

LETTER VI

Your meeting in Copenhagen-fields, on the 21st inst.,¹¹ and your subsequent march to Whitehall, merits, brethren, and will obtain, whatever your enemies assert, the applause and the gratitude of all who sincerely love their fellow-creatures. That miserable scribbler, the editor of the Times, whose ideas and opinions are wholly dependent upon the breath of his patron, and whose soul, of cork and feather texture, is ever uppermost upon the currents of the partial interests of the day, has been instructed to stigmatize your objects, and to condemn your pacific display. This writer is always in tune with those who constitute the prevailing middle class of society, and would have it believed that he takes the lead in the public concert; but I have observed that though, like a trumpet or a drum, he makes the most noise, he is never anything more than an accompaniment, of the most inferior description. Sometimes I have watched him as I might watch a weather-cock, with a desire to know from which quarter the wind blows. But the situation of the thing, whatever boasts have been made of it, is miserably low; and on every side of it there are old buildings, particularly to the east and westward, through which occasional breezes rush with very partial gusts, so that in every point of view it is really of very little utility. You, brethren, I am well aware, can coolly despise the cool insolence of this editor's remarks. You want not his good word, and can afford to accept the unintentional benefit that results from his bad one.

But let the Times deal with us, brethren, as it may think pleasing to its patrons we look for the approbation of a wider and better-informed portion of the public, than those who compose the bulk of his readers. He wants now no proof of the justice, the calm rectitude, and the peaceableness of the motives that govern our conduct. He witnessed them on the memorable twenty-first; though perhaps he as much under-rated them, as he then under-rated our numbers. Still, it would be out of nature to suppose that he or any man, however distorted his feelings may be by party views, could be totally untouched by that sentiment of admiration, which the march of your Army of Peace, brethren, so generally excited. I care not who they are, or to what degree their habitual fondness for the splendour of military array and the glitter of arms may have grown, but I call, unhesitatingly, for the conscientious sentiments of any hundred spectators of your procession, and I cannot permit myself to doubt that seventy out of every hundred will declare that there was a simple grandeur in the display, which awakened a more pleasing sensation in their breasts than anything that they ever beheld at coronations, reviews, or lord-mayors shows. I know the crowd which such exhibitions as those I have just mentioned draw together. I might estimate, as the Times of the 22nd does, with reference to your movement of the preceding day, the loss of time and wages which such useless, or worse than useless parades, occasion to labouring men and their families. I might dwell upon the drunken and disorderly evenings and nights with which the days of such idle display terminate; I might ask, and perhaps calculate, with an accuracy equal to that of the Times, the cost to the labourer of these reviews, coronations, and city pageants, independent of his loss of wages and time; and I might conclude by daring the Times to prove that they compensate to the

11 A large public meeting of members of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union which took place in London on 21st April 1834. It was estimated by the *Pioneer* that the number of trade unionists who processed to the fields was of the order of forty to fifty thousand.

working man such cost, by any beneficial moral effect whatever. There have always been occasions in which labouring men have felt gratification, far from reprehensible, in sacrificing a day of toil; and it must be admitted that, on the part of those whose labour, always sold at its lowest marketable value, as their only means of sustenance, the sacrifice of a day is a serious loss. But who is it that reproves us for the sacrifice we made on the twenty-first? Truly those who have boasted of the numbers in which we have assembled on occasions which they are pleased to call loyal; who have extolled us when they saw us in the train of any man in power, whether a Wellington or a Grey; and who, a few years ago, boasted of the multitudes with which we appeared ready to support the Whigs and their most promising of all promising administrations. No, brethren, it is not your loss of time and money which the Times and similar writers commiserate; and had you brought with you an address to the King, approving of the wonderful plans of church reform and the poor-laws, which the Whigs intend to be their master-pieces of legislation this session, the Times would have counted you at not less than half a million, and would have beheld the dignity of national loyalty in all your movements. Lord Melbourne¹² would have walked with Mr. Phillips, and a train of well-paid clerks (who would have lost no wages by so doing), to meet you, as far at least as the statue of Charing-cross; and the sentinels at the horse guards, instead of being boxed up unseen would probably have been ordered out to salute you by presenting arms! But the object of your petition, and even the calm firmness of your demeanour, had nothing courtier-like in them; they were stamped with the severe moral feature of reproof – yes, brethren, mild though severe. The moral of your proceedings on the twenty-first is nothing less than this – the productive class reproofing the executive power for the injustice committed against certain of its members. And the executive power, in the persons of the ministers of the crown, do stand reproofed by you, and will stand reproofed by you in the pages of history to the end of time. I know the sort of sneer that the editor of the Times, and those of his kidney, will endeavour to throw upon this assertion; he is fond of calling both persons and ideas which are above the scope of his narrow intellect, ridiculous! But I hope and I believe that Earl Grey knows better, and in his heart deeply regrets, as a man, that he has incurred your reproof! The reproof, brethren, of the millions who constitute the great productive class of this rich and powerful country! Were history to continue to be written as it has been heretofore, such reproof might be suffered to slide away from pages in which the people were forgotten, and kings and courtiers only named. But we shall be for the future our own historians; and statesmen shall learn to dread the recorded condemnations of the people.

