to the people who live on it. We want your opinion on the game laws and the enclosure laws. We want your opinion—and as this is the last, so it is the gravest matter which I shall touch on—we want your opinion on the foreign policy of the country. The next few months, perhaps the next few weeks, will decide whether British soldiers are or are not to march to battle, but I hardly think to victory, shoulder to shoulder with the perpetrators of the Bulgarian outrages. It is a crying shame that you, whose sons form our battalions, whose shillings make up the richest contents of our exchequer, should have no part in pronouncing whether your money is to be squandered, and your blood shed, in fighting one, two, or three campaigns in the defence of the integrity and independence of as corrupt and irreclaimable a tyranny as ever afflicted humanity. If you had possessed votes at the time of the Buckinghamshire election in September last, that election would have given Lord Beaconsfield a warning which even he could not have ventured to neglect; and when once our Bill is passed, and when you have a share in the government of the country, we shall never again be treated to the extraordinary spectacle of a nation which prays for the maintenance of an honourable peace, saddled with a Prime Minister who is edging it forward to the brink of a disgraceful and a disastrous war.

On Friday, the 29th of June, 1877, Mr. TREVELYAN introduced his Resolutions in the following speech:—

I trust that no hon. gentleman will complain that the promoters of these Resolutions, unappalled by frequent defeats, once more ask Parliament to give public assent to propositions the justice of which no one in private even attempts to controvert. As long as a vast grievance, affecting more or less three-fifths of the population of the United Kingdom, remains undenied and unredressed, there will always be found those who will not be deterred by the fear of being thought tiresome and importunate from calling upon this House to make its annual confession that, in dealing with the claims of the county householder, it does not even profess to be guided by those considerations which influence its treatment of all other matters. Let hon. gentlemen observe the different position which this question holds from any other that comes before the House. When the Irish tenants apply to Parliament for a change in the land laws—when the temperance party applies for a change in the licensing laws—when a portion of the Irish people press for a revision of the constitutional relations of Great Britain and Ireland—however little hope they may have of gaining their point, at any rate they are sure that their case will be discussed on its merits. On such an occasion, sir, your only difficulty is to select one among the many gentlemen who start up in every quarter of the House ready to state the arguments against the measure in as convincing language as he can find at his command. The advocates of these measures are out-voted indeed, and out-voted often by a much larger majority than I hope to see against me to-night, but they go away with the feeling that, right or wrong, they have had their answer; they have been met like reasonable beings; and the cause which they have at heart has not been condemned unheard. But that is not the case with the householder of the counties. When he comes before the House, nothing can exceed the unanimity of the discussion. Our galleries are crowded with his friends; our benches are thickly studded with his admirers; speaker vies with speaker in praising his patriotism, his industry, his frugality, his common-sense; and then, after a debate which has been nothing but one long and unbroken panegyric of his civic qualities, comes a division, the result of which is to exclude him from all hope and prospect of obtaining his civic privilege. Until our arguments are confuted by something more persuasive than a silent vote of this House, it is idle to expect that he will sit down contented under a deprivation from rights which, if he had been a New Englander instead of an Old Englander, he and his ancestors would have already exercised for a couple of centuries. On all other evenings of the session the county householder stands before you as a helpless being, with whom you may do what you like; he comes here to be taxed, and rated, and assessed; to be enlisted in the army for a long term or a short term; to be buried with or without rites; to be educated with or without a conscience clause. But on this day of all the year, and on this day alone, he stands at our door, not indeed in the capacity, but with the claims, of a British citizen; and if those claims continue to

