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**Richard Cobden and the Quakers:**  
**A Study of Mid-Nineteenth Century Liberalism**

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## **Thesis Summary**

The subject of this thesis is the intersection of the ideas of the manufacturer turned statesman, Richard Cobden (1804-1865), with members of the Quaker community in mid-nineteenth century Britain. Richard Cobden is often viewed as the embodiment of liberalism, arguing vociferously that his government should pursue policies of peace, financial retrenchment and reform. Underlying these ideas was his firm belief in the obtainability of a more equitable world governed by the natural laws of free trade, as described by Adam Smith. In the advancement of his cause he had the support of several Quakers, including the well-known liberal politician John Bright, as well as lesser-known figures such as Henry Ashworth and Joseph Sturge. What this thesis proposes is to focus on three historical subjects; the campaign for repeal of the corn laws, responses to the Irish potato famine and opposition to the Crimean war; comparing and contrasting the ideas of Cobden with those of several prominent Quakers. The commonality of ideas between them will be illuminated, but on a deeper level, the objective of this work will be twofold. First, aspects of Cobden's political and intellectual life will be revealed, as will the influence of Quakerism and Quaker individuals on British public life. Secondly, it will be argued that studying the interaction between Cobden and the Quakers in the context of these three events reveals a new understanding of the events themselves, and of the growth and development of liberal thought in mid-nineteenth century Britain.

## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

The subject of this thesis is the relationship between the manufacturer and liberal statesman Richard Cobden (1804-1865) and members of the Society of Friends, commonly referred to as Quakers in the context of three key historical events: the repeal of the corn laws in 1846, responses to the Irish famine of 1845-1849 and responses to the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the American Civil War of 1861-1865. As selective as this project might appear, there are good grounds for undertaking it.

Cobden was an important figure in the history of liberal thinking in Victorian Britain, representing, as Peter Mandler puts it so aptly, “the rise of middle-class consciousness.”<sup>1</sup> Well-versed in political economy and chanting a mantra of peace, reform and financial retrenchment, he was representative of a new type of politics that was in the ascendancy following the conclusion of the Napoleonic War in 1815. It was the election to Parliament of middle-class political figures like Cobden (first elected for Stockport in 1841) that helped form the Liberal Party in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. The myriad of changes that were achieved under the four premierships of William E. Gladstone between 1868 and 1895, including the adoption of free trade policies, financial retrenchment, reform of the army and navy, the creation of a national system for the provision of primary school education and a significant increase in the size of the electorate with the passing of the Representation of the People Act 1884, all had their antecedents in the thought of earlier liberals like Cobden.

Despite this however, Cobden’s contribution to the development of liberal ideas has been overlooked in favour of more canonical figures, notably Jeremy Bentham and the two Mill’s,

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform, Whigs and Liberals 1830-1852* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 275.

James and John Stuart. Bentham's work, some of it written decades before Cobden's appearance, contained some of the most important themes in early liberal thought, including the importance of representative government and individual freedoms, like freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly.<sup>2</sup> James Mill meanwhile earned his place in the history of liberal thought by being both a strong disseminator of Bentham's ideas and an important thinker in his own right who, according to scholars like Joseph Hamburger, transcended the world of ideas and brought about political reform.<sup>3</sup> In terms of creating the intellectual framework for mid-nineteenth century liberalism most, though all historians give much of the credit to writings of J.S. Mill, particularly his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), *On Liberty* (1859) and *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861).<sup>4</sup> Some of the contention around Mill's contribution to liberal thought results from his partial rejection of David Ricardo's economic doctrines (which so dominated liberal thinking during Mill's lifetime), while his encouragement of co-operative movements went against the rampant individualism promoted by many liberals.

Most scholarship on Cobden has focused on the progression of his political career and the milieu he operated in. The first definite biography on Cobden, John Morley's *Life of Richard Cobden* (1879), argued that Cobden was a stabilizing influence on British politics, that he helped usher in what William Burn has described as the "age of equipoise," the age of relative political calm that mid-Victorian Britain experienced.<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Edsall's contemporary work *Richard*

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<sup>2</sup> H.L.A. Hart, *Essays on Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 16, 193; Frederick Rosen *Bentham, Byron and Greece: Constitutionalism, Nationalism and Early Liberal Thought* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), 297.

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Fenn, *James Mill's Political Thought* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987); Joseph Hamburger *James Mill and the Art of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with some of their applications to social philosophy*. (London: John W. Parker, 1848); John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: John W. Parker, 1859); John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861).

<sup>5</sup> W.L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation* (New York: Norton, 1960).

*Cobden: Independent Radical* (1986) is good at depicting Cobden's central role in radical politics before the arrival of Gladstonian Liberalism while Wendy Hinde's *Richard Cobden: Victorian Outsider* (1987) provides an accessible contemporary biography of Cobden that methodically relates the major political movements Cobden participated in.

The depth and originality of Cobden's political thought is less acknowledged however. Miles Taylor's *The Decline of British Radicalism*, like Edsall's and Hinde's works, placed Cobden in the context of 1840s radical politics but doubted whether there was much that was original about Cobden's politics, seeing his brand of liberalism as indistinguishable from that of his radical peers.<sup>6</sup> This was despite the fact that Taylor himself had written earlier in positive terms about Cobden's politics and cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>7</sup> In larger studies of British politics meanwhile Cobden earns scant mention. When he does earn a mention, it is typically brief and in relation to his free trade agitation or his critiquing of foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> An exception to this is Jonathan Parry's *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867-1875*, which argues that Gladstone recognised in Cobden and Bright an important radical movement in favour of cheap government.<sup>9</sup> Similarly Eugenio Biagini in his work has argued that Gladstone shared to an extent Cobden's preference for fiscal restraint both as a matter of conviction and because he found himself needing Cobden's political support on occasion.<sup>10</sup> Parry and Biagini's appreciation for Cobden was an exception among scholars until recently however.

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<sup>6</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 50.

<sup>7</sup> *The European Diaries of Richard Cobden*, ed. Miles Taylor, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 1-7.

<sup>8</sup> Angus Hawkins, *British Party Politics, 1852-1886* (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1998), 39, 62; Alan Skykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism 1776-1988* (London: Routledge, 2014), 60.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867-1875* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), 155-170.

<sup>10</sup> Eugenio Biagini, *Gladstone* (London: Macmillan Educational, [2000] 2017), 37-39; Eugenio Biagini, "The 'European Mind' of late Victorian Liberalism," *Journal of Liberal History* 50, no. 98 (Spring 2006) 12-21.



*Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (2006) edited by Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan sought to counteract this lack of scholarly interest in Cobden. The essays in this collection analysed Cobden's support for democratic movements, his role in the development of a cheap press and his promotion of free trade and a pacific foreign policy. It also explored Cobden's involvement in land reform, a subject past studies of Cobden had overlooked. Cobden is depicted as an original thinker at the centre of nineteenth-century British liberal politics, instead of a manufacturer and politician from Manchester who occasionally warrants a mention. Cobden's reputation was further enhanced with the publication of his letters in four volumes between 2007 and 2015. *The Letters of Richard Cobden* illustrated the breadth of Cobden's interests, the sheer number of causes he was involved in and the vast network of contacts he cultivated at home and abroad. The letters attest to the keenness and originality of Cobden's thought. Each volume also contained an in-depth introduction by Anthony Howe that brought the scholarship on Cobden up to date.

Both *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism* and *The Letters of Richard Cobden* depict their subject as an international man, who not only possessed a rich overseas network but also influenced the development of liberalism abroad as much as at home. This portrait of Cobden has been further enhanced with Rosario Lopez's publishing of *Richard Cobden's European Tour: Three Unpublished Essays on Spain, Venice and Russia* (2015) and with the recent arrival of Jan Martin Lemnitzer's important work *Power, Law and the End of Privateering*, which presents Cobden as an important figure in the development of international law in the 1850s, 1860s.<sup>11</sup> *The European Diaries of Richard Cobden, 1846-1849* (1994), edited

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<sup>11</sup> Jan Morris Lemnitzer, *Law, Power and The End of Privateering* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 90-112.

by Miles Taylor, is another important, earlier work, that helps flesh out the international portrait of Cobden.

This thesis is therefore partly concerned with further restoring Cobden's standing as an important thinker in the history of liberalism. It is also the intention of this thesis however to offer a new perspective on liberal politics in mid nineteenth century politics by looking at Cobden's political partnership with Quaker politicians. Studying Cobden's political career has revealed that among the diverse groups of people he worked alongside, he worked particularly closely not only with the Quaker manufacturer and politician John Bright (1811-1889), but also with other Quakers of a similar political and social hue, notably Henry Ashworth and Joseph Sturge. These Quakers were not only representative of a new liberal politics, but it will be argued, they were also representative of the significant role that dissenting religion played in shaping liberal ideas. Therefore, looking at Cobden's political life and thought, his Quaker allies, and the ideas they held in common (and not in common) present an opportunity to examine the history of British liberalism in a new way.

What emerges is a picture of Cobden's liberal thought occasionally overlapping with Quaker dissenting religion. This blending together reveals the overall complexity of liberal politics and political thought in the early to mid-nineteenth century, which this thesis intends portray. To provide this, three key events in Cobden's political life and the role Quakers played in them will be examined.

The first event is the repeal of the corn laws in 1846. Though the corn laws were simply a tariff on the importation of foreign grain that was intended to protect British agriculture from foreign competition, their repeal became a political cause that earned Cobden an international reputation as the apostle of free trade, and indeed made the reputation of many individuals,

including John Bright. It was also an event that acquired metaphorical significance since, as Eric Hobsbawm succinctly put it, it appeared to represent the overall struggle for political power between the newly wealthy, industrialized northerners (some of whom thought the laws harmed them) and the old money, landowning southerners (who were seen as the primary beneficiaries and supporters of the laws).<sup>12</sup> The reality, however, was more complex and most studies reflect this. Pickering and Tyrell's work, *The Peoples Bread* (2000) includes chapters on the role of women in repeal, geographic differences in responses to the campaign and, of particular interest, the part played by religious belief and religious leaders. Norman McCord's more linear earlier work, *The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-1846* (1958) also manages to capture some of the nuances of repeal by focusing on the extra-parliamentary organization that Cobden and Bright dominated.<sup>13</sup>

The first section of this thesis will not so much refute these and other works that have been produced, but rather provides a new perspective on liberalism by analysing the relationship between Cobden and the Quakers in the context of corn law repeal. The Quakerism of some of the liberal businessmen that Cobden allied himself with to repeal a piece of economic legislation which he felt to be harmful has rarely been discussed. Quaker theology, it will be argued, had a formative influence on such notable anti-corn law campaigners as John Bright and Henry Ashworth in Manchester, and Joseph Sturge in Birmingham. And up to a point, a Quaker ethos worked well with liberalism. This first section of the thesis will seek to demonstrate, therefore, how liberalism was not a rigid ideology, but instead a loose collection of ideas, adopted by a variety of men who held a variety of other beliefs as well. The relation between Quaker beliefs

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<sup>12</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day* (London: Penguin Books, [1968] 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Paul A. Pickering, Alex Tyrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000); Norman Gash, *The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-1846* (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1958).

and political activism has, however, often been overlooked in favour of the more dramatic political activities of larger dissenting denominations. Michael Watt's *The Dissenters* (1995) and the more recent *Oxford History of Dissenting Protestant Traditions* (2017) are good examples of this overlooking.<sup>14</sup> An exception to this is *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, which does delve into the subjects of abolitionism and pacifism, but can still be faulted for tending to view Quakers as an outside pressure group rather than as a religious denomination that produced members who were at the heart of mid-nineteenth century politics.<sup>15</sup>

The second section of this thesis will explore the vicissitudes of liberalism by looking at the response of Cobden and the Quakers to the Irish Potato famine of the late 1840s. It will focus on their responses to the long-term economic instability created by the famine. Cobden's concern with Irish economic improvement, which predated the famine years, intersected with a Quaker interest that owed much to the humanitarianism at the heart of the religion. Quakers, both Irish and non-Irish, exhausted their ability to provide immediate relief and turned towards effecting long-term improvement, namely land reform and tenant rights. Quakers like Bright and James Hack Tuke in England, and Joseph Bewley and Jonathan Pim in Ireland not only discussed these issues in their writings and speeches, but in Pim's case, effected actual legislative change. This put them in the vanguard of liberal thinkers on Ireland (such as Cobden) who sought to take steps to prevent a famine as severe as that of the late 1840s.

What this section will argue is that behind liberalism's well-documented response to the Irish famine as both a subsistence crisis and an opportunity to effect improvement, were a variety

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<sup>14</sup> Timothy Larsen, Michael-Leger Lomas, eds. *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, University Press, 2017); Michael Watt, *The Dissenters, Vol. II, The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen F. Angell, Ben Pink Dandelion, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995).

of motivators. These motivators included religious belief and humanitarian concern. Illustrating this fact by looking at the response of Cobden and the Quakers to the famine reveals the overlooked complexity of liberalism's composition in nineteenth-century Britain; that those individuals who espoused liberal ideas were rarely doctrinaire in practice (a fact that the historiography of the famine has begun to realise).<sup>16</sup> It is this liberalism that is reflected in Cobden's theoretical ideas and the Quakers' practical solution.

The third section of this thesis will focus on responses to the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the American Civil War of 1861. Unlike corn law repeal, the advent of war triggered strong dissension, both among liberals and Quakers. This is a subject that has tended to be ignored in the historiography of the Crimean war in particular. The imperial ambitions of the states that participated in the conflict and how they were affected by the war have been the preferred subject of historians. The conflict that arose between the majority of British liberals who were enthusiastic about the prospect of fighting a Russia that they felt was despotic and a barrier to progress abroad, and a small minority of liberals, centred on Cobden, who felt the war was unnecessary and misguided, has received less attention.

Cobden, who did not suffer from the Russophobia of his countrymen, consistently advocated pacifism and the creation of international harmony through the bonds of free trade. To Cobden, warfare was, in most instances, the work of individuals with ulterior motives. In the decade preceding the Crimean War, he felt sure that through his writings and organising of peace congresses he had won over many liberals to his view, but as Miles Taylor notes, this turned out not to be the case. Free trade and foreign intervention seemed "compatible" for many liberals.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> George L. Bernstein, "Liberals, the Irish Famine and the Role of the State," *Irish Historical Studies* 29, no. 119 (November, 1995), 513-536.

<sup>17</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 223.

Besides Olive Anderson's 1967 work *A Liberal State at War: Politics and Economics During the Crimean War*, there is only Taylor's chapter on this subject within a larger work on the history of British liberalism, and Martin Ceadal's expansive studies of British pacifist history, which touch upon this subject.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, looking at Cobden's response to the Crimean War will be an attempt to rectify this dearth of scholarship.

A comparison between his response and that of John Bright and other Quaker liberals will also be important to my argument. Absolute pacifism is a theological doctrine central to Quaker belief, so Cobden might have lost the support of many fellow liberals, but he found himself in a small minority in the Quaker community who arrived at their pacifist position through a very different form of reasoning. Comparing and contrasting Cobden's response to the Crimean war with that of prominent Quakers, many of whom he had campaigned with for repeal of the corn laws, will provide an opportunity to look at a neglected area of British liberal history whilst also examining aspects of religious and pacifist history that have suffered from a lack of study. The response of Cobden and the Quakers to the Indian Rebellion and the American Civil War, will also be looked at in the third section as a means of further exploring the themes that emerge in relation to the Crimean War. The Indian Rebellion will also provide an opportunity to look at Cobden and Bright's views on empire.

The overall intention of this thesis is to demonstrate that the intellectual history of nineteenth-century British liberalism was more complex and more variegated than is still too often assumed. The early nineteenth-century contributors to liberal thought were a motley assortment that ran the spectrum from university-educated elites, to provincial businessmen and religious dissenters, and everything in between. The various ideas these individuals put into

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<sup>18</sup> Olive Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: Politics and Economics During the Crimean War*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967).

liberalism were both radically new and older, with roots in previous centuries. Ideological conflict was frequent and the development of liberalism was an unsteady process. Cobden and the Quakers were a part of this process. Richard Cobden was a very specific type of liberal politician and thinker, not always representative of mainstream liberal thought and the Quakers were a very small and not entirely homogeneous religious denomination that even in the varied landscape of dissenting religion, were somewhat unique. Nevertheless, this thesis will provide new insight into liberal thinking on a wide variety of subjects, including political-economy and land reform (in the chapters on corn law repeal and responses to the Irish famine) as well as on military intervention and empire (in the chapter on responses to the Crimean War and other wars). The permeability of the boundary between religion and politics will be a recurring theme of this thesis.

## Chapter One

### *The Corn Laws*

#### I.

According to the philosopher and journalist L. T. Hobhouse, liberalism is fundamentally a criticism, both destructive and constructive. It is a protest that is religious, social, economic and ethical.<sup>19</sup> Corn law repeal, that great mid-Victorian liberal cause, very much embodied these characteristics. It was an attempt to repeal a piece of economic legislation that was understood to cause national harm, but this was only the most basic fact of the agitation. Richard Cobden and the Quakers, which this section will examine, exhibited a deep-seated class antagonism against what they perceived as a malignant upper-class legislating for their benefit alone. The former were the newly wealthy men of the industrial era who were asserting themselves, challenging the way in which society was run and governed, by way of corn law repeal. They were proclaiming the entrepreneurial ideal of capital and competition as the forces that would create the best society.<sup>20</sup>

The men who mounted this challenge were far from homogenous in their beliefs. This is what this section will show by focusing on the prominent role Quakers played in repeal, and comparing their thoughts and actions to that of Richard Cobden, who will be portrayed as representing an important strand of mid-nineteenth century liberalism. The influence of religion on corn law repeal will be an important part of this section. As H.S. Jones observed, in Victorian England, “the political was not sealed off from the ethical and the religious.”<sup>21</sup> Both Cobden, an

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<sup>19</sup> L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1911] 1944), 19.

<sup>20</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1971), 223.

<sup>21</sup> H. S. Jones, *Victorian Political Thought* (London: Macmillan Educational, 2000), XIV.



Anglican, and the Quakers he worked alongside, sincerely invoked religion to condemn the corn laws, whilst also realizing the pragmatism of recruiting support from the dissenting churches, including the Society of Friends, who had an illustrious history of acting as a pressure group on Parliament, as well as having significant funds that they might be persuaded to donate. In addition, the Quakers possessed a strong social network that could prove useful when coordinating a campaign. But it will be argued, it was a shared social position and understanding of political economy that united Cobden and the Quakers. There were, however, subtle differences between Cobden and the Quakers, and it is these differences that illustrate the complexity of what may be defined broadly as mid-nineteenth century liberalism.

## II.

The corn law bill of 1815, formally known as the Importation Act of 1815, was passed in the face of strongly divided opinion. British agriculture had enjoyed a boom in prices during the long Napoleonic War of 1793 to 1815 when the domestic economy had been fairly isolated from foreign competition. Peace, however, had led to a collapse in corn prices and in an effort to rectify the situation, landowners lobbied the government of Prime Minister Lord Liverpool to introduce a corn bill that would limit the importation of foreign grain. The result of this lobbying was the introduction of the 1815 Corn Bill which prohibited the importation of corn (which included any grain that had to be ground) until the price reached 80s a bushel.

Undoubtedly, self-interest on the part of the landowners, who dominated the legislature and other positions of power, was at work. High corn prices meant that the landowners received higher rents from their tenants, while at the same time keeping the poor rates low because there

would be less rural unemployment. Even some of the bill's proponents had misgivings about their fellow supporters. "This was a measure which had been proposed and supported in the house by those connected with land and it ought not to be borne with," declared Sir James Graham MP for Carlisle.<sup>22</sup> Sir James was not opposed to the principle of protection, but argued that the opinion of more impartial people should have been solicited before the price for restriction of imports was determined. Self-interest was not all that was at work.

There was a precedent for this bill. A protective tariff for the benefit of domestic agriculture had been in operation, in one form or another, since before the reign of Henry VIII and had traditionally been understood as operating both in the interest of the landowners, as well as in the interest of the country more generally. This view was exemplified by Mr. Ellison, MP for Wootton Bassett, who argued during the passage of the 1815 corn laws that the interests of agriculture and manufacture were mutually dependent; if one failed then so did the other.<sup>23</sup> But crucially, in the mind of the bill's supporters, wealth could only flow one way, from the farmer to the manufacturer, not from the manufacturer to the farmer. This view owed much to the work of the eighteenth-century French physiocrats who had argued that agriculture was the primary source of a nation's wealth.<sup>24</sup> Manufacturing was treated as being of secondary importance. Thomas Malthus, the clergyman and economist exemplified this attitude in his work, *The Grounds of an Opinion on the Policy of Restricting the Importing of Foreign Corn* (1815).<sup>25</sup> He admitted that to pass restrictions on corn importation would result in higher food prices, which in turn would necessitate that the manufacturer pay higher wages and reduce his profit, but argued

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<sup>22</sup> *HC Deb 08 March 1815 vol 30 cc53-8.*

<sup>23</sup> *HC Deb 06 March 1815 vol 30 cc20-22.*

<sup>24</sup> Gianni Vaggi, *The Economics of Francois Quesay* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 94.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Malthus, *Grounds of an Opinion on the Policy of Restricting the Importation of Foreign Corn* (London: John Murray, 1815).

that the harm to the manufacturing interest would be far less significant than the harm to agriculture and the country generally, if it was unprotected.<sup>26</sup>

The bill's supporters also argued that agricultural protection was necessary for economic development. As explained by Schonhardt-Bailey in her work, *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade*, the protectionists felt that the promise of high prices was required to induce agriculturalists to invest in the most modern farming methods and to cultivate "marginal," or inferior land.<sup>27</sup> Ireland, which had seen many commercial restrictions repealed since the Act of Union (1800) including, most importantly, the end of prohibitions against grain exportation in 1806, was frequently mentioned in this respect. Mr. George Tierney, MP for Appleby, while disputing whether 80s was the correct threshold for allowing foreign corn into the country, professed his desire to encourage improvement in Irish agriculture and suggested that Ireland had the potential to become the "granary of the United Kingdom."<sup>28</sup>

Finally, it can be assumed as well that those arguing for protection did not simply see agriculture as central to the economy, but as central to the nature of the state itself. As Frank Trentman explains, the proponents of protectionism believed agriculture was intrinsically linked with the constitution. It was understood to be a stable and permanent feature of national life like its laws, conventions and Parliamentary Acts, whereas commerce was understood to be speculative and transitory, therefore not actually tied to the nation state.<sup>29</sup> Hence the view that the freeholder of the land was the person most fit to govern, since he had the greatest stake in the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade, Interests, Ideas, and Institutions in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006), 195.

<sup>28</sup> *HC Deb 10 March 1815 vol 30 cc 123-124*.

<sup>29</sup> Frank Trentmann, "National Identity and Consumer Politics: Free Trade and Tariff Reform," in *The Political Economy of British Experience 1688-1914*, eds. Donald Winch, Patrick O'Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 215-245.

nation. Schonhardt-Bailey labels this thinking the “territorial constitution.”<sup>30</sup> It was subscribed to by a significant number of politicians, both Tory and Whig, and undoubtedly informed the thinking of those arguing for protection.

In short, protection was not simply a partisan measure for the financial benefit of a few. It was based upon a comprehensive economic and political doctrine predicated on the necessity of a thriving domestic agricultural sector. As summarized by Anna Gambles, “protectionism in post-war Britain cannot be reduced to a sectional or a reactionary strategy for it was presented as a policy for economic change, which was sustainable in political, social and economic senses.”<sup>31</sup>

It was with this policy that opponents of the 1815 corn bill took issue. The leader of the Whigs and former Prime Minister William Wydenham Grenville, Lord Grenville, effectively voiced the economic viewpoint of those in Parliament who opposed the bill. In a reply to Lord Liverpool’s speech in the House of Lords during the second reading of the bill, he stated that a policy of free trade provided more benefits than a policy of protection. Grenville, in his willingness to argue that free trade principles should be applied to the corn trade, went further than either Malthus or Adam Smith, the Scottish political-economist credited with first articulating at length the principles of free trade in his work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776).<sup>32</sup> Smith, like Malthus later, believed that the corn trade was too essential to the security of the nation not to be protected, but Lord Grenville did not.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade, Interests, Ideas, and Institutions in Historical Perspective*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006), 40.

<sup>31</sup> Anna Gambles, *Protection and Politics: Conservative Economic Discourse, 1815-1852* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>32</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd, 1776).

<sup>33</sup> Donald Winch, “Science and the Legislator: Adam Smith and After,” *The Economic Journal* 93, no. 371 (September 1983): 506-511; Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey “Lessons in Lobbying for Free Trade in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain: To Concentrate or Not (1991)” in *The Rise of Free-Trade Volume 4, Free-Trade Reappraised: The New Secondary Literature* ed. Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, (London: Routledge Press, 1997), 62.

