

ESSENTIALS

OF

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

BY

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P R E F A C E.

THE extraordinary advance of the public mind, on the subject of Parliamentary Reform, within the last two or three years, is such as the most careless observer cannot overlook or dispute. Even the warmest friends of the existing system of representation are among the first to confess and to lament this ominous change; and those who recorded their disapprobation of the system, at a time when its deformities were less acknowledged, may congratulate themselves that their efforts, aided by recent events, have not been thrown away.

To any one who examines the signs of the times, there will appear a remarkable analogy between the present period and that which in France preceded the first French Revolution. The supreme power,—the source of all the painful restraints and burdens imposed upon society, has lost its hold on our moral feelings, and is becoming worn out and discredited. From ancient habit, and from the imperious necessity of one known standard of action, men still pay their taxes and obey the commands of the Legislature; and they have done so from the Revolution

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of 1688 to the last few years, without ever seriously asking themselves what title that Legislature possessed to their confidence. The mere name of Parliament has sufficed to strike them with awe: a body of English gentlemen, variable under certain conditions, and bearing the same denomination as those assemblies which fought the battles of the people against the Stuart princes, has always been and still is sitting at Westminster: and the mass of the people, as it commonly happens, have been slow to perceive that the relations of that assembly towards them are the very reverse of what they were in the seventeenth century. A partial community of interest between the House of Commons and the people, prior to 1688, was created, not by the mode of their election, but by common fear of the Crown: and so soon as the alliance—equally profitable to both parties—between the House of Commons and the Crown, was organized, the divorce of the former from the people was an immediate and inevitable result. But no glaring evidence of such a divorce appeared on the face of affairs: on the contrary, the attention of intelligent observers was called more to the improvement in the administration of the Crown, than to the deterioration in the character of the House. Nor can we wonder at the general inattention to this latter fact, when we recollect that the formalities of election remained unaltered:—that the great and wealthy, and all the talented dependents on greatness and wealth, had the strongest interest

in upholding the degenerated assembly, and in continuing to cry up the blessings of securities against the Crown, when the Crown, as a separate enemy, had ceased to be formidable: and farther, that the English Government during the last century was really both good and free, in comparison with even the best of those on the Continent.

During the last forty years two circumstances have been simultaneously operating to sharpen the insight of the English people into the real character of their Constitution—diffusion of knowledge, and increase of burdens. The number of those who read and talk politics has been prodigiously multiplied: newspapers, though their circulation is studiously restricted by a pernicious tax, are now numbered among the aliments of life by the population of every considerable town; and an extensive class of independent thinkers, unconnected with the leading strugglers for power, and refusing to be regimented either as Whig or Tory, has grown up all around. While political knowledge and feelings were monopolised by a small knot of gentlemen, the whole of their narrow circle, whatever might be their dissensions amongst themselves, had a separate and exclusive interest as against the whole community, and their debates were shaped accordingly. But the circle has now been so enlarged, as no longer to have any interest at variance with the whole community; and the tone of political discussion, instead of being purely personal and factious, has consisted, to a great

degree, of principle and philosophy, making their way by slow degrees against established corruptions and ancient prejudice. Whoever has watched the proceedings in Parliament during the last ten years, on the subject of Law Reform and Commercial Reform, must have seen ample evidence of this truth.

But, even if the intelligence of the English people had continued unexcited and stationary, it is scarcely possible that such taxation as ours could have been permanently endured without impairing their good will towards the Government which imposed it. The amount of money drawn from the nation and expended by the English Government, since the year 1793, is something which defies all power of conjecture, and which we can scarcely believe even when the Parliamentary returns are summed up before our eyes. No conqueror ever wrung from vanquished and despised aliens so severe a tribute as the English Aristocracy have extorted from their subjects and fellow-countrymen. During the war, men paid without murmuring, on the assurance that such exorbitant demands would only be temporary, and that peace would bring with it relief and abundance: during the first years of peace, promises of retrenchment in progress operated to appease their discontent; but when year after year passes, and the amount of taxation is still found most weighty and distressing, the sufferers become painfully disappointed and clamorous. Even the most patient and reverential men

begin to inquire into the system which bears upon them so heavily, and to look with an invidious eye on the receivers of the public money. They judge of the tree by its fruits; their painful sense of the effects is transferred to the cause. They listen with attention to criticisms on the Constitution, and a new light beams within them, when the character, the interest, and the working, of the House of Commons, as at present constructed, is made evident. Nothing short of impenetrable stupidity could make the English people continue to trust a House to which they owe such immoderate burdens, and from which* they have at length ceased to expect relief.

These two causes taken together—diffusion of knowledge, and unrelenting taxation—sufficiently explain the growing discredit of that system which passed current with the thinking men of the last century. Taken as it now stands in public opinion, the English Government seems approaching to the condition of the old despotism of France, prior to the Revolution of 1789. Its anomalies, its abuses, its want of system and coherence throughout, its immoral and corruptive effects upon the whole community—are becoming too palpable and revolting to make it suffice as an engine of taxation. The men of wit and eloquence, like Mr. Canning, who undertook to deck out all these hideous deformities—*arcem facere ex cloacá*,—have passed away, and few new orators venture to risk their reputation on the same dangerous ground. We may even congratulate

ourselves on possessing a Ministry, whose disapprobation of the existing system has been unequivocally proclaimed. At such a juncture, therefore, there is every reason to expect that the perilous consequences of keeping up the disgraced machinery will be duly appreciated, and that some attempts to amend it will no longer be postponed.

But whether such attempts will be sincere or deceptive—judicious or mistaken—comprehensive or superficial—is a point by no means equally certain. It is nevertheless of incalculable consequence. For, if the real defects of the existing representation are not accurately conceived—if the general principles, from whence alone these defects arise, are not laid bare and kept in mind—we run much risk of having some new delusion palmed upon us, equally objectionable in substance with the present, whereby misgovernment may be rendered, for another half century, decorous and endurable. The workings of the sinister interest may be reproduced under another name, and with a slight variation in the external forms, unless the public are taught to recognise and detect the seeds of evil in an untried scheme, before its bitter fruits shall have been actually tasted.

There is much reason to fear that the amendments contemplated by the Whig Ministry will be of this insufficient description—that they will apply themselves rather to clear away the obnoxious symptoms of a rotten system, than to redress the real source of mischief. The various speeches of

Whig Reformers within the last ten years, and the doctrines broached in the great Party Review, display so erroneous a conception of the real vices of our representative system, and so decided an aversion to the only effectual remedies, that gentlemen of that school can scarcely be expected to recommend any such Reform as will really impart a new heart and spirit to the Sovereign Council. It will be something, indeed, to obtain even a partial Reform; and when we reflect on the opposition which the Boroughholders are likely to offer, a Ministry may deserve our thanks for accomplishing something widely removed from perfection. But it is of the last importance that the public should accept such a Reform only for what it is worth—that they should not mistake it for the whole improvement requisite—and that they should continue to withhold their confidence from the Parliament until it be so elected as to afford them full and adequate securities for good government.

It is to assist in guarding against this error that the present pamphlet is composed. Assuming that some Reform is admitted to be necessary, I am anxious to place in relief the leading features which are essential to its efficacy—to expose those mis-statements of its real end, and those sophisms as to the means, whereby half might be passed upon us for the whole, or changes of name and form for newly acquired securities—and to signalize, especially, some of the fallacies which I

think most likely to mislead a Whig Ministry. In the year 1821, I published a pamphlet (entitled, "Statement of the Question of Parliamentary Reform,") in refutation of an article in No. 61 of the Edinburgh Review. That article, ostensibly a review of Mr. Bentham's work on Radical Reform, contained an elaborate exposition of the Reviewer's ideas on the subject of Parliamentary Reform, and an earnest and deliberate recommendation of the theory of representation by classes, as the best security for a good Parliament. Some of the remarks which I then offered, in reply to that Reviewer, appear to me suitable to the present juncture, and I shall embody the substance of them in the following pages.

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WHEN a people first awake to a strong feeling of discontent against Institutions of long standing, their indignation will seldom be directed in due proportion against all the objectionable parts. Accident brings to their view some one of the many ramifications of evil in a glaring manner, and at an opportune moment: while others, no less mischievous in themselves, either are not obtruded so indecently on the public, or find it otherwise occupied, and thus escape notice. This disproportionate and partial perception not only has the effect of retarding the proper outcry against unobserved abuses, but tends farther to keep out of view those great principles which connect one abuse with another, and which form the common source of all of them. Where the evil is thus imperfectly conceived, the remedies demanded are likely to be equally incomplete and superficial.

Something of this sort is discernible in the clamours raised against the Representative System.

Men fasten upon some special incongruity or abomination, as if the removal of it were the grand object to be effected by a Reform. Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham, are great cities, important enough to have their interests protected by Representatives of their own: Old Sarum, Gatton, and Weobly, are insignificant hamlets, yet their interests are better protected than those of the three greatest manufacturing cities in England. As long as the argument for Reform is thus put, its opponents meet it satisfactorily, by showing that, if the suffrage were transferred from the three hamlets to the three cities above-mentioned, all things else remaining unchanged, the residents in the latter would be neither better nor worse protected than they are at present. In like manner some persons exclaim against the open bribery at the Liverpool election, or against the severity of the Duke of Newcastle in expelling his tenants at Newark, and are anxious that such transactions should be prevented in future. But here, too, it is easy to reply, that little would be gained by tying men down to bribe in secret, and with some degree of coyness and ceremony. Nor is it without reason that the Duke of Newcastle complains of having been held up as a single and unique tyrant, while other landlords are accomplishing the same end with greater certainty and good fortune.

