SPEECH

OF

CHARLES TENNYSON, Esq.

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

MAY 19, 1828,

ON Mr. NICHOLSON CALVERT'S MOTION TO SUBSTITUTE THE HUNDRED OF BASSETLAW

FOR THE

TOWN OF BIRMINGHAM,

IN THE BILL FOR DISFRANCHISING

THE BOROUGH OF EAST RETFORD.

THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICE OF THE MIRROR OF PARLIAMENT, 52, *PARLIAMENT STREET;*

AND SOLD BY

MESSRS. LONGMAN AND CO., PATERNOSTER-ROW; HATCHARD AND SONS, AND RIDGWAY AND SONS, PICCADILLY; PARBURY AND ALLEN, LEADENHALL-STREET; CALKIN AND BUDD, PALL-MALL; WINCHESTER AND VARNHAM, STRAND; AND ALL OTHER BOOKSELLERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

MDCCCXXIX.

LONDON:
Printed by WILLIAM CLOWES,
Stamford Street.

MEMORANDUM.

On the 11th of June, 1827, the Order of the Day "for the consideration of the Special Report from the East Retford Election Committee" being read, —Mr. Tennyson moved, and, after discussion, the House of Commons resolved—"That the corrupt state of the borough of East Retford required the serious attention of the House." On the same day, Mr. Tennyson obtained leave to bring in a Bill "for excluding the borough of East Retford from electing burgesses to serve in Parliament, and to enable the town of Birmingham to return two representatives in lieu thereof."

On the 22nd of the same month, this Bill was read a second time, but in consequence of the approaching prorogation, the subject was postponed to the next Session; and on the 29th of June, the issue of the writ to East Retford was suspended accordingly.

On the 31st of January, 1828, the Bill was again brought in; and on the 25th of February was read a second time and ordered to be committed: several witnesses were then summoned to attend the Committee on the 3rd of March.

On the 3rd, 4th, and 7th of March, the Com-

mittee examined evidence in support of the Bill, and heard counsel against it.

On the 10th of March, the Committee went through the Bill, *pro formâ*, and reported it to the House.

On the 21st of March, Mr. Tennyson, having stated and commented upon the evidence, moved, —that the Bill be recommitted, on the ground that the case against the borough had been established. The House agreed to the motion; but on the question—that the Speaker should leave the Chair, Mr. Nicholson Calvert moved,— "That it be an instruction to the Committee, that they have power to make provision for the prevention of bribery and corruption in the election of Members to serve in Parliament for the borough of East Retford, by extending the right of voting to the forty-shilling freeholders of the hundred of Bassetlaw."

After debate, the House agreed to the instruction:—

Ayes	157
Noes	121
Majority	36

Mr. Tennyson afterwards moved the postponement of the Committee from time to time, on the ground that,—several Members having agreed to the instruction voted on the 21st of March, because it was proposed by the Bill in

progress for disfranchising the borough of Penryn, to transfer the elective franchise from that borough to Manchester,—it was expedient to delay the East Retford Bill until it could be ascertained whether the House of Lords would agree to that transfer.

On the 14th of May the Earl of Carnarvon, who had the conduct, in the House of Lords, of the Bill for disfranchising Penryn, stated in his place, after evidence had been heard in support of it, that the nature of that evidence was not such as would justify him in recommending a transfer of the elective franchise from Penryn to Manchester, but that he should probably propose to open the right of voting to the freeholders of the adjacent Hundreds.

Accordingly on the 21st of May, Mr. Tennyson moved the recommitment of the East Retford Bill in the House of Commons. Thereupon the House resolved itself into a Committee, and Mr. N. Calvert, with a view of giving effect to the instruction of the 21st of March, moved, in the first place, to omit that portion of the preamble which recited the expediency of entirely excluding East Retford from returning representatives, and of substituting the town of Birmingham.

After a debate in which Mr. N. Calvert, Mr. Tennyson, Mr. Lumley, Mr. Alderman Waithman, Lord Rancliffe, Sir George Philips, Mr.

Secretary Peel, Mr. Littleton, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Sturges Bourne, Lord Viscount Sandon, Mr. Secretary Huskisson, Lord William Powlett, and Mr. Williams Wynn took part, the Committee divided, when the numbers were:

In favour of Mr. Calvert's motion	145
Against it	127
Majority in favour of Mr. Calvert's motion	18

After this division, Mr. Calvert proposed to substitute for the words omitted in the preamble the words following:—

"And whereas such bribery and corruption is likely to continue to be practised in the said borough in *future*, unless some means are taken to prevent the same; in order, therefore, to prevent such unlawful practices for the future, and that the said borough may henceforth be duly represented in Parliament,"—

Whereupon Mr. Secretary Huskisson moved, that all the words of the proposed amendment, after the word "*future*" be omitted.

Upon which it was moved and agreed, that the Chairman should report progress, and ask leave to sit again on Monday, the 2nd of June.

In the debate which preceded the last division, Mr. TENNYSON spoke as follows:—

SPEECH.

