

Imperial Parliament

HOUSE OF COMMONS.—TUESDAY, May 3.

UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE.

Lord BROUGHAM presented a petition from the Provisional Council of the National Complete Suffrage Union, dated the 15th of April, praying for the National Universal Suffrage, Annual Parliaments, Vote by Ballot, and No Property Qualification. The petition stated that the suffrage union was composed of between ninety and one hundred delegates from different parts of England, Wales, and Scotland. They met at Birmingham, they held several elaborate assemblies for the space of several days, and they were unanimously agreed that the delegates convened a public meeting, which was attended by many thousands of their fellow citizens; that meeting consisted of persons of all descriptions amongst whom the greatest unanimity prevailed in favour of the petition; that the petition was signed by the sentiments of the individuals that had signed on behalf of the meeting, but also those of 3,000,000 of the people of Great Britain; that the petition was signed by the Lordships who trusted their Lordships would not think he was asking too much when he requested that the petition should be read at length. The petition was then read at length at the table.

HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Tuesday, May 3*

Mr. WAKLEY presented a petition from 41 letterpress printers in London, setting forth their grievances against that class of persons who were the principal consequence of the application of steam power instead of manual labour to the process of printing. The petitioners respectfully called attention of the House, and especially of the Speaker, to the fact that the Parliamentary papers were printed by steam, by which they believed little was gained to the public, whilst great loss was certainly imposed upon them. They alleged that their grievances were numerous in consequence of the letterpress men, who were the principal introduction of steam power, entailed upon them, and begged that the House would take the subject into its serious consideration with the view of affording them the relief for which they prayed.

THE UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE
PETITION.

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"Sunday-morning there was a numerous meeting of Whitehorn, on the confines of Yorkshire and Lancashire. Thousands assembled from places within twelve or fourteen miles distant. Yesterday, on Marsden height, there was another, of at least 7,000 men. To-day 10,000 have met in the vicinity of those meetings. There is no doubt, but one opinion, and that is, that the Charter must become the law of this land before a permanent good can be effected for the working classes.

"The police are so few, and the riotous spirit of the remainder are running short. There will be no meetings held every Sunday during the sitting of the Convention; next Sunday on Enfield, the Sunday following on Derby, and so on throughout the district.

"I can assure you, however, that when he arrives in Burnley, Mr. Bradford of Manchester, it will be with joy, and a good mark the contrary. The cry is it hastening the crisis.

"This is a fearful state of things. A people must be bordering on despair when what was formerly considered a half-penny halloo would be sufficient to excite them would be well for the Government to look to the things, ere it is too late. The people cannot suffer starvation much longer—hope is fled; and God on knowing the hand-loom weavers' position follows—they are compelled, against their very nature, to turn out into the streets and beg. On Saturday last they were begging from door to door, driven to it by sheer want. The police made an attempt to take them into custody, but they were broken up by a head-fist fight. The police make a virtue of necessity and left them alone.

"To-day a case has been brought before the magistrates of a young man from Padimah who, driven to desperation by starvation, broke two panes of glass in a shop-window, and was taken to gaol to remain so long as he could get something to eat. His mother is a widow, with six children, and all of them out of work. They had four shillings weekly allowed by the board of guardians to maintain six children and the mother (who is a Scotch woman) and her three children. She has no other guardians, and solicited further allowance. It was refused; and he stated before the magistrates to-day, that when he asked the overseer what he was to do, he told him he must go and steal; but the young man preferred to go to prison rather than do that. The board of guardians committed him to Preston House of Correction for one month, the young man thanking him kindly for the boon. That heart, indeed, must be steeled against the feelings of humanity that can contemplate such a state of affairs as this without endeavouring to remedy it.

The above, Sir, I will vouch to be correct. I fear it is not in the least exaggerated; indeed, Sir, I fear it is far short of the real picture.

"Yours, &c."

He had similar accounts from some of the midland districts, from Leicester, Loughborough, Mountsorrel, Sheephead, and Hinkley, respecting the stocking art-trade carried on in that part of the kingdom. He thought perhaps it was unnecessary for Scotland to trouble the House of Commons with the kind of distress prevailed in the metropolitan counties; all trades were in a most depressed condition, and let him tell us that Right Hon. Baronet, that his tariff would only maintain a condition of private hardship to Scotland, and that the House must hear-bear-bear-bear-bear-bear of the Vale of Leven. It appeared that wages there varied from 7½d. to 9d. per day, and scores of families never tasted animal food for various periods—some, for forty-eight weeks; oatmeal boiled in water and sweetened with a little sugar being the staple food of the unfortunate operatives. The following are some of the communications he had received from thence:—