Such abuses are indeed indefensible; but they ought to be attacked, not as vicious excrescences on a system sound in the main, but as symptoms, rather

gross and magnified, of widespread internal corruption. The system of representation should be surveyed, conceived, and criticised, as a whole : the purposes which it ought to answer should be compared with its actual workings : and it should be accounted a blessing or an injury according as the one of these coincides with or departs from the other. [No Reform can be treated as complete which does not render the Representative Body on the whole an efficient and trustworthy instrument of good government.]

That which the people require at the hands of their Government is, protection for their persons, their earnings, and their inheritances : good, accessible, cheap, and speedy justice, for settling private disputes, and for bringing offenders to punishment : together with an adequate public force, for ensuring execution of the laws, and for keeping off external enemies. No less sacred is the duty, though reserved for unborn statesmen to fulfil, of ensuring to the poorer classes universally the largest attainable amount of instruction ; I would add, of protecting them against indigence, were I not persuaded that well directed instruction would implant in them the habit of regulating their own numbers, and thus of maintaining wages, by their own prudence, at the proper level. To pay for all these services, adequate taxes,—not insignificant in amount, even under the best management—must, of course, be levied.

All this may be summed up in a few comprehensive words : but, in reality, it comprises an unceasing series of laborious acts and painful supervision, suffi-

cient to weary the zeal and fret the temper of benevolence itself: it calls for complete devotion of time, on the part of some of the ablest heads in the community: nor has the man ever yet existed, who could continue engaged in such employments without wishing to leave them half-performed. The nature of the case forbids that free competition, which ensures steady perseverance in the most repulsive private professions: for every public servant is necessarily a temporary monopolist. On the other hand, if there be this temptation to elude the obligations incident to office, there is a motive yet more unconquerable to multiply demands for taxes: to create pretences for palliating unlimited expenditure: and to acquire ascendancy, or gratify liberality, at the expense of the public purse.

To counteract, as much as may be, such overwhelming temptations, a feeling of anxious responsibility must be kept up in the minds of Government functionaries; and the romancers of the last age, complimenting the House of Commons at the expense of King, Peers, and subordinates, were pleased to assign that House as the body through whom responsibility was to be ensured. Not that Members of Parliament were supposed to be endued with any inborn virtue greater than that of gentlemen in office whom it was their business to watch: but their aptitude was affirmed to be derived from their being elected periodically by the people. Election by the people, real or supposed, was the ultimate source of security.

The framers of this seducing picture, misled by

common parlance and tradition, overlooked the fact that elections by the people were a pure fiction : that the persons who elected formed only a fraction of the people : and that to this electoral fraction, in the last resort, all the security was to be traced. According as the majority of the electors had interests identified with or opposed to the people, would be the security for good government arising from election. If the former, then security would be real and efficacious : if the latter, then not only would there be no real security to the people, but the pretended security would be a source of great separate evil, inasmuch as the House of Commons would be under the same temptations to neglect and abuse their trust as the functionaries whom they were assumed to controul. To take precautions against King, Peers, and Public Officers in general, is sufficiently difficult : but if the House of Commons and the electors be also interested in mis-government, the very idea and possibility of precaution becomes extinct : and the phalanx against the people is multiplied, strengthened, and rendered more irresistible than it could be by any other contrivance imaginable.

If the electors form only a small fraction of the people, they and the persons whom they choose must inevitably have a greater interest in conniving at misgovernment and sharing in its benefits, than in the obnoxious task which a rigid duty towards the people would impose upon them. A small fraction, set apart and vested with power, may at particular

emergencies act in behalf of the people against some common enemy: as the old French Parliaments occasionally resisted the enormities of the court: but their uniform tendency, here and elsewhere, now and in ancient times, has been directly opposite. It is fruitless to search for any peculiar set of men, exempted by peculiar virtue, or by station in society, from this predominant disposition. Individuals, superior to these and even to greater temptations, may doubtless be accidentally found: but if our earth were blest with any such celestial breed, elections and electors would be superfluous altogether. Government officers might on that supposition be trusted to perform their duties without any controul, or a King and Peers to controul them without any Commons. It really implies an insult both to King and to Peers to suppose that they can derive any accession of virtue from Commons chosen by a narrow electoral fraction, and thus under the same misleading influences as themselves. Whoever is of this opinion, must imagine the King and the Peers to be worse than ordinary men: a supposition which the true theories of Government do not by any means countenance.

The great question, therefore, with regard to the electoral body, will always be, are they few or many? Do they form a large or a small proportion of the people? If many in name and appearance, are they all so protected that each elector counts for a separate and independent unit? Unless such questions can be

satisfactorily answered, the whole process of election will certainly be useless, and, probably, worse than useless; productive by its own working of much separate and peculiar evil.

How they are to be answered in England, Lord Grey in vain warned the country by his memorable Petition of 1793. The truth then proclaimed, is now better known and less disputed. Less than 200 families, partly Peers, partly Commoners, return the majority of the Lower House. Of the remaining minority, a large proportion owe their return to money or local influence: to electors who vote from hope of gain, or from fear of loss: and the handful which remains, chosen by a few electoral bodies under very peculiar circumstances, serve only to show what the House might be if the whole system were amended.

When this wonderful paucity of the real, determining, electors is thus made out to us, we see at once that the Constitution is now and long has been only an oligarchy governing under certain forms and ceremonies. So long as it retains this character, no improvement is to be hoped for. So long as the House of Commons is chosen by a small fraction of the community, the community will derive from its existence no security which they would not have enjoyed equally well without it, from King and Peers only. Paucity of the real electors is the grand, the specific evil: multiplication of the real electors, until they cease to have a separate interest from the com-

munity, must be the vital, the effectual remedy. Nothing short of this can regenerate the body chosen. It is useless to substitute one small body in place of another, under pretence of picking out rich or enlightened individuals: it is useless to render the small body a trifle larger, until they become *pauci*, instead of *pauciores* or *paucissimi*: it is equally useless to prescribe new forms, or to invent new fictions, by way of giving respectability to their proceedings. Let other circumstances be as they may, if the electors remain a narrow minority, elections will be in the last result just what they are now: and the tree, deriving nutriment from the same pernicious soil—*radice in Tartara tendens*—will still continue to bear its bitter and poisonous fruits.

Among those doctrines, which divert the public eye from the real vices of our representation, there is none more current or more easily received than that of founding the Representative System on property—of making *property the basis of the elective franchise*. The sense put upon these words, indeed, is neither uniform nor well-defined: but all the fluctuations in their meaning appear reducible to two leading distinctions, which I propose successively to examine.

Some persons, when they affirm that property is the only suitable basis for representation, seem to intend that every man should be vested with an elective power proportioned to his fortune—that the weight of each in determining the members to be chosen should be measured by the amount of property which he pos-

esses. Because, (they maintain,) the richer a man is, the greater the stake which he has in the country— the greater his interest in the preservation and augmentation of its wealth and power. If this principle were openly followed out, without equivocation or disguise, we should see the votes of men graduated and valued: there would be voters of one star, two stars, three stars, and so on, as there are in the lists of East India Proprietors: and perhaps Sir Richard Arkwright, and Mr. Alexander Baring, by virtue of the countless stars which would stand opposite to their names, might be deemed qualified to return a member between them.

But the reasoning, on which any such preference to great proprietors is founded, is altogether untenable and fallacious. Not only is it untrue that they have a greater interest than small proprietors, or non-proprietors, in good government, but it may be clearly shown that they have much less. Among all the obligations which a good government ought to discharge towards a body of citizens, there is none of which the omission will not be far more painfully felt by the small than by the great proprietor. Suppose the course of justice to be dilatory, expensive, or corrupt: By all these circumstances the small proprietor is ruinously aggrieved: the course of his industry is interrupted or cut off: that constant aggregation of petty savings, without which he cannot leave his family in the condition occupied by himself, is rendered impossible: and if he escapes loss or fraud in his own person, he is sure

to be called on to rescue less fortunate friends or kinsmen. The great proprietor, on the other hand, is far less exposed to injury from such sources: he is embarrassed by no daily calling: his wealth attracts around him a host of private dependants, who conspire to protect him against the world without, and enable him almost to dispense with the shield of law: while he acquires a power, frightful indeed to society, but profitable to himself, of dealing out unredressed outrage to others. The state of society throughout Europe during the middle ages amply attests that which is here stated: and if the administration of our law were to recede from what it is now to what it was three or four centuries ago, the blow to the middling and the poor would be inconceivably severe, while the great proprietors would gain in one way as much as they lost in the other.

Take, again, the economy of the public revenue. It is the small, not the great, proprietor, whose interest in this desirable object is most powerful. For though the latter pays a larger positive sum in the shape of taxes, yet any given proportion of a large income subtracts much less from the enjoyments of the possessor than the same proportion of a small one: and, what is more important still, whenever excessive taxes are raised, it is the great proprietor who stands the best chance of determining the parties to be benefited by them. High taxation is to the rest of the community pure, uncompensated, sacrifice: to the great proprietor it is sacrifice on the one side, with

the prospect of patronage on the other. In no case is he injured by this description of misgovernment so much as the small proprietor: frequently, he proves a considerable gainer by it.