Notwithstanding the disposition manifested by the House on a former night, in favour of the proposal of my Honourable Friend, (Mr. N. Calvert) I must confess I did entertain a hope that he would have decided to abandon it, after what has since occurred in the other House of Parliament with regard to the Bill for disfranchising the borough of Penryn. The main grounds upon which he received the support of this House no longer exist; but as he thinks it expedient to persevere, I wish to remind the Committee that by the vote of the 21st of March to which I have referred, we are not in any manner bound to adopt his present proposition. That vote merely enables the Committee to take it into consideration, and to examine the claims of the hundred of Bassetlaw in competition with those of the important town, to which this Bill yet destines the elective franchise.

And now, Sir, that ample time has been allowed for reflection, and for collecting the general

feeling throughout the country on this subject, I do trust, that in a case where no man will deny that the whole current of public opinion is adverse to my Honourable Friend's proposal, and where reason, justice and expediency are, as I will undertake to shew, clearly arrayed against it, the Committee will at least pause before it shall consent to that proposal.

The Right Honourable Gentleman opposite (Mr. Secretary Peel) and those who act with him, although they consented to give this authority to the Committee, are still as much at liberty as any other Members of this House. The proposition did not proceed from them. The Right Honourable Gentleman has distinctly disclaimed it. But even if it had originated with him, it merely reserves to those who either proposed or voted for it, the power of consideration, without pledging them to any specific ulterior course. Even if the other House had agreed to transfer the elective franchise from Penryn to Manchester, this would have been the state of the question; —but when the power thus given to the Committee was part of an arrangement which had relation to the disposition of both these boroughs,—an arrangement suggested by the Right Honourable Gentleman himself, upon the hypothesis that the privilege of Penryn was to be given to Manchester,—it appears to me, that since it is

now clearly ascertained that no such transfer will take place, the Right Honourable Gentleman —although I will not say that he is distinctly pledged, as we are at present circumstanced, to the course which I would invite him to pursue, —yet cannot be personally bound to act in the manner proposed by my Honourable Friend, upon the instruction to which he thus consented under an hypothesis which has since entirely failed.

But although I do not assert that there is any thing which absolutely binds the Right Honourable Gentleman to adopt my course of proceeding, under the circumstances which have arisen; yet it seems to me to flow from the principles on which he professed to act in the former discussion, that he ought now to concur with me. He proposed to divide these disposable franchises between the commercial and the landed interest. Accordingly, he agreed to transfer that of Penryn to Manchester, while that of Retford was to be given to an agricultural district. Now if, on the contrary, the House of Lords should open Penryn to the adjacent hundreds, which is the course at present contemplated, then he will as effectually act upon the plan he laid down, by giving the franchise of East Retford to Birmingham. And if the Penryn Bill be entirely abandoned,—still, upon the principle of alternation which the Right Honourable Gentleman is dis-

posed to adopt between the landed and trading interests, a commercial or manufacturing town should now have its turn; inasmuch as, in the last case—that of Grampound—and in the three other cases of Shoreham, Cricklade and Aylesbury, which preceded it, the land had the benefit of the changes which then took place.

The time is now undoubtedly arrived for the Right Honourable Gentleman and the Committee to exercise, if they will, that consideration of the claims of Bassetlaw which this instruction permits. But before we proceed, Sir, I entreat the Committee to recollect that the town of Birmingham is still, as it were, in possession of this Bill. Its hopes have been raised, and its expectations excited; and it is, I submit, incumbent on my Honourable Friend and those who advocate with him the claims of Bassetlaw, to shew that those claims ought in justice to be preferred, before we deliberately eject the town of Birmingham from that position which, conformably to the first impression of the House in its favour, it has now for so long a period been allowed to occupy.

Sir, after the powerful arguments by which my Right Honourable and Learned Friend, the Member for Knaresborough (Sir James Mackintosh) opposed this motion on a former night,—in one of those convincing and splendid speeches with which he occasionally consents to instruct

and delight us,—I shall confine myself within narrow limits; and I trust that, under the new circumstances now attendant upon this question, I shall be able to satisfy a majority of the Committee, that every view of the public interest requires the transfer of this disposable franchise to some unrepresented manufacturing town.

In the first place, I contend that the course which my Honourable Friend invites us to adopt is novel in itself—unsanctioned by any precedent—and inconsistent with the established institutions of the country. My Honourable Friend says, he means to conform himself to the precedent of Aylesbury. But in that case,—and the two others of Shoreham and Cricklade, which have been assumed as precedents on the other side,—although the neighbouring freeholders were admitted to vote, it was upon grounds which do not exist here. In each of those cases, a considerable body of the electors were untainted by any proof of corruption. On behalf of that unimpeached portion, it was thought right to retain the borough; but, in order to prevent corruption for the future, it was determined to make a large addition to the constituent body. The neighbouring freeholders presented a convenient source from which the infusion could be drawn; but this plan was adopted in each case, most distinctly on account of the borough itself, and certainly not on account