“Every commercial transaction was an exchange of equivalents, in which both parties were interested,” he stated. The Russians or the French, for example, were as dependent on us to purchase their grain as we were on them to purchase our manufactures, he stated. There would always be nations willing to trade on fair terms, it could not be otherwise for, according to his understanding, this was how wealth was truly created; by the profit arising from the exchange of goods, not from a nation barricading itself behind tariffs.<sup>34</sup>

Continuing with the theme of wealth creation, Lord Grenville further argued that even if it were possible to obtain agricultural self-sufficiency, which he seriously doubted, it was not desirable because of the law of diminishing returns.<sup>35</sup> The eighteenth-century French economist and government minister Anne Robert Jacques Turgot first suggested the concept when he described agricultural output as comparable to a mechanical spring that could only be pushed so far. More recently however, in the same year that Lord Grenville was arguing against the corn bill, there had been a flurry of publications that expanded on Turgot’s thinking, most notably by Malthus (notwithstanding his favouring a tariff on corn) and by David Ricardo, who is credited by modern economists with coming closest to articulating the concept of diminishing returns as it is understood today.<sup>36</sup> Lord Grenville was clearly familiar with the concept when he argued against the idea put forward by the bill’s supporters that inferior land, such as that of Ireland, could be cultivated in order to achieve self-sufficiency. It would not only divert labour away from more profitable industries that would actually serve to increase national wealth (a point made previously by Adam Smith), but also, because of the greater amount of labour required, keep food prices permanently high. Any idea put forward that corn protectionism would in the

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<sup>34</sup> *HL Deb 15 March 1815 vol 30 cc187-203*.

<sup>35</sup> Lord Grenville himself did not use the term diminishing returns, but he articulated the concept nonetheless.

<sup>36</sup> Stanley L. Brue, “The Law of Diminishing Returns,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 7, no. 3, (Summer 1993): 185-192.

short-term lead to a rise in prices, but in the long-term lead to a lowering of prices, was to his mind nonsense.<sup>37</sup> The demand for subsistence, he continued, would increase as the population increased, requiring ever more labour to produce the food required and therefore drive the price of corn further up. In short, self-sufficiency was a waste of labour and capital.

Beyond economic arguments, there was also an antipathy towards landowners that was a second important feature of those who opposed the bill of 1815, both inside and out of Parliament. James Mill, the political philosopher, had set the tone for this type of argument in his 1804 pamphlet, *An Essay on the Impolicy of a Bounty on the Exportation of Corn* (1804).<sup>38</sup> This work was directed at a slightly different proposed government scheme to maintain high corn prices (a tariff on corn exportation as opposed to importation), but the scathing language of this work, which attacked the farmers for being extravagant in the boom years, for agreeing to outrageous rents and for failing in less prosperous years to take responsibility for their actions, would be echoed eleven years later by those opposed to the 1815 corn bill.<sup>39</sup>

Mr. Calcraft, MP for Rochester, said that landlords had taken advantage of previous high grain prices to raise rents, and now that prices for grain had gone down, they could easily reduce rents and not suffer greatly. But instead they wanted to “clinch the present high rents,” even if such high rents not only made bread exorbitantly expensive, but also threatened to render the landowners’ own tenants destitute because they could not pay the amount demanded.<sup>40</sup> “It would be a great misfortune to the country,” said Mr. George Philips, MP for Ilchester, “if all the consideration was given to the agriculturalist.”<sup>41</sup> To many of the bill’s opponents, the proposed

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<sup>37</sup> *HL Deb 15 March 1815 vol 30 cc187-203*.

<sup>38</sup> James Mill, *An Essay of an Impolicy of a Bounty on the Exportation of Grain* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, [1804] 2006).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *HC Deb 08 March 1815 vol 30 cc 64-69*.

<sup>41</sup> *HC Deb 08 March 1815 vol 30 cc 62-63*.

bill was at best an act of preference for one section of the economy over another, and at worst, an act of material gain at the expense of the larger population. This latter view, as Eric J. Evans notes, was more common outside Parliament and was spurred on by the hostility of the radical press.<sup>42</sup>

The corn bill would pass however. It was very much a product of its time. Not just an outright piece of class legislation (as reported by the radical press), but also reflective of the political and economic thinking prevalent in 1815. As G.M. Trevelyan has pointed out, and Malthus wrote at the time, manufacturing was not yet a large, vital part of the economy, which was still largely agricultural.<sup>43</sup> It would not be until decades later, when manufacturing came to be more economically dominant, that its wants and concerns became unignorable. But the essence of what Richard Cobden and like-minded Quakers would argue twenty-five years later; that free trade was most beneficial to all and that protectionism was the work of a parasitic upper-class, had already emerged in the initial 1815 debates.

The effect of the 1815 Corn Bill is difficult to determine, but a great instability in corn prices was undoubtedly one of the results. Historians attribute this instability, with its consequent sporadic hardships across society, to the bill's "inelasticity." As C.R. Fay and others have noted, the system of averages, of determining the price of grain, which in turn determined whether the 80s threshold for allowing foreign imports was met, was imperfect and tended to lag behind what the actual state of agriculture was. For instance, 1818 was a good year for agriculture, but the price managed to reach 80s 2d, there was an over-importation of foreign produce and "the law of 1815 recoiled on the head of its authors."<sup>44</sup> Or in 1816, there was a bad harvest and prices rose,

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<sup>42</sup> Eric J. Evans, *The Shaping of Modern Britain, Identity, Industry and Empire 1780-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 164-165.

<sup>43</sup> G.M. Trevelyan, *Illustrated English Social History: 4* (London: Penguin Books, 1964), 16.

<sup>44</sup> C.R. Fay, *Corn Laws and Social England*, Cambridge (Cambridge: University Press, 1932), 79.

though not fast enough to allow for the relief of foreign importation, so there was much hardship and serious industrial unrest. And the farmers themselves were frequently displeased, arguing that the averages system was fraudulent; that when prices were determined to be just above 80s, they were in reality receiving just a little above 70s and, with the ensuing importations, they would receive far less than that.<sup>45</sup> Great natural fluctuations took place in the state of the harvests after 1815, both at home and abroad, and the corn bill of 1815 made responding to this fact difficult.<sup>46</sup>

The government was loath to respond to popular agitation, but in 1827 a sliding scale of duties on foreign corn was proposed by William Huskisson, President of the Board of Trade, and passed by Parliament to replace the fixed threshold. The aim was to make the foreign corn trade more regular and therefore stable by allowing importation duty-free when the price reached 73s a quarter, and gradually increasing the duties when the price fell below this level. Huskisson, who had previously favoured such a scale, felt that such regularity would be the best means of securing the country's food supplies, though it should be noted that he was not as fixated on the importance of autarky as many other Tories continued to be. In fact, historians would credit him not only with introducing liberal thinking into his Tory party, but also with moving Britain in the direction of free trade.<sup>47</sup> He had served alongside the renowned economist David Ricardo on an 1821 committee of inquiry into the corn laws and, per A.C. Howe, came to believe in Ricardo's law of diminishing returns and the idea that as more capital and labour is expended on a piece of

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<sup>45</sup> Donald Grove Barnes, *A History of English Corn Laws: From 1660-1846* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 167.

<sup>46</sup> Jennifer Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution: 1785-1820*, (Abingdon: Routledge, [2000] 2014) 4, 105.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Duckenfield, *Battles Over Free Trade, Vol. I: Anglo-American Experiences with International Trade, 1776-2007* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 129-130.



land, the output of that cultivation would diminish.<sup>48</sup> Huskisson had come to believe that manufacturing, not agriculture, was to be crucial to Britain's economic prosperity.

The corn law that was passed in 1828, and which the Anti-Corn Law League would campaign against ten years later was not, therefore, as stark a piece of protective legislation as its predecessor. It was meant to be a compromise that would allow the price of grain to fluctuate more naturally, but would not betray the Tory party's fundamental commitment to protection and food security. The arguments for and against the 1828 revised corn laws, as well as those made for and against a slight tweaking of the sliding scale in 1842, remained remarkably similar to those that were voiced in 1815."<sup>49</sup> But debate over the corn laws had, by the late 1830s, moved beyond parliament. The repeal of the corn laws and the reshaping of the British economy would take place there (and many important speeches delivered), but it is the Anti-Corn Law League and the prominent role played by Richard Cobden and the Quakers that is the focus of this section. And the Anti-Corn Law Association was a decidedly Manchester-centered organization that formed a vigorous response to the laws, both inside and outside the Houses of Parliament.

### III.

Manchester, at the time of the Anti-Corn Law Association's founding in 1838 (it would later be renamed the Anti-Corn Law League) was very much reflective of this new class of manufacturers who were set on challenging the old order landed interest, as represented by the

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<sup>48</sup> A.C. Howe. "William Huskisson, (1770–1830), politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 9 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-14264>.

<sup>49</sup> *HC Deb 09 February 1842 vol 60 cc201-36*.

corn laws. The spirit of commercial enterprise, political agitation and adherence to free trade principles was prevalent. Perhaps Halevy's judgement that, "the economists have taken service with the captains of industry," overstates the influence that economic thinking (particularly free trade ideology) had on the businessmen of Manchester though.<sup>50</sup> These men were, after all, preoccupied with their own affairs and as Michael J. Turner has written, there was no consensus on economic theory in Manchester at the time (regardless of the League claiming otherwise). Even those men who professed themselves absolute free trade adherents occasionally agitated for government intervention, particularly with regard to strengthening the laws surrounding bankruptcy, and on economic issues such as prohibiting the exportation of machinery or the emigration of skilled workmen.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, there was a powerful group of manufacturers espousing free trade views who felt that not only should their views be heard, but acted upon as well by those in positions of power. "There needs but a spark to ignite the smouldering mass of discontent," wrote Archibald Prentice in his history of the league, published shortly after the corn laws were repealed.<sup>52</sup> And, he would add elsewhere, a body of men to direct the conflagration of public discontent. But it was more a confluence of events rather than a spark or single event that would lead to the founding of the Anti-Corn Law League.

Various organizations demanding total repeal, or a more moderate duty on imported foreign corn, had existed throughout the corn laws' existence. The Sheffield Mechanics Anti-Bread Tax Society, founded in 1830 by Ebenezer Elliot (famous for the poetry he wrote against

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<sup>50</sup> Elias Halevy, *The Triumph of Reform 1830-1841. A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 3*, trans. E. I. Watkin (London: Ernest Benn, 1961), 271.

<sup>51</sup> Michael J. Turner, "Before the Manchester School: Economic Theory in Early Nineteenth Century Manchester," *History* 79, no. 256 (June 1994), 216-241.

<sup>52</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League, Vol. 1* (London: W. and F.G. Cash, 1853), 77.

the corn laws, some of it on behalf of the league) is typical of the organizations that were formed at the time. Elliot came from a family of religious dissenters that had operated a foundry and had himself been successful in the production of cutlery.<sup>53</sup> But he was also a poet who wrote slightly maniacal poems, not just against the corn laws, but also against the middle and upper classes, and much else besides. In one piece, *Oh Lord, How Long* he writes, “our bread is taxed and rents are high,” while the aristocracy are “proud men who cannot live, they say, unless they plunder thee, but thou art free to toil and pay and so England is free.”<sup>54</sup> Thomas Carlyle, among others, found Elliott’s work, “a sort of wild war-music....belligerent,” but also, “warm and kind.”<sup>55</sup> This did not endear him, however, to the nation’s legislators who were already inclined to take a poor view of a man engaged in manufacturing, and Elliot’s organization ended up serving as a mere sounding board for like-minded persons.

A more substantial organization, the Anti-Corn Law Association, was formed in London in 1836 with some of the most important radicals of the day as members, but failed to take off, possibly because those members supported a variety of causes and corn law repeal did not seem the most important compared with, for example, universal suffrage.<sup>56</sup> There was both a distinct lack of support for extra-parliamentary efforts to repeal the corn laws as well as a lack of a disciplined organization to agitate for repeal.

There was also the issue, as identified by Betty Kemp, that many of those elected officials who could repeal the corn laws held a different view of the role of government, a “pre-

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<sup>53</sup> Angela M. Leonard, "Ebenezer Elliott, [called the Corn Law Rhymer] (1781–1849), poet and bar-iron merchant." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 9 Sep. 2019.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-8673>.

<sup>54</sup> Ebenezer Elliot, *The Selected Poetry of Ebenezer Elliot* (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp, 2008), 101-102.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Carlyle, Corn-Law Rhymes, *Edinburgh Review* 55 (January-July 1832): 338-362.

<sup>56</sup> Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey “Introduction,” in *The Rise of Free Trade Vol. I: Protectionism and Its Critics, 1815-1837* ed. Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), 7.

1832” view.<sup>57</sup> According to this view, the people elected their representatives, but the representatives chose what issues to address and what policies to follow in Parliament. Popular opinion was of secondary importance. If, as indeed was the case, a majority in Parliament circa 1838 felt that the corn laws were for the national good, then that was all that mattered. The ability of popular opinion and pressure-groups to influence policy was still in its infancy. The Birmingham Political Union, founded by Thomas Attwood in 1829 to campaign for Parliamentary reform, did manage to exert influence over the government, as did, more spectacularly, the abolition movement.<sup>58</sup> But these were exceptional circumstances. The older system of what has been termed the “trustee” mode of representation (as opposed to the “delegate” mode of representation) was still prevalent. Edmund Burke, the eighteenth-century parliamentarian and writer, exemplified this attitude in his 1774 *Speech to the Electors of Bristol* when he told the electors that though he would always be attentive to their wishes and opinions, he would never go against his own conscience, nor forget that he was elected not as a member of Bristol, but as a member of Parliament, and that ultimately his responsibility was to advance the “common good” of the whole country.<sup>59</sup>

This situation changed however in the late 1830s. In part, this was due to a growing sense of empowerment among the middle-class, particularly in the industrial cities of the midlands and the north. The 1832 Reform Act, although limited, increased the electorate from approximately 366,000 persons to nearly 650,000 persons, or close to 18% of the adult male population.<sup>60</sup> More importantly, it abolished 56 boroughs and reduced the number of MPs in 31

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<sup>57</sup> Betty Kemp, “Reflections on the Repeal of the Corn Laws,” *Victorian Studies* 5, no. 3 (March 1962): 189-204.

<sup>58</sup> Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture, ‘Hearts and Minds,’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 75.

<sup>59</sup> Edmund Burke, “Speech to the Electors of Bristol, November 3 1774” in *Select Works of Edmund Burke, Miscellaneous Writings*, Forward and Biographical Note Francis Canavan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 5-15.

<sup>60</sup> Parliamentary Archives HL/ PO/ PU/ 1/ 1832/ 2&3W4n147.

boroughs from two to one, while at the same time creating 67 new constituencies, such as that of Manchester, which heretofore had been without Parliamentary representation. A second piece of legislation that furthered a sense of middle-class empowerment was the 1835 Municipal Reform Act, which reformed the borough councils by restructuring them and opening them up to greater democratic accountability. Importantly, the act provided a path for unincorporated boroughs to become incorporated. As will be discussed later, many of the key figures in the corn law repeal movement first involved themselves in politics, either by taking up positions in these reformed councils, or by working for the incorporation of their borough.

But material conditions should not be discounted either in trying to explain why popular agitation against the corn laws gained momentum by the end of the 1830s. Poor harvests, starting in 1836, combined with an economic depression (Ebenezer Elliott was nearly ruined) and a consequent rise in unemployment, gave repeal greater momentum.<sup>61</sup> Free traders became convinced that the existing corn law was the cause of the economic downturn while some sections of the public became more receptive towards their ideas. It was the confluence of these material circumstances, with a growing sense of middle-class political confidence, that created the circumstances for the creation of an effective corn law repeal movement. And it was in Manchester that enough like-minded and capable persons were found who could form an effective repeal campaign.

The Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association was founded in 1838. A speech given on 10 September by Dr. John Bowring, a well-known political economist, politician and future diplomat who had helped prepare for publication the works of the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy

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<sup>61</sup> John Watkins, *Life, Poetry, and Letters of Ebenezer Elliot, The Corn-Law Rhymer, With an Abstract of His Politics*, (London: John Mortimer, 1850), 81-82.

Bentham, marked the start of their effort.<sup>62</sup> Dr. Bowring, in his brief speech, chose to focus on the reciprocity created by foreign trade and the benefits this would have at home, as evidenced by the commercial success of Holland, Switzerland and Egypt. He also warned of the harm that would occur if such a path were not followed.<sup>63</sup>

This was followed, a month later, by a more detailed speech delivered by A.W. Paulton, the league's first paid lecturer (his audition, as Norman McCord describes it).<sup>64</sup> Paulton, although he touched on previously mentioned ideas of capital being squandered in the pursuit of agricultural self-sufficiency and manufacturing being the true generator of wealth, chose to present repeal as a moral and social issue. It was a contest between the welfare of 26 million people, versus a mere 30,000 aristocrats, who apparently were not wealthy enough, Paulton stated. The tenant farmers, always indebted by high rents, did not benefit from the law's existence, he argued. They were in fact on the same footing as Russian serfs. It was the truth that Paulton said he wished to bring into the light. "Truth and facts are the raw material from which they [the people] must spin the strong yarn of power,"<sup>65</sup> he declared, using a manufacturing metaphor appropriate to his audience.<sup>66</sup> Paulton also advanced the more recent idea that closing the ports to foreign corn was creating resentment abroad and leading foreign governments to retaliate against British manufactures by imposing heavy duties.<sup>67</sup> But besides a dash of incendiary language directed at landowners and new examples to illustrate their points, neither

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<sup>62</sup> Gerald Stone. "Sir John Bowring (1792–1872), politician, diplomatist, and writer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 10 Sep. 2019.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3087>.

<sup>63</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, Vol. 1, 64-69.

<sup>64</sup> Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-1846* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 37.

<sup>65</sup> *Manchester Times*, Saturday 27 October, 1838.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Paulton nor Bowring were advancing novel arguments. How was this fledgling association intending to succeed then?

The Manchester Association's first significant action, besides arranging lectures and turning the Manchester Chamber of Commerce into a free trade organ, was organising a large dinner in January 1839.<sup>68</sup> Representatives of other anti-corn law associations were invited as well as sympathetic political figures. It was an impressive gathering, with (according to Prentice) in excess of eight hundred persons attending. A number of MPs were present, as well as the mayors for several cities, including Lancaster, Liverpool, Glasgow and Edinburgh. But as with so many future league events, the majority of those attending were from a concentrated area, the north of England and the midlands, with a handful of men from further afield, such as London. The vast majority of attendees were engaged in commerce and manufacturing. Still, the sheer number of representatives who were present bearing a mandate from their respective towns in the form of petitions with tens of thousands of signatures demanding repeal meant this was a movement to be taken seriously. At this dinner, reports were given of the degree of public support for repeal (apparently it was quite significant) and resolutions were passed condemning the corn laws.

The most important resolution that was passed was concerned with the next steps to be taken in achieving repeal. The attendees at the dinner resolved that their respective associations would send delegates to London, to meet at Brown's Hotel on 4 February, for the purpose of preparing material in support of the cause of repeal and to request to be heard at the bar of the House of Commons. In the meantime, the representatives of the various associations were resolved to continue pressing their case, gathering petitions and obtaining the support of friendly

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<sup>68</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League V. I*, 78-89; McCord *The Anti-Corn Law League*, 38-39.

members of Parliament who would advance the free traders' cause. "With a view to avert so great a danger by an act of universal justice, this meeting pledges itself to a united, energetic and persevering effort for the total and immediate repeal of all laws affecting the free importation of grain," was the note this dinner concluded upon.<sup>69</sup>

As energetic as the Manchester Association and other groups might have been, London proved a disappointment. The advice that Francis Place, the veteran radical, offered Richard Cobden in subsequent years on the necessity of cultivating the support of influential people would have been pertinent to the events that took place.<sup>70</sup> Some effort had been made to secure audiences with more influential members of Parliament, but not as much as had been made on securing the support of like-minded people. The reason for this fading away, besides the aforementioned lack of cultivation, was first that the delegates were refused a hearing at the bar of the House of Commons and secondly, the performance of G.W. Wood, MP for Kendal and President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, when he broached the subject in Parliament.

Wood had been tasked with raising the question in the Commons and had been bestowed with the honour of being seconder to the Queen's Speech. It appears that he had anticipated the Queen's speech to contain a mention of the corn laws but when it did not, he addressed the subject anyway and in the furious words of Archibald Prentice, the speech "demolish [ed] the foundation of the castle he was commissioned to be garrisoning."<sup>71</sup> Wood was sensible enough not to stand up in a House that was overwhelmingly in favour of agricultural protection and

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. at 101-102.

<sup>70</sup> *London Radicalism 1830-1843: A selection of the papers of Francis Place*, ed. D. J. Rowe, (London: London Record Society, 1970), 203-218. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=39497> Date accessed: 13 November 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, Vol. 1, 108-109.



angrily denounce outright the evils of protectionism and the plight of the manufacturer as a result, but his was an odd speech. It sang of the glories of manufacturing, of what an astonishing recovery it had made in the aftermath of the Napoleonic War, so much so that it had become the envy of other nations, and he went on to read out a long list of mostly encouraging exportation figures. There were a few statements along the lines of an aristocracy badly legislating, but any faint radical sentiments were drowned out in the cacophony of praise for how the economy was progressing. And though manufacturing was, at that time, in a recession, Wood ascribed the greater share of the blame to a bad banking system rather than to the corn laws. What he asked of the House when he asked for repeal, therefore, was not so much to remove a great, harmful injustice, but to remove something that could potentially be harmful given the fact that other nations were becoming increasingly competitive and were not burdened with high bread prices.<sup>72</sup>

Sir Robert Peel's devastating response to Wood was irresistible and signalled the end of the nascent Anti-Corn Law League's efforts in February 1839. Acknowledging Wood's authority on the subject, Peel, then leader of the opposition, thanked him for expressing his support for the current economic system and went on to state that since the President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce said manufacturing was stable, there was no reason the government should alter its current policy because of one bad harvest.<sup>73</sup> The various corn law repeal associations, for their part, retreated to Brown's Hotel where they vigorously countered among themselves everything Wood had said, sometimes in his presence. Retribution against Wood would take the form of his loss of the presidency of the chamber of commerce and a failed attempt to get him removed from his parliamentary seat.<sup>74</sup> Clearly Wood had failed to advance

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<sup>72</sup> *HC Deb 05 February 1839 vol 45 cc55-65.*

<sup>73</sup> *HC Deb 05 February 1839 vol 45 cc95-105.*

<sup>74</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League Vol. I*, 109-111; Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League*, 46-47.

the anti-corn law movement and caused it a setback. But a sense of naiveté on the part of those associations cannot be overlooked.

In the wake of the failed efforts in February 1839, a more mature group, the Anti-Corn Law League would be formed. It would unite the various associations that had convened in London and would have its centre of operations in Manchester. The free traders had already earned some disparaging labels including “Irish banditti...demagogues,” but the newly formed league was not going to change the course that had been chartered.<sup>75</sup> Lecture tours to the most unpromising of counties would be carried out, including in Wales, complete with a Welsh speaker.<sup>76</sup> The *Anti-Corn Law Circular* was started in April 1839 to proclaim the league’s message, and a host of innovative ways of popularizing the league’s message was devised, including free trade bazaars and tea parties. And despite the events of January 1839, the league would continue trying to make an impression in Westminster, flooding Parliament with petitions, securing audiences with cabinet ministers and later, fielding candidates for Parliament.

#### IV.

It is at this point, with the formation of the Anti-Corn Law League, that it is appropriate to shift the focus onto Richard Cobden, John Bright and the Quakers. In order to fully understand the interplay between the more straightforward liberalism of Cobden and the more complex liberalism of Bright and other Quakers within the context of corn law repeal, it has been necessary to acknowledge and analyse the ideas prevalent at the time. This section has sought to provide in the fullest detail a context within which to understand the thoughts and actions of

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<sup>75</sup> *The Royal Leamington Spa Courier*, 13 October, 1838; *London Standard*, 27 December, 1838.

<sup>76</sup> Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League*.

Cobden and the Quakers. But by doing so it has also sought to remove the necessity of laboriously reviewing the basic free trade beliefs that they held in common with other anti-corn law leaguers, and instead provide a fuller study of the unique ideas they held in common, as well as any divergences of thought that might have existed.

Richard Cobden was the dominant personality of the Anti-Corn Law League; the man who shaped the institution and its ideology more than any other. He was born, as his contemporaries and biographers have never tired of emphasizing, at Dunford House, Midhurst, in rural West Sussex. “Stiff land, small fields, broad hedgerows...fine growing oak trees,” was William Cobbett’s description of the landscape of Cobden’s childhood.<sup>77</sup> Cobden was of “proud English yeoman” stock, from a family that, on his paternal side, had resided in the area since the mid-seventeenth century, with the archives containing a record of a Cobden involved in a feoffment on 20 March 1641.<sup>78</sup> Dunford Farm itself had been acquired in 1695 by a Richard Cobden and would remain in the family until 1809.<sup>79</sup> His maternal side of the family had also resided nearby for several generations. But the archives also list the occupation of several generations of Cobdens as mercers; merchants specifically involved in the textile trade.<sup>80</sup> His grandfather had been a part owner of Bex Hill Mill. Therefore, Richard Cobden’s entrance into the commercial world, after a truncated education first in Midhurst and then for five years in Yorkshire, would have appeared likely. The declining fortunes of his family no doubt galvanized him as well.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (London: Penguin Classics, [1830] 2003), 115-120.

<sup>78</sup> Eliza Cook, “Tribute to Richard Cobden.” in John C. M. McGilchrist *Richard Cobden, Apostle of Free Trade, His Political Career and Public Services, A Biography* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1865), 283-284.

<sup>79</sup> *The Mitford Archives: A Catalogue Volume I*, (Chichester, West Sussex Record Office 1961), 32.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> John Morley, *Life of Richard Cobden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1881] 2010), 1-13.