be asserted till you are weary of hearing them (for be assured that we shall not easily be ashamed of repeating them), the blame lies not with us, but with those hon. gentlemen who refuse to give us any other answer than by the very cheap and easy process of walking through one lobby instead of through the other. But though hon. gentlemen, by declining to answer our old arguments, have absolved us from the obligation of presenting new ones, we shall not avail ourselves of our privilege. Nor is there any need for it; for the nature of this question is such that every fresh Session of Parliament brings with it a whole crop of reasons in favour of the reform which we advocate. There is hardly a notice of motion placed upon our books, there is hardly a Bill laid upon our table, which does not sensibly affect that large portion of our population who, standing outside the pale of political privilege, see matters touching their nearest interests and their highest sentiments discussed without them, and arranged for them, in an assembly over whose deliberations they have no larger influence than if they were inhabitants of Kamtschatka. And what manner of men are these that we should not consult them on the questions of the day? Is the Church of England ratepayer in the rural districts so indifferent to religious matters that he is not to be asked whether he has or has not an objection to seeing burials conducted in the churchyards with rites other than his own? Is he so careless of his money that he is not to be asked whether, in order to settle the burial question in accordance with the views of the hon. and learned member for Cambridge (Mr. Marten), he is prepared to bear his share in the expense of providing the country with a new outfit of cemeteries? Are the Scotch county householders so ignorant and simple that they are to see the guardianship of their poor and the management of their highways rearranged for them, without their consent, by Bills which the Lord Advocate has introduced to the House—Bills which these unenfranchised Scotchmen read with an eagerness and attention which hon. members reserve only for the most sensational of the Blue-books—which many of them understand (and I am not paying the Lord Advocate an ill compliment in saying so) every whit as well as the hon. and learned gentleman himself? Why, it is this very Parliament which placed in the hands of Scotch shepherds and ploughmen the charge of electing the minister who is to be their spiritual guide and adviser. Are we so inconsistent that we are to refuse them a voice in choosing the member of Parliament who is to look after their mundane and material interests? When we were discussing the Navy Mutiny Bill, would it have been no advantage to us to have been told by the representatives of those classes from whom our ships are manned, whether the punishment of flogging is considered by the relatives of our seamen as an attractive or deterring feature in our service? When we come to discuss the most important War Office report on the localisation of our army, which has this Session been placed in our hands, would it not be to our advantage that we should know what is thought about the effect of the

proposed scheme upon our recruiting by the representatives of the class from which we fill our regiments? If we want to be informed whether local influences and associations will bring more young men into the army, it is not to farmers and shopkeepers we should go, but to these agricultural labourers who are the fathers and brothers of our rank and file. From the Valuation Bill of the Government to the Thrashing Machines Bill of the hon. member for Mid-Lincolnshire (Mr. Chaplin), there is no measure affecting our rural population with regard to which we should not be the wiser for knowing the wishes and feelings of those for whom we are undertaking to legislate. And while every year adds to the grievances of the unrepresented county householder, by bringing with it a new list of enactments as to which his advice and assent have not been asked, every year likewise adds, and adds largely, to the number of those who suffer from that grievance, and suffer from it under its most invidious form. It is worth the while of hon. members to notice what class of our people it is that is increasing with a rapidity that produces such remarkable results in each successive census. It is not to the rural districts that the growth of our population is due. Owing to the conditions of modern agriculture, and other circumstances into which it is now unnecessary to enter, our purely rural population, so far from increasing, is steadily diminishing. There were fewer farmers in 1871 than in 1851; there were many fewer shepherds and indoor farm servants. The class of agricultural labourers proper had fallen in twenty years from 908,000 to 764,000. The only persons employed in rural pursuits who have multiplied during the same period are huntsmen, gamekeepers and ratcatchers. Nor, again, does the increase in census proceed mainly from the people within the boundaries of Parliamentary boroughs. Those boundaries are for the most part sufficiently crowded already. Population follows manufacture, and manufacture requires elbow-room. Population accompanies the spread of mining operations, and veins of metal and beds of fuel are for the most part found in other places than beneath the soil of towns which happened to be summoned to send burgesses to the Parliament of Edward the Third or Henry the Sixth. Wherever coal, or lead, or slate, or iron exists in abundance—wherever wool factories spring up along the banks of some convenient stream—there may be seen streets of well-built houses, rows of thriving shops and stores, schools, lecture-rooms, reading-rooms, elegant churches, commodious chapels,—everything that constitutes a town, save and except the ratepaying household suffrage. Let any intelligent foreigner go to such a place as Barrow-in-Furness, and let him view those docks and quays which, if they belonged to Germany, or Austria, or Italy, would be regarded with pride as a national possession; those smelting works whose produce would provide a first-class European kingdom with material for its system of railroads and its ironclad fleet; those other extensive and valuable manufactures which supplement the leading