of any supposed claim on the part of the hundred, still less of the county in which the borough was situated. Neither the hundred nor the county were ever dreamt of as having any pretence to increased representation. But here my Honourable Friend makes his claim distinctly and exclusively on their behalf. The Right Honourable Gentleman has done the same thing. The Acts of Parliament in each of those cases recite the end and intent to be, "That the said *borough* may henceforth be duly represented in Parliament;" and my Honourable Friend proposes to conform to those precedents. But does he propose this amendment as the means of having *East Retford* represented in future? No such thing. He, and others who concurred with him in the last discussion, expressly stated it as the means of giving representation to Nottinghamshire and Bassetlaw, and, in common with the whole House, utterly repudiated the borough and abjured all regard to it, and to the whole of the present burgesses, as unworthy of consideration. My Honourable Friend, indeed, seems now to have discovered all the difficulty of his dilemma, and has attempted to retrace his steps, so as to steer a middle course between the anomaly of retaining the whole corrupt body of electors, and the novelty of altogether rejecting them. Yet, as he is unable to distinguish any uncor-

rupted portion, he attempts to night to draw a fanciful and arbitrary line—he proposes to retain the upper portion of the electors; and therefore, as the most wealthy, the most inexcusable portion. His plan is, to retain those who are assessed at twenty pounds a-year and upwards to the poor-rate—that is, just those who ought to have set a better example. I happen to have before me, for another purpose, the assessment of the parish; and I find that it would produce him, on this principle, two or three persons at the most, as the nucleus for his new body of electors, which I before told him he wanted, and the idea of which he and the Right Honourable Gentleman then ridiculed. His two or three individuals are probably among the most objectionable persons in the whole corporation. He cannot separate the sheep from the goats, in a case where they are all goats; so he spares those which, as the most powerful and mischievous, ought to have been the first victims! The poor are excluded, not because they are more corrupt, but because they are poor; the rich are retained, not because they are less corrupt, but because they are rich. Surely this scheme will not be allowed to help my Honourable Friend out of his difficulty. He cannot conceal the truth. We must see through the flimsy veil he has now found it expedient to throw over his project. It was, and it is, undoubtedly, a case for absolute

transfer; but my Honourable Friend would not deal with it by a transfer to another town, or to a county according to precedent. He attempts, under the colour of a precedent to which his proceeding has no analogy, to transfer the franchise to a district yet unheard of for any purpose of representation—the district or *department* of Bassetlaw!

Thus, Sir, I am justified in boldly maintaining that this is a novel proposition,—strange to the Constitution,—an invasion of the ancient scheme of representation by counties, cities, and boroughs,—which I contend should not be broken into, as now proposed, without the gravest and most mature consideration. Even if I were willing to begin a new system with my Honourable Friend to-night, assuredly Bassetlaw would not be the spot upon which I would fix to open my campaign against the Constitution, unless I intended it also as a campaign against the principles upon which it is founded; for it is notorious, that to give the franchise to Bassetlaw is to give the nomination of two Members of this House to a corporation of peers. Bassetlaw is well known to be a crowded galaxy of coronets. I forget:—Gentlemen, may not know the fact as applied to Bassetlaw,—but who has not heard of "The Dukery!" It is this district which is so called—and to this "Dukery" it is that my

Honourable Friend proposes his transfer. What must the public think! Nay, Sir, we know (for the matter has been amply canvassed out of doors) what it does think, of the proposition to allot two Members for the purpose of giving double representation to the Dukery, when whole multitudes of the people, and some of the interests the most important to the common weal, are languishing for representation amongst us!

The freeholders of Bassetlaw have already ample representation. Are they to be gratuitously gorged with it! In fact, it is one of the best-represented districts in England. First, by the Members for the county of Nottingham;—they have never said that they were oppressed by their duties, neither has any complaint been made that they discharged those duties in a deficient manner. Next, by an extraordinary providence and beyond all example, in the other House of Parliament also,—by that constellation of Dukes and Earls, and Viscounts and Barons, who reside within the boundary of Bassetlaw or possess her soil; again, in this House, by all those Honourable Members, whom these puissant Nobles contrive, by means which I will not describe, to return to Parliament for places where representation is a name. Thus it would not only be idle to urge a claim, but ludicrous to pretend a want. In affecting to give better re-

presentation to the people of England, my Honourable Friend would, in truth, deprive them of a portion,—decayed and dilapidated indeed—but still a portion of their inheritance, in order to confer it upon that noble oligarchy which presides over the destinies of this otherwise obscure district. Bassetlaw herself is silent! Her body of independent freeholders, with some of whom I have the honour to be well acquainted, neither petition for, nor desire this privilege. They have nothing to gain, except another mark of their own comparative insignificance, and those who would really gain cannot and dare not ask. My Honourable Friend saves them the trouble; for he proposes to convert an open borough—a borough open to all comers—to all at least who have money in their pockets—into what will resolve itself into a close nomination, or at least into a prize for the powerful Mandarins of the district to bargain or to fight for. I have before me a curious exemplification of the truth of my impression. A most respectable gentleman, who has lately written a very valuable pamphlet in favour of Catholic Emancipation (Mr. Gally Knight), encouraged by what passed on the former discussion, has published an address offering his services to the future electors of Bassetlaw. Well knowing the fact as I have stated it, and who would be