Cobden started out as a clerk in his uncle's warehouse in 1820 at the age of fifteen. He would rise to the position of purchaser, but soon thought of leaving, stating that, "in the place of gratefulness they [his aunt and uncle] expected servility."<sup>82</sup> He would not manage this until 1826, but from this year onward he would experience rapid success. In 1828, he entered into a partnership with acquaintances to form a company that acted as London distributors for the Manchester calico printers, Fort Brothers, and at the end of 1831, he became a calico printer in his own right in Lancashire. He would move to Manchester the following year and four years later, according to Miles Taylor, he made a considerable annual profit of £23,000.<sup>83</sup> There would be setbacks, particularly during the year 1837, when the nation as a whole experienced a financial crisis, but nevertheless he prospered. Cobden benefited from a climate in which the entrepreneur could do very well. As described by Harold Perkin, the cost of starting a business; a mill or brewery for instance, was minimal in the early nineteenth-century. The *Manchester Guardian* was founded in 1821 with an investment of only £1,000.<sup>84</sup> And if, like Cobden, a person had no funds of his own, there were many people willing to loan the sum, though rarely did it come from a bank. Cobden secured a loan to found his Manchester business from the retailer John Lewis.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, when securing the lease on his first factory in Sabden, Cobden wrote that he had done so with an inadequate amount of capital, relying instead on the fact that the factory owner had faith in him and his abilities. In short, Cobden prospered in industry at a time when many men of similar backgrounds were prospering as well.

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<sup>82</sup> *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Volume 1: 1815-1847*, ed. Anthony Howe with the assistance of Simon Morgan and Gordon Bannerman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-8.

<sup>83</sup> Miles Taylor, "Richard Cobden" (1804–1865)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5741>, accessed 11 Feb 2015.

<sup>84</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880*, 81.

<sup>85</sup> *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Volume 1 1815-1847*, 45.

Like many of these other men, he was not merely content with wealth itself, but had greater ambitions. Cobden was engaged in local affairs, participating in local cultural organizations like the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, and co-founding the cultural institute, the Manchester Athenaeum (now part of the Manchester Art Gallery), while also taking on civic duties, such as police commissioner and board member of the chamber of commerce. These activities culminated in his participating in a campaign to incorporate his adopted home city of Manchester, which, like many newly industrialized towns with rapidly increasing populations, was still administered by the feudal system called a court leet, a court composed of jurors and presided over by a lord of the manor that met infrequently.<sup>86</sup> He penned a pamphlet on the subject, and after Manchester's incorporation in 1838, became an alderman. It was this local political activity, as well as the pamphlets he had started to write on national and international economics and politics, that alerted Westminster to his presence and led to acquaintances with veteran radical politicians.

What is also important to acknowledge is that by this stage in his life, early middle-age, Cobden was and would remain significantly influenced by two thinkers; the eighteenth-century Scottish economist Adam Smith and the phrenologist George Combe, also Scottish. Both Miles Taylor and Anthony Howe, the most authoritative and contemporary scholars on the thought of Richard Cobden, acknowledge these dual influences. According to Howe, Smith's work imparted to Cobden the belief that there was a self-regulating natural order that could deliver equality and justice when individuals allowed the unfettered marketplace, rather than inherited

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<sup>86</sup> Miles Taylor. "Richard Cobden (1804–1865)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. David Cannadine. May 2009. 22 Feb. 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5741>.

ideas (like aristocratic paternalism), to guide their actions.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, according to Taylor, Cobden had a particularly positive view of economic growth since he saw such a development as conducive to the overall well-being of the population.<sup>88</sup> He did not share the view of more contemporary thinkers like Malthus, or the Reverend Thomas Chalmers, who feared prosperity would lead to increased birth rates and a population without enough resources necessary to sustain itself.<sup>89</sup>

Alongside the importance of Smith's influence must be placed the influence of Cobden's friend, the Edinburgh phrenologist George Combe. The practice of phrenology, of discerning personal characteristics by the study of skulls, was controversial at the time it was practiced and historians now consider it a pseudoscience, but leaving aside Cobden's attitude towards the practice, the influence of Combe's writing, specifically his book *The Constitution of Man* (1828), is significant. *The Constitution of Man* was not strictly a work on phrenology, but rather a treatise on government suffused with morality. It was the morality of the work, argues David Stack in his essay on the intellectual and personal friendship of Cobden and Combe, which had an important influence on the former's intellectual development. Combe was not advancing a novel concept when he proposed that there existed a benevolent system of natural laws that was self-correcting; this was natural theology as espoused by many eminent thinkers, most notably the clergyman William Paley. What was unique in Combe's work was the way in which he viewed history as a process of moral and intellectual growth that brought mankind closer to

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<sup>87</sup> Anthony Howe, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism, Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, eds. Anthony Howe, Simon Morgan (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 3-5.

<sup>88</sup> Miles Taylor. "Richard Cobden (1804–1865)." Miles Taylor, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. David Cannadine. May 2009. 23 Feb. 2017 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5741>.

<sup>89</sup> Frances Knight, "Social Welfare and the Churches in England, Scotland and Wales," in *Charity and Social Welfare: Dynamics of Religious Reform in Northern Europe 1780-1920*, ed. Leen Van Molle (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017), 47.

being in accordance with natural law.<sup>90</sup> It repudiated the idea that the working classes and destitute were inherently deficient, arguing instead that through education and discipline they could join the ranks of the middle-class, while at the same time castigating the middle-classes for being too acquisitive and blind to the harm they inflicted on their workers.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, *The Constitution of Man* vehemently denounced colonialism and the warfare that was (to his mind) a consequence of colonialism, as detrimental to the development of the populace, morally, intellectually and materially.

All of these points that Combe made, the possibility of individual betterment, the necessity of education to effect this, and the detriment that warfare and foreign adventures posed to this process were crucial to Cobden's thought. Adam Smith provided him with a system for understanding how the world operated, but Combe not only gave Cobden a moral sense but, more so than Smith, convinced Cobden that man had an infinite capacity to improve himself, provided he was enlightened and not interfered with. The Victorian ethos of self-improvement that Samuel Smiles would sum up in his book, *Self-Help* (1859), was already present in Cobden twenty years earlier and was partnered with the political economy of Adam Smith.<sup>92</sup> It is these two strands of thought that would inform Cobden's actions when he began his campaign against the corn laws.

Economic reasoning was the critical starting point for Cobden's advocacy. It was very much in accordance with the prevalent principles of political economy that have already been

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<sup>90</sup> David Stack, "Phrenological Friends: Cobden and his 'father confessor' George Combe," in *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism, Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 23-39.

<sup>91</sup> L.S. Jacyna, "George Combe [Comb] (1788–1858), phrenologist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 10 Sep. 2019.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6019>.

<sup>92</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, (London: John Murray, [1859] 1897)].

discussed. Domestically, he argued, it was not acceptable that people in certain industries (his example was iron mongering) should be subject to market fluctuations affecting their earnings, but the agricultural industry should be impervious to these changes, and hence the price of such essentials as bread kept high. The overall effect of this was an unbalanced system, he argued, whereby when the agricultural industries were prospering, the manufacturing industries suffered and the converse occurred when the manufacturing industries were doing well. What should be happening instead, was that both industries should be working in tandem to create a healthy, unified economy that could compete internationally and at the same time lead to greater prosperity at home. Mainly due to Cobden's pacifist stance on foreign affairs, scholars have traditionally labelled him an isolationist or "little Englander," but this was not the case. As John Vincent explains, Cobden's was a "scientific liberalism" that viewed the world through the economic history of exchanges.<sup>93</sup> He gave the global as much attention as the local. Therefore, whilst he viewed the corn laws and the harm that he believed they rendered from the perspective of an Englishman concerned for the prosperity of his own country, he took an international approach to the subject.

In particular, it was the effect that protectionism had on foreign trade that animated Cobden's thinking. Manchester, as McKeown notes, was the center of the export industry, particularly for the exportation of calicos, which Cobden was involved in producing.<sup>94</sup> Cobden argued, like most contemporary economists do, that protection harmed the export industry by driving up the cost of production and making the exported product too expensive to be competitive in the international market. Britain's comparative advantage in manufacturing over

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<sup>93</sup> John Vincent, *Formation of the Liberal Part, 1857-1868* (London: Constable, 1966), xvii.

<sup>94</sup> T.J. McKeown, "The Politics of Corn Law Repeal and Theories of Commercial Policy," *The British Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 3 (July 1989): 353-380.



other European countries was being squandered due to the corn laws. The potential for other countries to retaliate with tariffs of their own also worried Cobden, since he believed that the corn laws were inhibiting the importation to Britain of a product that other European countries were particularly willing to sell. It should be noted however, as John R. Davis has done in his work, that Cobden did not share the view of earlier prominent corn law opponents like the politician, Sir William Molesworth, that the creation in 1834 of the Zollverein, a customs union that had been formed by independent German states to allow a freer trade between them, while restricting external competition by implementing tariffs, was done in response to British agricultural protectionism. Instead Cobden was astute enough to realize that the Zollverein brought important benefits for the development of Central Europe and the consolidation of Prussian power (which, given Cobden's admiration for the Prussian state, particularly its system of secular, national education, he probably approved of).<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, fear of foreign competition concerned him. His letters written to his brother Frederick during his travels in Europe in 1838 express his concern that industrial development in Saxony was such that he feared their cloth industry would rival England's in the future. Similarly, alarm can be detected in his report, also to Frederick, that agricultural over-production in Bohemia and lack of a convenient market for their produce, was sending the workers into the factories instead.<sup>96</sup>

Cobden, however, was not acting exclusively out of pecuniary self-interest, though this was a charge he and other free traders were constantly faced with. Chartists argued, like other commentators, that Cobden merely wished to reduce the price of bread in order to reduce the wages paid out by manufacturers to their workers, which is a logical conclusion to draw given

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<sup>95</sup> John R. Davis, "Richard Cobden, The German States and the Zollverein," in *Acta Oeconomica Pragensia* 1 (2008): 15-30.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Cobden, *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Volume 1*, 124-144.

Cobden's statement on exports.<sup>97</sup> It is also true that there was a Manchester contingent in favour of repeal who did wish to reduce wages.<sup>98</sup> But Cobden denied that a free trade in corn would lower wages. According to Boyd Hilton, Cobden (like J. S. Mill) advanced a utility theory of value, which held that the value of a product, including the value of labour, was determined by supply and demand. The greater demand created by free trade would raise wages, not lower them, even as the price of goods was reduced. Furthermore, Cobden stated in Parliament that he had found that when wages were reduced, productivity declines.<sup>99</sup> There is also little mention in his correspondence with friends, acquaintances or family of how repeal would benefit him personally.

Regardless of whether self-interest was at work, Cobden did genuinely believe that free trade was beneficial too. There are numerous debates in Parliament where Cobden spoke extensively on the poverty of the tenant farmers and argued that a corn law was a false form of protection that did not actually improve the lives of the people who worked the soil. It merely allowed the landowner to collect generous rents without actually having to improve the land, and perform other actions that would increase productivity and benefit the tenants. Free trade, he felt, would force the hand of the landowners by compelling them to be more competitive. More significantly, however, Cobden felt that free trade between nations led to mutual dependence and therefore stability and peace. This last point will be looked at later on in detail, but it is important to note that Cobden had a seemingly unlimited faith in free trade as a force that benefited all sections of society.

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<sup>97</sup> Preston William Slosson, *Decline of the Chartist Movement* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1967), 48.

<sup>98</sup> William Dyer Grampp, *The Manchester School of Economics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 5.

<sup>99</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 345.

Cobden, in his speeches and writings, also emphasized, like others before him, that the corn laws were the embodiment of a conflict rooted in class strife with the few (the aristocracy) attempting to profit by the oppression of the many (the middle and working classes). In Parliament, to which he had been elected in 1841, Cobden argued in painstaking detail that the corn laws cost the working man two shillings a week, or close to twenty percent of his weekly wage. But his sense of class-based grievance extended far beyond simple iniquity. To Cobden the corn laws represented the corruption of the political system. “The government’s job,” he told Parliament during one debate, “is not to defend monopoly.”<sup>100</sup> The fact, as he understood it, that Parliament continued to do so was an example of this corruption. As Richard Francis Spall has noted, it was felt by Cobden that the Parliament of his time was merely a form of aristocratic welfare, designed for their employment and benefit.<sup>101</sup> The corn laws therefore took on totemic significance for Cobden. Their abolition would, according to Wendy Hinde, be for Cobden a significant step forward in the country’s “social and political evolution.”<sup>102</sup>

John Bright, a Quaker and the other leading figure of the Anti-Corn Law League, had a similar view of the political system. His campaign speeches contained a degree of class-based politics that was arguably greater in vigour than what was expressed by Cobden. In one speech, John Bright stated that class formed the basis of his campaign to repeal the corn laws, illustrating his cause in animated terms that described a battle of the many against the few, and placing its importance alongside such events as the Civil War, as well as the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>103</sup> Bright, in

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<sup>100</sup>Richard Cobden, “Agricultural Distress, House of Commons, October 19, 1845,” in *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 133-147.

<sup>101</sup> Richard Francis Spall, “Free Trade, Foreign Relations, and the Anti-Corn Law League,” *The International History Review*, 10, no. 3 (August 1988): 405-432.

<sup>102</sup> Wendy Hinde, *Richard Cobden: Victorian Outsider* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 57-79.

<sup>103</sup> According to the classic Marxist formula the idea of class and class-conflict originated in the conflict between the workers, the proletariat and those who owned the means of production, the bourgeoisie. Bright however viewed the distress of his times in a different light, attributable to the nature of the political system and its beneficiaries. Gareth Steadman Jones would characterize this as an older, radical perspective with its origins in the

this particular address though, did not simply compare the importance of his cause to the importance of these historical conflicts. Rather, he saw the Civil War as indicative of what could occur if aristocratic misrule (the maintaining of the corns laws) were to continue.<sup>104</sup> Pickering and Tyrrell, in their work, have documented that “much of its [the league’s] success arose from the flair [of its meetings],” so caution must be taken to distinguish between Bright as dramatic orator and Bright as he really felt.<sup>105</sup>

But still, the seriousness of Bright’s bold claim appears genuine. He, like Cobden, understood that there was a malignant class that profited from the toil of the many and that one of the instruments that allowed the few to profit was the corn laws. In a retrospective speech thirty-one years later, Bright would again articulate the notion of the few oppressing the many, and in still vigorous language describe the time of the corn laws as a time of effrontery to civilisation and Christianity.<sup>106</sup> At one point Bright argued that the objective of the league had been only to explain simple economic principles to a “dull-headed” Parliament, but the rest of this address illustrates that both in retrospect and during the time of the league, Bright understood his actions as essentially a matter of preventing nothing short of a revolution on the part of the oppressed.<sup>107</sup> Bright, like Cobden, saw the corn laws as a colossus that rendered an

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works of Thomas Paine. And to some degree, he continues, this was the view held by the early Chartists who tended to view the middle-class employers as simply middle-men, unable to do the right thing by their workers because of the pressures brought upon them in the form of rents, tithes, annuities and the like by the upper-classes and their government. It was not until after the reform bill of 1832 and the increase in the political power of the middle-classes that the hostility of Chartism and other working-class movements shifted towards that group, particularly the manufacturers. Then the idea of a bourgeoisie driven by pecuniary self-interest with a monopoly on the means of production emerged. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 118-123, 158-159.

<sup>104</sup> John Bright, “The Repeal of the Corn Laws, December 19, 1845,” *Free Trade and Other Fundamental Doctrines of the Manchester School* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1903), 208-221.

<sup>105</sup> Paul A. Pickering, Alex Tyrrell, *The People’s Bread* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 41-67.

<sup>106</sup> John Bright, “Speech on Free Trade,” in *Selected Speeches of the Rt. Honble John Bright MP on Public Questions* (London: G.M. Dent and Sons, 1914), 232-250.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

untold number of evils upon the working classes. Time did not diffuse the ardour of his conviction.

John Bright came from a distinctly different background than that of Cobden. He was a northerner, of an old Quaker family that, in the words of G.M. Trevelyan, had long ago deserted a rural existence for town life and the world of industry.<sup>108</sup> Bright was born in Rochdale, the son of a bookkeeper at a cotton spinning works who would go on to be a successful cotton spinner in his own right. Educated at a variety of Quaker schools, Bright appeared to have had a better educational experience than Cobden did, though it was equally brief. But despite its brevity, it no doubt left a lasting, Quaker impression on him. Initially he was sent to Ackworth School, Yorkshire, where religious instruction was emphasized, with the reading out of a chapter of the Bible after breakfast and a library stocked with Quaker religious texts. But as Henry Thompson cannot help admitting in his otherwise glowing history of the school, there was an endless list of prohibitions covering the minutest details of pupil life, and Bright was clearly unhappy and was placed instead at Bootham School, in York.<sup>109</sup> John William Graham would argue that it was the third and final school Bright attended at Newton-in-Bowland that had the greatest influence on him, but it seems more likely that it was in fact the Bootham School that shaped his character.<sup>110</sup>

Bootham School was founded by the esteemed Quaker William Tuke, who distinguished himself with his efforts to bring about the humane treatment of the mentally ill.<sup>111</sup> An ethos of active involvement in social and political causes was present in the school as well as a more

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<sup>108</sup>George Macaulay Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1913), 5-6.

<sup>109</sup> Henry Thompson, *A History of Ackworth School During its First Hundred Years* (London: Samuel Harris and Co., 1879), 104-106.

<sup>110</sup> John William Graham, *The Faith of a Quaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 172.

<sup>111</sup> Anne Digby. 'William Tuke (1732-1822).' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: OUP, 2004 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27810>, accessed 16 March 2015.

relaxed attitude to religious instruction (though it was still a central part of the school's mission). It was also notable for its encouragement of the study of the natural sciences, with some of the botany specimens collected by pupils over the past two centuries preserved in local archives. Undoubtedly some of the spirit of William Tuke and Bootham School was transmitted to Bright. And, as was the case with Cobden, although Bright left school at fifteen to begin his career, he had greater ambitions than succeeding in commerce, and late night and early morning readings of works of political economy were a part of his intellectual development, as was a love of the works of John Milton and Lord Byron.<sup>112</sup> He also participated in various societies including the Rochdale Literary and Philosophical Society, which he helped to found. Bright led debates on a variety of questions ranging from capital punishment to the abolition of the monarchy, though religion and party politics were prohibited subjects.<sup>113</sup> Political interests soon followed.

In some respects, these interests were those that would have engaged any young man of the time in his social situation. The parliamentary election campaign of 1830, particularly the contest that took place in Preston between the radical Henry Hunt and Lord Edward-Smith Stanley, who had strong influence in the area due to his family's standing and who was slated to win, provides the first evidence of Bright's political interests. Bright expressed admiration for Hunt's "daring," going on to write that "at that time I knew little of the questions in dispute, but I sympathized with the multitude...I could not be otherwise than liberal."<sup>114</sup> In a second diary passage he writes of how he was inspired by the avidity with which one of his father's employees followed the course of the 1830 election campaign. "He communicated to me some

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<sup>112</sup>*Biographical Dictionary of Literary Influences*, ed. John Powell (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 52.

<sup>113</sup> Miles Taylor. "John Bright (1811–1889), politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 11 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3421>.

<sup>114</sup> John Bright, *The Diaries of John Bright*, ed. R. A. J. Walling (New York: W. Morrow and Co., 1931), 11.

of his enthusiasm and through him I became something of a politician.” A year later, describing the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832, he wrote approvingly that a “revolution,” had taken place that allowed public opinion to be heard and that would oppose a government disinclined to “reason and a sense of justice.”<sup>115</sup> But beyond predicting a century of progress to come, Bright does not think further on the subject. Bright’s attitude towards politics appears to have been instinctual or emotional from an early age.

The question therefore arises of what influence Quakerism had on the forming of Bright’s political outlook. G.M. Trevelyan writes of a young John Bright being taken to the modest Rochdale Friends meeting house on Sundays, an austere place with wooden benches and a small platform where the elders, the most respected members of the Quaker community, sat. Passionately, but calmly, some people would speak, but mostly there was silence, “silence spoke in the heart.”<sup>116</sup> There were no official ministers. Quakerism in the early nineteenth-century, writes Sandra Holton, was a divided religion, with some of its members following an older, eighteenth-century model of inwardness; of modesty and separation from greater society, while other members were more evangelical; outspoken and heavily involved in humanitarian causes alongside other dissenting Christian sects. The Bright family was somewhere in between, involved in charitable campaigns, but still adhering to a more traditional inwardness, particularly with regards to the central Quaker doctrine of inner-light.<sup>117</sup> Bright, as his diaries show, absorbed these Quaker concepts of the notion of the free individual, self-contemplation, bearing witness and seeking justice for those suffering, but as he himself admitted when courting his first wife, Elizabeth Priestman, his Quakerism was of a very liberal variety, bordering on the non-

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>116</sup> Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 9.

<sup>117</sup> Sandra Holton, “John Bright, Radical Politics and the Ethos of Quakerism,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2002), 584-605.

religious.<sup>118</sup> He worried that his religious outlook would clash with that of his devout, evangelical future wife and her family.

Bright's first overtly political act was when he participated in the campaign against the payment of the church rate to The Church of England, or more specifically, its church in Rochdale. The new vicar of Rochdale, John Molesworth, had arrived at the beginning of 1840 to find his parish in a state of neglect and according to Bright, no clergyman in England fought harder to reinstate the church rates and secure the funds he desired.<sup>119</sup> "I took a lively interest in some questions," he writes, "the most important being that of the imposition of the Church rates," and goes on to describe his active involvement in opposing them, including delivering speeches and using a tombstone as a platform.<sup>120</sup> Opposition to church rates and tithes was a common activity among Quakers and other dissenting sects. The longstanding, official Quaker policy with church rates, as well as with militia service and other legal obligations that were antithetical to their beliefs, was peaceful disobedience. The yearly meeting of 1727 recorded £4,017 confiscated from Friends for non-payment of church rates and tithes, while in 1748 the amount was £4,200. "You cannot but be sensible of standing clear in our ancient testimony against the Anti-Christian yoke of tithes," was one statement attached to a report of pecuniary loss, while the meeting of 1839 again mentions the yoke that is "so opposite to Christian liberty."<sup>121</sup> These reports from the annual meeting were in turn disseminated throughout the Quaker meeting houses of the country. John Bright was undoubtedly aware from an early age of

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<sup>118</sup>Sandra Holton, *Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radical in the Lives of Women Friends, 1780-1930*, 66.

<sup>119</sup>H. C. Beeching. "Edward Nassau Molesworth (1790–1877)." Rev. Ellie Clewlow, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: OUP, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18899>, accessed 9 March 2015.

<sup>120</sup>John Bright, *The Diaries of John Bright*, 52.

<sup>121</sup>*Epistles From the Yearly Meeting of the People Called Quakers Held in London* (London: Samuel Clark, 1860).



the civil disabilities that Quakers were encumbered with, and absorbed some of this language of standing up to an injustice.

Twenty years after his contest against Molesworth, Bright spoke in Parliament in support of a bill for church disestablishment, with evident pride in his being a dissenter. Central to Bright's argument was his belief that left unsupported by the state, the Church of England would flourish. The voluntary subscriptions required for its maintenance would lead to greater liberality and zeal. The success of the Free-Church of Scotland, after its separation from the Church of Scotland, illustrated the renewal that disestablishment would bring about, he stated. Or there was the flourishing of Roman Catholicism in Ireland, with little or no state support and the multifarious dissenting groups in Wales. All these examples were evidence of an enthusiasm, Bright felt, "a chain of sympathy," from richest to poorest in dissenting congregations that was lacking in the Church of England.<sup>122</sup>

The essence of Bright's character can be seen in this speech. Pride in coming from the background he did and an unshakeable conviction in what men can achieve on their own, without external support, was central to Bright's personality. Whether it was a question of fiscal policy or religion, he was sure that non-interference by the state was not only best, but also produced greater individual character. For Bright, the state church was a decayed institution because of being overly protected from outside influences; from competition with other theological arguments. Similarly, it can be inferred, he felt that agriculture was decayed because of protectionism, that it lacked the energy and innovation that competition with foreign agriculture would have produced. That ethos undoubtedly originated at least in part from his Quaker, dissenter background.

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<sup>122</sup>John Bright, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), 513-531.

Tennyson might have labelled Bright a “hawker of holy things/ Whose ear is stuff with his cotton and rings/ Even in dreams to the chink of pence,” but what influenced Bright and drove his political activities was far more complicated and substantial than mere piety or financial self-interest (charges frequently brought against him).<sup>123</sup> A Quaker childhood, as documented by biographers, had an influence on Bright’s political thought. But what his diaries also attest to is that he felt an instinctual pull towards radical causes that were firmly opposed to the aristocracy and other powerful institutions. He felt that Christian dissenters paying taxes to The Church of England was wrong; he felt admiration for politicians challenging the firmly entrenched aristocracy; and he felt that a more populist government was good. He was inspired by working-class political involvement. Bright therefore entered the campaign against the corn laws with an emotional radicalism, imbued with a certain strand of Quaker theology, that would shape his more mature thoughts.

Bright’s efforts on behalf of the Anti-Corn Law League started later than those of Cobden. Bright’s father is listed as a financial contributor to the league before he was. In part this was due to his first wife, Elizabeth, being terminally ill. It was after her death at the end of 1841, according to contemporaries and later historians, that he threw himself into the league’s activities at the behest of Cobden (as a means of overcoming his grief), and while this version of events is true, his letters do contain a note of hesitation.<sup>124</sup> Prior to Elizabeth’s death in September 1841, he had acted as an advisor, offering his thoughts on how funds should be raised, who should be solicited for help and what strategies should be pursued. He also worried

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<sup>123</sup> Alfred Tennyson, “Maud, X. (3),” *The Poetical Works of Alfred Tennyson, Complete Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 212; Ralph Wilson Rader, *Tennyson’s Maud: The Biographical Genesis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 147.

