

An Imperial Banquet

When the storm had in some degree subsided, Owen said sneeringly:

'Some of you seem to think that it was a great mistake on God's part to make so many foreigners. You ought to hold a mass meeting about it and pass a resolution something like this: "This meeting of British Christians hereby indignantly protests against the action of the Supreme Being in having created so many foreigners, and calls upon Him to rain down fire, brimstone, and mighty rocks forthwith upon the heads of all those Philistines, so that they may be utterly exterminated from the face of the earth, which rightly belongs to the British people".'

Crass looked very indignant, but could think of nothing to say in answer to Owen, who continued:

A little while ago you made the remark that you never trouble yourself about what you call politics, and some of the rest agreed with you that to do so is not worth while. Well, since you never "worry" yourself about these things, it follows that you know nothing about them; yet you do not hesitate to express the most decided opinions concerning matters of which you admittedly know nothing. Presently, when there is an election, you will go and vote in favour of a policy of which you know nothing. I say that since you never take the trouble to find out which side is right or wrong you have no right to express any opinion. You are not fit to vote. You should not be allowed to vote.'

Crass was by this time very angry.

'I pays my rates and taxes,' he shouted, 'an' I've got as much right to express an opinion as you 'ave. I votes for who the bloody 'ell I likes. I shan't arst your leave nor nobody else's! Wot the 'ell's it got to do with you who I votes for?'

'It has a great deal to do with me. If you vote for protection you will be helping to bring it about, and if you succeed, and if Protection is the evil that some people say it is, I shall be one of those who will suffer. I say you have no right to vote for a policy which may bring suffering upon other people, without taking the trouble to find out whether you are helping to make things better or worse.'

Owen had risen from his seat and was walking up and down the room emphasizing his words with excited gestures.

'As for not trying to find out wot side is right,' said Crass, somewhat overawed by Owen's manner, and by what he