the real electors of Bassetlaw, he addresses himself to the "Noblemen," as well as to the Freeholders of the hundred,—although noblemen cannot vote nor interfere, without being guilty of a high infringement of our privileges. Mr. Gally Knight, adopting the language of my Honourable Friend and others, speaks of this operation as a transfer from the borough to the hundred,—and Lord Newark, another candidate, does the same thing. I have also an address to these electors in embryo, signed by Mr. Edward Cromwell Brown, (the witness who underwent so long an examination at the Bar,) on behalf of a candidate whose name is concealed, and whom he pledges to oppose Catholic Emancipation. I have reason to believe that this hand-bill proceeds from the Duke of Newcastle on behalf of a relation. It is pretended that the Duke has little interest in this hundred of Bassetlaw where he resides; yet within it lies the greater part of his estate in Nottinghamshire, and he is said to return one of the Members for the county. If so, he must have still more decisive influence for this particular hundred. Why did not the relative of the Noble Duke come forward, openly, like the other candidates? Obviously, because it would have exposed his Grace's pretensions, and increased the just opposition to my Honourable Friend's motion. I have also an address

to the "independent burgesses" of Retford, soliciting the "honour" of representing them; as it is probable, says this candidate, that their ancient privileges will be preserved. He, too, rests his claims on his strenuous opposition to popery, and is no less a personage than Mr. Edward Goulburn, the brother of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It seems the Right Honourable Gentleman had founded some hope on the notice, which had been given by an Honourable Member, to move for the issue of the writ. The letter which brought me this handbill, states, that the freemen of Retford, considering Mr. E. Goulburn to be in the secrets of the Government, now entertain an expectation that the Right Honourable Gentleman and his colleagues would support even that motion.

There is only one other point on which I would touch, in reply to what has been urged in favour of my Honourable Friend's proposition. It is said to be great injustice that the county of Nottingham, heretofore represented by eight Members, should be reduced to six. Sir, I am confident that the measure I propose will not deprive this county of any advantage, but simply relieve it from a flagrant nuisance. Up to a period comparatively recent, Nottinghamshire had only four representatives. It was not until late in the reign of Charles II. (in 1676) that

Newark, in that county, first obtained the privilege of returning Members to Parliament. It was the last exercise of royal favour and prerogative in this way. But the privilege was not given on the ground of any necessity which the county felt for increased representation; it is known, historically, to have been bestowed as a mark of gratitude by Charles II. for the manner in which Newark had held out on behalf of the royal cause. At that time too, if I must consider my Honourable Friend's view of the subject, the population of Nottinghamshire bore a much larger proportion to the population of Warwickshire,—into the bosom of which I propose to transfer this franchise,—than it now does; the mere increase of the population of Warwickshire during the last century, being alone equal to the entire present population of the county of Nottingham. Again, it was only in the reign of Queen Elizabeth that Retford itself obtained the privilege it has now forfeited.

By these two acts of royal grace, the representation of Nottinghamshire, adopting my Honourable Friend's view, was doubled; whereas it is not on record that Warwickshire, the relative importance and population of which have increased in an immense proportion, has ever received any addition to its representation since the establishment of the representative system in this king-

dom. But, in fact, what have the Members for Retford to do with the county in which it stands? First,—Who return them? The shoe-makers and minor artisans of the town—about 100 persons, and about the same number of non-resident freemen—individuals, on the whole, who have no sympathy whatever with the interests of the county. Next, who are the parties who have been returned? Gentlemen from Nottinghamshire?—No. In the two last Parliaments, my friend Mr. Evans a banker from Derby, and Mr. Crompton from Yorkshire. In the Parliament of 1812?—Mr. Osbaldeston from Yorkshire, and Mr. Marsh, who was entirely unconnected with Nottinghamshire. Who were returned the last time?—My Honourable and Gallant Friend Sir Robert Dundas and Mr. Wrightson, both from Yorkshire,—the unsuccessful candidate being Sir Henry Wilson, a worthy knight from Chelsea.

If we consider the manner in which the counties are represented,—not as the Right Honourable Gentleman looked at it in the former discussion, but with reference to their population,—the population of Nottinghamshire does not appear to require eight Members nearly so much as Warwickshire. Warwickshire has at present only six Members for its population, which may now be stated at 300,000; while Nottingham-

shire has eight for its 190,000. But taking the relative population as stated in the last census—that of 1821,—Warwickshire at 274,000, and Nottinghamshire at 186,000; still, after the transfer to Birmingham, Nottinghamshire will be better represented by its remaining six Members, than Warwickshire by the eight Members it will then have, for it will still have only one for each 35,000 inhabitants, while Nottinghamshire will retain one for each 31,000. At present the disproportion is quite unfair; Warwickshire with six Members has only one for about 46,000, while Nottinghamshire has one for about 23,000, or, in other words, has double the representation of Warwickshire. In fact, Nottinghamshire stands the twenty-first in point of population upon the scale of English counties, while Warwickshire is the twelfth.