But if the great proprietor is less interested than the small in the performance of the obvious duties of government, still more is this true with regard to the remote and exalted obligations. What member of the community has so little to gain by diffusing instruction among the poor, as a very rich man? He sees and hears less of them than any one else: and as he is always able to pay for the services of the choice few among them, his comfort is scarcely at all affected by the good or bad character of the mass. With respect, again, to the moral effect of the government,—to its influence, so prodigious either to good or to evil, on the minds and character of the citizens. Is the great proprietor more interested than others in so constructing all its machinery as to encourage probity, industry, and self-denial, and to discountenance fraud, rapacity, and improvidence? In this, as in the other cases, he will be found to have little or no interest in that salutary moral teaching which would be the first of all blessings to every other man in the community. To him the prevalence of such habits would be a loss of consequence, of ascendancy, of admiration. His position commands him to cherish far more unworthy and immoral dispositions among the community: to spread abroad that overweening and prostrate veneration of wealth, which not only softens all scruples as

to the mode of acquisition, but effaces true dignity of character, and renders men the pliant instruments of any one who can help them on in life: to plant in every one's bosom a passion for that show and ostentation, which none indeed can successfully exhibit except the rich themselves, but which every one may pant after and affect, until he loses both the relish for simple and accessible enjoyments, and the feeling of sympathy and brotherhood with men of inferior style. How lamentably such defects eat up the happiness and taint the springs of beneficence among the middling and the poor, is abundantly manifest: how they have been fostered in England, under the baneful ascendancy of wealth in large masses, is matter of remark to all who compare it with the Continent.

It is then demonstrable, that the great proprietors are the precise persons in the nation to whom good government in all its branches is the least essential. And, if so, what pretence remains for arming them with any peculiar influence in the choice of members of Parliament? Loose language, assisted by rooted habits of deference and idolatry, have cast a dense cloud in men's minds over this important subject. Our terminology rudely bisects the community into rich and poor—men of property and men of no property: and hence an association grows up in our thoughts between *men of property* and the *institution of property*. The deep respect, which deservedly belongs and has always been paid to that inestimable institution, is transferred mechanically to

those who are surnamed after it: they come to be considered as its guardian angels and natural protectors: while such as refuse submission to them are vilified as if destitute of the just feelings towards *property*. But the truth is, that these men of property have no other interest in the institution of pro-^{*}erty than that which they possess in common with the mass of smaller proprietors, whom we so vaguely huddle together as men of no property. To become an instrument of benefit to his country, a great proprietor ought to act, not upon that narrow interest which connects him with other great proprietors, but upon that more extended interest which binds him to all proprietors whatever. He must condescend to confound himself with their ranks, to join in the prosecution of objects by which he benefits only in common with them, and to catch a portion of the modesty, the assiduous habits, and the demand for unbought sympathy, appertaining to their station. In place of that curse of English society—small proprietors apeing the imperfections of the great—true benevolence would teach the great proprietors to imbibe the virtues of the ^{*}small. But never will they do this so long as a peculiar and privileged interference in elections is reserved ^{*}for them: so long as peculiar electoral rights fence them off conspicuously from the remaining community, and thus both entice and enable them to conspire for their separate interest: and so long as unprincipled expectants are tempted to look to them for

promotion, apart from the approving voice of public opinion.

But if there be no ground for privileging great proprietors on pretence of superior interest in good government, as little reason is there for doing so on the score of superior knowledge and intelligence. Admitting it for the present to be true, that without such aids as can only be procured by persons possessing a certain moderate income, such as 100*l.* per annum, no one can acquire sufficient instruction to perform the functions of elector,—admitting that moderate income affords a just presumption of capacity as compared with very low income—yet to rate the understandings of men throughout the whole scale in proportion to their wealth, would be a measurement altogether perverse and unwarrantable. Superior income is not only an inaccurate test in individual cases, but it affords no ground for guessing at the capacities of men, even as a general rule. A man of 100*l.* or 200*l.* a-year, who lives in a considerable city, enjoys opportunities for mental improvement, not perhaps equalling those which richer men might command, but far exceeding those which the majority of them ever turn to account. Individuals who will labour to instruct themselves, are indeed rare in this class: but they are also rare amongst the classes who possess 1,000*l.* 2,000*l.* or 5,000*l.* per annum: and the ordinary literature and periodicals form the stock reading of the one as well as of the

other. In comparing men of middling incomes, from 100% per annum upwards, there is no presumption of superior capacity on either side: but when we reach the very high figures in the scale, it will be found that not only is there no presumption in favour of mental eminence, but there is a probability not easy to be rebutted against it. The position and circumstances of a very rich man cut off all motive to mental labour: he is caressed and deified by his circle without any of those toils whereby others purchase an attentive hearing: and the purple, the fine linen, and the sumptuous fare every day, of Dives, are impediments to solid improvement, hardly less fatal than the sores and wretchedness of Lazarus.

I trust that I have now shown that neither on the ground of special interest in favour of good government, nor on that of presumed mental superiority, are the great proprietors entitled to privilege or ascendancy in the representative system. Protection they will of course receive, in common with all other proprietors: but if they seek pre-eminence, they must be content to earn it by evidences of superior worth and ability. Equalize their political position as much as you will, the prejudices of mankind are sure to turn the scale more or less in their favour: their private munificence confounds itself with and enhances their public services: and the eyes of the unambitious many eagerly look for merit where they are predisposed to pay deference.

That property should be the basis of representa-

tion, then, in such sense as to award greater elective influence to the large proprietor than to the small, is a proposition altogether inadmissible. No sacrifice, indeed, can be too great to protect property ; but as this institution is of incalculable benefit to the whole mass of smaller proprietors, a legislature chosen by all of them together, great and small alike, is as sure to protect property, as to guard personal safety. And the great proprietors will be no less certain of enjoying security in common with the rest, than of being debarred from all undue usurpations beyond ; for the same institutions which shut them out from the latter, guarantee to them the former.

There is another sense in which some persons propose to make *property the basis of representation*. They are of opinion that no one who does not enjoy an income of a certain given amount, ought to exercise any political rights : to all above that minimum, they would award equal, not graduated, elective power ; all below it, they would disfranchise without exception. Some indeed are more indulgent, others more rigorous, in determining the point of actual exclusion : but the principle of exclusion is the same with all.

The reasonings sometimes advanced on behalf of this opinion appear to imply that no person below the appointed minimum has any interest in preserving property : that property is an institution beneficial indeed to a fortunate minority, but injurious and oppressive to the remaining multitude ; and that if

the interest of the latter were consulted, not only existing possessions would be divided, but the institution itself would be swept away. This theory of property, fatal as it would prove to the continuance of the institution, except in the most degraded state of the human intelligence, is not unfrequently resorted to by aristocratical advocates, when they wish to alarm the middling classes into uncomplaining submission.

It is fortunate that a just comprehension of the interests of all holds out brighter prospects. So far from being injured by the institution of property, the multitude have a deep and lasting interest in its continuance. No set of men, whether all poor, or all rich, or some poor and some rich, can possibly live together in society without some rules to define what shall be enjoyed by one and what by another. One man, by virtue of these rules, may acquire a greater amount of enjoyment than another, but the fixity and observance of the rules is as much necessary to the continuous sequence of smaller acquisitions as to the safe enjoyment of the greater. One man, in like manner, may turn the air and the sun to greater account than another; but these beneficent influences are alike indispensable to all. Here and there a being may be discovered so destitute and unhappy as to be inaccessible to any additional suffering: to have no enjoyment open to him, except that which he can find unappropriated, or that which he can snatch by force: to be, in other words, in the

position to which all mankind would be reduced, if no laws of property were known or respected. But such cases are rare exceptions to the ordinary lot of the many, who derive a steady subsistence from the uninterrupted exercise of their industry. Scanty as this subsistence too frequently is, it would be intercepted altogether if the safety of property became a matter even of reasonable doubt: for it arises from the outlay of capitalists, made only under assured prospect of return, and ready to be withheld the moment future acquisitions can no longer be reckoned on. Deprived of all means of recruiting his little fund, the poor labourer passes from assured subsistence into absolute and irremediable starvation.

The disfranchisement of the body of the poor, then, cannot for a moment be sustained on the pretence that they have no interest in the maintenance of property. They have at least as great an interest in its stability as the rich: for even a temporary suspension of its laws would deprive them of existence, while the rich might stand some feeble chance of defending and reserving to themselves their pre-existing hoard.

But are the poor wise enough to recognise and act upon this interest? Many reasoners contend that they are not: and hence, in general, the reluctance to bestow on them political rights: though there are not wanting persons who, inconsistently enough, protest against universal suffrage, both on one ground and on the other; insisting on the one hand that the

body of the poor have a real interest hostile to property, and reproaching the poor on the other for their brutish ignorance in not venerating so sacred and beneficent an institution.

The ignorance of the body of the people is a ground for their disfranchisement far more plausible than the former: because, to a certain extent, the fact is undeniable. No one can dispute that they ought to be, and might be, much more carefully educated than they are at present. Yet I feel well persuaded that their ignorance, comparatively to other classes, has been greatly over-stated, and in particular that no evidence can be adduced of unfriendly feelings, in the generality of them, towards the institution of property.

Is there any error or prejudice now current among the poorer classes, to which a parallel cannot be produced among the richer? If they are taunted with their hostility to machinery, may they not recriminate on the landlords by pointing to the Usury Laws and to the Corn Laws? If their misapprehension of the principle of population is cited as an evidence of stupidity, how will the squires and parsons, and the parochial chiefs in general, stand exonerated from the like imputation?

To me it appears that the poorer classes in general have an understanding sufficiently just, docile, and unprejudiced to elect and to submit to the same legislators whom the middling classes themselves, if they voted apart and voted secretly, would single out.

But assuming the contrary to be the fact, as so many sincere reformers believe and lament—admitting that the poor are at the present moment unprepared for the elective franchise—expedients may yet be found for allaying the apprehensions of the middling classes, without either degrading the lower by perpetual exclusion, or neglecting to provide for the duties of Government towards them.

Reasoning on this admission, we should of course acquiesce, under a certain modification, in the principle, that property should at present form the basis of representation,—not under the belief that men of property had any superior interest in good government, but because, under the existing difficulties in obtaining, and carelessness in diffusing, knowledge, few persons below a certain amount of income could be presumed to yet have acquired mental aptitude for the elective function. It cannot with any pretence of reason be maintained, that a man of 100*l.* annual income has not enjoyed full facilities for instructing himself up to the requisite pitch. A pecuniary qualification, therefore, if fixed at 100*l.* annual income, would embrace no one, as far as could be reasonably presumed, unworthy of the trust.