<sup>124</sup> Miles Taylor. “John Bright (1811–1889), politician.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 11 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3421>.

about being an “indifferent adviser,” but at the same time admitted to Cobden that he was unsure what part he should play in the league’s activities. The instinctive radical in Bright that had fought against church rates earlier could not be suppressed however, and in the same letter in which he expressed his hesitation, he also declared that the league must win or perish with the multitude.<sup>125</sup> The sympathy that he felt for the electors of Preston in their desire to elect the radical Henry Hunt more than ten years earlier, reemerged as sympathy for the multitude that he perceived as suffering from the existence of the corn laws. Before the year 1841 was out he was distinguishing himself as an advocate of the league.

Touring and petitioning relentlessly were Bright’s initial contribution to the league after he had decided to fully commit himself to the cause of repeal. He wanted to “distribute facts” on a far greater scale than the league had previously done, with a dedicated speaker for every county.<sup>126</sup> These facts would not simply state the case against the corn laws, but would also emphasize the part played by the league, what it had achieved, what it hoped to achieve and in short, to build up the league’s image. Bright, usually accompanied by Cobden, was at the forefront of this fact distribution, undertaking exhausting tours throughout the country, including Ireland. He still managed his cotton mills when at home in Rochdale, but in one week alone he managed to visit local free trade associations in Edinburgh, Kirkcaldy, Stirling, Glasgow and Carlisle. He also stopped at Newcastle on his way home, not just to visit the parents of his late wife, but also to have a tea party with the “free-men,” which he recorded as going very well.<sup>127</sup> Bright also played a crucial part in keeping up the league’s pace of petitioning, writing in one

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<sup>125</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden 19 October 1841, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305), 1841-1854, British Library, Add MSS 43383.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> John Bright Letter to Richard Cobden, July 11, 1843, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library, Add MSS 43383.

letter that to stop petitioning would be to signify that the corn law question had been settled. Whether the government took any action was a different matter.

For Bright, the object was to make the league “a great fact,” to quote from *The Times*’s grudging admission that the league and its loud advocates could not be ignored.<sup>128</sup> He also wrote articles for the league’s *Anti-Bread Tax Circular* and played an administrative role, dealing with everything from organising meetings, arranging accommodation for speakers and reviving free trade enthusiasm where he felt it to be flagging, for instance dispatching lecturers as quickly as possible to Sabden to stress the importance of the corn law question.<sup>129</sup> Bright had to address the more serious problem of Chartist hostility. “Will never give heartily in any corn law agitation,” he writes after one meeting with Chartist leaders, “but much would be gained if they did not oppose the league.” Bright even attended an outdoors Chartist meeting in Littleborough, but could not see their opposition to the league as anything but “foolish.”<sup>130</sup>

Bright’s oratorical and strategic abilities were what distinguished him among the free traders. He subscribed to the standard free trade dogma of his contemporaries, but injected Carlyle’s “dismal science” with emotion.<sup>131</sup> For instance, Bright labeled the corn laws the noble bread tax.<sup>132</sup> Such language alluded to how, in the mind of Bright and his supporters, the aristocracy benefited from the corn laws at the expense of the dietary staple of the population as a whole. More simply, the use of the words “bread” and “tax” made the issue seem more

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<sup>128</sup> *The Times*, 18 November, 1842.

<sup>129</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, 8 October, 1843, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library, Add MSS 43383.

<sup>130</sup> John Bright Letter to Richard Cobden, February [?], 1842 John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library Add MSS 43383.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas Carlyle, “The Present Time,” *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 38.

<sup>132</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, March 5 [?], 1842, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library Add MSS 43383.

directly relevant to the everyday population. Bright had several innovative ideas for effectively communicating economic facts.

One idea was to write a radical petition to Parliament stating that manufacturing was in distress. Like other petitions on the subject it would contain a statement that the manufacturer, the true creator of the nation's wealth, was squandering his capital paying his workers the high wages that the corn laws made necessary. More radically, it would also contain a statement saying that the manufacturers are concerned about political rights for the working people.<sup>133</sup> Partly this was opportunistic. In an earlier letter Bright had admitted that taking up the suffrage issue would alienate some supporters, but argued that many more supporters would be gained.<sup>134</sup> Bright realized more clearly than some of his fellow free traders that working-class support was necessary. At the same time, his early political activities and his future championing of the second reform act of 1867 demonstrate a genuine interest in wider political representation. The lack of genuine representative government and the dominance of the aristocracy, Bright believed, led to class-based legislation, such as the corn laws and all the harm they rendered. This was a point he wanted addressed both in the petition and at league meetings.

Bright's attempt and, to some degree, success in winning the support of the farmers for corn law repeal was part of his larger attempt at attracting a diverse group of supporters. In targeting the farmers, Bright was in complete agreement with Cobden, who shared his belief that the league had to expand beyond Manchester and the world of the manufacturers if it hoped to have any success. The letters between them make frequent references to agriculture.

Throughout the spring of 1843, Bright records giving lectures to groups of farmers, and even

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<sup>133</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, March 9, 1842, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library Add MSS 43383.

<sup>134</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, October 9, 1841, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library Add MSS 43383.

when a league meeting was not aimed specifically at wooing the agricultural element, he had a tendency to mention how many farmers had attended (as well as women and other groups not traditionally inclined to take an interest in free trade). Central to Bright's message for the farmers was his belief that the public was deluded about agricultural wages.<sup>135</sup> He wanted to convince them and the wider public that the system of protection, besides harming manufacturing and the nation as a whole, did not even benefit those involved in agricultural production, except for a small minority of landowners. Free trade was offered instead as the most beneficial system. This is a point Bright would continue to make in Parliament following his election as MP for Durham in 1843, where he made some effort to depict himself as the true friend of the farmer.<sup>136</sup> Bright wanted to distribute facts and counter the suppression of information that he felt protectionists like Sir James Graham, were engaged in.<sup>137</sup>

Of course, Bright's efforts were not simply a benign effort to persuade a hostile faction that his ideas were best, but were very much tied in with the aforementioned issue of class; with the battle between town and country. As described by Harold Perkin, the 1840s was a time of battles on the grounds of humanity. Social reformers like the aristocratic and devout Lord Ashley, many of whom hailed from rural districts, were at the centre of efforts to introduce factory legislation, particularly legislation to limit the hours of work performed by children.<sup>138</sup> Most manufacturers, and Bright especially, were hostile to state interference in their businesses, believing it violated the workers' "right" to negotiate with employers and took away their status

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<sup>135</sup> John Bright Letter to Richard Cobden, 18 May, 1842, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library Add MSS 43383.

<sup>136</sup> HC Deb 06 February 1846 vol77 cc195-200.

<sup>137</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, 18 May, 1843, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library Add MSS 43383.

<sup>138</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society*, 332-365.

as “free agents,” as factory reformer Richard Oastler (sarcastically) labeled it.<sup>139</sup> Bright was adamant that his workers were well-cared for, providing a testimonial from his employees stating his goodness as an employer, and the Quaker brothers, Henry and Edmund Ashworth, were similarly indignant at the suggestion of poor conditions in their mills, citing the amenities they provided for their workers. Bright, Edwin B. Bronner argues, was convinced that attempts to pass the factory legislation bill were a retaliatory measure on the part of the landowning class in response to corn law repeal agitation.<sup>140</sup> So whilst trying to bring about corn law repeal, Bright and the league were also engaged in a secondary effort to show that conditions were no better in the agricultural districts, and often times worse.

Bright’s tours of the countryside sometimes appeared vindictive. At the end of 1841, he organized with Cobden a tour of Dorset, the constituency of Lord Ashley, who had recently taken a tour of the manufacturing districts to report on the state of the people there. The explicit purpose of this Dorset trip, wrote Cobden, was “to turn the tables completely on Lord Ashley.”<sup>141</sup> The league was to some degree fixated on this one county. Earlier in the year, the league had put a pair of trousers formerly belonging to a Dorset tenant farmer on display in its Manchester offices. According to Prentice, not only were the trousers covered in patches, but they were so greasy they stood up on their own.<sup>142</sup> Such a theatrical act could be interpreted as a humorous way of rebutting the argument that agricultural protection brings prosperity, but when placed alongside Lord Ashley and factory reform, it hints at a greater political and social antagonism in which Bright played an energetic part.

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<sup>139</sup> Richard Oastler, “Yorkshire Slavery,” *Leeds Mercury*, 29 September 1830.

<sup>140</sup> Edwin B. Bronner, “John Bright and the Factory Acts: Humanitarianism vs. Laissez Faire,” *Bulletin of Friends Historical Association* 38, no. 2 (Autumn 1949): 92-102.

<sup>141</sup> Richard Cobden Letter to Henry Ashworth, 1 December, 1843.

<sup>142</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, Vol. 1.

Bright's decision to take up the issue of the game laws, which protected game on landowners' estates from being hunted (even by their tenants when game were damaging their crops), can be understood as a further attempt to needle the aristocrats who criticised the working conditions in the factories and opposed corn law repeal. He stated that he had the "deepest sympathy" for the people who suffered the harsh penalties meted out to those who broke the game laws, as well as for those poachers who lost their lives in armed battles with the landowners and their agents. He had a "deep reverence for the sacredness of human life." But above all else it was the damage that game caused to the crops of the farm tenants, examples of which Bright provided, that concerned him most and led him to demand an inquiry into the matter. He talked in Parliament of acres of turnips being destroyed, bushels of wheat damaged and ill will being created between tenant and landowner.<sup>143</sup>

Bright did genuinely appear to want to help the rural community. He supported the tenant-farmer John Horncastle of Hertfordshire, who successfully sued his landlord for £70 because of damage to his crops by game, and delivered a speech at a dinner in St. Albans celebrating Horncastle's success.<sup>144</sup> This is evidence of a genuine concern; that "chain of sympathy" he would speak of two decades later. But as with the tours of Dorset, his motives were not so simple. There was the instinctive, self-confident radicalism that could be traced back to the ethos of the Bootham School, but there was also the fact that many of his political opponents happened to be landowners, and the fact that the Parliamentary inquiry into the game laws that he established was constituted of a large number of free-traders (he was taken to task for this in Parliament). Political gamesmanship was at work as well.

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<sup>143</sup> *HC Deb 27 February 1845 vol 78 cc53-118.*

<sup>144</sup> Nigel E. Agar, *Behind the Plough, Agrarian Society in Nineteenth-Century Hertfordshire* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 2005), 86.



Bright expounded the virtues of free trade and most significantly, he injected the league with his oratorical skill and class-based politics, but his religious, Quaker beliefs were only hinted at beneath the surface. In one speech in Parliament, Bright stated that he spoke for people “into whose hearts free trade principles had sunk and become, verily, a religious question.”<sup>145</sup> Religion was an important element that the league utilized in their campaign for repeal, stressing that free trade was the Christian way and hence managing to recruit a diverse group of people. Richard Francis Spall, in particular, has shown the pragmatism of The Anti-Corn Law League in injecting a Christian dimension to their cause. The League formed strong links with dissenting Christian groups, such as Quakers, Methodists and Anglican low-church ministers, describing their mission as, to quote W.A. Gardiner, “to equalize God’s gifts.”<sup>146</sup> This allowed their message to be projected to a wider audience by way of the pulpit. The League’s organising of a convention of ministers in 1841 to discuss decreasing living standards, the plight of the poor, and by implication, how free trade could resolve these issues is a particular example of the efforts made by the league to establish itself as a Christian-inspired movement; to transform free trade into a “scriptural principle.”<sup>147</sup>

Bright, as a dissenter, played a central part. He was able to inform the league of dissenter sensitivities; for instance warning Cobden that although he and other league members were enthusiastic about an 1843 bill that would make education compulsory for children employed in factories, it would not be wise to support it because it proposed that Anglicans would have near

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<sup>145</sup> *HC Deb 10 June 1845 vol 81 cc241-351.*

<sup>146</sup> Richard Francis Spall, “Free Trade, Foreign Relations, and the Anti-Corn Law League,” *The International History Review* 10, no. 3 (August 1988): 410.

<sup>147</sup> Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 159.

total control over the appointment of teachers.<sup>148</sup> He also imbued his activities with a broad Christian message, but made little reference specifically to his Quaker religion. Whether this was because he wanted to make people from diverse religious backgrounds feel welcome in his cause, or because his religious outlook was itself broadminded, is difficult to establish. He accepted the position of doorkeeper at his Quaker meetinghouse in later life, but refused to take on any higher role, stating that he was not enough of a religious authority. This seems to indicate that whilst he was not fervently attached to the Quaker religion, he still felt attached to the community, whose values no doubt shaped the character of the man who played such a vital role in the Anti-Corn Law League. It was Walter Bagehot who first pointed out this “conservative vein.”<sup>149</sup> Bright championed a variety of liberal causes that proposed radical political, economic and social changes, but he also retained Quaker principles inherited in childhood. These principles coexisted and frequently shaped his thought as he became embroiled in politics and free trade advocacy.

Henry Ashworth and his brother Edmund were wealthy Quaker cotton manufacturers who played an important part in the Anti-Corn Law League as well, and like Bright, exhibited little indication of their religious outlook. Of the two brothers, it was Henry Ashworth (1794-1880) who would obtain prominence for his part in the league, and for his intellectual, as well as practical, contribution. Henry Ashworth’s enthusiasm for the unpopular poor law of 1834, which he described as embodying the best principles of political economy and life-long hostility to trade unionism, undoubtedly damaged his posthumous reputation and caused it to fade.

Additionally, his narrow concentration of interests left posterity less to remember him by. But at

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<sup>148</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, March 25, 1843, John Bright Correspondence with Richard Cobden, Vol. I (f. 305) 1841-1854, British Library Add MSS 43383.

<sup>149</sup> Walter Bagehot, Quoted in Bill Cash, William Cash, *John Bright: Statesman, Orator, Agitator* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co, 2012), 284.

the time of corn law repeal he was referred to as part of the A B C of the league leadership (Bright and Cobden being the other two). Edmund Ashworth, meanwhile, played a far quieter role. He was an early supporter of the league, gave generous financial support (in excess of £1,000) and took on various administrative roles, but he did not possess his brother's desire to proclaim the greatness of free trade. Edmund published one book in his life, a guide to salmon farming. Henry on the other hand, published numerous books and pamphlets on a variety of subjects, but with political economy being the predominant topic of course. It is these works that provide a good introduction to his ideas and beliefs.

Henry Ashworth delivered several lectures on the economic history of his native Lancashire at learned societies that were subsequently published. These works illustrate his fundamental understanding that manufacturing and the manufacturer were a great force for positive economic and social change. Ashworth, in two nearly identical works published in 1842 and 1866, started by describing a medieval Lancashire so wild and inhospitable that invading Normans only advanced with great reluctance and Camden, in his survey of 1586, prayed that no harm would come to him.<sup>150</sup> But out of this wilderness, he writes, around 1760, a great change occurred with the introduction of cotton spinning. The serious, straightforward, resolute character of the Anglo-Saxon proved itself adept at enterprise. The indigenous population "rude as the wilds around his sylvan home" (to quote George Richards, one of Ashworth's preferred poets) would lead the industrial revolution.<sup>151</sup> Population and revenue exploded. In the area of

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<sup>150</sup> Henry Ashworth, *Statistical Illustration of the Past and Present State of Lancashire* (London: J. Madden and Co., 1842), 5-6.

<sup>151</sup> George Richards, "The Aboriginal Briton," *Oxford English Prize Poems* (Oxford: D.A. Talboys, 1828), 28. This poem by the clergyman George Richards (1767-1837) also refers to the Norman Yoke, the idea that an alien outside force, the Normans, had conquered Britain and subjected its native, freedom-loving people, the Anglo-Saxons, to its tyrannical rule. Given Ashworth's hostility to the upper-class, his depicting them as a corrupt, exploitative class that lacked the goodness or ingenuity of the rest of the population, it is possible that he too endorsed the idea of the Norman Yoke, viewing the upper-classes as modern-day Norman oppressors. Ashworth

Rossendale Forrest alone, according to Ashworth, the population went from eighty people in number in 1500 to a population of 45,606 in 1842. Rents now added up to £135,273. He cited various other places with similarly spectacular levels of growth. Statistics were his weapon of choice in heralding the economic benefits of industrialisation.

But then, Ashworth writes, if economic growth was not enough, there were the social benefits. Rossendale, he claims, has witnessed the steady increase in the peoples' "religious, moral and social standing." Likewise, in other industrialised parts of Lancashire, "happier homes have been created." Partaking in industry led the rural labourer to the "high avocations of life."<sup>152</sup> It introduced him to education, mechanics' institutes and newspaper consumption, all of which endowed him with "political intelligence, forerunner of constitutional freedom." Education would also, he felt, lead the worker to "identify his enlightened self-interest," which was the guiding force of Henry Ashworth's life, though Ashworth, in later pamphlets, talks of the simple enjoyment of the fine arts that industrialisation had allowed the working-class as well.<sup>153</sup>

That education and subsequent political intelligence might lead the worker into conflict with the manufacturer, did not seem to occur to Ashworth. In his dispatches on the various manifestations of industrial unrests that took place in Lancashire during his lifetime, he would attribute the workers' grievances to a variety of causes, including coercion and manipulation from outside groups, misunderstanding and lack of education generally.<sup>154</sup> Ashworth could not

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was also probably acquainted with J.E.T. Rogers, political-economist and proponent of the Norman Yoke theory, who in turn was a friend and, by marriage, a relative of Richard Cobden.

<sup>152</sup> Henry Ashworth, "Cotton: Its Cultivation, Manufacture and Uses," *Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts*, Vol. VI. (London: Bell and Daldy, 1858), 56-64

<sup>153</sup> Rhodes Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise: The Rise and Fall of a Family Firm 1818-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 84.

<sup>154</sup> Henry Ashworth, *An Inquiry into the Origin, Progress and Results of the Strike of the Operative Cotton Spinner of Preston from October 1836 to February 1837* (Manchester: John Harrison, 1838).

see any legitimacy in demands for higher wages, better factory conditions and the like. He was convinced that manufacturing was an unqualified good and the force of his conviction resonated in these pamphlets on the economic history of Lancashire.

Henry Ashworth and his brother Edmund were the embodiment of this confident manufacturing ethos. Like John Bright, they came from a family that had long been associated with manufacturing. Generations of Ashworths, at least since their great-grandfather John Ashworth (1696-1767) had been chapmen, purchasing raw materials for spinning and weaving by outworkers. And their maternal grandfather, Thomas Thomasson, had also owned a cotton mill. It was an ideal background for entrance into the cotton industry. Henry, born in Turton, Lancashire, was educated (like Bright) first at local schools and later at Ackworth, where according to Boyson, the school's Quaker ethos had a profound effect on him, imparting to the young Henry a narrative of a religious sect valiantly surviving persecution throughout the ages. Undoubtedly, speculates Boyson, this narrative partly shaped his combative attitude towards social and political issues later in life. Edmund, too, was educated at Quaker institutions, though what effect it had on him is unknown.

Henry and Edmund's father, John, was a part owner of the New Eagley cotton mill. At an early age, first Henry (in 1818), then Edmund (in 1821) were made partners in the mill and steadily increased their ownership until it was theirs alone by the 1830s. Through heavy investment and generous loans, they expanded the mill's production capacity significantly, implementing the latest technologies and increasing its size and workforce. At the same time, they purchased a second mill, already partially built, at Edgerton. By the 1830s, Henry and Edmund had established a prosperous and well-known firm employing approximately 1,000 persons, though annual profits hovered at a four percent return on the amount invested in a good

year, and in the latter part of that decade, during the national economic downturn, losses were incurred.<sup>155</sup> Still, it was a success overall. “Cotton manufacture is one of the pillars of our national wealth,” wrote Henry Ashworth, quoting from the respected political-economist Nassau Senior, and he and his brother Edmund were a part of it.<sup>156</sup>

Henry Ashworth felt that the employer had certain duties to both his workers and society. Consequently, the Ashworths, like many enlightened employers, created housing for their workers as well as schools and churches within close proximity to their New Eagley and Egerton mills. This was not simply an act of altruism, but consonant with Henry Ashworth’s belief in enlightened self-interest. To begin with, the Turton area in Bolton, had little housing available for the rapidly increasing workforce that the Ashworths employed. But more importantly, Henry Ashworth believed that if provided with good housing, his workers would benefit physically and mentally and hence, become more economically productive and better able to serve the needs of industry. It would also, he felt, engender loyalty to the Ashworth firm.<sup>157</sup> Similarly, the establishment of schools and provision of various other educational opportunities was a case of desiring to give his workers opportunities for self-improvement (very much embodying the idea of the “steam intellect society,” as described by Asa Briggs and other historians), which in turn would make them more able to meet the requirements of industry.<sup>158</sup> Ashworth believed that industrialization was the future. Its growth would require new managers and other senior skilled operators. Hence gifts were given to workers who obtained qualifications and advanced through the ranks. It was an investment in human capital, to use modern economic language. Ashworth

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<sup>155</sup> Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise*.

<sup>156</sup> Henry Ashworth, *Historical Data Chiefly Relating to South Lancashire and the Cotton Manufacture* (Manchester: A. Ireland and Co., 1866), 21.

<sup>157</sup> Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise*, 223.

<sup>158</sup> Asa Briggs, “Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780-1846,” *Past and Present* 9, no. 1 (April 1956): 66.

had a belief bordering on the naïve in the mutual benefit to all sections of society if the country was run according to the laws of supply and demand, with a minimum of state involvement.

Class antagonism animated Ashworth's thinking as well though. His pamphlets on the economic history of Lancashire make it clear that the landed gentry and aristocracy had, to his mind, nothing whatever to do with the great manufacturing boom of his time. The landed class were, to his mind, lazy and unambitious, much in love with their domestic life. Throughout Ashworth's writings they are referred to as, at best, reactionary landlords interested only in their short-term gain. Occasionally he referred to them as blood-suckers. It was the common man in possession of talent and energy to whom the nation could attribute its current greatness.<sup>159</sup>

This attitude of Ashworth's, pride in his class and scorn for the upper classes, was similar to Bright's attitude in its vehemence. And to varying degrees it was an outlook common among the textile masters at the time. But then there was the idea of justice, or rather suffering injustice, that animated the thoughts and actions of Henry Ashworth and presumably his brother Edmund. Suffering injustice and fighting against it, while obviously an idea found in many nineteenth-century political movements from abolitionism to suffrage, is also a particular feature of Quaker thought. Henry Ashworth was greatly influenced listening to the history of his forebears suffering persecution. And more generally, the central Quaker ethos of peace, equality and simplicity was expressed not simply through dress and personal habits, but by the campaigns for social and political justice that it had waged since the eighteenth-century.<sup>160</sup> The religious thought of Henry and Edmund Ashworth will be examined later, but it is important to

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<sup>159</sup> Henry Ashworth, *Statistical Illustrations of the Past and Present State of Lancashire (Read for the British Association)*, June 27, 1847 Pamphlets and Other Papers, 1842-1872, 314.27 \*2227\*, British Library.

<sup>160</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, xxvi.

acknowledge this mixture of political economy, class-based antagonism and sense of injustice that informed their actions before they launched themselves into local and national politics.

Richard Cobden and Henry Ashworth had been acquainted with one another since the early 1830s. They were part of a close-knit community of manufacturers that were drawn together because of a commonality of interests as well as concerns, such as employee relations and burdensome legislation. Cobden, before working for the incorporation of Manchester, assisted Henry and Edmund Ashworth in their campaign for the incorporation of Bolton. For Cobden it was a sort of trial run. Bolton, like Manchester, was governed by a court leet, a group of magistrates, a Boroughreeve and a board of trustees (sometimes referred to as the “forty-thieves”).<sup>161</sup> Worse still, Bolton was divided into several districts, each regarded as thoroughly corrupt. It was the concentration of power in these few people that irked Henry and Edmund Ashworth. Like many manufacturers they desired to play an active role in their community, assert their new status as men of substance and in 1838, the Ashworths played an important part in successfully petitioning for Bolton’s incorporation. Confronted by disgruntled Tories, Henry Ashworth sternly explained to them that his was a “democratic case, whilst they had a baronial one.”<sup>162</sup> This was his introduction to politics and would set the tone for his future political activities.

The corn laws were seen as the great obstacle to future prosperity by many manufacturers, as well as the cause of the economic downturn of the late 1830s, and none believed this more assuredly than Henry Ashworth. He heard “a cry for justice,” created by the restriction on the importation of foodstuffs and threw himself into the cause of repeal. It was Ashworth and Cobden who, in 1837, had the idea of forming an anti-corn law group in

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<sup>161</sup> <http://www.boltonsmayors.org.uk/0-townhall.html>.

<sup>162</sup> Ashworth, *Recollections of Richard Cobden*, 29.