Sir, I have thought it a proper mark of respect to my Honourable Friend so far to discuss, upon his own grounds, the proposition which he has submitted to us. But, Sir, there are other and far higher motives, which have influenced me in the course I have pursued, and to which I feel it my duty to adhere.

My Honourable Friend has told us, with the candour which belongs to him, that the object of his motion is to give this franchise as a boon to the landed interest. I am one of the last men in this

House likely to take a bigoted view in opposition to the landed interest, because all the means which I possess are derived from that source, and thus identify my private interest with it. My Honourable Friend will recollect, that I lately sat in a division upon the same bench with him in support of the landed interest; and I was satisfied that, by the vote I then gave, I was not aiming any blow at the commercial or manufacturing classes of the community; for, whatever supports the agriculture of the country must be beneficial to them. And now I am equally persuaded that the landed interest will be effectually promoted by duly encouraging and giving the advantage which I seek, at present, for the commercial and manufacturing interests. But even if I did not think so, still a sense of the injustice of my Honourable Friend's proposal would divert me from acceding to it.

I have shewn that the Members for Retford did not, in any sort, represent the county of Nottingham. But, Sir, I will now add that they were never intended so to represent it, and ought not, according to my Honourable Friend's design, to be made to do so. I will cite an authority to which he will defer, that of Sir William Blackstone. He says in his first volume, page 159,—"The counties are represented by knights elected by the proprietors of lands: the cities and

boroughs are represented by citizens and burgesses chosen by the mercantile part, or supposed trading interest of the nation."

Again, page 174:—

"As for the electors of citizens and burgesses, these are supposed to be the mercantile or trading interest of this kingdom. But as trade is of a fluctuating nature, and seldom long fixed in a place, it was formerly left to the Crown to summon, *pro re natâ*, the most flourishing towns to send representatives to Parliament; so that as towns increased in trade and grew populous, they were admitted to a share in the Legislature."

In fact, the boroughs did, as Sir William Blackstone states, formerly give direct representation to the trading interest of the nation,—such as it then was,—and of which those communities were the chief depositories. Changes in the circumstances of the country have thrown its trade,—and that of a much higher character,—into other hands; but still these small open boroughs form the main source from which a secondary representation is, in a circuitous way, furnished to the new and real trading interests which have now risen up out of the pale of the representation. The demand for representation on the part of these new and extensive trading, manufacturing, and monied interests, during the last 150 years,—that is, since the crown discontinued exercising

the prerogative referred to by Mr. Justice Blackstone, has set them to obtain—by corruption and stratagem—that supply, for which the practice of the constitution had ceased to afford the due and legitimate means. Just as the demand for game, on the part of the monied interest, is satisfied through the lawless channel of the poacher, for want of a supply through channels authorized by law. The small open boroughs have accordingly fallen a prey to this demand and necessity for representation which have risen up in other quarters. The result is, that some virtual or secondary representation is thus obtained for these new interests, but it is accomplished by means of the most demoralizing and vitiating character. The matter should not be so left. It may be said that the venality and corruption now practised are necessary, as it were, to the system;—that without them this system would not "work so well" as it has been said to do, and which I admit that, to a considerable extent, it yet does. Yet they should, undoubtedly, be got rid of. But if got rid of, *per se*, and the franchise were still left in the hands of these petty corporations,—then the dregs of the people, such as the 100 resident voters of Retford,—for the non-residents would not come to vote if there were no money in the case,—would be represented on the one hand, and the upper classes, by the counties and close boroughs,

on the other; while the middle classes,—at present forming the substance of the people of England,—would be deprived even of that secondary representation which they now, by these vicious means, obtain. The judicious course is, therefore, gradually and as opportunities offer, to transfer these franchises from the hands of those who, not requiring the privilege, abuse it,—to the interests which, having a real necessity for it, are driven to obtain representation by mischievous courses. With regard to the close boroughs—I mean those which were formerly open boroughs, but are now fallen under the control of some individual patron,—they still give virtual representation, in many cases, to the monied or commercial interest; but, inasmuch as the proprietors of these close boroughs are, for the most part, connected with the landed interest, the chief dependence of the monied, commercial and manufacturing classes, must be upon those which still remain open boroughs.

When arrangements were, from time to time, heretofore made for the due representation of the landed and trading interests, the former, in the early periods, bore an enormous proportion to the latter. I have seen it stated somewhere lately,—I believe in that very able and valuable work recently published by Mr. Mackinnon, on the progress and present state of Public