It has been stated that a qualification of 100*l.* annual income would comprehend a million of electors : but if the conjecture were not confirmed by actual returns, I should think it requisite to lower the qualification until that number was attained. No number of voters falling much short of a million, could

possibly put out of sight and out of apprehension that first of all evils, a separate interest from the community; and in order to purchase such a certainty, it would be well worth while to submit to such slight depression in the scale of instruction as might be incurred by introducing persons of an income the next degree below 100% per annum. Nor could any reasonable alarmist anticipate either hostility to property, or general unsoundness of views, from the richest million in the country. They might as soon be imagined to surrender England to a foreign enemy, or to plant in it the seeds of an epidemic disease, as to invade or unsettle the sanctity of property.

A representative system including one million of voters, properly distributed and protected, would be that "*almost all*" in Parliamentary Reform which a distinguished orator unworthily predicated of the proposal to admit members from three or four great towns.

It would purify the Government, thoroughly, at once, and for ever, of that deep and inveterate oligarchical taint which now infects it in every branch. The Old Man of the Sea would be shaken from our backs, never more to resume his gripe. The interest and well-being of the middling classes would become the predominant object of solicitude, and would be followed out with earnest and single-hearted perseverance. Economy in the state expenditure; unremitting advance towards perfection in the law and in the administration of justice: entire abstinence

from ambitious or unnecessary wars; all these great results would be ensured by such a legislature as completely as the most ardent patriot could desire. Nor would it fail to operate a wholesome change in the public sentiment, and to root out or mitigate many of our wide-spread national vices. It would suppress that avidity for patronage, which now renders so many fathers of families petitioners at the doors of the neighbouring great: it would lower the value of the rich man's nod, and teach men to earn advance in the world, not by clinging to his skirts, but by their own industry and their own frugality: and it would eradicate the proneness to local jobbing which the imperfect constitution of parishes and corporate bodies so fatally implants and so abundantly remunerates. Legislators so chosen must be men of first-rate intelligence, whose discussions would rectify and elevate the tone of political reasoning throughout the whole country—men in whom the accident of birth and connection would be eclipsed by the splendour of their personal qualities—identified in heart and spirit with the happiness of the middling classes—and no less qualified, by laborious completion of their own mental training, to serve as an example and an incentive to aspiring youth.

A constituency of one million of voters would infallibly bring about these signal and beneficent results, without the slightest loss or peril to any one, except to those who are receiving undue gains or exercising a malignant influence. The very idea of peril to the

middling classes is unreasonable and absurd: they would themselves form the constituent body, and the acquisition to them in every way would be incalculable. Nor would it prove injurious to the tranquil man, who enjoys his affluence apart, without seeking to club with the oligarchical confederacy. Such a person has really no interest distinct from that of the middling class; he suffers at present under their grievances, and would partake in their benefits under an improved system. To wealthy individuals of superior ability and benevolence, it would be highly gratifying and consolatory: since it would cut off the perennial source of those abuses against which they have been vainly striving in detail.

There needs but one addition to render such an electoral system every thing which the widest philanthropy could aim at. A provision should be annexed to it, gradually lowering the qualification at the end of certain fixed periods, so as to introduce successively fresh voters, and after a certain period to render the suffrage nearly co-extensive with the community. The interval might be employed in improving and extending education, so as to remove the only valid ground which is now supposed to command the disfranchisement of the poor.*

This very deficiency in the poor, on which the necessity of their present exclusion is founded, de-

* I owe the suggestion of this gradual enlargement of the franchise to an excellent weekly journal,—the Examiner.

monstrates the vast importance of impressing on the Government peculiar motives to enlighten them. What portrait shall we draw of a government, under which four-fifths of the male adults are so degraded in understanding, as to be incapable of forming any opinion on the laws to which their obedience is exacted, and to be destitute, therefore, of that rational attachment towards them which assists and seconds so materially the operations of justice? If their stupidity be really so deplorable, as to leave them ignorant whether they owe gratitude or execration to their laws and their legislators, it is impossible to make exertions too speedy or too strenuous to amend it. Under a government faithful and energetic in the performance of all its duties, such mental darkness would be rapidly dispelled, and the reason for continued disfranchisement would disappear along with it. But inasmuch as among all the duties of Government, those which it owes to the poor are the most liable to be neglected, the determination of periods for gradually extending to them the suffrage would serve as a spur to quicken inactivity, and as an admonition to prevent forgetfulness. And it is but too possible, that a body of representatives, perfect and admirable for the middling classes, might be less keenly alive to the importance of elevating the condition and assuring the independence of the laborious many. If they seriously contemplated perpetual disfranchisement—if they considered the many, not as minors requiring farther tuition,

but as half-witted by nature and smitten with inherent incapacity—they would be slow in communicating to them acquirements not deemed available to any ultimate end, and only sharpening the sense of an humiliating exclusion.

A constituency of a million of voters, however, even taken apart and without any such gradual enlargement, would effect a change so great and desirable, that I should deeply regret to abate the demand for it by thus showing that it would not accomplish every thing. The poor, though not permitted to vote, would partake in its benefits: not merely by the diminution of taxes, and by such amendments in the law as would open to them the avenues of justice, but also by the improved character of the wealthy and middling class, and by the more frequent prevalence of sober and useful virtues in the place of ostentatious frivolity.

If it be once determined that the constituency shall include a million of voters, it is better to select them by an uniform income qualification than by any other. No just excuse can be given for preference on such an occasion, except presumed mental superiority: and though the inference derived from income is by no means free from objection, I know not any better which can be obtained. If the aggregate of voters were smaller, certain professions and occupations might be resorted to, as affording adequate evidence of mental capacity: but it will be found that the richest million will embrace all those

whose occupation or profession could have been thus singled out as presumptive testimony.

The endless varieties of qualification in different English boroughs appear more like an olio of anomalous customs, than like the methodical workings of a reasonable Legislature. But the principle of uniform qualification has been impugned, and that of multiform qualification maintained, by some reasoners of note, who have insisted on the propriety of rendering the representative system a representation of classes, not of individuals. That theory I shall now examine.

In combating the principle of strengthening the great proprietors at elections, I have supposed it to be acted upon openly and avowedly, by allotting a number of votes to each man proportioned to the amount of his property. Such a regulation, however, is repugnant to the general habits of English elections. Immense as the influence of great proprietors is at present, it is still exercised under a thin disguise, which enables men to quibble about its amount, and sometimes, when it suits their purpose, even to contest its reality. The conditions under which it is exercised, unhappily, aggravate its inherent mischief: for while they nowise serve to restrain or purify the oligarchical influence, they render its *modus operandi* such as to keep the minds of the people venal, open to intrigue in all shapes,

athirst for irregular patronage, and insensible to any public principle. But English thinkers have become familiar with this practice of attaining by stealth ends obnoxious to avow : and those who, in their plans of reform, leave the oligarchical preponderance still unabated, usually seek for some new contrivance to screen its working, and to mystify its real character. What is called the class system of representation, advocated in the Edinburgh Review, as well as in other places, is a contrivance of this description.

The plan of the class system is to divide the citizens into various classes ; each consisting of individuals bound together by some interest common to them all, but separate from the rest of the citizens. Thus we are to have one class of merchants, and another of landholders : and each of these is to elect representatives, intended to watch specially over the interests of their several classes, and to see that those interests are adequately protected in parliament. Each representative is supposed peculiarly cognizant of the interests of his own class, and under special obligation to promote and prefer them. No uniform qualification for voters (we are told), either founded on property or on any other principle, could ensure the election of members either acquainted with the interests of these various classes, or animated with competent zeal to watch over them. The interests of the class of merchants will not be protected unless that class elects representatives: the same with the class of landholders, and with the

rest. Whoever would see this theory explained and vindicated at length, should consult the article on Reform in No. 61 of the Edinburgh Review.

Let us consider the simplest particular case which can be imagined to answer the conditions of the theory. Suppose three classes, landholders, merchants, and lawyers, each returning one member, or each an equal number of members, to form a governing body. Each member comes exclusively devoted to the service of his own class: but as no measure can be adopted without a majority, two out of the triumvirate must combine: and that combination can only take place by mutual concessions on the part of the two allies, each consenting to drop such part of his respective class interest as may interfere with the class interest of the other. Those two out of the three will combine whose alliance can be accomplished with the smallest sacrifice of their respective class interests. But when two out of the three have combined, the concurrence of the third becomes a matter of no importance. His interest, therefore, and the interest of his class, is completely disregarded. The two allies, who, as a majority, are in possession of the governing power, would be unfaithful deputies of their respective classes, were they to concede any thing in favour of a colleague with whose co-operation they can dispense.

How then is the end answered of affording protection to each of the separate class interests? It is so far from being attained, that each and every one

of them remains unprotected. The moment that the members begin discussion, it must become apparent that each class interest excludes the rest: and that to ensure protection to one of them is to deny it to the others. Either the assembly has a majority of its members returned by one particular class, or it has not. If the former, then the dominant class interest is indeed sedulously provided for, but all the classes in the minority are neglected and trampled upon. If the latter, then it is not the separate interest of any class whatever which is protected, but the common interest of those two or more classes who combine to form a majority; all the classes in the minority being neglected as in the previous case.

Perhaps the partisans of this system may reply, that they never imagine a deputy to seek protection for his class interest at the expense of other classes, but only so far as the interest of other classes can be made to coincide with it. But on this supposition the cardinal principle of the system is infringed, and the deputy ceases at once to be a class deputy. He does no more for the class by whom he is returned than for the other classes by whom he is not returned. He becomes, what he ought assuredly under every good system to be, a deputy devoted to the service of the country; for the interest which all classes have in common *is* the interest of the country.