The Times has the folly to say that your object was to intimidate the government; and the silly magistrate Roe had, I perceive, the stupidity to squeak out a sort of echo of terror of this suggestion. The word intimidation was in constant use at all the old women's tea-parties in town on the Sunday evening previous to your procession; and I have been told of a polite white-gloved lecturer, who made it the subject of a discourse from the pulpit. In fact, in the minds of many fools, and in the mouths of many rogues, intimidation and treason actually meant the same thing; and, at the same time, walking unarmed to solicit the King to do a deed of mercy, meant intimidation! These are the wise-acres, brethren, that we are to call our betters, – to whom we are to pull off our hats, - and to whom we are to say “thank'ye” when they give us a bit of work at the lowest possible wages. There is no natural feeling – no blood – in such beings. The only circulation of which they are sensible is the circulation of money; and of that they are always anxious for its return with profit to their heart,

12 William Lamb, second Viscount Melbourne, 1779-1848, Whig Prime Minister, 1834-1841.

which is their pocket. Fie upon such an alarm, which was got up by the Times principally, as the chief tavern and breakfast-parlour newspaper of the day, to injure us, brethren, in the estimation of society!

But let us look a little closer at this word, intimidation! Party has been in the habit of arraying itself against party, and drunken tumultuous mobs have unhappily been the ignorant tools of each; but the Times, and the ministers too, knew well enough, brethren, that we were totally without the factious stimulants by which riotous mobs are created. It was not any apprehension of vicious tumult on our part that caused them any sense of intimidation. They have their spies among us, and they know us too well to entertain the most distant idea of violence on our part. They know that nothing but pure justice is our object, and that peace, goodwill, and good sense are our guides. Intimidation, indeed! It is the ministers, and those whose cause they are at present compelled to espouse, that endeavour to intimidate – not we! Why has a special law been wrested to a general meaning, in order to make it reach the case of the unhappy men at Dorchester? And why has the cruel, the unjustifiable sentence of transportation been carried into effect against inoffensive beings, so blameless as those victims in equity and even in regular law? The answer is plain: it has been done to intimidate us, brethren; and it has been done under the intimidation of capitalists, land-owners, and other men of property, to whom the ministers and the parliament are compelled to be subservient. The present system of government, and the present order of society, cannot be maintained without intimidation on their part. What is their standing army – what is their well-organized police? Are not these instruments of intimidation? And how do they intimidate? Is it not by threats of worse than brutal force? Is it not by a strictly disciplined – a perfected system of murder? Look at the science that they enlisted in the cause of intimidation – listen to the honourable appellations, and view the splendour of apparel, by which their system of intimidating violence is rendered glorious and seductive! When their forces move, blood is shed, and the widow, surrounded by orphans, mourns amid its triumphs. They fill graves, and they boast that they have restored peace. Ours is a very different movement, brethren! Our firm but pacific ranks come forth not to destroy, but to reprove, to enlighten, and to convince! We will not wound the bodies of even our most obstinate enemies; but we will wound and subdue the consciences of those who, proud of the power they at present possess, make the forms of justice a mockery to us, and banish us as felons for the pretended crime of striving, by unity, to maintain the hireling price of our labour. Yes; they who thus, in their cowardly pride of trembling authority, have done this evil – verily, I say unto you, brethren, they must and shall repent! They know it, they feel it; their parliamentary proceedings are sufficient to convince us that the power of doing and maintaining evil is departed from them: they are entangled in their own folly and weakness, and their fall is at hand. In the meantime, brethren, let us be attentive to the means of improving the moral organization of our unions in all our lodges. Useful, practical knowledge is easily attainable. I speak not against learning: – I am sensible that thousands among us, even with their limited hours of study, are pretty well masters of “the little that can be known!” We have all information enough to convince us that we and our fathers have too long revered pretenders to religious knowledge, and been led and plundered by rogues in the name of statesmen. In the meantime, let us lose no opportunity of exhibiting our numbers, our strength of union, and the moral dignity of our cause. The consciences of our opponents may call it intimidation; but such intimidation is good for them. It is our business to prevent them, and their army, and their police, from intimidating us. Let no man that belongs to the Trades’ Union ever enter into the army, or connect himself with the police. We want no oath; not even a verbal pledge

– I know that it is understood in every heart, that all connexion with the army, or with the restrictive force of the men in power, is to be avoided and abhorred. This is already felt in the army itself, where among our brothers and other relatives in blue and scarlet, it has not been without the good effect of sorrow and penitence. You have now acquired knowledge, brethren, and you are sensible that a standing army is a standing insult; it answers no purpose but to vilify and oppress.

SENEX.