Opinion,—a work abounding in new and interesting matter, and directing the statesman and the legislator to the most important conclusions,—I say, I believe, it is there stated, that at the time when the land was chiefly in the hands of the King, the Church and the Barons, the landed interest bore to the trading interest a proportion of 500 to 1. The bulk of the people were then in an abject state; but as circumstances arose to develope and stimulate their industry and intelligence, a middle class sprung up in the trading towns, who were to bear a considerable proportion towards the national charges. In behalf of these towns, as their means of contribution increased, abundant use was made of the power of the Crown, in order to give them representation in Parliament. In the century which elapsed between the reigns of Henry VIII. and Charles II., —the period during which various circumstances and some wholesome laws caused trade to make its first great strides in this country, ninety-three boroughs,—a majority of those now sending Members to Parliament,—were added to the representation. Some, indeed, have since decayed; but among the first so added, I find Lancaster, Preston, and Liverpool. Durham and Newark, in the reign of Charles II., were the last instances; and from that period the representative system has stood still; but while it

has been stagnant, trade has been making prodigious advances. The trading and monied interests are now at least equal in importance to the landed interest; and I may appeal to the Right Honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether they are not estimated as contributing, at least in an equal degree with the land, to the revenues of the country. That trade has, in this interval, advanced in an enormous ratio to the advance of the landed interest, will be obvious from a very simple statement. About the period of the revolution, and for a few subsequent years, the rental of the landed property may be stated as amounting to between 10,000,000*l.* and 14,000,000*l.* In 1812, according to the returns under the Acts relating to the property tax, it scarcely amounted to 30,000,000*l.*, so that it had, within the intervening period, doubled, or at the most, trebled. Now let us look at the relative progress of trade. In 1689, the Customs yielded about 600,000*l.*; and, according to the account lately presented to the House, they produced in 1827 about 20,000,000*l.*, or nearly 18,000,000*l.* into the Exchequer; thus the Customs' duties have between those years increased thirty times. Yet, notwithstanding this enormous proportionate advance of trade and manufactures—in this state of things, which, if the ancient prerogative had continued in action,

would, doubtless, have caused great additions to the borough representation,—my Honourable Friend, instead of agreeing to my proposal, which is,—not to make any addition to it, but merely to substitute one borough for another,—would seduce us to make a direct transfer to the landed interest from that fund which was designed to represent the commercial classes, and thus invade the limited territory which still, after a fashion, supplies a kind of virtual representation to the new trading interests of the community. This project is, therefore, as unjust as it is novel; but it is also unwise and inexpedient.

We have been long and actively engaged in promoting the commerce and manufactures of the country. They have, within the last century, doubled its population and infinitely more than doubled its resources. They have created several immense trading communities, yet unrepresented in Parliament, and a prodigious mass of wealth and intelligence residing in a widely-extended middle class of the people, which is now become the chief seat of the public feeling and opinion of this kingdom.

Some there are who view this result with alarm. And, Sir, I confess that I have occasionally looked with doubt and anxiety at the question,—whether our institutions would be allowed to expand and adapt themselves with sufficient

promptness to this great change in the condition of the people. Let those who have felt alarm be assured that this is the only just and substantial ground for it. No scheme of representation can possibly be adapted to all states of society; and no institutions can hope for perpetuity, but such as are endowed with some inherent power of adaptation,—for change of some kind in the condition of society is continually in progress. The history of mankind shews, that as these mutations have taken place, old governments have been constantly thrown off—sometimes, indeed, to exchange them for the worse,—and the disquietude now exhibiting in some European States arises from the progress of society on the one hand, and the stationary character of the existing institutions on the other. But up to the union with Scotland, the English Constitution did possess—nay, it still retains, although no longer exercised—this inherent power of adaptation, this *vis medicatrix*, by means of that prerogative of the Crown to which I have before referred; and in cases where it was probably doubted whether the Crown possessed this prescriptive power, Acts of Parliament were resorted to,—as in the instances of the Principality of Wales, the County Palatine of Chester and Berwick-upon-Tweed, in the reign of Henry VIII.; and again, in that

of the Palatinate of Durham, in the reign of Charles II.

If, in centuries past, these measures of the Crown or of Parliament had not, from time to time, established a direct correspondence and sympathy between the Legislature and the new communities and interests as they arose, by giving them representation in this House,—long—long ago would it have become unfit for its purpose; and that Constitution, the balance of which has been thus preserved, would have shared the fate of some other Gothic constitutions, which, having lost their sympathy and due connexion with the people, had become unfit for their new exigencies. And now, Sir, if the frame of our representation be not allowed to recover that elasticity, in this respect, which it formerly possessed,—if it is to remain stationary, while these great interests are progressing, and are giving birth to vast unrepresented and intelligent communities,—it will gradually become less and less adapted to the condition of the country, and we shall insensibly, but continually, approach some great and fatal catastrophe. A century and a half has elapsed since the ancient prerogative of the Crown did infuse any new portion of vitality into the Constitution. During that period, the representative system, which before expanded as new

wants and interests were developed, has stood still;—while a variety of causes have so co-operated, that precisely during the same period the monied capital, the commerce, manufactures and general intelligence of the country, have made an infinitely greater advance than in all the centuries which preceded it. If, then, we would avert that catastrophe, which, although it may not occur in our time, yet, if the next half century is to effect as great a change as the last, may be at no great distance;—if we would not, by damming up the stream, suffer it to accumulate and finally to overwhelm us or our posterity,—this is the season to recommence a gradual accommodation of the representative system to the new condition of the people. Thus, instead of postponing and seeking pretexts to get rid of such opportunities as these, a wise and enlightened Government should even studiously seek, encourage and court them. At any rate, let me ask, are these times and circumstances in which,—instead of so taking advantage of a favourable occasion like that which is now offered to Parliament,—we should not only neglect it,—but, by complying with my Honourable Friend's proposition, work in an adverse direction, and actually transfer such means of secondary representation as the commercial and monied interest now possess, into the opposite scale?