The fundamental error of the class system consists

* in a wrong conception of what constitutes the interest of the country. "We must divide the people into classes (observes the Edinburgh Reviewer) and examine *the variety of local and professional interests of which the general interest is composed.*" Now the general interest, far from being composed of various local and professional interests, is not only distinct from, but exclusive of, every one of them. The interest of an individual by himself apart—the interest of the same man jointly with any given fraction of his fellow citizens—and his interest jointly with the whole body of his fellow-citizens—all these are distinct objects, abhorrent and irreconcilable in general, coinciding occasionally by mere accident. To promote the joint interest of any given class, you do not set about first to promote the separate interest of one member of it, then the separate interest of another member, and so on. You neglect all these, to fix your eyes on an independent end, the joint interest of all the members of the class one with another. Just so it is with that grand aggregate of classes, the community. The general interest is not to be attained by pursuing first the separate interest of one class, then the separate interest of another, but must be studied as an object apart from all these. Individuals compose the class, but the interest of the class is not the sum total of the separate interests of all its members: classes compose the community, but the interest of the community is not the sum total of the separate interests of

all its classes. And a governing body which would promote the universal interest, must discard all inclination to the separate interest of any class whatever.

What would be the result of the class representation, as its partisans apply their principles, it is not difficult to trace. The great body of the community—the multitude—are considered to be *one class*, and are as such empowered to return certain representatives. The remaining minority are then subdivided into a great number of different classes, each of which is to elect members of its own and for its own benefit. From this nice subdivision many of the electing classes become of course numerically small. And is it not manifest that these numerically small classes will combine to form a majority in the assembly? and that the classes not included in the majority—the multitude among the number—will receive no more protection than if their deputies had never been elected? The oligarchical Proteus thus reappears, in another of his ever-varying shapes: and the result of the system may be described in the words used by Livy (i. 43) when he is explaining the Roman class system ascribed to Servius Tullius—“ Gradus facti, ut “ neque exclusus quisquam suffragio videretur, et “ vis omnis penes primores civitatis esset.” Votes are given to the people, not as a security for good government, but as a sop to delude and quiet them: the real power remains, where it would be if they

had no votes, vested in the few of rank and property.

It may be urged, indeed, that this result arises, not from the inherent principles of the class system, but from a vicious distribution of the people into disproportionate classes: that if the separate classes framed were more equal, and each numerically large, no majority in the assembly could combine without including a number so large as to coincide in interest with the whole community. Such an arrangement is indeed conceivable: but if, in the last result, the deputies are neither able nor inclined to follow out any other interest than that of the community, what is gained by the peculiarity of the system—that of calling the electors together in classes—and what would be lost by abandoning it? Would not the same result be equally assured if the same number of electors voted in sections not coinciding with each man's class or profession, and not suggesting the idea of any distinct principle of union among themselves?

Not merely would the result be equally assured: it would be far more infallible and far more complete. The general interest will be most certain of receiving paramount and undeviating attention, when it stands forth prominently and conspicuously as the single purpose of delegation—when it enters into every man's feelings of duty—and when it is least traversed and overlaid by other objects of pursuit. All these essential requisites are frustrated by

summoning the electors to vote in groupes, each animated by a peculiar interest distinct from the community. Each class, convoked apart, will dwell upon and magnify its own separate interests, which it will treat as at least co-ordinate in importance with the general interest; the minds of individuals will be engrossed by the feelings of their rights and obligations as fellow classmen; and the sentiment of a common interest with the whole nation will be to a great degree obliterated. A member thus elected will carry to Parliament the sentiments of his constituents respecting the treatment which their class ought to receive: the interest of the class will be his first duty, that of the country his second: at any rate, the two conflicting obligations will divide his soul, and drive him to perpetual trimming and evasion. No sincere or single-hearted patriot can be seen in the assembly. Instead of an union of wise and incorruptible legislators, agreeing in one common end, and only differing as to the means of promoting it—Parliament would become an arena for rival conspirators or opposing counsel, each engaged in serving a separate client: each seeking to twist a grant or to qualify a restriction, in his own peculiar sense: and no two concurring in devotion to the same ultimate objects.

Such would be the tendency of a representative system, under which each member should be chosen by a peculiar class, and should be recognised as the special guardian of the interest of his class. The

more strongly and intimately the members of each choosing body are knit together, the more perniciously would this anti-social taint infect the legislative assembly.

I grant indeed that vestiges of it may still remain—that it will not be entirely extirpated—under the best electoral system conceivable. For as each member must be chosen by a particular body of electors, and those too voting in one neighbourhood, their own separate interest may occasionally pervert their judgment, and lead them to elect with little reference to their obligations as citizens of the community. But under good electoral arrangements this cannot happen often, nor in many places at once; and the more its mischievous tendency is denounced, the less likely it will be to occur at all.

Instead of trying to guard against such a tendency, and only submitting to it where precautions prove ineffectual—the class system actually recognises it as a sound and beneficial principle of action, and is built upon it as upon a corner stone. Independent of all other objections, the monstrous immorality of the system cannot be too earnestly exposed. It treads out and extinguishes every spark of a general interest: it disavows all idea of the rights and obligations attached to citizenship: and those feelings which bind us to our community, the source of so many exalted virtues, become obsolete and unknown. In place of an united and harmonious nation, what does the system present to us? A mere congeries of

unfriendly confederacies, each combating for its own separate ends: the strong classes combining to prey upon the weak, and grasping at the Legislature as an engine of usurpation: the weak submitting from inability to resist, and hating a Legislature from whence they derive no protection: the members of each class deeming the others legitimate plunder, and treating them in effect as aliens under the cheat of a common country. All these consequences are infallible, if Parliament is to be corrupted into a congress of class deputies, instead of an assembly of citizen legislators.

A salutary Reform ought to proceed on principles the very reverse of the class system. Far from encouraging the exercise of the elective franchise by local bodies and corporations, every such union ought to be studiously dissevered, so that an electoral section which returns one member may seldom or never consist of individuals already united by any partial tie. It is the individual judgment of each voter which is required: a certain number of voters must concur to return the same candidate, in order to answer the purpose of attesting his competence: but it is neither necessary nor desirable that all of them should vote in the same place. By proper distribution of the electoral bodies and places of voting, each elector might vote with little personal inconvenience, and disengaged from any corporate bias.

In speaking thus respecting local and partial

associations, I would by no means be understood to dispute their great utility when limited to their proper sphere. For local purposes, they are excellent and indispensable: and their organization ought to be revised and purified with much greater solicitude than has ever been hitherto manifested. In England the old institutions have lingered on from generation to generation untouched by the hand of philosophy: salutary in their first commencement, they have not only outlived their period of utility, but have passed into instruments of jobbing and abuse. The history of a corporation is the history of the English Parliament. The rise and progress of these bodies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries forms an epoch in the history of society: without them the blessings of security would have been unknown: and the European countries might still have been groaning under the tyranny of local barons, contentious indeed as against each other, but animated with a common spirit of insolence and rapacity towards the people. Against such enemies, every individual in the nascent town had a joint interest: and very imperfect corporate institutions sufficed, while the idea of danger to all from the same quarter was predominant and overpowering. But when the enemy without ceased to be formidable, the leading men in a town found themselves possessed of established ascendancy over their fellow townsmen, which it was tempting to convert to their own account. The once useful corporation gradually degenerated into a field of

disunion and intrigue: freemen remaining distinguished by an indefensible line, and by still more indefensible privileges, from non-freemen; and a select junto mal-administering over them all. The subject of good municipal institutions and assemblies, which is now attracting so much attention in France, deserves no less serious consideration in England: but however these bodies may be constituted, whether well or ill, it will still be essential to exclude their interference as much as possible in elections for the general legislature.

The use and abuse of corporate bodies, and the pernicious tendency of the class system in general, is a topic deserving of the deeper attention, as the existing English representative system is in effect a class government, of which the landholders form the preponderating partners. Hence such plans of Reform, as retain the class system unchanged, and profess merely to vary and remodel its component parts, come recommended by the imposing assertion, that the principle on which they proceed has already been tried and is familiar to the Constitution.

It has, indeed, been abundantly tried, and its baneful workings are easy to be detected; not merely in the details of misgovernment, but also in the perverted tone of the current politics. What more common than to hear the country described as composed of so many "interests"—some more or less great and valuable than others—the landed interest and the manufacturing interest—the East Indian and the

West Indian interest,—the Ship interest, and the Wool interest! Some persons even speak as if they imagined that Parliament met for no other purpose than to watch over these great interests; each of which is constantly complaining that it does not receive adequate protection, and that “rival interests” return so many members to Parliament as to stifle its just claims. Such pretensions involve the fundamental fallacy of the class system. Landlords or manufacturers have sacred claims on the Legislature in common with the general body of citizens, but they acquire no new and peculiar claims by the fact of their sharing in the same occupation or in the same description of revenue. Protection to themselves, as individuals, is their indisputable right: protection to their “interest” as a separate interest, is a privilege over their fellow citizens,—a monstrous injustice and usurpation. Because a hundred or a thousand men choose to band together, to give themselves a common name, and to talk of themselves as an *interest*, is the Legislature to make separate terms with them, and to grant them concessions at the expense of the modest citizen, who seeks only a citizen’s share in the benefits of good government? Yet such concessions, teeming as they do with evil, are in the ordinary spirit and track of the English Parliament. Its Constitution, tainted with the inherent vice of the class system, has caused it to be pulled hither and thither by the great rival “interests:” it has been a theatre for their selfish

struggles among themselves, as well as for their common encroachments on the body of the people, who, as they bear not the name and the banners of any particular "interest," have been treated as if they needed no "protection" at all. No man can have attentively studied the English Government without learning, that the path of advancement and honour has been monopolized by these potent fraternities, and that the character of a private citizen was of little account. Hence the fatal temptation, so prevalent wherever we look, to join some one of them in intriguing for privilege or undue gain, and to renounce all sense of obligation towards the people as a body. Even virtuous men, who would shudder at injustices for their own individual benefit, become perverted with the class-morality, and act agreeably to the memorable declaration of Lord Grey, when he set *his order* against and above his country.