"Your request I present you with an account of the situation of the people I represent in the Convention. The spot from which I was sent is known by the name of 'The Vale of Leven,' one of the most beautiful spots in Scotland; on the banks of the silver stream that runs through it, which gives it its name, there are 8,411 inhabitants, 2,115 of whom are males, and 6,296 females. In 1841, was 2,115, now 2,115, praising three villages:—A Bonhill, 2,115; one of Alexander's, 3,060; Kington, 2,326; making a total of 7,501. The following estimate, the result of a careful inquiry, will give you some idea of the extent of destitution which prevails only Bonhill and Alexander's, and takes up a period of twenty-eight weeks:—There were, on an average during that time, 4 persons at 7½d. per day; 2 at 7d.; 6 at 6½d.; 11 at 6d.; 5 at 5d.; 21 at 5½d.; 11 at 5¼d.; 13 at 5d.; 13 at 4½d.; 21 at 4½d.; 10 at 4½d.; 8 at 4½d.; 11 at 4½d.; 15 at 4½d.; 55 at 4d.; 11 at 3½d.; 28 at 3½d.; 9 at 3½d.; 21 at 3½d.; 135 at 3½d.; 135 at 3½d.; 126 at 3½d.; 14 at 3½d.; 15 at 3½d.; 55 at 14d.; 31 at 3½d.; 28 at 3½d.; 9 at 3½d.; 21 at 3½d.; and 65 at 3½d.; that period with nothing but Scotch porridge, little beer, and bread, and butter, and know scores of families who had never tasted animal food in that time; oatmeal boiled in water, sweetened with a little sugar, is their principal diet. Notices of election are being served by landlords to their tenants, and proprietors of farms, and the poor are being evicted unless the applicant can find a surety for the payment of rent—a task, being unemployed, they find it difficult to accomplish. Dumbarton is suffering a vast amount of destitution, and the corporations are doing nothing to work. Kirkcaldy cloth-makers are idle, many are doing better, but still twelve or fourteen hours daily, go home with about five shillings weekly. Campsie in Stirlingshire, with a population of 5,000, except they could not live—their dwellings are generally ill-furnished, and were it that they were employed, they are in their sufferings, being buoyed up with the hope that legislative changes will come to their relief, they would sink into recklessness and despondency, for honest and industrious men are everywhere to be seen, except from the fact that not having died they must have managed to keep life in. Trade of all kinds is veiled, and of course the labouring classes feel the pressure very much in and around Edinburgh where numbers of them are seeking employment, and much so that it is only working men, or such such as are in communication with that, can know it. Dalkeith there is also great distress from want of employment, and it is only those who are afraid they will be affected by the tariff; where they formerly had large numbers of men employed, they now have only one or two."

A paper recently established, called the *British Statesman*, it was lately reported in a certain place of the country a cow which had died of disease being buried, but so great was the destitution of the people that it had been disinterred for the purpose of feeding the poor. The writer says that he saw that a gentleman known to some members of the House of Commons had written to the editor of the *Statesman* a banker named Livesey—

M. COBDEN.—I know him, and am acquainted with all the circumstances.

"That gentleman wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper after he had ascertained the fact, and it was in these terms:—

"I received a letter from Master Brown, of Burnley, March 1st, containing a statement that such was the distress of the poor in Pendle Forest near Burnley, that they were reduced to the necessity of eating the refuse food. The statement was so revolting to my feelings, though requested to publish it, I could not help suspecting that it was either a fabrication, or much exaggerated. I accordingly wrote to Mr. Brown, giving a certificate of the fact, and asking him to send me the original document received the answer inclosing the certificate of the horrible fact given below.

"JOS. LIVESAY, 28, Church-street, Preston.

"This is to certify, that Thomas Horn, of the place, had a cow died on Wednesday, the 23rd day of February last, which he buried, and that was afterwards taken up to use for food.—As witness my hand and seal this 2nd day of March 1846.

"THOMAS LORD, "JOSEPH WOOD, grocer. "J. ASPDEN, farmer. "THOMAS A. JAY, weaver." JOHN LORD, weaver.

In the same paper it also appeared that the Rev. Mr. Herbert, the Dean of Manchester, had read from the press a revelation of those town, calculated to excite the charitable feelings of that had anything to spare. He cited two from many cases, the clothing and families were to lead, no chair, no fire, little clothing, and scarce any money. He said that the condition of the labouring population of Manchester was late as the 16th of April, not one week ago. In the petition which he (Mr. Duncombe) had presented to the House of Commons, he stated that the condition of the desperate condition of the people was such that they were reduced to the necessity of eating the refuse food.

to the people in that House. They said that without the Government it was impossible that any civilised country could possibly have fallen into such a state as this was ready to prove we were now in. He had alluded to a proclamation made by the Dean of Manchester, and he would shortly refer to one issued by the magistrates of Burnley. It was dated the 25th of April, and was not more than a week old. It was as follows:—

"PUBLIC NOTICE.