industry of the place : and when he has finished his inspection of the town, which is already justly recognised to be among the wonders of England, then let him be told that, of the seven or eight thousand heads of families whose enterprise and energy have made Barrow what it is, six out of every seven are excluded from those rights of citizenship which in the course of the next three months every Frenchman of mature age will be called upon to exercise. Why are the five-and-twenty thousand inhabitants of Heywood, and the five-and-twenty thousand inhabitants of Accrington, excluded from the right which townsmen enjoy elsewhere? What intelligible reason can you give for such exclusion? What reason, I mean, which would be intelligible to the inhabitants of Heywood and Accrington? Take the woollen districts. The chief seat of a very important branch of the woollen industry lies in a group of towns and villages situated upon the Tweed and its tributaries. Some among these communities have been constituted Parliamentary burghs, while others still remain part of the county ; but if you seek for a reason why the inhabitants of Walkerburn and Innerleithen should be deprived of the franchise which is enjoyed by the inhabitants of Hawick, Galashiels, and Selkirk, you certainly will not find it in the character of the population. The people of Walkerburn and Innerleithen earn the same wages as my constituents ; they read the same newspapers ; they are subject to the same local influences. They share the merits of my constituents ; and they would share their defects—if my constituents had any defects. Why, in the name of all that is just and reasonable, should they not share their political privileges? Let us come nearer home, and take the immediate neighbourhood of the Metropolis. If any hon. gentleman has a spare Saturday afternoon about this time of the year, he will find nothing within the compass of an hour's walk so pleasant as Clapham Common. If he takes the shortest route, over Chelsea Suspension Bridge, and by Battersea Park, he will pass through a region with quite a character of its own, and which well repays a visit. What once were Battersea Fields are now covered with thousands of healthy and roomy dwellings, inhabited by working men who have their business in the Metropolis. Part of this district is well and widely known as the Shaftesbury Park Estate, and hon. members may recollect how, when the Shaftesbury Park Estate was set on foot, the present Prime Minister, who is always ready to do a good-natured thing, went to Battersea to attend what he justly regarded as a most interesting ceremonial. That ceremonial has within the last week been renewed in the same locality under the same distinguished auspices. On both these occasions the inhabitants of the Victoria Buildings and the Shaftesbury Park Estate were told how grateful they ought to be for the blessings that were provided for them. They are congratulated upon the simple excellence of their architecture, on the breadth of their roads, on the frequency of their churches, on the paucity of their public-houses. But on one point silence was kept, in order, I suppose,

that nothing might destroy the harmony of the meeting. They were not told that, as a reward for their intelligence in appreciating a comfortable home, and for their thrift in having made themselves able to pay for it, they had forfeited the privilege of giving their vote for a member of Parliament—a privilege which was still possessed by their less frugal and provident comrades whose circumstances obliged them to continue living in the smoke and crowd of Southwark, of Finsbury, and of Lambeth. It is not in one part of the kingdom more than another that a large population is being accumulated outside the boundaries of Parliamentary boroughs. Look at the section on Wales in the preliminary report of the census of 1871. In Glamorganshire alone the increase in the population in ten years nearly reached the figure of 80,000, which in itself would make a respectable population for a Swiss Canton; and one of the four localities which are responsible for this enormous addition is the district of Pontypridd. Now, if on other grounds the people of that district have a claim to the franchise, I do not think that I need, during the current Session at any rate, consume the time of the House by arguing that on the score of personal character they are worthy of their political rights. The circumstances connected with the rescue of the imprisoned colliers in the valley of the Rhondda speak with a force which any words of mine could only serve to extenuate. If, as we have every reason to believe, these men, of whom we have heard so much, in their heroic courage and in their sincere and sterling religious feeling, are but a fair specimen of the miners of South Wales, if I were one of the members for Glamorganshire, I should be the first to vote for a measure which would endow me with such constituents. I have been at the more pains to lay before the House the case of the mining and manufacturing population which lies outside the boundaries of boroughs, because this question is generally argued as if it concerned no one but the agricultural labourer. If we take England and Wales as a whole, of the new voters whom this measure would enfranchise, it is probable, according to the best calculation that I can make, that not more than one-half will belong to the class of agricultural labourers. Be they many, however, or be they few, I come with great confidence before the House to ask for their enfranchisement, and for that confidence I have special and recent grounds. We have not often the pleasure of being unanimous with regard to a great social and political change; but in the course of the present Session one of those happy occasions befell when all the House was of a mind, and that was when the hon. member for East Norfolk proposed to hand over county business to a representative county board. It is a strong proof of the justice and reason of the principle on which the resolution which we are now discussing is founded, that when that principle is presented to hon. gentlemen under a new form, from a new quarter, severed from those associations of ancient political controversies which have, I cannot but think, a disturbing effect upon their judgment, it at once is seen to be so equitable and so unanswer-