I abstain from touching, as I might well do, on the encouragement which such a state of the representation affords to the most mischievous tenets of the mercantile system. Though not chargeable with having given birth to them, it has assuredly retarded their extirpation. The body of consumers—the general public,—who are interested in low and steady prices, especially of necessaries—constitute no "interest," and are never seen in battle array. It is in vain that political economy advocates their cause against the sellers, not only forward in associating and loud in complaint, but favoured by the erroneous

disposition of ordinary men to sympathise only with a special and recognised class.

Having established the necessity of a total number of voters, so great as not to be capable of having a separate interest from the country, and of taking their votes, not in classes, but as individuals, I come to the important question of open or secret voting. There is every possible reason for taking the votes by Ballot: not one single reason, so far as I can discern, for taking them openly. This question has been so admirably handled in the Westminster Review of last July, that I might be satisfied with referring to the demonstration there given: but it is impossible to pass over a subject of such incalculable moment without a few additional words to elucidate and enforce it.

Without ballot, the most extensive provisions of Reform in other respects would be nullified: for the * creation of new open votes would be only an empty multiplication of names, leaving the band of real choosers scarcely larger than it was before. Under secret suffrage, every man who has a vote is a * real chooser: he votes from genuine, intrinsic, preference, well or ill founded, for his candidate. His vote can neither oblige nor offend: it is an act purely public, and counts as a separate grain of evidence to attest the competency of the person whom he supports. Under open voting, the reverse is true in all points. The number of nominal voters does not afford any test of the number of real

choosers: out of a thousand voters, there may not be fifty who have any genuine preference for their candidate, or any sincere persuasion of his fitness for the trust. Provided only he be exempt from notorious disgrace or indisputable imbecility, the grades of superiority above that low minimum are never scrutinised. And the election of a candidate, even by a considerable number of open votes, far from furnishing presumption of his competency, proves only that he has either many dependants, or an unusual number of influential private friends, who are willing to make his cause their own.

If reasons were needed against open voting, the disgusting details of an English election would abundantly supply them. The candidate convenes an active committee of private friends, who look over the list of voters, and set about to consider by what weapons or baits each of them is assailable. Some of them are known to be openly venal: others are dependent tenants on the estate of Lord A. or Mr. B.: a third class are tradesmen, and supply the families of Lord C. and Mr. D.: of the remainder, several are comfortable in their incomes, but are fond of shooting, and prize highly the permission of going upon a neighbouring manor, or are anxiously seeking intimacy with some families wealthier than themselves. To track out all these ramifications of each voter's peculiar interest—to penetrate the hidden sources of his hopes and fears—and to hook his vote through the medium of one or the other—is the business of

an election committee. It is futile to prohibit any part of their proceedings, while the means and the motive to practise them are left open: and however the number of open voters may be multiplied, it will only become more troublesome, but by no means less practicable, to govern the majority of them by private hopes and fears. At certain grand periods of excitement numerous voters may break loose, and give open utterance to their faith with the exalted constancy of martyrs; in ordinary times, they are tame and sequacious, and a thousand of them are marshalled with hardly less facility than a hundred.

In spite of the crooked manœuvres so universal in electioneering, there are persons who dwell much on the empty and fallacious distinction between dependent and independent voters. A poor voter, they affirm, is by his station dependent, and this is urged as one reason for withholding votes from the poor: while a person of greater affluence is spoken of as if his position afforded security for his independence. But the test here assumed, for measuring dependence and independence, is equivocal to a high degree. That man is the most dependent who is liable to suffer the greatest and most irreparable evil at the hands of some one or some few others; and many who enjoy a most eligible position are, for that very reason, exposed to far more alarming liability of evil than simple poverty ever entails. A poor artisan or labourer may be displaced, but the number of equally good situations open to him is so considerable, that

he may speedily hope to repair his loss. But the higher and better paid officers have more to lose by dismissal, while the number of such places is so limited as to afford them little chance of an equivalent elsewhere. It seems evident, therefore, that shopmen, clerks, and highly paid functionaries of every description, being greater sufferers by arbitrary displacement, are really more dependent than artisans or servants, and consequently that poverty is no measure of the degree of dependence.

But it is superfluous to verify the graduation of the scale, if we can satisfy ourselves that he who is called thoroughly independent is exposed to powerful private influence, more than sufficient to pervert any open vote. I would fain ask whose position is so fortunate as to enable him to deny this? Look at the tradesman who is making 500*l.* or 1,000*l.* per annum, and the manufacturer or merchant who is making 2,000*l.* or 3,000*l.* Each of them acquires his income out of fractions, some large, some small, arising from connections profitable in various degrees; and the best of these connections think themselves fully entitled to ask for his vote, whenever they take interest in an election. If the request be refused merely on public grounds, displeasure and provocation are infallible: and the refuser incurs the chance of pecuniary loss, of seeing himself supplanted by rivals, and of being stigmatised as ungrateful. How is this consistent with the pretended independence of his position? Even the man whose

income is already treasured up, finds many individuals around him whom it is exquisitely pleasing to oblige and highly distressing to offend, though their political views may be such as he entirely disapproves. Is it not true, then, that the man most independent by position and circumstances is yet so fettered and so vulnerable, as to lay him under temptations far too strong for average political integrity?

So long as voting is open, therefore, the votes of the middling and of the affluent will be determined, in the majority of cases, by some one of the innumerable varieties of private influence: nor is the Ballot less essential to purify their votes than to liberate those of the poor. I duly appreciate the beneficial effects of the private sympathies, and of that readiness to oblige and to requite, without which life would be a desert: but if the business of voting is to be subservient to a public end, it ought to be abstracted altogether from the sphere of their interference. Is it at all less detrimental to the main purpose of voting—the advancement of the wisest and best men in the community into the Legislative Assembly—that I should vote to please a friend, to return an obligation, or to conciliate a customer, than that I should sell my vote for ten pounds, or for a place in the Excise? It is melancholy to confess that on this important topic the morality both of rich and poor has yet to be formed, nor can we hope ever to see it formed except by means of the Ballot. Most men consider their vote merely as a means of render-

ing service to a friend ; and dispose of it exactly on the same principles as they would bestow any other favour. How abominable would be the course of justice, if they forgot their trust as jurors in the same cool and systematic manner : if one man thought himself authorized to solicit, and another to grant, a verdict in favour of plaintiff or defendant ! Yet the function of voter is no less a public trust than that of juror : nor would the mischief of corrupt juries, prodigious as it is, surpass that of corrupt voting. It is fruitless to admonish men on the pernicious tendency of what is daily before their eyes, so long as the misleading influence is left in full vigour and application : but if the door be once shut against such influence, there is nothing to prevent voting from being assimilated to other public trusts, and from becoming really conducive to its peculiar and all-important purpose.*

* The duty of a voter to the public has been banished, not only out of fact and society, but also out of political reasonings and conceptions. Hence the extraordinary difference in the public sentiment between the promise made by a voter to support a particular candidate, and the promise made by a juror to deliver a particular verdict. To be known to have made such a promise as juror, would suffice to brand a man with infamy : but assuming that he has been guilty enough to make it, and that he repents prior to the verdict, will it not be generally considered that he commits less evil by breaking his promise than by consummating an injustice ? The indignation of mankind is directed, not against the violation of such a promise, but against the making it and the asking it.

Were voting considered as a public trust, the like feeling

I had the opportunity of being present, a little before the French elections of June, 1830, at a private preliminary meeting of French electors in one of the arrondissementens not far from Paris. About thirty electors met, to estimate the chances and to concert measures for the success of their candidate in the approaching contest. They called over the electoral list, and each person present pronounced respecting those whom he knew or those who lived near him, whether they were likely to be supporters or opponents. For such as were not thoroughly known, attempts were made to guess at their political sentiments or at their private partialities. But never was

would prevail with respect to a voter. But it is considered as a matter purely private and optional ; so that all which the public exacts of a voter is, that he shall keep a promise when he has once made it ; and strenuous opposition has been raised to the ballot, on the ground that it would permit him to violate his promise without detection. Objectors on this ground forget that no promise, interfering with the due execution of a public trust, can be innocently made : and that with respect to culpable promises, the desirable object is to prevent them from being ever asked or ever made, not to ensure their strict observance after they are made—to preserve men from ever entangling themselves in that trying position, wherein they can only choose between violating a promise or forfeiting a trust. Now it is obvious that electors are much less likely to be called upon to promise when they vote secretly, than when they vote openly : and where few promises are asked, few promises can be broken : so that the fact which the objection assumes, that promises will be habitually broken, is really untrue ; while the end is also attained, of removing one great temptation to an undue species of promise.

the slightest hint started of winning over a questionable voter by solicitation and intrigue, or of approaching his bosom by those invisible bye-paths which an English electioneerer so skilfully explores. Such artifices appear to have been considered in France too degrading for any one except the agents of Charles X., who did indeed employ them as much as was practicable, and who of course spared no pains to nullify and elude the Ballot.