Manchester and using the Manchester Chamber of Commerce as a vehicle for repeal. It was also Ashworth who co-wrote the more radical petition that was adopted by that chamber in late 1838 which declared that they had “no allegiance to the soil,” and demanded immediate repeal to assure the economic prosperity of Britain.<sup>163</sup> The standard phrases, “manmade famine,” and, “injustice of class-legislation,” appear throughout his writings. In one speech he described the corn laws as a “belly question.”<sup>164</sup>

Such emotive language was undoubtedly sincere, but Ashworth first and foremost thought of himself as a statistician, and he compiled volumes of figures to demonstrate his conviction that the corn laws were ruining the economy and that only free trade was the remedy. In a series of reports compiled on behalf of the league, he painted a harrowing picture of the economy since 1836. Newcastle shipping was depressed, 800 mill workers in Aberdeen were unemployed and poor relief was up 80%, while poor relief was up 90% in Preston, and in Wrexham, 700 colliers asked for relief at once. And in his native Bolton he estimated the local economy was £148,000 worse off than the year before.<sup>165</sup> There are dozens of pages and columns containing similar figures. The statistics that Ashworth compiled are so detailed that he copied a report stating that in one area of Spitalfields, 50 families were so impoverished they had only ten beds between them.<sup>166</sup> A global banking crisis in 1837 and the overexpansion of Britain’s cotton industry, most contemporary economists agree, was the cause of the downturn, but to Ashworth, the blame rested with the corn laws.

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<sup>163</sup> Henry Ashworth, Richard Cobden, J.B. Smith, “The Manchester Petition Against the Corn Laws,” *Free Trade and Other Fundamental Doctrines of the Manchester School* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1903), 139-143.

<sup>164</sup> Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise*, 203.

<sup>165</sup> Henry Ashworth, *Report of the Statistical Committee Appointed by the Anti-Corn Law Conference* (Bolton: Thos Abbatt, 1842), 41-43.

<sup>166</sup> Henry Ashworth, *Statistics of the Present State of Depression of Trade at Bolton* (Bolton: Thos Abbatt, 1841).

The “yoke of landowners,” and their corn laws were taxing food and harming industry, he believed.<sup>167</sup> According to Ashworth’s calculations, the national economy was £53 million worse off because of protectionist policies. The source of this estimate is unclear, but Ashworth did make in his writings and speeches the reasonable argument that whilst many manufacturers like himself kept wages consistently at the same level in recent years, despite a decline in profit, food prices had gone up significantly due to poor harvests and restricted importation. This meant that in the short term the landowners benefited, but in the long term, they were harming themselves. The steady rise in food prices meant an increasing reduction of the workers’ ability to purchase foodstuffs. And this in turn, argued Ashworth (following the well-rehearsed argument of his fellow corn law opponents), meant that the overall purchasing power of the people was reduced because so much of their income was spent exclusively on food. The market for the products of manufacturing, that great engine of economic growth, would shrink and, following this logic, Ashworth felt sure economic ruin would be the end result of continued agricultural protection.

Like the similar arguments of other corn law opponents, there are objections that could be made. But Henry Ashworth was convinced of the reasonableness of his cause. Quite simply, he believed in a world where “those who could make good cheese [or any other product], could make profit,” free of government interference, regardless of whether they were British or foreign.<sup>168</sup> Boyson notes that Ashworth was exceptional among the members of the league in his absolute free trade principles. As previously mentioned, some free trade professing manufacturers expressed reservations about the exportation of machinery or skilled workers abroad, but not Ashworth. He believed in free exchange unreservedly. And he believed, like

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<sup>167</sup> Henry Ashworth, *Report of the Statistical Committee Appointed by the Anti-Corn Law Conference Held in London, 1841* (Bolton: Thos Abbatt, 1841).

<sup>168</sup> Henry Ashworth, Letter to Richard Cobden 3 October, 1849, Cobden Papers Vol. VII. (ff. 325), British Library, Add MSS 43653.

Cobden, in a future globalised world of self-reliant men. Countries, he predicted at the time of corn law repeal, will join together, monarchies turn into baronies, there will be transnational roads and railways, and the “last remnants of despotic ill-nature” will vanish.<sup>169</sup>

The distinguishing feature of Henry Ashworth’s contribution to the Anti-Corn Law League, besides his statistical approach, was his contribution to the league’s religious character. Like Bright, his Quaker faith was of the most liberal variety. He approved of James Ewing Ritchie’s description of his religious denomination as laughed at for “harmless peculiarities.”<sup>170</sup> As Boyson describes in detail, the Ashworth family was particularly relaxed in its devotion to the doctrines of their faith. Henry and Edmund Ashworth were the product of Regency times and lacked that characteristic austerity of mid-Victorian Britain. Both brothers came into conflict with their local meetinghouse because of their most non-Quaker love of hunting and allowing their children to attend dances. Of Henry Ashworth’s nine children who reached adulthood, three daughters married out of the Society of Friends (which meant they were expelled from the Society), in part because their father cared more about the social and financial standing of their future husbands than their religious beliefs, whilst three of his sons married out. Similarly, most of Edmund Ashworth’s children renounced their Quaker religion and Edmund himself became a member of the Church of England in later life.<sup>171</sup>

But Henry Ashworth remained a Quaker throughout his long life (he died in 1880, aged eighty-five) and surprisingly, given his relaxed approach to faith, imparted a very forceful religious element to corn law repeal. As this section has sought to show, invoking religion had its practical benefits, but Ashworth was also entirely sincere in his actions. The *Annual Monitor*,

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<sup>169</sup> Henry Ashworth, Letter to Richard Cobden 1846, Cobden Papers Vol. VII. (ff. 325), British Library, Add MSS 43653.

<sup>170</sup> James Ewing Ritchie Quoted in Henry Ashworth, *Recollections of Richard Cobden*, 19.

<sup>171</sup> Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise*, 243-257.

a Quaker publication recording deaths among its members, contains an obituary of Ashworth that attests to his faith and goodness. At the end of the obituary, a hymn is attached that contains the lines, “thy generation thou has served/According to God’s will.”<sup>172</sup> It was God’s will, Ashworth believed, that hard work should yield ample food, therefore the corn laws violated God’s law.<sup>173</sup> He even went so far as to say that the corn laws were so opposite to what was natural and Godly that those who supported them might as well not believe in Scripture. Ashworth did not wish simply to denounce the corn laws Biblically. He also sought to draft his fellow Quakers into the cause. In one letter, he expressed impatience with the official Quaker response. How could they not support something that promotes liberty and peace and “appeals [to their] moral conscience”?<sup>174</sup> Maybe, given how the world is now “constituted,” he should appeal to self-interest he wondered.

Ashworth was willing to scheme to get people on his side. Instead of appealing to self-interest, he considered doing the very opposite in recruiting Quakers to corn law repeal and entertained the idea of separating the financial element of his argument from “the higher, the more ennobling considerations.”<sup>175</sup> He even considered replacing the expression “free trade” with “free intercourse,” fearing that “trade” sounded too “mercenary.”<sup>176</sup> In another letter, he suggested the idea of getting the Society of Friends to endorse a prize essay on the subject of the corn laws, and later, with Bright, he started a league circular specifically for Quakers. Most significantly, in 1842 he organized a meeting of Quakers chaired by the esteemed philanthropist

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<sup>172</sup> Joseph Joshua Green, *The Annual Monitor for or Obituary of the Members of the Society, 1881* (London: Forgotten Books, [1881] 2013), 14-5.

<sup>173</sup> Henry Ashworth, *Report of the Statistical Committee Appointed by the Anti-Corn Law Conference Held in London, 1841*.

<sup>174</sup> Henry Ashworth, Letter to Richard Cobden April 1842, Cobden Papers Vol. VII. (ff. 325), British Library, Add MSS 43653.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

Samuel Fox, which produced “evidence of success.”<sup>177</sup> Success for Ashworth was generating private conversation among Quakers and securing monetary contributions.

Anthony Howe, in his study of the early Victorian cotton masters, described the role of dissenting religions as reinforcing political and social attitudes, particularly in regards to philanthropy.<sup>178</sup> This is especially applicable to Henry Ashworth and explains the contribution he made to the Anti-Corn Law League. Ashworth, compared with other members of his family, remained attached to the Quaker religion, but his economic views appear to have been of greater importance to him than his religious convictions. His earliest published works about economic policy and industrial unrest were limited in their references to religion. But as he became increasingly vocal in his opinions, religious sentiment became both more evident, and more clearly a factor, in how his thoughts were shaped. That vitriolic attitude to the power of landowners, like John Bright’s, probably originated from a sense of being a member of a religious sect that had historically suffered persecution from that same social class. But whereas with Bright, a Quaker ethos appeared alongside instinctive radicalism and a free trade adherence from the beginning of his political activities, in Henry Ashworth’s case, ideas of political economy predominated throughout his political career. What Ashworth contributed to the league was his utilization of his genuine religious beliefs for the advancement of a political and economic idea he had long held.

Joseph Sturge, full-time philanthropist and retired corn merchant, was another Quaker who would be prominently associated with the Anti-Corn Law League. It was an ambiguous association however and frequently, relations between Sturge and his fellow leaguers were strained. John Greenleaf Whittier, the American Quaker poet, political activist and friend of

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Anthony Howe, *The Cotton-Masters, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Sturge, noted in a poem of remembrance that for Sturge, it was not with “golden pen’s or lip’s persuasion” that he contributed to a vast array of political causes from abolitionism to pacifism, but with “a fine sense of right/And truth’s directness/with sturdy hate of wrong” that was channeled into an impressive ability to marshal support for a cause he had adopted.<sup>179</sup> The scarcity of published writings or recorded speeches, as well as an absence of much of his correspondence, make it difficult to fully understand Sturge’s contribution to the anti-corn law movement, but his sometimes bitter disagreements with the league from 1841 onwards are vital for understanding not only the role religion played in the league’s efforts, but also the conflicts within Quakerism itself. Whereas John Bright and Henry Ashworth were fairly liberal and pragmatic in their approach to the Quaker religion, with a variety of non-religious ideas influencing their character, Sturge was devout and stringent in his beliefs. He was a Quaker and an evangelical, an adherent of that religious movement that would profoundly influence the Society of Friends as much as it did any other religious group. Sturge placed his religious beliefs and the uncompromising moral values they engendered before any other consideration, placing him at odds with the league (as well as many other movements and people throughout his lifetime). This conflict, with the light it sheds on the history of the Anti-Corn Law League, makes Sturge’s involvement worth examining.

Joseph Sturge, like Cobden, came from a yeoman background. Born in 1793, he was the son of a Gloucestershire farmer and in common with many other anti-corn law leaguers, he had only a brief formal education; one year at a local school and three years at the co-educational Quaker school, Sidcot, in Winscombe, near Bristol. Again, like many leaguers, he supplemented

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<sup>179</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier, “In Remembrance of Joseph Sturge,” *The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier. Complete Illustrated Edition. With Critical Biography by William Michael Rossetti*. (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1880), 175-177.

his meagre education with self-learning, and later participated in various reading societies including the Endeavour Society, which was organized by Quakers for the study of books that accorded with Quaker values (Quaker doctrine at the time disapproved of novels and other so-called diverting texts). According to Alex Tyrrell, Sturge's choice of reading material in his early years pushed slightly beyond what was Quaker approved. It included the works of Germaine de Stael, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Southey and, with mild trepidation, Lord Byron, as well as historical and religious texts. In other respects though, he was very much a Quaker.<sup>180</sup> Stephen Hobhouse notes that there was little religious discussion in the Sturge family correspondence, but that has more to do with the common Quaker reticence about mentioning the religious, with the word God scrupulously avoided and words like Providence substituted in its place.<sup>181</sup> The judgement of Sturge's first biographer, the Congregationalist minister and Parliamentarian Henry Richard, that Sturge grew up in a good traditional Quaker household seems correct. The confiscation of young Joseph Sturge's sheep at the age of nineteen (he started his professional life as a farmer and grazier) for refusing to serve in the militia or pay a penalty of £10 attests to the fact that he adhered to the Quaker doctrine of total pacifism. Similarly, when he moved to Bewdley in 1814 to try his luck as a corn factor, he was instrumental in reopening the meeting house there.<sup>182</sup>

Evangelicalism, was the force that would shape Sturge's religious views and come to dominate his thoughts and actions. Evangelicalism might have seemed a strange form of Christianity for a Quaker to adopt. It emphasized the absolute authority of scripture, confirmation of one's sanctity through good works and generally, the maintenance of spiritual

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<sup>180</sup> Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London: Christopher Helm, 1987), 16.

<sup>181</sup> Stephen Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge, His Life and Work* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1919), 8-9.

<sup>182</sup> Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1865), 23-24, 42-44.

health in preparation for judgement day.<sup>183</sup> Traditional Quakerism was distrustful of the Bible, believing that the light, the divine spirit, was within everyone and therefore it was possible to obtain Godliness by contemplation. The Bible might provide assistance in helping find this light within, but it might also interfere with this process. It was not until the 1860s that Quaker meetings started reading the Bible aloud. Similarly, being aloof from the world, of ignoring its distractions and temptations, was central to Quaker thinking, whereas evangelicals, though focused on another world, were very much out and about performing their good works.

Evangelicalism, however, was sweeping through all denominations, Anglican and dissenting. Within Quakerism, during Sturge's lifetime, the traditional Quaker quietist view remained dominant, but there were powerful evangelical voices, especially that of the esteemed John Joseph Gurney, the banker and philanthropist. Sturge, when still in his youth, according to Alex Tyrrell, was much taken with the preaching of the evangelical Quaker William Forster, who endorsed the doctrine of inner light, but at the same time propounded evangelical doctrines.<sup>184</sup> Sturge's joining of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and subsequently becoming the secretary of its Thornbury branch, was a confirmation that he had become an evangelical Quaker. The Foreign and British Bible Society was the pre-eminent evangelical group. "It unites piety with the widest range of philanthropy," wrote its historian, George Brown.<sup>185</sup> Equally important, it was a non-denominational society that brought together a wide variety of evangelical dissenters and created a powerful pressure group that did far more than distribute in excess of four million bibles in its first twenty years of existence.<sup>186</sup> Undoubtedly Sturge's

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<sup>183</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, Part I*. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), 5.

<sup>184</sup> Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party*, 24-25.

<sup>185</sup> George Browne, *The History of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Vol. I*. (London: W.M. Watts, 1859), 3.

<sup>186</sup> Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, Part I*.



impressive later ability to organize pressure groups, and lifelong friendships with a variety of dissenting ministers, originated from his early involvement in this society.

The manifestations of Sturge's evangelical ethos appeared alongside his considerable success as a corn merchant in 1820s Birmingham. Sturge arrived in Birmingham in 1822 in his thirtieth year; his previous partnership as a corn factor at Bewdley having failed due to a variety of factors both within and beyond his control. In Birmingham his luck changed quite quickly. Initially he had modest success buying and selling corn in local markets, but a switch to importing corn from abroad on commission, the establishment of a distribution centre at Gloucester (at the time an increasingly important inland port), and a heavy investment in canals and later railways, meant that he became quite prosperous. The completion in 1827 of the Gloucester and Berkeley Canal, later renamed the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, was crucial for the prosperity of Sturge and other merchants. Not only did it allow better access to the Midlands for imported goods, but the size of the canal meant that large seagoing ships, like those carrying Sturge's grain from Ireland and later, Russia and Turkey, could be accommodated in the wharves of Gloucester. From there it was transferred to smaller vessels and transported further inland to Birmingham and other places. Additionally, Joseph Sturge and his brother Charles' significant shares in the canal company meant they were able to reduce the canal duties on corn shipments by nearly a third. Several of his eleven siblings were involved in the firm of J. & C. Sturge (the C stood for his brother Charles). In 1850, the capital of the firm was estimated at £47,000. But Sturge, although he remained involved in its operations throughout his life, retired from day to day management in 1831 and focused on civic and philanthropic activities.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party*, 29-30.

Hannah Isichei writes in her masterful study, *Victorian Quakers*, that the early Victorian Quakers who were heavily involved in philanthropy were almost exclusively adherents of evangelicalism, but cautions that this was not their only motivation. A sense of guilt over the amount of wealth many of them had obtained and an awareness that other members of their small religious community (which officially disapproved of excessive wealth-accumulation) knew full well how prosperous they were, also spurred them to perform good works.<sup>188</sup> Sturge was particularly uneasy about his prosperity. Thus, he was relentless in his activities in 1820s and 1830s Birmingham. Temperance was one movement he was involved in, going so far as to refuse to sell his grain to distilleries, therefore denying himself a significant source of income. His role as a street commissioner, a position that he was appointed to in 1830, reveals more about his character however.<sup>189</sup>

Normally it was a role that came with little power, except that in 1830 this body was involved in the construction of Birmingham's town hall. The trouble came about when it was decided that the hall would occasionally be used to host musical events in support of the General Hospital. This was something Sturge could not countenance. Quaker doctrine was opposed to such entertainments, believing they were profane and encouraged immorality, although Alex Tyrrell argues that Quaker thinking was not the deciding reason for Sturge's protestations. Instead, he suggests, it was an evangelical attitude that disapproved of oratorios, the singing of sections of Scripture for popular amusement, and indeed the protest group Sturge helped to organize was interdenominational and very concerned that oratorios would be performed in the

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<sup>188</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, 180-184.

<sup>189</sup> "Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832." *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham*. Ed. W B Stephens. London: Victoria County History, 1964. 298-317. *British History Online*. Web. 3 September 2019. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/pp298-317>.

town hall.<sup>190</sup> Henry Richard lends support for this view when he suggests that the Anglican clergyman John Newton's lengthy broadsides against Handel's oratorio *Messiah*, published thirty-years earlier, influenced Sturge's thinking.<sup>191</sup> To paraphrase Sturge, oratorios blurred the distinction between good and evil and were particularly bad for children. And he was implacable in his opposition. Having failed to convince the street commissioners to prohibit the musical events and seek alternative means of funding, he resigned his position and refused to pay the rates that were being levied to fund the building of the hall. It was a "violation of religious liberty to tax persons for their support who consciously believe them to be inconsistent with Christianity."<sup>192</sup> Such an unyielding attitude, which in regards to the town hall and other activities left him open to charges of fanaticism, would characterize Sturge's behaviour throughout his life. Years later, as a director of the London and Birmingham Railway, he protested at trains being run on Sundays. The board offered to compromise and suspend services during the hours of religious service, but to Sturge, this was not enough and he eventually resigned, warning of evil being afoot.<sup>193</sup>

Such an unyielding attitude was also exhibited in his approach to political matters in the 1830s, particularly in his strong support for politicians whose principles accorded with his own. A fellow Quaker accused him in print of violating the Society's principle of non-political involvement, but Sturge simply retorted that said principle was only in the regards to the supporting of political factions. He was acting according to the Gospel and for the public good.

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<sup>190</sup> Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party*, 43-44.

<sup>191</sup> Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, 59.

<sup>192</sup> Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, 62.

<sup>193</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, Part I*, 458.

It was the duty of a Christian, whether Quaker or otherwise, to support peace, order and social improvement.<sup>194</sup>

In the years before the corn law struggle, the fruits of this uncompromising attitude can be seen in Sturge's success on behalf of the cause of abolition. Abolition, at home and abroad, was Sturge's great concern throughout his life and therefore it is nearly impossible to summarize his involvement, but it must be attempted since it was one of the reasons, he fell out with the Anti-Corn Law League. Abolition of slavery in the colonies was a focus of Quaker energies for decades and various groups of prominent Quakers were involved in William Wilberforce's emancipation struggle. Sturge started attending meetings at the Birmingham branch of the Anti-Slavery Society almost immediately upon his arrival in that city and in 1826, became one of its secretaries.<sup>195</sup> Four years later, he attended the Friends Yearly Meeting and declared himself in favour of immediate abolition, putting himself at odds with some of the older Quaker abolitionists who favoured a more gradual emancipation. The restlessness of the younger abolitionists with their elders was increasing, culminating in the formation of an Agency Committee in July 1831 that sought, like the Anti-Corn Law League did a decade later, to send forth paid lecturers to arouse support for the cause outside of Parliament. It was a successful strategy, but its militancy led an alarmed Anti-Slavery Society to disassociate itself from them, which meant the Committee became an independent body and rebranded itself the Agency Society.

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<sup>194</sup> Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, 69-72.

<sup>195</sup> "Political and Administrative History: Political History from 1832." *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham*. Ed. W B Stephens (London: Victoria County History, 1964), 298-317. *British History Online*. Web. 3 September 2019. <http://www.british history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/pp298-317>.

Sturge and many of his siblings, especially Sophia Sturge, played an important role in the Society, and their contribution was acknowledged by their contemporaries. But equally important were the friendships Sturge developed with fellow campaigners, which meant that in addition to his demonstrable organisational skills, he had a key list of contacts, and therefore became much sought after by future political and social movements.

Abolition of slavery was achieved on 1 August 1833, but for Sturge, this was only the beginning of his struggle. Slavery was outlawed, but an apprenticeship system, lasting four to six years before complete freedom would occur, had taken its place. The unity and strength of the anti-slavery movement collapsed over whether or not this apprenticeship system should be accepted or campaigned against. Sturge, of course, was appalled by the apprenticeship scheme. In the weeks leading up to the Emancipation Act he denounced it vehemently, despite the warnings of his fellow abolitionists that he was jeopardizing the prospect of at least some freedom for the enslaved. “Uniformly asserting that what was morally wrong could not be politically right,” is how one memorial to him summed up his lifelong attitude to political questions.<sup>196</sup> Sturge travelled to the West Indies to prove the evils of apprenticeship, felt confirmed in his opinion, gave evidence in Parliament and published, with his travel companion, the Quaker philanthropist and pharmacist Thomas Harvey, a bestselling book, *The West Indies in 1837*.

The objectivity of this book is doubtful, both because of the preconceived ideas of its authors and the way in which they conducted their investigation, mainly with the help of the missionary societies located on those islands. Their main observation that the apprenticeship system left the emancipated worse off was in many respects true. Many planters abandoned their

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<sup>196</sup> *Legge Street Temperance Society Memorial of Joseph Sturge and the Inauguration of His Monument, Five Ways, Edgbastom* (Birmingham: White and Pike, Printers, 1862).

old obligations of providing housing, food and sometimes medical care, whilst still expecting a certain number of hours of unpaid labour. The long catalogue of abuses on the part of the conspiring planters and magistrates of the islands was also undoubtedly true, but overemphasized. Other, more disinterested visitors had not seen as much cruelty, but they were not trying to alter an entire system of labour either. Sturge's comparison of the West Indies to Ireland, plagued by absentee landlordism and great wealth (he described it as excessive wealth) that failed to spread beyond a small clique is one of his more interesting observations, as is his vague declaration that free trade would solve many of the problems besetting the islands. Finally, there is his observation that the emancipation achieved had led to an increased desire for education and more religious devotion, both of which Sturge valued highly. But it was undoubtedly his depiction of the bad character of some of the planters and magistrates and their abuses that gave his push for full emancipation its momentum, and led to his most tangible success in public life.<sup>197</sup> The apprenticeship scheme was abandoned in 1838. But even then, Sturge felt he could not rest for a minute, co-founding the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in 1839 to eradicate slavery throughout the world. This new movement would become immensely powerful and though Sturge never held a formal position in the BFASS, his correspondence indicates that he was working diligently at the heart of its operations, a silent director.

It was at this point that Sturge became involved in the corn laws. The Anti-Corn Law League adopted many of the techniques used by the abolitionists. It included adopting their strategies of paid lecturers and obtaining pledges from Parliamentary candidates. More importantly, as Simon Morgan has pointed out, the League consciously sought to emulate the

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<sup>197</sup> Joseph Sturge, Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1838).

moral tone of abolition, depicting the corn laws as a sinful abomination against the natural order. The league wanted the moral authority that the support of evangelicals would confer. Both Richard Cobden and Henry Ashworth were aware that economic reasoning was not the sturdiest platform upon which to launch a national movement: it must have additional support.<sup>198</sup>

Sturge, one of the leaders of what has been called “the moral radical party,” was an ideal recruit to the cause of repeal, not that he needed to be recruited.<sup>199</sup> He had been an opponent of the corn laws for as long as Cobden had been. In 1836 Sturge had given evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee on the State of Agriculture in which he described the corn laws as injurious to everyone and beneficial to none. And before that, in Sturge’s *Corn Circular*, the trade journal he produced annually discussing all aspects of his industry, there had been occasional condemnations of the existing corn laws. He was a believer in the benefits of free trade, but Sturge also strongly disapproved of the speculation he felt the corn laws encouraged. Such disapproval probably had its origin in the Quaker stricture against excessive risk-taking and greed in the business life of its members.<sup>200</sup> The epistles issued by the Friends Yearly Meeting frequently warned against this behaviour, declaring that it showed too much love of this world and put one at a distance from God. Disownment did occur to members who failed to heed the advice of the society.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Simon Morgan, “The Anti-Corn Law League and British Anti-Slavery Society in Transatlantic Perspective, 1838-1846,” *The Historical Journal* 52, no. 1 (March 2009): 87-107.

<sup>199</sup> Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party*.

<sup>200</sup> Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party*, 29-32.

<sup>201</sup> *Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of People Called Quakers Held in London to the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings In Great Britain, Ireland and Elsewhere From the Year 1675-1759, Inclusive*. (London: Samuel Clark, Samuel Clark, MDCCL); Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, 136; Esther Sahle, “Quakers, Coercion and Pre-Modern Growth: Why Friends’ Formal Institutions for Contract Enforcement Did Not Matter For Early Atlantic Trade Expansion,” *Economic History Working Papers*, no: 211 (November 2014): 24.