"Whereas a practice has recently prevailed in Burnley and the neighbourhood of that town of persons going together to private houses, and also of parading the streets, highways, and other public places, to beg and gather alms, which conduct is illegal, and subjects such parties to the punishment of imprisonment with hard labour, and whereas the rates also calculated to create terror and alarm to the peaceful inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood, notice is therefore hereby given, that with a view to check such illegal practices, and to preserve the peace and order of the town, and to prevent the necessity of issuing a proclamation, which would be liable to issue the public notice and proclamation that the law will be put in force against any parties so assembling in the manner and for the purposes aforesaid.

"By order of the magistrates.

"Burnley, April 25."

The House would see that it was not private begging which was spoken of, but begging by the people collected in large masses. The answer which the people of Burnley made to the proclamation was as follows:—

"V. R. TO THE MAGISTRATES OF THIS TOWN.

"We, the unemployed and starving operatives of the town feel disposed to put a plain question or two to the above authorities, as they find themselves placed in rather a curious position. Now, we wish to know how long it is possible that a town like Burnley, under the present condition of things, could support its several thousands of idle and while hundreds, yea thousands, are kept by oppression and misrule, thrown upon the once lovely and pleasant, but now, alas! miserable, degraded streets and lanes of this town and neighbourhood? Unhappy that we are, that we are so miserably poor! We, the nearest and dearest ties of nature, make the inquiry:—

"What, as human beings, are we to do, after having been deprived of every comfort, and almost every means of subsistence of life, and after having seen our several families, with anything like reasonable success, and when now by starvation we are compelled to expose ourselves and families to public inspection, in order to crave a portion of bread for our miserable starving children? And what support can we expect from those persons from whom we ought to have expected better things? And we say that to close the scene of misery the law is consulted, and about to be introduced, and simply for the purpose of smothering the cries of the poor, and of preventing the people from making the present law to back their proceedings, must at the same time be very cautious how and to what purpose they apply its restrictions, because we, though out of work, cannot live without (at least) some of the necessaries of life, and we are not to be driven to any where. We wish not to do injury neither to persons nor property, but at the same time we cannot leave ourselves down and die.

"What saith the scriptures in support of these allegations? They say, 'Thou shalt not kill'; and will not provide for his family is worse than an infidel?—

"And also, 'They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger?'—Lamentations, lv. 9.

"By the Starving and Unemployed Operatives of Burnley.

"Burnley, April 25th, 1842."

He would ask that a state of things which could be allowed to exist in England? All he wished was that the House would hear the parties at the bar, but he would not say that he was not prepared to receive any grievance in the petition, long as it was. That was the state of the people, and he would like to ask the Right Honourable Baronet what he meant to propose in order to render them more comfortable? Surely they were not to be asked to support a law which would in its tariff would cure the evils which the petitioners complained! Why the tendency of the income tax bill would be to reduce the middle classes to a level with the lower orders; and the effect of the tariff would be to deprive the poor of their means of subsistence, and who now had employment. Surely the Right Hon. Baronet did not intend to have recourse for the suspension of Charism to the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act? Did the Right Hon. Baronet mean to say that the House would not be asked to suspend the law? Hon. Baronet would not have recourse to such means for effecting that object, but that he would endeavour to accomplish it by reason and conciliation. He was convinced there was no disposition on the part of the House to suspend the law, and he was sure that the majority of Hon. Members might strongly disapprove of many paragraphs which it contained. He (Mr. Ducommun) would not say that he subscribed to all the requests of the petitioners. He regretted that the House was not asked to suspend the law, and he would like to see the political party to which Hon. Gentlemen opposite were attached, had attempted to ridicule the mode in which signatures had been obtained to this petition. He would glad, however, that one of the Ministerial agents had been heard to say that the petition was a very good degree of respect. The *Morning Herald* stated, "The petition was signed by 3,315,752 persons described as belonging to various sections of the industrious classes of the Kingdom, and in direction to the signatures of the House of Commons, a vast number of signatures were triplicate, and perhaps we ought to suppose that this is the petition of a vast body of the people who as an energetic and growing demand for the fatal-tendency of the law, of the social and political evils of its effect, and of the anarchy. Are there in the large catalogue of petitioners ascribe so much of the positive suffering of enormous communities of their countrymen to the effect of the law, and to the anarchy of the law, as are at once undoubted and susceptible of remedy? And there any that the Legislature and the Government without compromise of their constitutional functions and state responsibility, can apply a healing and remedial remedy to the anarchy of the law, and to the well known characters and schemes of a few artful demagogues, who prey on the unsuspecting credulity of their deluded followers—that nothing, even in the notorious trickery and cheating which resorted to in the petition, could be a sufficient reason for the suspension of the law? The petitioners are at once undoubted and susceptible of remedy? 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All Communications must be addressed, (Post-paid)
HOBSON, Northern Star Office, Leeds.
Saturday, May 7, 1842.