But if, Sir, the commercial interest were at all times considered an object for representation, how much more important to the country, and even to that interest in particular, is the representation of those great manufacturing classes, which may, in an especial manner, be said to be the *new interests* which have risen up since any change took place in the representation! It is these which have given life and activity to all the other interests, and are the very soul and substance of commerce itself;—for our commerce would sink into its original comparative insignificance, unless our manufactures enabled us to create at home articles, in exchange for which we may receive the raw produce or manufactured goods of other countries. The chief source of our national wealth is the industry and ingenuity of the manufacturing classes of the people: it is that ingenuity and that industry which chiefly impart to us the civilization, the wealth, the power, and the happiness we now possess,—which supply the means of maintaining our extensive establishments, and our eminent position amongst the nations of the world.

One of the main branches of British commerce and manufacture, vast in its importance as a source of national prosperity, I would now particularly recommend to the favourable consideration of the House. Employing and maintaining half a million of people—dividing itself into an infinite

variety of ramifications—diffusing its productions through the whole country—supporting an extensive export trade, in articles unrivalled, unapproached, and almost unattempted by any other manufacture in the world;—otherwise entitled to our anxious protection as giving an immensely increased value to the metallic productions of our own soil, by the simple application of human labour and ingenuity, which, so applied, add to the stock of national wealth in a greater degree than any other application of it, by converting materials of trifling intrinsic worth, and for which no equivalent is paid to the foreign merchant, into articles of great comparative and exchangeable value;—I have not hesitated to select it for the transfer of the elective franchise now at our disposal.

This manufacturing and commercial interest, so varied, complicated, and extended—is connected with, and has created and collected together, large masses of the people. In a particular district,—and that the very heart and centre of England, one of these masses consists of 400,000 persons, in the midst of which, an enormous town—a sort of focus—has formed itself, containing a wealthy, industrious, enlightened and loyal population.

This prodigious capital—the whole of its own peculiar commercial kingdom—and the interests

which engendered and now maintain them, are unrepresented—totally unrepresented amongst us,—either directly or indirectly—actually or virtually; for no other town, sending Members to Parliament, has the slightest identity of trading interests with this community; so that such interests, important as they are, must depend upon the gratuitous and charitable attention of others, or, as my Right Honourable Friend on a former night expressed it,—upon the general justice of Parliament.

Will any man—will my Honourable Friend the Member for Hertfordshire himself—contend, that such a community ought to remain an outcast from the scheme of representation, if the means of remedy offer themselves, as in this case, without trenching upon other interests;—and that, not only without risk, but in conformity with the ancient practice and principles of the Constitution? Yet such is the town of Birmingham,—and now it is proposed by my Honourable Friend to eject Birmingham from this Bill, and bestow the two Members we have to dispose of—not upon any unrepresented town, or even district,—but upon the Dukes and Earls of Bassetlaw, already represented twenty-fold!

The House has already declared its opinion that Manchester should be represented in Parliament. Undoubtedly, she does require it in an

urgent degree; but if Manchester require it, still more urgently does Birmingham. There are towns sending representatives, which have the same interests as Manchester:—Lancaster, Preston, Wigan, Newton, Liverpool, Derby, Leicester, Nottingham, and Glasgow. Thus Manchester has some virtual representation; but Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Sheffield, have none—absolutely none, direct or virtual—except through the county Members. Accordingly, last year, and now again, I have presumed to recommend this important interest to the favour of Parliament. I did so on public grounds, and I do so still. The Right Honourable Gentleman opposite, on a former night, alluded to a rumour that I intended to offer myself as a candidate to represent the town of Birmingham. The tone and manner of the Right Honourable Gentleman at the time were so far from importing anything like an imputation upon my motives—and it was so unlike him to intend it—that I did not then think it necessary to express any disavowal. I trusted, also, that my friends and those whose regard I value, would acquit me of all interested objects. And I should not now allude to it, if, out of doors, I had not been assailed by the public prints, some of which have thought fit to construe the Right Honourable Gentleman's expressions, and my silence, into a

charge on the one hand, and an admission on the other. But still, Sir, I should not, perhaps, condescend to notice this unwarrantable inference, if I did not feel that those claims which I wish to recommend might, by possibility, suffer from any suspicion attached to their advocate. I can assure the House that, when I originally inserted Birmingham in the Bill of last year, I did so spontaneously, and that I had not the slightest private communication, or even acquaintance, with any individual connected with the town. With regard to the supposed intention, on my part, to offer myself as a candidate to represent it—I am the only individual existing who would stand precluded. The slightest reflection will make it clear, that common delicacy must prevent me from asking that which, if asked, could scarcely be met by a refusal,—unless, indeed, the indelicacy of the request should produce it. So far, therefore, as my own conduct and intentions are concerned, I am ready to pledge myself that I shall not make any tender of my services to the town of Birmingham, if it should obtain the privilege of representation in Parliament.