Despite such Quaker strictures regarding business practices, excessive speculation in corn is a charge that the wider Quaker community occasionally had to contend with.<sup>202</sup> William Cobbett, for instance, wrote with implied disapproval of a Quaker firm in Liverpool that sent “corn gaugers” throughout the kingdom to determine the quality of the crop and to take samples so that they could more profitably speculate on the future harvest.<sup>203</sup> Sturge himself, Tyrrell argues convincingly, had partaken in some questionable practices that involved driving up the price of grain and therefore allowing the importation of foreign grain. So Sturge had a two-fold reason for being an early opponent of the corn laws. He had a general sense that they were harmful and against sound economic principles and a more specific Christian, Quaker concern that they encouraged immoral practices, including possibly by himself.

Sturge’s actual involvement in the Anti-Corn Law League was nowhere near as great as that of Cobden or Bright. The sheer number of causes he was involved in, including the BFASS, pacifism, Birmingham municipal politics as well as national politics, makes the future political activities of Cobden’s daughter, Jane Cobden, the Liberal politician and suffragette, look sedate in comparison. Still Sturge made an important contribution in his favourite role, that of organizer. Cobden’s letters to him attest to this. Sturge discussed strategy with Cobden, exerted political pressure where he could and solicited help for the league from his many acquaintances, such as the powerful Irish politician Daniel O’Connell, who had the ability to mobilize a significant bloc of Catholic support.<sup>204</sup> Trying to awaken Quaker support for corn law repeal was also something he attempted, though Sturge was more concerned about obtaining their backing for his other causes, particularly peace and abolition. There were also his contributions to the

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<sup>202</sup> Robert Howard, *A Few Words on Corn and Quakers* (London: William Phillips, 1800).

<sup>203</sup> William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, 209-210.

<sup>204</sup> Daniel O’Connell, Letter to Joseph Sturge, 24 November 1840, Correspondence of Joseph Sturge with Richard Cobden, M.P.; 1839-1853, (f. 326) British Library, Add MS 50131.



literature of the league; the occasional article or gathering of facts for someone else's use. And finally, Sturge was very generous financially, giving an estimated £500 to the league in total, though with stipulations. His largest single contribution, at the end of 1841, for £200, was given on the condition that the league would stay true to its founding principle of total and immediate repeal.<sup>205</sup> Sturge had become alarmed at the fact that several league members were becoming politically involved with Whig politicians who favoured a gradual reduction of duties on foreign grain. He would not suffer a repeat of anything like the partial victory of emancipation and apprenticeship again. Sturge was as stringent and as forceful as ever in his views. Such moral certainty and practical ability proved useful, but Sturge's nature, as this chapter has sought to show, meant that a fallout with the League would be inevitable.

Sugar became a sharp point of division, not just between Sturge and the league, but between abolitionists as well. The issue, at its simplest, was the customs duties that discriminated against the foreign, slave grown sugar of Brazil, in favour of the sugar produced by the recently emancipated in the West Indian colonies. In some respects, the issue was similar to the corn laws, since the duties against foreign produce drove up prices and restricted working-class enjoyment of sugar, while benefiting a powerful landed interest. But, as Disraeli noted, the sugar question was "a maze of conflicting interests and contending emotions."<sup>206</sup> Naturally, free traders such as Cobden, were absolutely opposed to any form of protection and supported a reduction or repeal of the duty on foreign sugar, but Joseph Sturge, his BFASS and many others, set on abolishing slavery world-wide, disagreed. They worried that a free trade in sugar would encourage and perpetuate slavery.

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<sup>205</sup> Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, 276-277.

<sup>206</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, Quoted in Richard Huzzey, "Free Trade, Free-Labour and Slave Sugar in Victorian Society," *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 2 (June 2010): 359-360.

Those who supported an absolute free trade believed that free labour would triumph in the end. Slavery would end eventually because it was against the natural economic order. Sturge did not disagree with this view; he had been an enthusiastic if time poor member of the League. However, he felt that morally it was more important to immediately combat slavery than to uphold an economic principle. Henry Ashworth's alarm at the coalition that developed between planters seeking to preserve their protection and abolitionists who had been in a bitter struggle with them only a few years earlier, did not dissuade Sturge from believing that unnaturally high sugar prices were a moral price that had to be paid.<sup>207</sup>

Cobden tried his best to convince Sturge that free trade was the only sound policy to follow, but failed to change his mind and was later accused by Sturge of having called him a hypocrite.<sup>208</sup> Given Sturge's nature however, it is unsurprising that he refused to alter his views. For him it was a moral question of refusing to consume slave produce. Cobden's additional point, that many products Sturge enjoyed were the direct or indirect result of slave labour, particularly cotton, did not change his thinking.<sup>209</sup> John Bright also had little patience for Sturge, on the one hand writing that sugar was such a minor issue, but on the other hand declaring that determining the moral condition of all trading partners was "irrational." Worse still, it created the grievous crime of monopoly against the people.<sup>210</sup> "The sugar question amounted to a test of faith in free trade," Richard Huzzey concludes and although, in his opinion, Sturge did not fail this test, it revealed the fact that the League was not a unanimous body of thought.<sup>211</sup> The

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<sup>207</sup> Henry Ashworth, *Recollections of Richard Cobden*, 46-47.

<sup>208</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Joseph Sturge, 3 March 1841, Correspondence of Joseph Sturge with Richard Cobden, M.P.; 1839-1853 (f. 327), British Library, Add MS 50131; Richard Cobden, Letter to Joseph Sturge 11 March 1845, Cobden Papers, Vol. X. (ff. 384), British Library Add MS 43656.

<sup>209</sup> Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party*, 140-141.

<sup>210</sup> John Bright, Letter to Joseph Sturge February 11, 1843, Sturge Papers, (ff. 12-15b) British Library, Add MS 43845.

<sup>211</sup> Richard Huzzey, "Free Trade, Free-Labour and Slave Sugar in Victorian Society," *The Historical Journal*, 53, no. 2 (June 2010): 369.

backgrounds of the participants were similar and Sturge, Bright and Ashworth possessed the same faith, but temperament and other political commitments caused acrimony.

The final break for Sturge with the Anti-Corn Law League came at the beginning of 1842, when he turned his attention towards Chartism. Despite witnessing Chartist violence in the 1830s he did not, like many members of the middle-class, feel uneasy about their aims. Sturge had been in contact with moderate Chartists, like Henry Vincent and A.G. O'Neill, as well as with various middle-class radicals and dissenters who wished to institute governmental reform.<sup>212</sup> He had also received literature from the Metropolitan Parliamentary Reform Association in London. As for the violence associated with Chartism, Sturge believed that most of it had occurred as a result of brutality on the part of the authorities, the special constables, Metropolitan police and army.

Sturge wanted to unite the working and middle classes over the issue of universal suffrage. It was an idea that he had probably received from the former Congregationalist minister and writer Edward Miall, for whose pamphlet on suffrage he provided a brief introduction.<sup>213</sup> Sturge's organization, founded in February 1842, was called the Complete Suffrage Union. Its stated aim was the achievement of Christian equity and the removal of national distress and oppressive class legislation. The Association would be a peaceful organization, almost identical to Chartism in that it demanded equal distribution of Parliamentary seats, ballot protection, the payment of MPs, and most importantly, the eligibility of every man to vote, regardless of how

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<sup>212</sup> Alex Tyrrell. "Joseph Sturge, (1793–1859), philanthropist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 13 Sep. 2019.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26746>.

<sup>213</sup> *Reconciliation Between the Middle and Labouring Classes* (Edinburgh: Q. Dalrymple, 1842); D.W. Bebbington "Edward Miall, (1809–1881)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oct. 2006. 9 July 2015.

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18647>.

little property he possessed.<sup>214</sup> Temperance and abolition were also mentioned as possible aims of the society. In a way, it was an attempt to unite Chartism and the Anti-Corn League under Sturge's leadership in a broad Christian movement that was both philanthropic and political. Several important Leaguers, including Archibald Prentice, attended the Association's second meeting, but the League avoided becoming involved in this venture. Instead, the League's newspaper wrote a juvenile rant, which complained that the Association was trying to make itself more important than the League, and that one of the individuals involved in the Association campaigned against a League candidate at the last general election.<sup>215</sup> The refusal of the Chartists to participate was what doomed Sturge's Association however.

The failure of Sturge's Complete Suffrage Union reveals much about his character. He was interested in, and informed about, the issue of parliamentary reform, and sympathized with the peaceful elements of Chartism, and therefore sought to form an organization that addressed this issue whilst at the same time injecting it with his Christian values. The evangelical element drove his philanthropic and political activities, whilst the quiet Quakerism of his youth had a subtle effect. But the failure of his Association also hints at impatience and stubbornness. Cobden suggested to Sturge that there were ways to reconcile the middle and working classes through anti-corn law agitation, but instead Sturge gave the League even less of his time and went off to form his own organization. Similarly, when the BFASS voted to drop its opposition to free trade in sugar, Sturge contrived a way to reverse their decision.<sup>216</sup> His stubbornness occasionally bore fruit; for instance the abolition of the apprenticeship scheme in the West

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<sup>214</sup> *Complete Suffrage Conference Program, 3 March 1842*, (Birmingham: J.W. Showell, 1842).

<sup>215</sup> Alex Tyrrell. "Joseph Sturge, (1793–1859), philanthropist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 13 Sep. 2019.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26746>.

<sup>216</sup> C. Duncan Rice "'Humanity Sold for Sugar!' The British Abolitionist Response to Free Trade in Slave-Grown Sugar," *The Historical Journal* 13, no. 3 (September 1970): 417.

Indies, but it also led to squandered opportunities and lost friendships. Sturge was very different from his fellow Quaker Anti-Corn Law Leaguers. The devoted free-trader Henry Ashworth was of a laxer Regency era disposition and Bright, while he could match Sturge for tenacity, was worldlier and not an evangelical. Each of these three Quakers exercised a unique influence on the League. Sturge might not have contributed much to its success, but he revealed the divisions in the free trade movement, one being the moral problems the free trade movement could present.

The influence of any specific Quaker thinking has been unclear in this section. In part this is due to a lack of uniformity within Quakerism itself. The Society of Friends did have an impressive administrative system, pyramidal in shape, which at its most basic consisted of preparatory meetings, monthly meetings, quarterly meetings and Yearly Meetings. The preparatory meetings were the local meetinghouses, several of which comprised a monthly meeting. The monthly meetings were the first level at which important matters were transacted; births and deaths recorded, issues affecting the congregation examined, discipline enforced and membership applications and disownments decided upon. The quarterly meetings, consisting of several monthly meetings, were, however, relatively unimportant, mainly serving the purpose of a conduit, deciding on which issues from the monthly meeting should be passed on to the Yearly Meeting and nominating delegates to attend it. The Yearly Meeting was the final executive authority, consisting both of the chosen delegates and any other Quaker who chose to attend.<sup>217</sup>

The epistles issued by the Yearly Meeting were the official voice of Quakerism, but there was great variance in how individual Quakers chose to live their Quaker faith, despite the

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<sup>217</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, 68-107.

willingness of early-nineteenth century monthly meetings to expel members who did not adhere to Quaker discipline.

In part this was due to the way in which decisions were reached at the yearly meeting. Quakers felt that voting on an issue that was being discussed was tyrannical, because it forced individuals to comply and violate their conscience. Instead, the clerk of the yearly meeting took the sense of the meeting, judging the mood of the attendees based upon what had been said and how individuals had responded. That was how decisions were reached. The fact that a cohort of older, esteemed friends sat near the clerk and tended to be the only ones that managed to catch his eye when they wished to speak undermined the democratic nature of the proceedings however, and led some Quakers to disregard the instructions that were issued. Ashworth was not alone in finding nothing wrong with entertainments like dancing and hunting, despite the instruction to “avoid vain sports and places of diversion, all kinds of gaming,” that the yearly meeting of 1833 issued.<sup>218</sup> The Quaker William Lucas, diarist and brewer and an acquaintance of Ashworth, was a frequent visitor of exhibitions at the Royal Academy who was familiar with the works of Charles Dickens, and was partial to visiting Anglican chapels during visits to Cambridge. His brother Samuel became a respected painter. William Lucas’s diaries make it clear that he was not the only Quaker to enjoy such diversions.<sup>219</sup> Any thinking man, Lucas notes, would diverge a little from official Quaker views. But then there were also many men like Josiah Forster (1782 to 1870), a highly respected attendee of Yearly Meeting and one of Sturge’s harshest critics, who worried that music “allured the feet of the young” and believed that almost everything was corrupting and tempting.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> *Christian Doctrine, Practice and Discipline Society of Friends* (London: Richard Barrett, 1861), 181.

<sup>219</sup> William Lucas, *A Quaker Journal: Being the Diary and Reminiscences of William Lucas of Hitchin, Vol. 1, Vol. 2*. (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd. 1934).

<sup>220</sup> Josiah Forster, *On the Principles of Friends* (London, A.W. Bennett, 1860), 103.

There was a wide variance in Quaker thought. Traditional quietists wanted to have as little to do with the world as possible, while rabid evangelicals followed political events closely and were members of every conceivable association. Officially, Quaker doctrine stressed the importance of civil obedience and warned that political engagement tended to corrupt the individual, to bring him too much in the “spirit of the world,” and away from the nature of true Christianity. Additionally, the many “peculiarities” of the society, such as the prohibition against taking oaths and testimony of absolute pacifism, meant that most political offices were impossible for a Quaker to fill without incurring sharp rebuke and possible disownment from his fellow members.<sup>221</sup> Both practically and spiritually, a Quaker had to remain “quiet in the land.”

Isichei correctly points out that one of the paradoxes of Quakerism was that for all its emphasis on quietism, it could be rather loud and effective as a pressure group.<sup>222</sup> Petitions could be gathered at record speed, and local and national elections influenced. Quite possibly the historian and politician Thomas Babington Macaulay lost his Edinburgh seat in 1847 because of the efforts of Quakers who objected to his religious views.<sup>223</sup> More often however, it was legislation that affected Quakers, such as tithe payments or occurrences that were antithetical to their beliefs, like war or capital punishment, that galvanized them into action. The emphasis within Quakerism on channeling one’s inner-conscience with the aid of the Holy Spirit, of discerning what was truly in accordance (and what was not) with Christianity both within oneself and the outer world, as well as the exhaustive list of formal Quaker testimonies against many elements of the state, had always been a part of the Quaker faith. Opposition to slavery was a

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<sup>221</sup> *Extracts from the Minutes and Epistles of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Held in London, From Its First Institutions to the Present Time, Relating to Christine Doctrine, Practice and Discipline*. (London: Richard Barrett, 1861), 18-124.

<sup>222</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, xx.

<sup>223</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, 189.

particularly notable position that Quakers took; as early as 1727, members of the society were forbidden from being connected with it in any way and were encouraged to work towards its abolition. Prison reform and adult education would follow later, led by evangelical Quakers like John Joseph Gurney and his sister Elizabeth Fry. These activities were understood to be acts of philanthropy (the Victorian understanding of philanthropy was far broader than today's definition), but they tended to intrude upon the political, and evangelicals and quietists clashed over whether the participants in these activities had strayed too far from official doctrine. In short, Quakerism was a divided religion in a period of transition, and therefore it is difficult to generalize about the way in which its members were influenced by its teaching, especially those members who campaigned against the corn laws

It is possible to argue, as has been done in this section already, that there was an ethos of Quakerism that did exercise an influence over those Quakers who participated in corn law repeal. To argue that there is an ethos is to engage in a degree of speculation. It has been shown that Quakerism exercised only a mild influence over the Quakers that this section examined. Bright nurtured his oratory skills denouncing Church tithes (an important element of Quaker practice), but radical politics and the incorporation of Bolton and Manchester also absorbed his youthful energies. In some ways, he was out of step with the Quaker community. William Lucas observed at the Yearly Meeting of 1846 that Bright spoke well, but not to the right "tune."<sup>224</sup> Miles Taylor has gone so far as to suggest that Bright's Quakerism merely served to remind him of the quiet world he had forsaken for the public arena.<sup>225</sup> And Ashworth's Quakerism was only remarkable in that he remained faithful to it, when his attitude towards its rules was so lax and so

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<sup>224</sup> William Lucas, *A Quaker Journal: Being the Diary and Reminiscences of William Lucas of Hitchin, Vol. 2*.

<sup>225</sup> Miles Taylor, "John Bright, (1811–1889), politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. October 03, 2013. Oxford University Press. Date of access 5 Sep. 2019, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3421>.



many members of his family were leaving the fold. Joseph Sturge demonstrated the greatest religious conviction, but his uncompromising nature owed far more to evangelicalism than to a specific Quaker doctrine.

Still there was an ethos within Quakerism that must have influenced all three of these men. G.M. Trevelyan's evocation of John Bright's childhood attending Quaker meetinghouse, quoted earlier in this section, where the attendees sat in austere silence, could equally be applied to the childhoods of Ashworth and Sturge. The sense of exclusivity from the greater world that they experienced fostered an outsider mentality that was undoubtedly redoubled by their later position in life as manufacturers, and men of commerce, in provincial regions far removed from the powerful upper ranks of society. The force of Bright's denunciation of the aristocracy, or the conviction with which Ashworth hailed the glories of manufacturing, appear to be attributable not just to their belief in a mainly middle-class agitation and its attendant understanding of political economy, but also to their profound sense of outsider-ness, of being very far outside the citadel of political power, and therefore having to try twice as hard to enter it.

That same attitude, of being in conflict with a powerful force, can be found among the early Quakers too. Bright, Ashworth and Sturge were familiar with the works of Scottish nobleman and soldier turned Quaker convert Robert Barclay (1648-1690), who contributed greatly to the development and expounding of Quaker doctrine. He was highly politicized, acquainted with King James II, and a tireless advocate for religious toleration, and had no scruples about declaring that magistrates who prosecuted religious dissenters were murderers.<sup>226</sup> Likewise, Barclay's equally esteemed English contemporary, William Penn, had no scruples about challenging a magistrate's powers.<sup>227</sup> Both men relentlessly petitioned for the release of

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<sup>226</sup> Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, (Farmington: Quaker Heritage Press 2002), 407-429.

<sup>227</sup> William Penn, *Penn's Fruits of Solitude and Other Writings* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.), vii-xxxix.

Quakers imprisoned on the basis of their religious convictions. Voltaire signaled out Barclay in particular for commendation, noting that his plea to Charles II for religious toleration was not only wise, but devoid of any of the flattery and praise that royalty might expect.<sup>228</sup> Freedom of conscience inspired by the Holy Spirit and its supremacy over any temporal authority was at the forefront of early Quaker thinking, and the Quakers, who were involved in the Anti-Corn Law League two centuries later, were aware of this legacy.

Another influence that the Quakers who participated in the league felt, was the increased urgings of the Society of Friends to not simply bear witness to the ills of the world, but to actively address them. The epistles of the Yearly Meetings made it clear that it was the Christian duty of its members to do something about what they found amiss within their society. Primarily these epistles urged the helping of the poor. “The trimming of the vain world would clothe the naked one,” was a William Penn maxim that appears frequently in Quaker publications.<sup>229</sup> Quakers were told that the greatest satisfaction they could derive from having wealth (and really the only purpose of possessing it) was to help the less fortunate. But calls to effect “moral improvement,” and actively seek out the downtrodden became louder until Quakers were being urged not simply to give to charity, but to “search out the causes of these evils” and recruit others to help in their eradication.<sup>230</sup> Hence, the plethora of causes that attracted the energies of Victorian Quakers, from mental health to political enfranchisement, can be seen as consonant with official Quaker urgings.

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<sup>228</sup> Francois Marie Arouet, *Philosophical Letters: Letters Concerning the English Nation* (Mineola: Dover Publications, [1778] 2012), 14-15.

<sup>229</sup> William Penn, *Penn's Fruits of Solitude. With an Introduction by John Clifford, MA* (London: Headley Brothers and Co., [1682] 1905), 38; “The London Conference. Second Report.” *Friends Review: A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, Vol. XII. (Philadelphia: Merriew and Thompson, 1859), 244.

<sup>230</sup> *Christian Doctrine, Practice and Discipline Society of Friends*.

The Victorian critic Matthew Arnold's judgement that nonconformity "makes a large part of what is strongest and most serious in this nation" seems appropriate when applied to the Quakers who contributed to the Anti-Corn Law League, even if the exact influence of being a nonconformist is unclear.<sup>231</sup> Quaker membership was by birthright and none of the men who have been looked at experienced either a dramatic falling away or reaffirmation of faith. What this section has managed to do is examine the practical contribution made by Henry Ashworth, the vital part played by John Bright and the exposure of a moral conflict within the league by Joseph Sturge. The liberal philosophy that drove corn law repeal was espoused by all three Quakers and was identical to that of Richard Cobden. Liberalism was the prevailing philosophy of the time, composed of the works of several eminent political economists, adapted and utilized for a political purpose.

Perhaps corn law repeal was not a great enough issue to expose the divisions within the ranks of liberalism. Thanks in no small part to the efforts of Cobden and Bright, and those who preceded them, the corn law question was neatly arranged into a conflict between a wealthy, powerful elite representing the worst of the old political order, and the newly enriched modern men proclaiming the coming of a new and better age. The sharp oratory of Cobden and Bright focused the energy of the assorted liberals they recruited on a political-economic issue that was unlikely to cause internal divisions. Cobden and Bright also directed these liberals' attention to a social class they had long resented. Sturge's sugar controversy was not a significant issue. In the following chapter "Responses to the Irish Famine," there shall be a greater opportunity to examine the complexities of mid-nineteenth century liberalism and its overlap with Quakerism,

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<sup>231</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1869] 2009), xvi.

since it was an event that attracted the attention of a large number of Quaker individuals and generated strong debate within liberalism over which relief policies were best to implement.

## Chapter Two

### *The Great Famine and Land Reform in the Thought of Richard Cobden and the Quakers*

#### I.

This thesis thus far has looked at the intersection of the ideas of Richard Cobden with those of the Quaker community within the context of economic reform. Mid-nineteenth century English liberalism was the backdrop against which their ideas converged and diverged. What has been revealed is not simply the heterogeneous nature of liberalism, but also the less than unified nature of Quakerism itself.

The Irish Potato Famine of 1845-1851, during which approximately one million people died and more than twice that number emigrated, was a horrific event that provides an opportunity to compare how Richard Cobden and the Quakers (who had been allies in other political endeavours) responded, as well as to compare their ideas on Ireland more generally. Such comparisons will reveal their thoughts on a range of subjects, particularly their views on economic development, the role of the state and the part played by religion in shaping individual behaviour. It will also provide an understanding of how Quaker beliefs operated alongside liberal doctrine since many important Quaker individuals subscribed to these doctrines (indeed it was what initially bound them to Cobden), but at the same time, they were members of a religious denomination that distinguished themselves with their philanthropy towards the famine stricken. First though, a basic outline of the events of the famine itself is necessary.

The potato blight that appeared in Ireland in 1845 was a water mould called *Phytophthora Infestans*, which destroyed a third of that year's crop and the better part of each subsequent crop up until 1849. What made this occurrence so tragic was that, as commentators from Cecil

Woodham-Smith's classic study *The Great Hunger* onwards have emphasized, approximately half of the Irish population relied almost exclusively on the potato for their subsistence.<sup>232</sup> More recently, Cormac O'Grada revealed in his study that in the 1840s, young Irishmen in the lowest income group consumed approximately three kilograms of potatoes daily, six times greater than the amount consumed by Frenchmen of similar economic status. There were only a few foreign regions where the population approached the Irish in daily consumption of potatoes.<sup>233</sup>

Such dependence on one food alone was more broadly the result of the long standing, historic impoverishment of the majority of the Irish population, due in great part to the property laws, as well as customs. There was a lack of tenant rights, including the frequent lack of a formal lease, which discouraged land improvement. Equally discouraging for agricultural development was the middleman system whereby a landlord would hire an administrator to subdivide his land out to lease-paying farmers; the administrator's task being to render the greatest profit possible for his employer. High rents and small plots were the result. A significant population increase beginning at the end of the eighteenth-century led to a high demand. This created rents that could not realistically be paid and tenant farmers frequently subdivided their plot for family members, which created a tenuous situation where in some instances, multiple generations of a family attempted to subsist on a quarter acre of land. Hunger and its resulting illnesses were a chronic situation for the majority of the population and famine in parts of the country was common.<sup>234</sup> A failed potato harvest therefore was particularly tragic for Ireland, not only removing its key food source, but also affecting an already economically vulnerable population. It was this vulnerability, what the economist Amartya Sen has called this

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<sup>232</sup> Cecil-Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger, Ireland 1845-9* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), 15-38.

<sup>233</sup> Cormac O'Grada, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>234</sup> Cecil-Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger* (New York: Harper & Ro, 1962), 15-38.

lack of entitlement, or ability to purchase what was necessary to survive, that created famine conditions.<sup>235</sup>

The government response, its choice to minimize its involvement and follow laissez-faire doctrine was partly what created the severity of the famine, though obviously it was not the sole reason. As O'Grada sensibly points out, and most historians agree, after the blight itself, it was a combination of Irish economic underdevelopment, a lackluster and not particularly humane government response, and bad luck that were to blame for what took place.<sup>236</sup> Still, as George L. Bernstein notes, this reluctance to intervene, an ideology that placed explicit faith in the marketplace as the only means of addressing the crisis that created real, avoidable hardship.