Among the several objections urged against the Ballot, there is one which not only admits, but is even founded upon, the marvellous debasement produced by the English system of open voting. Some persons allege that under secret voting scarcely any elector would go to the poll: that when his vote could neither gratify a friend nor repay a benefactor, he could not be induced by a "cold sense of duty" to undertake the inconsiderable labour of going occasionally to a neighbouring voting place. So low is their estimate of the strength of the public affections amongst a community whom yet they describe as pre-eminently virtuous, and under a Government which they extol as little short of perfection! To me such eulogies either on the people or on the Government seem little better than a childish self-adulation: yet I never could have supposed an average Englishman so dead to all public feeling, as to think a good member too dearly purchased at the cost of a short walk or ride—for the labour of voting need be no greater—once every year, or every two or three years. As-

suming the fact, however, to be true, the expediency of a secret suffrage is not impeached by it. Though few votes be actually given, yet as every vote denotes a genuine preference and esteem, some rational ground is really acquired for believing the person chosen to be a superior man: whereas a hundred times the number of privately-determined votes proves literally nothing in favour of his competency as a Legislator. Better take the evidence of ten sincere truth-tellers, than that of a thousand suborned witnesses, who speak without caring whether what they attest is true or false.

Others object that the Ballot will be found in practice not to produce secrecy, inasmuch as a man may tell and will tell how he has voted. They omit to indicate at the same time the test whereby they mean to determine whether he speaks truth or falsehood. Of what value is a man's statement, when he may violate truth without any chance of detection, and when he has a direct interest in repelling tyrannical inquisition by justifiable deceit? His vote may perhaps be guessed: but that is not enough—it must be actually and positively known, before a patron can make his displeasure or his satisfaction contingent on the direction of it. And, indeed, the virulent opposition of the vote-commanders to the Ballot, plainly demonstrates how little faith they themselves repose in this miserable quibble.

There are others who exclaim loudly against the mischiefs of secrecy, and against the lying and hypo-

crisy of the Ballot, forgetting that they are themselves habitually employing it in their clubs, and that they can therefore scarcely be treated as serious when they brand it with such contumelious epithets elsewhere. Secrecy is good or bad according as it conduces to a good or a bad end: and in the case of voting, it may be proved to be essential to the most beneficent of all ends. And as a vote given by Ballot quickly comes to be ranged among matters unbecoming to pry into—just as no man ever thinks himself entitled to ask about the tenor of his friend's will, or the amount of his property—so there really would be neither lying nor hypocrisy, except where a shameful intrusion had been employed to wring from the voter his secret, and where the lie was a pardonable shelter against the greater evil of oppression. “In order that all men (observes Dr. Johnson) * may be taught to speak the truth, it is necessary that all likewise should learn to hear it.” When gentleness, sympathy, and tolerance of dissent, shall have become habits of action in the superior, evasion and concealment in the inferior will disappear of themselves. But until the former has thrown away his spear, it is monstrous to call upon the latter to perform his duty without a shield.

But there is one argument against the Ballot which I never hear advanced without indignation. It is to be withheld because it would cut down the influence

* Rambler, No. 96.

of the great proprietors. Wheresoever we turn in Reform, these tremendous giants are posted to bar our progress—

“ Apparent diræ facies, inimicaque Trojæ
 “ Numina magna Deûm.”

It is indeed true that the Ballot would materially abridge their influence: and any reform which did not effect that end would be hollow and delusive. Far from denying or disguising such a result, the advocates of Ballot avow and exult in it. And they ask at the same time what peril would ensue if the influence of the great proprietors were so far cut down as to be proportioned to their individual wisdom and merit, not to the size of their rent-rolls? In order that this class—against whom mankind have never yet provided adequate safeguards—in-solent bullies and ravishers in the Grecian States—cruel ejectors of neighbouring poor proprietors in the Roman Republic—sticklers for the Fist-right,* in the middle ages, against the growing ideas of law and order in the cities—spoilers of the church property, for their own benefit, in the sixteenth century; auxiliaries of Charles Stuart against English liberty in the seventeenth; authors, in the eighteenth and nineteenth, of the devouring war and the Corn Laws—in an age of crime, the most high-handed

* I take the liberty of translating literally the significant German compound *Faust-recht*.

criminals ; in an enlightened time, the most obstinate foes of improvement.—In order that this class may outbid friendless merit and ride down conscientious opposition, are we to dupe the people with the spurious forms instead of the essence and virtue of an electoral security? To cheat them with the outward and visible sign, while we rob them of the inward and spiritual grace? To invest them with an important public trust, designing beforehand that they should barter it away each to his patron-aristocrat, and thus to efface in their minds, by Legislative authority, the idea of obligation to the community? The influence of these elevated beings must indeed be as the dew from Heaven, if it be worth purchasing at the cost of all the evils of a simulated suffrage. If they must have more votes than one—for the influence which they claim means nothing else—let them become three-star, four-star, or twenty-star men, leaving to the humbler citizen his one poor vote secret and free. It will be bad enough to exalt them thus into a privileged few : they may spare us the bitterness of making them, besides, extorters and corrupters of other men's votes.

The importance of the Ballot, on every ground, as well in its direct and immediate as in its remote and indirect effects, appears to me vast and overwhelming. But it cannot, undoubtedly, be rendered efficacious, if the number of voters who concur to return a single member is permitted to be small. In that case, an opulent man might bribe them in the mass, covenant-

ing to pay to each a certain sum after his election. But if the number be large, it will become too expensive thus to pay all in order to purchase a majority.

In my opinion, no section or district which returns a member ought ever to consist of less than 2,000 voters: every section ought to include an equal or nearly an equal number: and if the necessity of obtaining a certain aggregate of returns out of a certain aggregate of voters permitted, it would be an improvement to make the number of voters in each electoral section even greater than 2,000. Every increase in the number of secret votes, whereby a candidate is chosen, furnishes increased presumption of his superior qualifications.

In this point of view, the number of members in the House of Commons becomes an important subject of discussion, because the smaller its total, the greater the number of voters who can be allotted to each separate returning body. The present House would be found far too numerous for the dispatch of business, if all the members were constant at their posts. The real working persons in it are notoriously a very small proportion: two hundred members constitute a large, three hundred a very large, attendance: and questions which draw together a greater number than three hundred are rare and unusual indeed. Three hundred really assiduous members appear to me amply sufficient to prosecute the business of legislation: and the surplus above that number, if any there were, would be found rather to

impede than to forward the ends for which they are assembled. To lessen the total number of members, too, as much as can be done without delaying the public business, is advantageous in other ways: it renders the post itself more conspicuous and honourable: it fastens public attention more steadily upon each member's parliamentary conduct: and it will of course be easier to find three hundred highly qualified persons in the country than five hundred, so as to avoid the necessity of resorting to a lower scale of intellect.

If the aggregate of voters were a million, and the members returned to Parliament 300, no returning body need include less than 3,300 voters: if the members of Parliament were 500 in number, each returning body might then have 2,000 voters allotted to it. A body of 2,000 electors, voting secretly, and voting so as to occasion no expense, could not be tampered with by the most expert electioneerer. The member whom a majority of these return, must be a person of some public reputation; a person believed to possess talent and worth, not merely equal, but much superior, to the average of his fellow-citizens.

In looking over the manifold enormities of our present system of representation, it will generally be found that any one defect, if left uncorrected, suffices to neutralize the remedies applied to the rest. If voters are habitually called upon to vote at a distance, one of two consequences will ensue: either

they will not vote at all, or they will find means to shift upon some one else the expense of their journey. In the first case, the benefit of their judgment is lost: in the second, solicitation, intrigue, and preponderance of the half-qualified rich man, are revived and rendered available. It is essential to any good system of voting, that an elector should vote at or near the place of his habitual residence. Any parish, any fraction of a parish, or any cluster of parishes, which comprised 200 voters, might have a separate polling-place, with proper apparatus: ten such being combined to form one returning body. Less than 200 (or such a proportion of them as chose to come) ought not to make use of the same balloting-box: with a number smaller than this, secrecy could not be effectually guaranteed. All the votes might thus be taken on the same day, with little inconvenience to any one, and hardly any necessary expense.

The existing distinction into Town and County Elections, without any reference to the number of voters contained in each county or in each town, appears to me indefensible and injurious in every way. The grand circumstance to be considered in the electoral sub-divisions is the number of voters included in each returning body, so as to ensure that no Member enters the House of Commons who has not obtained a certain minimum of votes, and so as to equalize, besides, the value of each man's vote, or the elective force vested in each voter. For, if one man votes in a returning body of 200, and another in a

returning body of 2000,—the vote of the first is worth ten times as much as the vote of the second; and comparing the elective force assigned to each, or the total effect which each is allowed to produce upon the representative body, the result is, as if the first man had ten votes and the second only one. It is obvious that such inequality, if pushed to a certain extent, would of itself be enough to corrupt a system of representation involving all the other requisite conditions; nor can any reason be given why even a small inequality should be allowed.

When the voters are polled in small fractions, at different places, and all on the same day, the enormous evils attending populous elections as now transacted would altogether disappear. The saturnalia of our present elections are enough to shock any reasonable man, and to alienate him, not only from the external shew of popular controul, but even from the people themselves. The riot, drunkenness, and fighting in the streets, form an appropriate parallel and accompaniment to the low manœuvres of electioneering leaders behind the scenes. Yet there are those who contend that these disgraceful and noxious tumults are essential to the existence of public spirit, and that they serve to nurture both the sublime emotions and the sense of mutual right and duty which connect a man with his fellow-citizens. To me they appear no less inconsistent with genuine patriotism than with private decency. A great public question is discredited and rolled in the dirt

by being converted into the war-whoop of a hired mob, in whom the fiction of a public concern serves only to supersede the restraints of private life, without substituting any better feeling than that of devotion to their temporary employer. The band of *sicarii* organised by Clodius against his enemies at Rome could not be more destitute of attachment to the public welfare. Indeed, the whole transaction is more akin to a pugilistic contest or a horse-race, than to a selection between two opponents, each professing to be qualified for the grandest function which society has to fill up. The resemblance would be complete in almost all points, if the backers of pugilists were to carry into the ring banners inscribed with some popular question or high sounding abstract word: Dutch Sam and the Revolution of 1688! Neal and Purity of Election! When the knuckles and wind of Dutch Sam had achieved a triumph, his friends would retire, confirmed in their attachment to the Revolution of 1688, and exulting in the idea that the victory just gained would do much to imprint its benefits on the public mind.