Trusting that I have now relieved the question from any prejudice this unfounded rumour might have occasioned, I wish to state, that Birmingham herself is most anxious for the boon. She is a humble petitioner at your Bar. All the principal

and influential inhabitants—individuals of all parties and of all political feelings,—have testified their anxiety for representation. The petition was signed by nearly all the chief merchants, bankers, manufacturers and members of the chamber of commerce, and by 4000 individuals, within sixteen hours.

Of course I have now had much communication with the town. But one sentiment prevails—one uniform feeling, founded upon the necessity which those connected with it have long experienced,—that it is of the last importance for them to have Members of their own to represent them in Parliament. They are gratefully sensible of the attention of my Honourable Friends, the Members for Warwickshire—and of that eleemosynary assistance which they constantly derive from my other Honourable Friends, the Members for Staffordshire; but they have explained to me a variety of constantly recurring particulars, which render it important for them to have representatives in more immediate connexion and correspondence with the town. Their intense anxiety can only arise from their extreme exigency. The grounds of that exigency may, in some degree, be estimated by the quantity of local legislation connected with Birmingham. There are between 150 and 200 private Acts, relating to the canals, public offices, companies and esta-

blishments, and to the various branches of trade and manufacture peculiar to this town. In the present Session, there are two Canal Bills and a Town Improvement Bill, by the last of which it is proposed to lay out no less a sum than 125,000*l.* for that object. But the application of the great body of the public statutes to the trader of Birmingham is more extensive than to those of any other town, except the metropolis; and she has no representative to attend to them as they pass. In fact all these large trading communities are deeply interested in the general legislation of the country, considering the great mass of it which affects the mercantile interest. The House can scarcely have a conception of the extent and importance of the manufactures of Birmingham. There are at least 60 different trades quite peculiar to it. They are carried on by about 2000 master manufacturers, and are chiefly founded on our native minerals, iron, steel, copper, tin and zinc. Thus the great mineral interests, and the interests of 500,000 persons engaged in hardware manufactures, are essentially bound up with those of Birmingham, but are now entirely unprovided with any special guardian in this House. The population of the town alone is about 120,000. The advance of this population to great intellectual weight may be estimated from the fact, that 15,000 children are

constantly in progress of education at 26 different schools; and its moral weight is equally indicated by those various philosophical, scientific, literary and charitable establishments, which belong to an enlightened and highly-civilized state of society, and are worthy the capital of a considerable kingdom. The rental of Bassetlaw was mentioned to justify the course proposed by my Honourable Friend. The rental of the town of Birmingham alone is 300,000*l.*, the local rates about 55,000*l.*, and the estimated capital of the town and immediate neigbourhood about 10,000,000*l.* Her manufactures for exportation to America alone, were in 1812 estimated at 1,000,000*l.* The usual stock, in transit, at Liverpool has been stated at 500,000*l.* The manufactures for home consumption may be estimated at 2,000,000*l.* per annum.

The extent and peculiar character of these manufactures for home consumption are such, as may satisfy those Gentlemen who imagine risk to the landed interest by giving representatives to the large towns,—that if, in any instance, it be true that the agricultural prosperity of the country is identified with its manufacturing and commercial interests,—it is so in relation to the town of Birmingham. The great mass of the articles of its manufacture are those of ordinary necessity in every family, as any man may per-

ceive who will look round a farm-house, or even the meaner habitation of the labouring peasant. The next class of articles are of the same nature, but fall within the range of comforts,—and some amount to luxuries. For each of these there is, of course, a greater or less demand, according to the prosperity or depression of the agricultural interest; and no proposition is more clear than this, that although such depression might afford cheaper bread to the artisan, yet it would leave those who are chiefly engaged in manufactures for the domestic use of the rural population, with much diminished means,—if not utterly without means,—to purchase it. On the other hand the prosperity of the artisan re-acts upon, and advances in its turn, the prosperity of Agriculture; it is obvious, that they must constantly go hand-in-hand; and it is idle to imagine that any course which shall advance the prosperity of one, can retard or interfere with the prosperity of the other.

Thus, Sir, the manufactures of Birmingham—being not only an important source of foreign commerce, but based upon, and more closely connected with home-interests of every sort than any other;—mainly dependent on the welfare of the agricultural population;—supplying domestic comforts and luxuries to all classes of the people;—giving life and vigour and value to our mineral

productions;—engaging and supporting three times the population of the whole county of Nottingham, and fifteen times that of the hundred of Bassetlaw;—I am not intimidated by the pretensions or the influence of this the aristocratical rival of a trading community so abundantly productive of national wealth and energy,—but I still seek for the Town of Birmingham, admission into the Constitution:—I implore for her, the signal advantage—the just privilege—of distinct representation in Parliament.

With her half-million of dependent population—with her three millions of annual manufactures—with her ten millions of active capital,—I submit it to the candour of my Honourable Friend, whether his hundred of Bassetlaw, with all its coronets, has any claims which could compete with these, even if justice, expediency, and the Constitution, would permit them to be heard?

LONDON:
Printed by WILLIAM CLOWES,
Stamford-street.