It was not a foregone conclusion that the government would respond to the famine in this way.<sup>237</sup> The economic historian Francois Crouzet points out that while the British economy was undergoing a period of liberalization (such as corn law repeal), government policy had, from the 1830s onward, shown itself willing to intervene socially and economically, with legislation like the Municipal Reform Act of 1835, or the Factory Act of 1844.<sup>238</sup> Unfortunately for Ireland, its economically underdeveloped state during the first half of the nineteenth-century meant that it had been subjected to many studies by the leading political economists of the day who had drawn up a list of supposed remedies. When a prolonged famine arrived therefore, government policy was more inclined to see it not as a humanitarian crisis that needed immediate addressing, but rather as an opportunity to finally rearrange Ireland along what they regarded as sound political-economic lines. Richard Cobden and John Bright, as this section will show, were no less guilty

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<sup>235</sup> Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1-19.

<sup>236</sup> Cormac O'Grada, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 1.

<sup>237</sup> George L. Bernstein, "Liberals, Irish Potato Famine and the Role of the State," *Irish Historical Studies*, 29, no.116 (November 1995): 513-536.

<sup>238</sup> Francois Crouzet, *The Victorian Economy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 107-108.

of being preoccupied with long-term schemes for Irish improvement and less concerned with alleviating the immediate mass-starvation than many other leading politicians and economists. Practical aid was given to Ireland, but ideas of reform were foremost in the minds of many leading individuals.

It is important to briefly mention what political and economic ideas were prevalent at the time in relation to that country before detailing what actual policies the government pursued in relation to famine-stricken Ireland. The population of Ireland had been increasing rapidly since the middle of the eighteenth-century and although growth had begun to slow, the Irish population stood at approximately eight million, or a third of the entire population of Great Britain at that time. This rapid increase was combined with the economically disadvantaged position of the population, with the average Irish income estimated to be three-fifths less than that of the rest of Britain.<sup>239</sup> This state of affairs, vividly portrayed in the writings of visitors to Ireland, had confirmed the worst fears of many political economists who subscribed to the ideas of the cleric and economist Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834). In 1798, he had put forward the argument that if left unchecked, population would grow faster than the food resources available, leading to ruin for whichever country fell into this unsustainable state.<sup>240</sup> Fear of a Malthusian nightmare was strong and this led to a group of political economists who believed that to avoid this occurrence, one of two things must occur: either population must be curtailed (how to achieve this formed a crucial part of Malthus's work) or capital must be increased.<sup>241</sup> It was the latter idea that preoccupied many economists. Richard Whately (1787-1863), Church of Ireland

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<sup>239</sup> Cormac O'Grada, "Ireland's Great Famine," *Refresh*, 15 (Autumn 1992): 5-8.

<sup>240</sup> J. M Pullen. "Malthus, (Thomas) Robert (1766–1834), political economist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 13 Sep. 2019.  
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-17902>.

<sup>241</sup> Thomas A. Boylan, Timothy P. Foley, "A Nation Perishing of Political Economy?," in *Fearful Realities: New Perspectives on the Famine*, eds. Christopher Morash, Richard Hayes (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 1996), 142-145.



archbishop of Dublin and philosopher, was at the forefront of an effort to bring political-economic thinking to Ireland, founding the Whately Chair of Political Economy at Trinity College Dublin in 1832 and later, the Dublin Statistical Society in 1847. Whately was a firm follower of Malthus and promoter of education, although the education he advocated had a very specific mission, namely the “civilising” of the Irish by the teaching of political economy.<sup>242</sup>

The early holders of the Whately Chair were staunch advocates of the popular political economic doctrines of the day, namely economic liberalisation and laissez-faire. From the chair’s first occupant, Mountifort Longfield (1802-1884) onwards, they advocated the popular view that Ireland was diseased and required, however harsh the medicine might seem, a strong dose of free trade. Lack of economic competition and the feudalism of the property system were viewed by them as great obstacles that required removal. Specifically, they wished to introduce what they understood as the superior system of modern capitalism into a country where in the most deprived regions, tenant farmers still paid their rent with crops and rarely handled actual cash.<sup>243</sup>

It was the lack of capital in Ireland, writes R.D. Collison Black, that concerned both native Irish economists and the government in Westminster. Proposals for land reform, encouraging inward investment (as opposed to the common practice of exporting money earned in Ireland for investment abroad) and industrial development were aimed at stimulating the Irish economy and avoiding a Malthusian crisis where the population was greater than the resources available to sustain it.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Prendergast, Renee, "A Civilising Mission," *The Irish Review*, no. 12 (Spring-Summer, 1992): 145-47.

<sup>243</sup> Thomas A. Boylan, Timothy P. Foley, "A Nation Perishing of Political Economy?" in *Fearful Realities: New Perspectives on the Famine*, 145.

<sup>244</sup> R.D. Collison Black, *Economic Thought and the Irish Question, 1817-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 134-140.

Crucially, it was understood, government should keep its involvement to a minimum and allow the unfettered market to operate freely. Government involvement was not desirable. If anything, many economists felt, it had created the state Ireland was in. There were always critics of the idea of applying to Ireland the doctrines of political economy, most notably Nassau Senior, who was tutored by Whately at Oxford and who had drafted the English Poor Law of 1834. He argued vehemently that Ireland was an exceptional case that required government intervention, particularly investment in infrastructure.<sup>245</sup> But whether the government ministers during the time of the famine subscribed to the ideas espoused by men like Whately and Longfield, or to the radical ideas of Senior, the overall point they had absorbed was that Ireland was not merely requiring humanitarian assistance, but a social and economic shake-up as well.

The relief measures that were taken with Ireland reflect this fact. In 1845, the first year of the famine, the crop was not totally blighted and the Tory Prime Minister Robert Peel, about to come out in favour of corn law repeal (and to use Ireland as a pretext for doing so) was not overly concerned. Anticipating a food shortage, Peel, who had been chief secretary for Ireland thirty years earlier, took the step of importing maize from America so as not to meddle with the local food market. 1845 proved to be the least harsh year, though most likely this was due more to the limited extent of the blight and not the effectiveness of Peel's policy.<sup>246</sup> In 1846, he started a program of public works, but what he had not anticipated was a recurrence of blight that would be far more severe. The 1846 potato crop was completely blighted, and while 1847 was blight-free, sadly, little had been planted, in part because many of the seed potatoes had been eaten.

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<sup>245</sup> Phyllis Deane. "Nassau William Senior (1790–1864), political economist." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 16 Sep. 2019.  
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25090>.

<sup>246</sup> Cormac O' Grada, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 15.

1848 proved to be the last year of extensive blight, but it was not until 1850 that a plentiful, blight-free harvest of potatoes appeared. By then, close to a million people had perished, mostly from the illnesses associated with extreme hunger. Government policy meanwhile had evolved over these years and not necessarily for the better.

The change of government in 1846 saw the Whig Lord John Russell become Prime Minister, while the 1847 general election returned to parliament many members from mercantile backgrounds who demanded fiscal retrenchment. Lord Russell did institute one program of food distribution; soup kitchens for a one year period in 1847, which proved effective at alleviating the high mortality rates, but overall, he preferred to follow what he understood as the sound principles of political economy: work programs and a revised Irish poor law, funded through local rates. The Irish should pay their own way he argued, regardless of the fact that the wages paid to those employed on the public works programs were inadequate, or that not enough had been raised through the levying of rates on local landlords to support the workhouses.<sup>247</sup>

Parsimony was not the Whig administration's only consideration when formulating its Irish policy. Christine Kinealy argues, in her study of the famine, that public works "were regarded as a vital tool in the moral regeneration of Ireland, rather than simply an apparatus for providing relief."<sup>248</sup> This was undoubtedly true. Whether government figures, like the undersecretary of the Treasury Charles Trevelyan, who was effectively in charge of Irish relief efforts, or his superior, Charles Wood, actually wanted to punish the Irish for their perceived indolence and guide them towards "atonement," as Kinealy suggests, is debatable.<sup>249</sup> But there was a lot of blame (and prejudice) directed at the Irish population, of both the upper and lower

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<sup>247</sup> Paul Scherer, *Lord John Russell: A Biography* (London: Associated University Press, 1999), 160-170.

<sup>248</sup> Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 39.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

classes. Furthermore, as Robert Dunlop explains, people at the time of the famine understood nature as something static, so when a natural disaster like blight occurred, it was particularly traumatic and lead them to imagine that Providence was condemning them for some error they had made.<sup>250</sup> In short, ideas of political economy that included not just notions of fiscal restraint, but long-term Irish improvement schemes, went alongside more general ideas of Irish regeneration that contained an undertone of religious sentiment.

It must be noted that the historiography relating to the famine has been a scene of much contestation between historians. Part of the problem, as Christopher Morash notes in his study of literary representations of the famine, was the lack of an “intrinsic formal structure.”<sup>251</sup> Unlike a war (to use Morash’s example), which has a declaration that begins it and a truce that concludes it, famine is elusive because it is difficult to know exactly when it began and when it ended.<sup>252</sup> This has allowed historians much scope for debating the causes and effects of the famine, as well as which individuals or institutions bear the greatest culpability for what took place.

The issue of revisionism has further complicated this debate. History, wrote the early Irish historian Alice Stopford Green, can either be “a science or interpreted as a majestic natural drama or poem.”<sup>253</sup> Irish history had, during the first half of the twentieth century, tended towards the latter approach and was infused with the nationalism produced by the achievement of Irish independence in 1921. It was in reaction to this that there appeared in the 1930s a more scientific group of historians, such as Theodore William Moody, Dudley Edwards and David

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<sup>250</sup> Robert Dunlop, “The Famine Crisis: Theological Interpretations,” in *Fearful Realities: New Perspectives on the Famine*.

<sup>251</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Alice Stopford Green, *The Old Irish World* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son Ltd., 1912) Quoted in Roy Foster, “History and the Irish Question.” In *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1995), 3-35.

Beers Quinn, Irishmen, but trained in the methods of the London-based Institute of Historic Research. They strove to convey Irish history in as objective a way as possible, following the social science methods advocated by the great German sociologist Max Weber, who acknowledged that pure objectivity was impossible, but at the same time believed that it was an ideal worth striving for.<sup>254</sup> The work of Roy F. Foster, written half a century later, is the best example of the continuation of the revisionist method. There are many critics of this approach however, most notably the medieval historian Brendan Bradshaw, who saw this revisionism as “draining it [Irish history] of its emotional and moral content,” or more extremely the historian and journalist Desmond Fennel, who accused the revisionists of being anti-nationalist and undermining “the moral legitimacy of the national revolution.”<sup>255</sup> In the same vein, many anti-revisionists argued that far from being objective, the revisionists sought to downplay elements of Irish history that might lend legitimacy to the renewed activity of the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland from the 1960s onwards.

It is perhaps for this reason that the Great Famine, such a significant event in Irish national memory, remained little studied until the second half of the twentieth century. The national school curriculum up until the 1950s taught the famine according to the interpretation of men like John Mitchell (1815-1875), the writer and nationalist, who did not go so far as to blame the English for the blight itself, but nevertheless blamed them for everything that happened subsequently.<sup>256</sup> A professional historical study would have run up against an entrenched

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<sup>254</sup> Ciaran Brady, “‘Constructive and Instrumental’: The Dilemma of Ireland’s First ‘New Historians’.” In *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, 3-35.

<sup>255</sup> “Interview Brendan Bradshaw,” *History Ireland* 1, no 1 (Spring 1993); Ronan Fanning, Desmond Fennell, Arthur Green and Stefan Collini “Nationalist Perspectives on the Past: A Symposium,” *The Irish Review* 4 (Spring, 1988): 26.

<sup>256</sup> Roy F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1993) 15; Brigitte Anton. “John Mitchel (1815–1875), Irish nationalist.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 14 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18828>.

narrative, which is indeed what happened when *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History*, edited by Moody and Edwards, appeared in 1956.<sup>257</sup> Eamon de Valera, who had suggested such a study more than a decade earlier, when serving as Taoiseach, complained that it ignored the tragedy suffered by everyday people. Cecil Woodham-Smith's, *The Great Hunger*, published in 1962, was in contrast saturated with tales of tragedy and trauma, and was preferred not just by de Valera, but by the public as well; becoming the bestselling book on the subject that has remained continuously in print.<sup>258</sup> Roy F. Foster later lamented the overzealous nature of Woodham-Smith's work, while other historians have taken issue with the quality of her scholarship, but *The Great Hunger* conformed to popular understanding of the famine.<sup>259</sup> More contemporary famine studies, produced in increasing numbers since the 1980s, continue to struggle against this dichotomized approach. The recent historiography of the famine has lately become more varied and less contentious, but the difficulty that historians have faced in conveying the events must be acknowledged before this section moves on to looking at various individuals and their response to the famine.

## II.

Cobden formed an early opinion of Ireland when, at the age of twenty, he traveled by coach from Belfast to Dublin in his capacity as a commercial traveller soliciting calico and muslin orders for his uncle, Richard Ware Cole.<sup>260</sup> This 1825 trip impressed upon him the poor

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<sup>257</sup> Robert Dudley Edwards and Theodore W. Moody eds., *The Great Famine* (Dublin: Irish Committee of Historical Sciences, 1956).

<sup>258</sup> Cormac O'Grada, "Making History in Ireland in the 1950s and 1950s: The Saga of *The Great Famine*." In *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1995), 269-281; Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*.

<sup>259</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994), 1-10.

<sup>260</sup> Miles Taylor. "Richard Cobden (1804–1865), manufacturer and politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 14 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-5741>.

state of the Irish countryside. “Poverty, ignorance and misrule” was the conclusion he reached as he observed, like other Victorian travellers before him, scenes of material deprivation, the inadequately clothed people, the shoeless children and the poor quality of dwellings, many made of mud.<sup>261</sup> Cobden’s observations were remarkably similar to an account published a year earlier by his confidant George Combe, which contained a lengthy description of the pervasive poverty of the Irish countryside.<sup>262</sup> Both Combe and Cobden observed that there was a noticeable absence of a middle class, which in their minds and in the minds of many of their contemporaries, was understood as the great engine of economic growth. Looking over Dublin harbor seemed to confirm for Cobden the moribund state of the Irish economy.

Cobden’s observations would find their way into his 1835 pamphlet, *England, Ireland, and America*.<sup>263</sup> The section of this pamphlet dedicated to Ireland contained more than mere observation. It contained a forceful denunciation of how successive English governments had governed Ireland. England, he argued, had misruled Ireland for centuries by discriminating against her commerce, from a ban on cattle exportation during the reign of King Charles II (Irish Cattle Bill 1666) to a ban on glassware exportation up until the reign of King George III. Cobden is referring here to the various commercial prohibitions that the English Parliament had enacted for the benefit of its own commerce at the expense of Irish commerce, though as James Livesey has pointed out, there was nothing systematic about this policy of discrimination and other Irish industries were allowed to flourish, like the beer trade. Arguably, selective prohibition could sometimes produce a positive result, since it encouraged the concentration of resources in

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<sup>261</sup> Quoted in John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, (London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1903), 11.

<sup>262</sup> George Combe, “Cursory Remarks on Ireland” *The Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* 2, no. 6 (August 1824-October 1825): 34-40.

<sup>263</sup> Richard Cobden, *England, Ireland, and America* (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1835).

non-prohibited commercial activities.<sup>264</sup> Furthermore, Cobden felt that successive generations of English politicians had made a grave mistake by expending their financial resources and energy on military campaigns and colonial adventures rather than on addressing longstanding Irish social, economic and political issues. The result of this misspending of resources, as well as the historic practice of commercial discrimination was, he felt, perpetual turmoil in Ireland in the form of famines and violence. Compounding the problem, Cobden felt that most Englishmen were wholly ignorant of Irish affairs.

Being a staunch Protestant, Cobden could not help blaming the Roman Catholic religion as well. Repeating a claim common enough at the time and which would receive its greatest expression at the beginning of the next century in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Cobden claimed that it was in the nature of Catholicism to "retard the secular prosperity of nations."<sup>265</sup> The contrast in the economic well-being of the Catholic and Protestant cantons of Switzerland, to his mind, proved this. (Cobden was quick to add that he was not arguing for the "spiritual superiority" of Protestantism).<sup>266</sup> At the same time though, he blamed England for the flourishing of the Catholic faith in Ireland. The existence of the Church of Ireland, representing approximately a seventh of the entire population, but demanding tithes from all, was, argued Cobden, simply a form of "persecution," that engendered bitterness and a redoubling of Catholic faith, rendering impossible Irish conversion to the Protestant faith, with its superior commercial virtues.<sup>267</sup> It also gave rise to the nationalism professed by men like the politician Daniel O'Connell. It is interesting to speculate whether Cobden was familiar with the

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<sup>264</sup> James Livesey "Free Trade and Empire in the Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions of 1785," *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 1 (January 2013): 104-107.

<sup>265</sup> Richard Cobden, "England, Ireland and America," in *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, Volume 1* (London: William Ridgway, 1867), 58-59.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. at 65.



works of native Irish historians at the time, who produced narratives of historical Irish discontent that, according to Foster, influenced the thinking of many non-Irish thinkers.<sup>268</sup> The Irish poet Thomas Moore's multi-volume *The History of Ireland* (1838), recording the suffering of his once proud and culturally superior countrymen at the hands of English rulers, is emblematic of the type of works that were popular in the early nineteenth-century.<sup>269</sup> Regardless, Cobden was aggrieved by the way Ireland had been ruled.<sup>270</sup>

Cobden's *England, Ireland and America* also offered remedies for the state of Ireland. He rejected the popular idea of legislating against absentee Irish landlords, which he saw as unenforceable and, quite perceptively, rejected the other fashionable idea of the time; the creation of an Irish poor law, arguing that it could not deal with the poverty of the countryside, particularly in the west of Ireland. Instead, Cobden presented the case for intensive infrastructure construction funded with English capital. What he wished to see was the development of Ireland into an important participant in the transatlantic shipping trade. Cobden pointed out that Ireland was geographically closer to America and its rapidly developing economy than other parts of Britain, and all that was required to take advantage of this was the building of ports and railways to facilitate the movement of goods. He realized that Irish agriculture was overcrowded and there was a surplus of labour available for the purpose of infrastructure development.<sup>271</sup>

More radically, Cobden suggested the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. He advanced the idea that the money raised through tithes should be distributed to each religious

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<sup>268</sup> Roy F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*.

<sup>269</sup> Geoffrey Carnall. "Thomas Moore (1779–1852), poet." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 15 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19150>.

<sup>270</sup> Miles Taylor. "Richard Cobden (1804–1865), manufacturer and politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 15 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-5741>.

<sup>271</sup> Richard Cobden, *England, Ireland, and America*, 50-80.

denomination in proportion to the number of their members. He approved highly of a similar scheme operating in Belgium and felt that it was the most sensible way of promoting Irish goodwill. He also felt that doing away with the Church of Ireland would only upset the upper-classes, whose members populated it and whose feelings he regarded as unimportant. Cobden also had a secondary, evangelical reason for proposing disestablishment. He wanted the Irish converted to Protestantism, but believed that the Church of Ireland, with a significant proportion of its clergy being alien Englishman, could not hope to rival Catholicism, which accepted hundreds of men per year from the native population for the priesthood, and then sent them back to their villages and cities to act as ministers. Disestablishment would reduce the wealth of the Church of Ireland, removing its attractiveness to English clergyman and therefore, hopefully, encourage a more energetic native Protestantism.<sup>272</sup> This is similar to the position taken by Bright, who argued in Parliament throughout the 1850s and 1860s the importance of Irish disestablishment, although Bright would go further in 1871 by supporting a motion for complete disestablishment made by Cobden's friend, the Congregationalist minister and founder of the Liberal Society, Edward Miall.<sup>273</sup> In short, Cobden argued not just for economic investment, but also for the removal of what he identified as the cause of Irish discontent.

*England, Ireland and America*, Cobden's first published work, contained a sensible, occasionally astute diagnosis of and suggested cure for what he believed to be Ireland's maladies, but he would not think or write significantly on the subject again, even during the height of the famine. That he felt empathy with the condition of Ireland before, during, and after the famine is undoubtedly true. He told Parliament during a debate on the endowment of

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<sup>272</sup> Richard Cobden, "England, Ireland and America," in *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, Volume I*, 80-94.

<sup>273</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, 199.

Maynooth College (which trained Catholic priests) that Ireland pained his conscience.<sup>274</sup> This debate is important because, taking place in April 1845 just before the onset of the famine, it illustrated that he still held similar opinions to those he had published ten years earlier.

Maynooth College, founded in 1797, had always enjoyed a small government endowment. Up until then, it had been £9,000 per annum, but Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, had proposed raising the amount to £30,000, which would allow building work to take place and hopefully placate the Irish population, particularly the Catholic clergy.<sup>275</sup> Speaking out against the torrent of objections to the increased grant, Cobden castigated the “pettifogging persecution,” of Catholic Ireland, going on to declare “we take money out of their [Irish] pockets, and will not apply it when it touches our own pockets. There is not justice in that.”<sup>276</sup>

Cobden clearly wanted justice for Ireland. As he explained to his long-time friend, the phrenologist George Combe, there should be a tribunal free of the “landlord spirit,” to deal with Ireland’s troubles.<sup>277</sup> The number of English and Irish Members of Parliament who were significant landowners and who, to his mind, tended to look after their own interests, was a continuous complaint that Cobden made. He felt that these landowner politicians would prevent any meaningful changes (particularly in land practices) from taking place in Ireland for fear that such changes might undermine their own power. Notwithstanding these concerns, Cobden became increasingly interested towards the end of the famine years in the benefits of land reform, of giving “Ireland to the Irish.”<sup>278</sup> There was little mention of his youthful idea of

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<sup>274</sup> *HC Deb 18 April 1845 vol. 79 cc939 1046-963-969.*

<sup>275</sup> Oliver MacDonagh, “The Economy and Society, 1830-45,” in *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland under the Union, 1801-1870*, ed. W.E. Vaughan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1989] 2010), 235.

<sup>276</sup> *HC Deb 18 April 1845 vol. 79 cc939 1046-963-969.*

<sup>277</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to George Combe 4 October, 1848 Quoted in John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 492.

<sup>278</sup> John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 493.

making Ireland an essential part of the Atlantic shipping trade. Instead, Cobden reasoned that since the Irish were still primarily an agricultural people, a redistribution of the land was the only means materially and morally for improving their lives.<sup>279</sup> His support for the 1849 Encumbered Estates Act, which simplified the process by which indebted Irish estates could be sold, shows how far the free-trader Cobden was willing to go to effect this change. It should be noted that the Encumbered Estates Act was not necessarily conducive for the creating of a class of small landowners. It has been pointed out that many of those who utilized the act were already prominent Irish landowners who frequently evicted the existing tenants on the estates they purchased.<sup>280</sup> What Cobden thought should be done with the tenant farmers who did not have the means of buying their plots is unclear, although he expressed an interest in the activities of the Irish Tenant League.<sup>281</sup> Founded by the journalist and nationalist Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, it was concerned not just with free trade in land, but also with security of tenure and fairness of rent.<sup>282</sup> Cobden did not concern himself with the failed passage of the 1848 Farmers Estate Society (Ireland) Act, which former Anti-Corn Law League supporter George Poulet Scrope was helping to draft. This act was intended to create a framework for purchasing encumbered estates and subdividing them into smaller plots, thus creating that class of peasant proprietor Cobden admired.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Lindsay Proudfoot, "Encumbered Estates Act" in *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199234837.001.0001/acref-9780199234837-e-626>.

<sup>281</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to John Bright, 3 October, 1851, *The Letters of Richard Cobden Volume II 1848-1853*, ed. Anthony Howe, 335-336.

<sup>282</sup> R.B. O'Brien, Brigitte Anton. "Sir Charles Gavan Duffy (1816–1903), journalist and politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 15 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32921>.

<sup>283</sup> Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society 1843-1850* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 207-208.

Cobden had developed a variety of ideas on land reform more generally. In part this can be dated to the Anti-Corn Law League and its attempts to garner support among British farmers while weakening support for the league's primary opponents, the large landlords. John Bright's campaign against the game laws, which Cobden encouraged, was a means of achieving this, as Chester Kirby has pointed out.<sup>284</sup> The game laws touched on the subject of land reform since they pitted the rights of tenants (to defend their crops against animals) with the rights of the landlord (to hunt animals on his property or issue licenses for others to do so), as well as the responsibility landlords had to their tenants. Game law reform might appear not the most significant issue, or merely a means of irritating the landowners, but Cobden genuinely believed in its importance, writing to the Scottish agriculturalist George Hope in summer 1846 that he viewed the game laws and land tenure as significant issues.<sup>285</sup> Earlier, Cobden had supported Bright's motion on 27 February 1845 calling for a select committee on the game laws, passionately speaking of the destruction that tenants crops endured because of game they were not allowed to kill, and denouncing the landlords in Parliament as ignorant of the lives and hardships of their tenants.<sup>286</sup> Cobden positioned himself as the true friend of the tenant farmer. This was a constant theme throughout his agitation on behalf of corn law repeal that predated his support for Bright's campaign against the game laws and would continue in subsequent years. Archibald Prentice in his *History of the Anti-Corn Law League* would claim that the campaign for repeal that was waged by Cobden, Bright and others in the rural districts was so successful that farmers in places like Taunton were soon declaring them the "real farmers' friend."<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>284</sup>Chester Kirby, "The Attack on the English Game Laws in the Forties," *Journal of Modern History* 4, no. 1 (March 1832): 32.

<sup>285</sup> Letter Richard Cobden to George Hope, 9 July, 1846 in C. Hope *Memoirs of George Hope* (Edinburgh: Privately Printed, 1879).