There are some few cases of exception, even as matters are at present, where the population really take a sincere interest in the event of the election. But the evil of fixing one single place of voting, and of congregating men in large numbers about it, is still very great, though of a different character. Inflamed by one common sentiment, the crowd cannot be restrained from venting, either by words

or by action, their antipathy against opposite voters, who are abused or pelted, so as to drive away the timid, and to furnish a pretence to the indolent for remaining at home. Such bursts of wrath, where no effective and tranquil system of controul has as yet been organized on behalf of the people, may perhaps be pardonable against a flagitious statesman : against a private citizen, they are altogether vicious and inexcusable, and they fatally counteract the salutary lesson, so hardly learnt by any one, of tolerance towards disinterested dissent. Nor does an election, so taken, exhibit a fair result of the judgment of all the voters nominally appealed to.

Every evil incidental to elections would be done away with, and the efficacy of the system as a means to good government greatly strengthened, if voters polled secretly, in small bodies, and in different places at the same time.

One more addition remains to be made to the essentials of Parliamentary Reform :—increased frequency of election. A peaceful citizen, accustomed to elections as they are now, may well feel repugnant to such invasions of his comfort at shorter periods ; but when it has been shown that voting may be so conducted as to molest no man's tranquility, a most injurious prepossession will be dispelled, on this truly important part of the field.

Election for seven years certain has almost the same effect as election for life. So faintly is the imagination affected by a contingency seven years

removed, that if a man can be trusted to do well for that long period, he might also be trusted to do well, though chosen for life. What would be said of the prudence of any one, who, having selected a particular attorney or physician, should enter into a contract binding himself to resort to no other for the same space of seven years? Would he not be universally considered to have taken the most effectual measure for making them remiss and indifferent?

On the other hand we find, in the actual course of affairs, that although a man may change his lawyer or physician any day, he very rarely does change: because these practitioners, knowing that if they do not give satisfaction, they will immediately lose business, take care to be attentive and zealous in their duty.

I think it may be stated, as a general fact, that when a trust is revocable at pleasure, the person entrusted acts so as not to deserve displacement, and in general is not displaced.

This is precisely what we desire to see happen with respect to Members of Parliament: and the mode of ensuring it will be, as in other cases, by conferring on them their trust for very short fixed periods. One year, in my opinion, would be quite sufficient, and better than any longer period: two years would be tolerable: three years seriously objectionable on account of its length: and any period longer than three years not to be entertained for a moment.

Many persons are alarmed at the idea of annual elections, as if they imported actual change of members

every year. This would, indeed, be a very formidable evil,—an evil only less than that of retaining dishonest or incompetent members. I feel persuaded that their real operation would be directly the reverse: that a member would retain his seat longer under annual elections than under any other, because the security for his good conduct would be so much more complete. The ideas of accountability and obligation, and the necessity of maintaining a high reputation with the public, could never be absent from his mind: the shortness of the period would leave him little hope of making up the negligence of one month by increased diligence during the remainder: and as he would indulge a reasonable hope of re-election, if he only avoided occasioning painful disappointment to his constituents, the motives to zeal and good conduct would be really at their maximum. If a man possesses the confidence of an electoral body in 1831, and is under such paramount and continuous motives to do his very best, can he be supposed likely to lose it in 1832, except by some most rare and unusual occurrence? On the other hand, if the certain duration of his trust be lengthened, the motives to the best possible discharge of it are proportionally enfeebled, and he is more likely to do or to omit something whereby he would deserve to forfeit, and would really forfeit, the confidence of his constituents. It is only under the shorter duration that the desirable result will be ensured, of members being

continued, simply because they deserve to be continued, in possession of their trust.

Some persons apprehend that annual elections would make a member too attentive to the approaching end of his trust, and that they would subjugate the independence of his private judgment too much to the voters by whom he was to be re-chosen or displaced. But it is to be recollected that a voting section constituted as I have supposed—voting by ballot, in small divisions, and without any separate local tie—would be nothing more than a fraction of the general public: and that, consequently, the same behaviour which sustained his reputation with the general public, would also sustain it with his own peculiar voters. The only prejudices, therefore, to which he will be called upon to bend, are those of the general public. To these every man must bend, more or less: and the only person who can hope to combat them effectually and beneficially, will be he who has established a high reputation on other grounds for wisdom and virtue. The motive to establish and sustain such a reputation will be highest in the bosom of the member chosen for a year, whose authority will therefore be the greater when he stands up against any special prejudice. Nor do I imagine that he would be backward in such an opposition, so far as prudence will permit. For if he timidly chimes in with the prejudice, and if some bolder rival takes out of his hands the task of enlightening the public, com-

parative discredit is sure to await him. The path of evasion will be found hardly less dangerous, and far less elevating and satisfactory, than that of sincerity.

Perhaps it may be contended, that according to the principles on which I have reasoned, annual elections would not be sufficiently frequent, and that monthly elections ought to be regarded as still better. To this I reply, First, That monthly elections would be a vast additional trouble to voters, without any adequate benefit. Secondly, That there are reasons which make a year preferable for this purpose to any shorter period. For it is desirable that the voters, when they exercise their privilege of re-choosing a member, should fix their eyes on his general reputation for worth and ability, more than on his conduct with reference to any particular question. This general estimate is the resulting impression, formed by surveying and laying to heart successively a series of his acts and speeches, assisted by the criticisms which each of them may provoke from the organs of public discussion. The seat of the member ought, therefore, to be assured for a period sufficiently long to include a certain number of various acts and speeches, so as to serve as a basis for that general estimate on which the voters ought to proceed, and so as to prevent their judgment from being unduly absorbed by any one particular question. A year, in my opinion, is long enough to answer this condition perfectly, and short enough to keep alive the most

earnest sense of obligation in the bosom of the member.

Though I regard a year as the best period, and any period longer than two years as seriously objectionable, yet I am far from denying that even Triennial Parliaments would be a prodigious improvement, in comparison with Septennial, which are, as I have before observed, scarcely less pernicious than nominations for life.

The conditions, then, of an effectual Parliamentary Reform, without alarming the middling classes by multiplying very poor voters in their present state of intelligence, are the following:—

1. An aggregate of voters not less than one million, formed of all persons enjoying the largest income. It has been stated that a pecuniary qualification of 100*l.* annual income would embrace one million of voters: whether this be the fact or not, can only be verified by actual returns: but I think the qualification ought to be so adjusted as to be sure of embracing such an aggregate.

2. This aggregate of one million distributed into electoral divisions of equal or nearly equal numbers, coinciding as little as possible with separate class interests, or local interests, and each voting for one member.

3. Electors to vote by ballot: in small bodies and

at separate polling places, yet so that no body smaller than 200 shall be assigned to the same balloting box. Each election to be concluded in one day.

4. Parliaments on no consideration longer than Triennial: better far, if Biennial: better still, if Annual.

By these provisions alone, an enormous and incalculable gain would be assured: but, to render them quite complete, they ought to be accompanied with a farther provision for gradually lowering the suffrage at the end of some fixed period, say five years—so as to introduce successively new voters at the end of every five years, and to render the suffrage at the end of twenty or twenty-five years, nearly co-extensive with the community. The interval would be more than sufficient so to educate and prepare the minds of the poorer voters, as to obviate all ground for alarm on the part of the richer.

It is but too certain, however, that we shall not at the present moment acquire even our million of voters with the requisite accompanying precautions: so that it becomes a matter important to determine, since all of the first four provisions cannot be obtained, which of them can be least injuriously postponed, and which of them ought to be most strenuously insisted on.

Whatever else may be postponed, let no man for a moment think of laying aside the Ballot. This is the vast and grand amendment, in the absence of which every other concession would be unavailing and

nugatory. Without secret voting there cannot be public-minded voting: and without public-minded voting, men worthy to be legislators can neither be singled out nor preferred—scarcely even created. Under a numerous and equally distributed open suffrage, it is possible that the mutes and idlers in the present House might be replaced by active and stirring gentlemen, and that what Mr. Tennyson calls “the inert physical mass” of the House might thus be lightened. But the voters, though increased in number, would still persist in their rooted habit of voting from desire to oblige, from fear to offend, or from personal sympathy or kindness of one description or another: the election committee and the canvass would still be the grand instruments of success: and the most promising candidate would be he who, steering his political course midway between truth and falsehood, so as to offend no one, could create the most favourable impressions by seducing manners, by overflowing politeness, and by officious attentions. It is not from such a school that the men are to be drawn, under whose guardianship we may lay down our heads in peace, and to whose mandates or exactions we should cheerfully submit, under the conviction that they emanated from tried wisdom and benevolence. It is only when the vote, secured by secrecy, stands upon grounds quite distinct from the ordinary track of private affections and sympathies, that the elector will look out for that assemblage of public qualities

which the magnitude of the trust really calls for. Then only will such qualities be sought, and then only will they be found.

To gain the Ballot, it would be amply worth while to make concessions as to the number of voters, if we were compelled to take our choice between the two. Though I could not place full confidence in an aggregate of voters much smaller than a million, I should greatly prefer 500,000 voters, qualified by superiority of income, along with the Ballot, to 2,000,000 of voters without it. If the House of Commons were reduced in number to 300, an aggregate of 500,000 voters would allow of 1,660 voters for each electoral division. A suffrage, narrowed even to this nearly oligarchical limit, but accompanied by the Ballot and by Triennial Parliaments, would afford a great and salutary opening to superior minds and to men of public reputation, and a comfortable foretaste of better things to come.

THE END.

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