able that hardly anyone can be found to speak, and no one to vote, against it. Hon. gentlemen who regard it as a matter of such moment to give to the ratepayer the management of his own local affairs that they actually invent and create a new representative body for the purpose, cannot much longer refuse him a voice in the management of the affairs of the nation in Parliament. Just see what the consequences of such a refusal will be. The representatives of the agricultural labourers will then, as now, be excluded from Parliament. But though they have no power of expressing their sentiments here, they will have a vent elsewhere. On the county boards will sit, in larger or smaller proportion, men who are the representatives of the labourers, who know their wishes, who sympathise with their opinions, and, if you will, with their prejudices. In a country which has the instinct of self-government, you cannot give men representation and then dictate to them the nature of the subjects which they are to discuss and the resolutions which they are to pass; and whenever the mass of our rural population have their minds set on any object, whether it comes within the legitimate scope of county business or whether it does not, you may be very sure that they will turn these county boards into so many little Parliaments, where they will give expression to that voice which is stifled at Westminster. And if these men insist on urging their grievance in season and out of season, we cannot justly blame them, for that grievance is curiously compounded out of all the elements which render wrong intolerable; for in the case of the unenfranchised householder, the practical injury from which he suffers is enhanced by an insult to which he is keenly sensible. He is not only unrepresented; he is misrepresented. The House of Commons, I am well aware, always prefers facts to assertions, so I will take a special case—the case of a county of small extent, but which on that very account, affords a clearer illustration of my meaning. Selkirkshire contains about 10,500 inhabitants, but most of these are collected within Parliamentary boroughs, and the entire roll of county electors, dead and alive, only reaches the figure of 272. Well, the past electioneering history of Selkirkshire is worth recording, but into that I will not enter. I will take the register as it stands, and will call the attention of the House to a single item. In the year 1870 a bit of land was bought, and was divided into seven little parcels, each surrounded by a wire fence, and each having two owners. All the fourteen lairds concurred with ominous unanimity in having one and the same tenant, for which they had very good reason, seeing that upon the land there was only one set of farm buildings. Now, let us turn to the register, and see who these fourteen gentlemen are. First come two gentlemen who reside at Lochearnhead. Lochearnhead is a pleasant place, but it is not in Selkirkshire, but in Perthshire. Then we have two Writers to the Signet, both resident in Edinburgh. The fourteen proprietors are, in exactly equal proportions, Writers to the Signet in Edinburgh and county gentlemen whose estates are situated in other counties. There you have an official and

authoritative description of these people who, joining in a conspiracy to commit an act which is not indeed opposed to the letter, but which is a violation of the spirit, of our Constitution, have by a single operation possessed themselves of more than 5 per cent. of the entire voting power of a county the inhabitants of which are not so ignorant of public affairs, or so indifferent to the welfare of the nation at large, that they require to have strangers brought in from a distance to speak in their name, and to usurp their undoubted rights. But the people of Selkirkshire have no special cause for complaint. They are in the same plight as the people of every county in the kingdom. As soon as the polling begins, from one end of the island to the other our railway carriages are stuffed with people, with free passes in their pockets, and cut and dried party notions in their heads, hurrying about from shire to shire to decide the political representation of localities they never visit from one general election to another. Meanwhile the native and genuine inhabitants of the locality—unable to vote—unable even to influence those who do vote—for these non-resident electors care no more for local wishes and interests than we care for the public opinion of Bohemia—patiently and passively look forward to the declaration of the poll, in order that they may enjoy their political privilege, that of knowing the name of the gentleman whom Providence and the faggot voters have allotted to them as their representative. It was not so once. Those who characterise the proposal now before the House as a democratic innovation must have studied history to very little purpose. It is worth our while on this point to appeal to the wisdom of our ancestors. The writs for county elections, as far back as the reigns of Edward I., and his successors, are addressed, not to any special class, but the whole community. The people who are directed to choose representatives are variously described as “freemen,” “the community of the counties,” “the honest men of the counties,”—a qualification which, as far as my experience goes, would exclude very few of the agricultural labourers. So it was in the good old times; but after the death of Henry V., power fell into the hands of a lawless clique of nobles headed by an unscrupulous ecclesiastic. Under the influence of this cabal—as bad a set of rulers as ever misgoverned a country—a statute was passed which ran thus: “Whereas the election of knights of the shires to come to the Parliaments of our Lord the King have now of late been made by a great and excessive number of people, of which the most part was people of small substance and of no value, whereof every one of them pretended a voice equivalent to the most worthy knights and esquires dwelling within the said counties, whereby manslaughter, riots, and batteries among gentlemen and other people of the same counties shall very likely arise and be”—therefore (the statute goes on to say) the right of voting shall be confined to people dwelling and resident in the said counties who have forty shillings a year in land, which, as hon. gentlemen are aware, is equivalent to at least forty pounds a year of our money. Now, I am not going to defend

