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Original Correspondence

[To the Editor of the *North Devon Journal*]

WHAT A WORKING MAN THINKS

SIR,—I should like to give you the vues of a working man on the hextenshun of the Franchise and a fu other things.

There hath lately been two polehitical meetins in our parrish, sitch a thing as wis niver rayminbered by the oldest man livin. The fust was a Tory meetin in Mr. Fordgum's barn. I wis there in good time, and 'eard min propose that the passon should be Chairman, so he hundertook the post and stuck to it very well, for he diden seng much hissel, but a man cal'd Lyons was the cheef spayker, and he told a long tale and no mistake about the good things the Tory party had dun for the people; how they've gived the vote to the towns and intended to do it in the country, and had helped to give heddication to all the childern (a thing wich I much feels the want of mesel), and a lot of other things too numerous to mention, as the hocksheneers used to put on their bills. Then he said they took the duty off the corn: when he said that something come up my

throt that nearly stopped up me winpipe, for my father had always told me how they wis against it, so, thinks I, this man is come here to contradict my poor old father, who is lien over in the churchyard and can't anser for hissel. Then he went on to tell about Sir Stafford Northcote, wot a good man he was, and asked us all to vote for en. A chap cal'd Jimmy Trimmer said arter the meetin was over, "I shant vote for he, cause he tried to keep me from hev'n a vote at all." However, I've 'eard since that twant make any odds, as he'th bin helevated to a higher place. I think its a good thing for en, for he wou'den have had many supporters down here. To return to me tale, Mr Lyons told a lot of other things about Haygypt and other furrin pairts that dont much consarn us down ere, and I cuden raymimber much more, for he put me thinkin about father and what he used to tell us, how bread was 4d. a lb., and men worked for 14d. a day, and if a poor fellow wis hungry and stole a sheep and got caught he wis hanged for it; now no Methody (Dissenter) could hold any public office, tho they had to pay like other people; how no Roman Catholic could be a Member of Parliament, and none but landowners and freemen could vote for members of Parliament. He used to say they called them Freemen because they thought they wis free to sell their vote to the highest bidder, and he used to tell how the Tories wis against any alteration in these things and said the Church and constitution was in danger, as if they diden hang anybody who stole a sheep or a hass they shou'den be able to keep one.

Well, bamby the meeting was auver, and I was glad, for I diden veel comfortable at all till us got outside, and I ses to a man thit I thot nawed purty well about things, "Is it all true thit thicky man hath bin a tellin up," and I told en jist wot my feelings wis. Ses he, "*Audi alteram partem.*" Ses I, "What's that?" Ses he, "Hear the other side: theres goin to be a Liberal meetin up to Mr. Rigsden's barn in a fu days; go and ear what they've got to say, and dont'ee trubble but wot your father told'ee was tru." Well, I said, I haup'd twudden be long: no more twassen, avaur I seed a bill sayin thre wud be a meetin, and the Rev. Mr Hervey would haddress the helectors. Well, as twas Saturday night, I left work early, and got there almost the fust one. Very sune comed Tom Trick, and Sam Cornish, and Farmer Hoak, and Caleb Wakeley, the blacksmith, and Benny, and Farmer Hedden, and Farmer Jollow, and Farmer Howard, and Farmer Metherall, and a lot of others. I seed some strangers come in, but I cuden see no passon, and thot twas a dun job. I seed a tal man thit they sid wis cald Wilsher. After sitting a bit some

wan proposed that Mr. Rigsden's son shud be Chairman, and I diden see but wot he was so good a wan as the passon at the Tory meetin, for they both sot down most of the time and let the others stand up. Well, arter he had sed a fu words he sed the Rev. Mr. Hervey wud haddress the meetin. When hup he ruuse, thinks I, he dithen luke like a passon, and hathen got no white choker like on had at the other meetin. He told us he was a Liberal because they wis for helevatin the lower classes and making everybody equal in the eyes of the law. Then he told what the Liberals had done in the past; admitted Catholics to Parliament; abolished the duty on corn, and told how it was done; that twas a Tory Prime Minister at the time, but that most of the Tory party voted aginst it, and all the Liberals except 10 or 12 voted for it. I saw then that what my father had told me wis the truth, and that the other man's tale had only jist enuf truth in it to make it appear genuin, when at the same time it was a counterfeet. He also tuld how they had took the duty off paper, so thit a poor man kin git a nusepaper for a penny. I see yours is to be sould for that next week, so plase let me have one every week. When I wis a boy twas a very rare thing to see one, and I well raymimber when I used to be sent to Tom Prust's for a pound of rope how I used to read the bits of paper thit wis rapped round it. Thank goodness, them days is past, and now narely everybody hath a paper to see wats a doin in the world. I shud a sed thit Mr. Wilsher mentioned the name of one Pitt-Lewis, and I sed I hauped he wasen no relation to thicky Pitt thit I've herd father tell about that was in Parliament so long ago, and thit promised the Irish mimbers if they would vote to be united to England most likely Catholics would be admitted, and how thit afterwards he opposed it. However, they told me that he wasent, and thit he was a Devunshur man.

I see by the papers that the Tories have got huld of a working man. I suppose they dont git many, as they make so much fuss about it. I dont think much of he, for he spayketh agin the members of his own Church. If theym rong I think he shud try to git them in the rite way fust avore he gothe about lecturin others.

I hope to write to you again soon.

Yours truly,

R. GILES

Welcombe, June 26th, 1885