Cardinal Beaufort and his accomplices for passing one of the most unjust laws that disgraces our statute book ; but at any rate they had two excuses which we have not. They were afraid of having riots and batteries, which certainly were frequent enough in the days of open elections, whereas our happy experience tells us that under the ballot contests are always conducted in peace and quiet ; and in the next place, as the terms of the preamble show, they confined the choice of representatives to knights and esquires resident in the county, while we permit the inhabitants of a district in the Lowlands of Scotland to be disfranchised for the benefit of a troop of Edinburgh lawyers and Highland proprietors who have no part or parcel in that district except a fictitious qualification. And if we come to more recent days, the wisest statesmen of our country—such men as the Duke of Richmond, Mr. Flood, Mr. Fox, Lord Shelburne, Lord Chatham, the precursors and progenitors of our modern Reformers—have looked for a remedy to the evils which from time to time afflicted the State in the restoration of county elections to the hands which formerly held them. In the year 1790, when the troubles on the Continent were beginning, some of these great men proposed to add to the House of Commons a hundred members, elected by the resident householders in every county. These proposals were combated by Mr. Windham, on the ground that the time was inopportune, and that men should not choose the hurricane season to repair their houses. That is an argument which I suppose will be repeated to-night by gentlemen who will point to the East of Europe, as Mr. Windham pointed to France, but it is an argument which those who advocate the extension of the franchise need not be afraid of meeting. It is in the time of peril and of difficulty—when it is of vital consequence that the public opinion of the country, if not united, should at any rate be unmistakable—that we feel more than at other times the inconvenience of a state of things under which two-fifths of the House of Commons only represent two-fifths of the people who ought to be their constituents. That is the answer to the argument, founded on a panegyric of the high qualities of the House of Commons, with which, the day before yesterday, my right hon. friend the Member for the University of London (Mr. Lowe) regaled the ears of the young patriots of Merchant Taylors School. We are very much obliged to the right hon. gentleman for all the civil things which he said of us. We hope and believe that we deserve them. But that does not alter the fact that, at a crisis when the eyes of Europe are fixed upon us, we cannot pretend that we speak in the name of the entire population of this kingdom. The jokes of the right hon. gentleman, good as they were, and his quotations from Milton, do not supply an answer to the people of our rural districts, when they complain that they have no voice in these questions of peace and war ; when they ask whether their part in the business is for ever to be confined to sending their sons to be shot, and giving their money to be squandered. No, this of all others is not the time when we, on this side of the House, should shrink from asserting

the doctrine on which the creed of our party is founded—the doctrine that taxation should be accompanied by representation, and that the extension of the franchise to all who are fit to exercise it is a strength, and not a weakness, to the Constitution. Hon. gentlemen opposite, when they were in a minority, never wearied of asserting their convictions, and fighting their battles, under every form of discouragement, with a consistency that won our respectful admiration. We, too, I confidently believe, have our share of that national courage and constancy which we recognised in them; and I trust that the division to-night, by a unanimous vote of these benches, will show that Liberal members under every turn of fortune are resolved on being true to Liberal principles.

The Resolutions were again seconded by Sir CHARLES DILKE, in a speech which concisely stated the anomalies of our present distribution of seats, and clearly indicated the remedy. The Resolutions were supported by Mr. STANSFELD, Lord EDMOND FITZMAURICE, Mr. Serjeant SPINKS (the Conservative Member for Oldham), Mr. MACDONALD, Mr. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN, Mr. O'DONNELL, and Mr. MUNDELLA. The Government announced its opposition to the measure. The discussion was closed by the Marquis of HARTINGTON, who gave the Resolutions his warm support. "I believe," said the noble lord, "that the country will have to decide at another election whether it will have another period of rest and repose, or whether it will prefer that action should be taken on the subject of these Resolutions; and I earnestly hope that the result of this, and of other debates which may be held in the House in the interval, will be to induce the country to take up the matter once more in earnest, so that without haste and without passion, but at the same time without hesitation and without timidity, this long-standing question may be settled on a basis which will hold out some prospect of permanence."

With these words the debate came to an end, and the House was cleared for a division. The numbers were:—

For the motion.....	220
Against it	276

The announcement of the numbers was received with loud and long cheering from the Opposition benches ; and Parliamentary Reform is now regarded as an object towards the accomplishment of which the efforts of the united Liberal party will henceforward be directed

Houses of the Oireachtas