<sup>286</sup> HC Deb 27 February 1845 vol 78 cc113-115.

<sup>287</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, 69.

Similarly, in an 1846 “Letter to the Tenant Farmers of England,” Cobden described himself “as one who has sprung from your ranks,” and who will “I hope, live to be regarded as a promoter of the independence and prosperity of the farming tenantry of the kingdom.”<sup>288</sup>

It is important to remember, however, that for Cobden, genuine interest in the welfare of the rural population went alongside an explicit political objective. This was also the case with his other early foray into the land issue, his involvement with land societies. Starting in 1844, Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League had engaged in the perfectly legal activity of manufacturing county votes by creating freehold properties worth forty shillings per annum, possession of which qualified a man to vote (presumably for free trade candidates against Tory landowners). This morphed into something greater. As F.M.L Thompson has written, Cobden came to believe that possession of small plots would enfranchise individuals and have moral benefits by instilling in those individuals a self-help ethos, whilst also undermining the aristocracy.<sup>289</sup> Or as Cobden put it in a letter to George Combe “the possession of a piece of land has a tendency to create self-respect, prudence and self-control-and these are root of all wisdom and virtue.”<sup>290</sup> To this end, he helped found the National Freehold Land Society in 1849. A free trade in land, a term then in vogue according to Thompson, was essential for Cobden’s vision of a small property-owning democracy, though publicly Cobden did not enter upon this subject for various reasons.<sup>291</sup> The point worth noting is that, as the Irish famine was reaching its horrible

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<sup>288</sup> Richard Cobden, “Letter from Mr. Cobden to the Tenant Farmers of England,” in *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P.*, Ed. John Bright J.E. Thorold Rogers (London: Macmillan and co., 1880), 230.

<sup>289</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, “Free Trade in Land,” in *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, eds. Anthony Howe, Simon Morgan (London: Routledge, 2016), 73.

<sup>290</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to George Combe, 29 February 1848, (f. 254) British Library, Add. MS 43660.

<sup>291</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, “Free Trade in Land,” in *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, 70-71, 77.

climax, Cobden was seriously thinking about the benefits politically and socially of creating a class of small landed proprietors throughout Britain, including in Ireland.

Cobden's ideas on land ownership were further influenced by his 1846-1847 tour of Europe. Free trade promotion was the primary object of this tour, as he was feted at dozens of banquets in multiple countries, but his notes also contained detailed observations on the agricultural conditions of the countries he visited. Spain in particular elicited much comment from Cobden who felt that protectionist economic practices in that country were causing its natural resources to be wasted and that irrigation would introduce a more profitable and scientific type of farming, particularly in the region of Castile.<sup>292</sup> Cobden also expressed his approval of the recent abolition of mayorazgos or the system of primogeniture and non-divisibility of property, and its replacement with a law requiring a more equal distribution of property among a deceased person's relatives.<sup>293</sup> At the same time he was making these notes, he was writing to Henry Ashworth that Ireland required a social revolution, particularly a redistribution of land.<sup>294</sup> Presumably he saw the abolition of entails as an appealing option. He told George Wilson, "I have very decided opinions against all laws or customs which favour accumulation or transmission of large landed properties in the hands of individuals or families."<sup>295</sup> However, he complained to his brother Frederick William two weeks later of "the Irish bog out of which I see no escape yet."<sup>296</sup> Whilst it is clear that the abolition or modification of primogeniture as the liberal Spanish and French government, had done was appealing, (Cobden was discussing French property laws in other correspondence from around the same time), he was unsure whether this

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<sup>292</sup> Rosario Lopez, "Richard Cobden's European Tour: Three Unpublished Essays on Spain, Venice and Russian," *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 7, (2015): 953-957, 962.

<sup>293</sup> Rosario Lopez, "Richard Cobden's European Tour: Three Unpublished Essays on Spain, Venice and Russian," 957.

<sup>294</sup> Richard Cobden letter to Henry Ashworth, 30, December, 1846, British Library, Add. MS 43653 ff. 21-3.

<sup>295</sup> Richard Cobden letter to George Wilson, 31, March 1847, MCL Wilson Papers Volume 10, M20/31/3/1 847.

<sup>296</sup> Richard Cobden letter to Frederick William Cobden, 12, April 1847, West Sussex Record Office, CP28.

was the most suitable means of addressing the problem of Ireland and its system of land ownership.<sup>297</sup>

Cobden's thinking on land reform was further enhanced by the months spent in the Italian states following his trip through Spain. He engaged with numerous Italian liberals who had taken an interest in agricultural reform. Foremost among these was Carlo Cattaneo with whom Cobden had already been corresponding. Cattaneo was the author of, amongst other works, *Notizie Naturali e Civili su la Lombardia*, which lauded the utilization of irrigation and other technologies to boost agricultural outputs in Lombardy and more pertinently, *D'alcune istituzioni agrarie dell' alto Italia applicabili a sollievo dell' Irlanda*.<sup>298</sup> Cobden was aware of these works. He had received and read various works of Cattaneo's, including *D'alcune istituzioni agrarie dell' alto Italia applicabili a sollievo dell' Irlanda* and an essay that contained a comparison of the agricultural practices of India and Ireland.<sup>299</sup> It can be assumed that in addition to reading about the applicability of Italian agricultural practices to Ireland, Cobden also encountered Cattaneo's criticism of the Irish land system as flawed and of the landowners as exploitative.<sup>300</sup> Other liberal figures he was introduced to were Giovanni Pietro Vieusseux, who had written on the necessity of Irish land redistribution, and the statesman Gino Capponi who, amongst his many achievements, had helped found the *Giornale Argario Toscano*. Cobden was introduced to both men in Florence, where he was attending a free trade banquet. Whilst there, he was made an honorary member of the Accademia dei Georgofili, which had been founded in 1753 to "perfect

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<sup>297</sup> John Morley, *Life of Richard Cobden*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 (1881)), 426.

<sup>298</sup> Jonathan Steinberg, "Carlo Cattaneo and the Swiss Idea of Liberty," in *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, eds. C.A. Bayly and E. F. Biagini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 217.

<sup>299</sup> Letter Richard Cobden to Carlo Cattaneo, 12 June 1847.

<sup>300</sup> Jonathan Steinberg "Carlo Cattaneo and the Swiss Idea of Liberty," in *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, 217.



the very useful art of Tuscan cultivation.”<sup>301</sup> Cobden had the opportunity to observe some aspects of Tuscan agriculture as well, noting approvingly of the Mezzadria system, a form of sharecropping, which was widely practiced. In the North of Italy, particularly in Tuscany, he was exposed to landlords who took an active interest in their estates and tended to hold laissez faire economic views.<sup>302</sup> Something else Cobden was exposed to during his Italian visit was less pleasing. Many of the notables he was introduced to seemed to know more and care more about Ireland than many Englishmen did. In Naples, he records in his diary the numerous times the subject was raised by the Neapolitans he encountered.<sup>303</sup>

Cobden did not appear to have a definite answer to the question of what should be done on Ireland. It seems that he had to some degree embraced what Peter Gray describes as the radical economic idea that the large capitalist farming methods of England were not applicable to Ireland and that the small scale, peasant proprietor model found on the continent would be better.<sup>304</sup> Cobden approved of the abolishment of the *mayorzagos* system in Spain. He also frequently mentioned with approval the peasant proprietorship system operating in France, and strongly disagreed with the Scottish economist John Ramsey McCulloch’s view that the French system had the effect of reducing her population to the same level as the Irish tenant farmer.<sup>305</sup> As Cobden told George Combe, there had to be some redistribution of land and an end to primogeniture in order for there to be progress and for the current irresponsible landlordism to be left in the past.<sup>306</sup> McCulloch felt that primogeniture would encourage the younger members of a

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<sup>301</sup>*The Georgofili Academy*, Supplement, VIII, Vol. 11 (2015), 8.

<sup>302</sup>Frederico Cohen, *Growth of the Italia mEconomy, 1820-1960*, 39.

<sup>303</sup>*The European Diaries of Richard Cobden*, ed. Miles Taylor, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 107.

<sup>304</sup>Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British government and Irish society 1843–1850* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>305</sup> Richard Cobden Letter to George Combe, 29 February 1848, British Library, Cobden Papers Vol. XIV Add MS 43660 (ff.103-106); Morley, ii 17.

<sup>306</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to George Combe, 4 October 1848, Cobden Papers Vol. XIV (f. 254) British Library, Add 43660.

landowner's family to profitably direct their energies elsewhere, away from the land, Cobden did not entertain this idea.<sup>307</sup> He appears to have thought that the Irish would remain predominately agricultural and that the best that could be done for them was to increase their access to the land. Left to her own devices, Cobden told Bright, this would naturally occur, that four-fifths of the land would be redistributed.<sup>308</sup> But he felt that England would not allow such a process to occur and it would continue to uphold primogeniture. McCulloch's other concern that equal division of property among a landowner's heirs would lead to agricultural overcrowding (which was a problem in Ireland) and hamper the adoption of efficient new technologies is also not mentioned by Cobden.<sup>309</sup>

He only spoke on the subject of Ireland during three Parliamentary sessions in 1846 before setting off on his European tour. All three speeches were not concerned exclusively with the failure of the potato crop, but also with the repeal of the corn laws and the Irish Coercion Bill (which was intended to give the authorities greater powers of search and seizure). In later years he consistently voted against any of the Irish Coercion-type bills that came before Parliament but, as Miles Taylor notes, Cobden kept clear of the Irish question during the late 1840s, although many radical members of Parliament whom he had worked with for corn law repeal were fiercely debating what steps should be taken.<sup>310</sup> Arthur Roebuck, for instance, the MP for Sheffield and previously an on and off supporter of the Anti-Corn Law League spent most of 1849 ceaselessly objecting to the amount the government was spending on Ireland, while Joseph Hume, a more moderate radical MP and friend of Cobden, was warning against the "dangerous

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<sup>307</sup> Takuo Dome, *The Political Economy of Public Finance in Britain 1767-1873* (London: Routledge, 2004), 161.

<sup>308</sup> Letter Richard Cobden to John Bright 1847., British Library, Cobden Papers Vol. III (f. 300) British Library, Add MS 43649.

<sup>309</sup> Takuo Dome, *The Political Economy of Public Finance in Britain 1767-1873*, 161.

<sup>310</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 140-150.

proceedings,” or the giving of money for Irish relief without a remedying of the deeper problems in that country.<sup>311</sup> But other radical MPs, particularly Bright, were more fair-minded on the question of relief.<sup>312</sup> Still, Cobden remained aloof from the debate in Parliament over what the government’s response to the famine should be, despite pledging to help Ireland in a letter he addressed to a public meeting on Irish distress which took place in London.

The truth seems to be that Cobden had adopted an attitude of exasperation towards Ireland, notwithstanding his occasional interest in the country in subsequent years. He wrote to Bright in 1849 that the British people have a duty to Ireland, but Cobden also told Henry Richard the previous year that he did not “fear or hope anything from that country.”<sup>313</sup> Similarly he confessed to Ralf Bernal Osborne, MP, that whether there was a solution for the general problems of Ireland and the Irish, he “sometimes almost doubt[ed] it.”<sup>314</sup> Ireland, wrote Cobden, was “that scandal of Europe and the civilised world...that will haunt your steps,” that “cancer” which could prove fatal for Britain and which had already tarnished Britain’s reputation with other nations.<sup>315</sup> The starvation must be stopped of course, but at the same time Cobden felt that the “landlord spirit” would prevent anything being done that would actually remedy the chronic problems blighting that country.<sup>316</sup> Most Englishmen treated primogeniture like an eleventh commandment, he told George Combe.<sup>317</sup> This sense of helplessness in the face of that great

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<sup>311</sup> S. A. Beaver “John Arthur Roebuck (1802–1879).” S. A. Beaver *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: OUP, 2004. 12 Mar. 2016 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23945>; *HC Deb 07 February 1849 vol 102 cc. 410-412*.

<sup>312</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860*, 145.

<sup>313</sup> Richard Cobden, 1 October 1849, Letter to John Bright, Quoted in John Morely, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 514.; Richard Cobden, Letter to Henry Ashworth, 21 July 1848 Ashworth 21 1848, (f 352) British Library, Add MS. 43653.

<sup>314</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Ralf Bernal Osborne, 22 November 1848, Quoted in Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860*, 146.

<sup>315</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to John Bright, 18 July, British Library, Add. MS. 43649.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>317</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to George Combe, 4 October 1848, Cobden Papers Vol. XIV, (f. 254) British Library, Add MS 43660.

shibboleth that Cobden dedicated much of his life to attacking provides a partial answer to the question posed in Miles Taylor's work: why Cobden did not advocate more energetically for Irish land reform when he had been impressed during his travels on the continent by systems of peasant proprietorship of the land, which had been introduced in France and Tuscany?<sup>318</sup> It also provides a partial answer to why he did not view the famine years, as others did, as an opportunity to effect serious reforms.

There is a second explanation for Cobden's distancing himself from the famine. He had a deep antipathy towards most of the Catholic Irish liberal MPs, especially Daniel O'Connell, who died in 1847. Up until his final years, O'Connell had immense power in Parliament, representing as he did the Irish Catholic interest. O'Connell and his fellow Irish MPs worked relatively well with other radical, liberal MPs like Cobden, whose corn law repeal O'Connell supported. Also, importantly, both O'Connell, with his Catholic Repeal Association (to repeal the 1801 Act of Union between Ireland and England) and Cobden, with the Anti-Corn Law League, were involved in organisations that occasionally pushed at the boundaries of legality. The existence of these organisations in a way protected each other, since if the government chose to move against one of them, it would be hard to justify not going after the other, but such a broad attack against extra-parliamentary organisations would generate great public discontent.<sup>319</sup> Cobden disliked O'Connell intensely and did not trust him and for this reason, he told George Combe he avoided speaking on Irish affairs. "Morally I felt a complete antagonism and repulsion."<sup>320</sup> Specifically, he continued, it was O'Connell's passion and vanity on some public issues that made him

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<sup>318</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860*, 146.

<sup>319</sup> Oliver MacDonagh, "The Economy and Society, 1830-45," in *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland under the Union, 1801-1870*, 183-184.

<sup>320</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to George Combe 4 October, 1848 Quoted in Morley, John, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 492.

untrustworthy. Cobden is probably alluding to O’Connell’s monster meetings for repeal of the Act of Union, when tens of thousands (historians disagree on the true attendance figures) would march with O’Connell to an outdoor venue to hear his oratory.<sup>321</sup> Cobden certainly did not like monster meetings, which is odd considering that he first gained public recognition organising and speaking at massive Anti-Corn Law League rallies, but as R. V. Comerford remarks, disliking and distrusting O’Connell for his reliance on massive popular support was a common sentiment among many Members of Parliament.<sup>322</sup> Cobden found Irish political figures too rancorous in general, describing them as an “odd and unmanageable set.”<sup>323</sup> When in a fair-minded mood, he could blame his fellow English politicians for failing to make any concessions to the moderate Irish politicians in Parliament, thereby encouraging the more extreme politics of the Young Ireland Movement.<sup>324</sup> At the same time, the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848 could draw out the worst prejudices in Cobden, leading him to call the entire Irish character defective, with both peasant and landlord lacking something socially and morally.<sup>325</sup>

It is doubtful whether the fading presence of O’Connell or a sense of futility were the sole reasons Cobden avoided the politics of the famine and the issue of relief, but they were nonetheless significant reasons. An additional reason, identified by the historian F.M.L. Thompson, is that Cobden was pragmatic, and indeed came close to being opportunistic with the

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<sup>321</sup> Gary Owens, “Hedge Schools of Politics, O’Connell’s Monster Meeting,” *History Ireland* 1, Vol. 2, (Spring 1994, 32-36.

<sup>322</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to John Bright, 18 October, 1850, in *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Volume 2, 1848-1853*, 242.; R.V. Comerford. “Daniel O’ Connell (1775–1847).” R. V. Comerford *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oct. 2009. 6 Apr. 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20501>.

<sup>323</sup> Letter Richard Cobden to Catherine Cobden, 27 April, 1846, Cobden Papers Vol. XXXV (ff. 222-5) British Library Add MS 5074.

<sup>324</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Henry Ashworth, 21 July 1848, Cobden Papers Vol. VII (f. 325) British Library, Add MS 43653.

<sup>325</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to George Combe, 25 August 1848, Cobden Papers Vol. XIV (f. 254) British Library, Add MS 43660.

causes he chose to advance, choosing only those he thought would have the greatest chance of succeeding.<sup>326</sup> After his return in 1847 from the continent, financial reform and enfranchisement through land societies became the causes to which he directed most his attention. Financial reform dominates his correspondence throughout the late 1840s and was the subject of several Parliamentary bills he introduced. Whilst this might be a harsh judgement to make, it can be argued that Cobden saw the issue of the Irish famine requiring, in his own words “superhuman” abilities to solve, and felt himself devoid of this quality at this point in his life so he directed his energies elsewhere.<sup>327</sup> Cobden understood better than many the obstacles standing in the way of his helping Ireland and decided to pass. It was in complete contrast to the attitude taken by John Bright, and members of the Quaker community, several of whom made substantial contributions to the political debates on Irish land reform that occurred in the decades following the famine.

### III.

John Bright did experience Ireland at an early age, just as Cobden had done during his days as a commercial traveler. In 1832, when Bright was twenty-one, he accompanied a cousin who was conducting business there and, like Cobden, witnessed a degree of poverty that he had never encountered back home. Unlike Cobden, what Bright saw of Ireland did not lead to him writing a pamphlet describing what he saw and how it might be remedied, though undoubtedly, the question of Ireland remained on his mind.<sup>328</sup> Later, starting in the early 1840s, Bright benefited from detailed first-hand information on Irish affairs, courtesy of the Ulsterman William Sharman Crawford, a friend of Joseph Sturge, whom Bright and other Rochdale liberals had, in

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<sup>326</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, “Free-Trade in Land, and the Road to Abbey Nation.” In *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, Eds. Howe, Anthony, Morgan, Simon, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 71-72.

<sup>327</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to John Bright, 18 July, (f. 300) British Library, Add. MS. 43649.

<sup>328</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1979, 17.

1841, induced to stand successfully as their candidate for Parliament. Crawford was a very wealthy Protestant landowner from County Down and a firm unionist, but he also supported Catholic emancipation and spent most of his life campaigning for the rights of Irish tenants.<sup>329</sup> The influence that Crawford had on Bright's views of Ireland appears to be significant.

Bright's speech in April 1845 opposing the Maynooth Grant for the education of Irish Catholic priests (which Cobden supported on the grounds that it was only fair, given how much money England had taken out of that country) illustrates how fully developed Bright's thoughts on Ireland were immediately before the famine. Of course, his objection to the Maynooth Grant was in part because he was a member of a dissenting religious denomination and like most dissenters, he opposed state involvement in religious life. As Bright explained in this debate, as well as in a later debate on the Church Rates Abolition Bill (1860), he believed that a Church was more vibrant and spiritually rich when supported by voluntary contributions.<sup>330</sup> The condition of Ireland was however just as relevant to his decision to oppose the grant.

Bright considered Maynooth Grant to be "hush money" intended to silence the politicised Catholic clergy.<sup>331</sup> It would do nothing to augment the fact that one-third of the Irish population were paupers. Nor, he argued, would it do anything to address the evil of the Church of Ireland, whose members controlled every aspect of Irish life and used Protestantism to justify the actions of the "exterminating landlords" and murderous soldiers.<sup>332</sup> The aim of the bill, Bright concluded, was to ensure that the Irish continue being poor like some of those living in the mainly agrarian southern England (this was a dig at the great Tory landowners like Lord

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<sup>329</sup> Sidney Lee. "William Sharman Crawford (1781–1861)." Rev. Alan O'Day. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008. 1 Apr. 2016 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6648>.

<sup>330</sup> John Bright, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy, Volume II* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1868), 513-531.

<sup>331</sup> John Bright, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy, Volume I* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1868), 298.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

Shaftesbury who were implacably opposed to the Anti-Corn Law League and who in turn faced accusations by the league that they kept their tenants impoverished), with clergymen as unconcerned about Irish welfare as the clergy of the Church of England were unconcerned with the welfare of the pauperized southern English tenant farmers. Besides demonstrating that Bright had been thinking about the state of Ireland, this speech also briefly mentioned the two obstacles that he believed stood in the way of Irish prosperity: The Church of Ireland and the landlords, or the system of land ownership generally.

During the early years of the famine, Bright remained removed from the events. The Quaker community, both in Ireland and Britain, as this section will discuss later on, distinguished itself in providing relief, so he was not entirely unaware of the scale of what was taking place across the Irish Sea. Arguably he was better informed than many members of the public, since Quaker reports describing the condition of Ireland and the relief work being undertaken were being transmitted to the Meeting for Sufferings (the main Quaker administrative body in London) and then disseminated throughout the Quaker meeting houses in Britain. Furthermore, thanks to the small and interconnected nature of the Quaker community, he was in correspondence with co-religionists who had more detailed knowledge, particularly the English Quakers James Hack Tuke and William Forster (of whom more will be said later). Initially, in 1845, when rumours were circulating that the potato harvest might fail, Bright was inclined to view such an unfortunate event as something that would compel Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel to repeal the corn laws.<sup>333</sup> As Cormac O'Grada notes, potato crops had periodically failed, leading to famine, though never on the scale of what was to occur.<sup>334</sup> Bright was not being callous, his sympathy for Ireland remained. Instead, he saw a pending Irish food shortage as an

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<sup>333</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, 59-60.

<sup>334</sup> Cormac O'Grada, "Ireland's Great Famine," *Refresh* 15 (Autumn 1992), 5-8.



unfortunate result of English misgovernance that might yet make a positive contribution towards reshaping the economy along free trade lines and in the long term, provide the population with greater access to cheap food.

As the famine continued throughout the late 1840s, Bright, as a Member of Parliament, voted for the relief works implemented by the government, even as his Parliamentary allies such as the radical Joseph Hume, balked at the expense involved. Retrenchment and reform were central to Bright's politics, but he understood the current state of Ireland to be an exceptional one. He was fully in favour of the 1849 Rate in Aid Bill, which would levy a tax of 6d in the pound on the value of Irish property in order to provide funds for the nearly bankrupt poor law unions. Bright's support might have been due in part to the fact that Irish landlords were, at that time, exempt from income tax.<sup>335</sup> In a lengthy speech, Bright detailed the sums distributed from the poor rates in cities like Glasgow and Manchester for the care of Irish immigrants fleeing the famine. It was time for the Irish landlords to pay. After all, Bright stated, as he directed his attention to these landlords in the Commons, "you have purchast Protestant ascendancy," blocked every reform, whether of the franchise, Church of Ireland or of the land. Irish lands in particular "enjoy a perpetual Sabbath," not because of Irish indolence, but because of the landowners.<sup>336</sup> Bright held far fewer prejudices about the Irish than many other Members of Parliament and was in general, sympathetic. There had been civil unrest in Ireland, culminating in the brief 1848 Young Ireland revolt, but Bright remained fair-minded in his attitude, supporting the Crime and Outrage Act of 1847, but abstaining from voting on the bill for the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus. Again, this put him at odds with many fellow liberals, but as

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<sup>335</sup> James S. Donnelly, Jr., "Famine and Government Response, 1845-1846," in *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland under the Union, 1801-1870*, 328.

<sup>336</sup> *HC Deb 02 April 1849 vol 104 cc 161-191*.

Miles Taylor remarks, it mollified somewhat the disquiet of many liberal Irish MPs with their English counterparts' support of harsh security measures, as well as their increasingly parsimonious attitude towards famine relief.<sup>337</sup>

The greatest indication of Bright's interest in Ireland, not just in the context of the famine, but more generally, was his visit of August/September 1849. Cobden had been contemplating a visit as well, having received an invitation in 1848 from the Irish landowner and Member of Parliament Ralf Bernal Osborne (who had estates in Wicklow and Tipperary), but ultimately decided to not visit.<sup>338</sup> Bright was accompanied some of the way by the Dublin Quaker James Perry and ventured widely across Ireland, visiting the cities of Dublin, Cork and Limerick as well as acutely famine stricken rural areas, including Connacht and Skibbereen. Bright had read a significant portion of the 1845 report of the Devon Commission, a voluminous account of the state of Irish agriculture compiled by former army engineer, John Pitt Kennedy. The report was highly critical of the social and economic situation in Ireland, with particular emphasis on the bad practices of landlords, and recommended the introduction of legislation requiring that tenants be compensated for improvements made on their land, given longer, fairer leases (although the report acknowledged that many tenants had no leases at all, some tenants in fact disliking them) and government aid to tenants for purchasing their own property.<sup>339</sup> Bright, during his tour, conducted his own miniature Devon Commission, interviewing over sixty persons and matter of factly recording his observations in his diary. Much of the information he

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<sup>337</sup>Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, 145-148.

<sup>338</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Ralf Bernal Osborne, 21 October 1848, *The Letters of Richard Cobden*, Vol. II, 1848-1858, 71-72.

<sup>339</sup> William A. Dunning "Irish Land Legislation Since 1845," *Political Science Quarterly* 7, Vol. 1 (March 1892), 57-79.; R. H. Vetch "John Pitt Kennedy (1796–1879)." Rev. Roger T. Stearn. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. May 2010. 1 Apr. 2016 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15387>.

recorded corresponded with that produced by Kennedy. The way in which insecure tenure discouraged tenants from improving their land was one observation that features regularly in these diary entries, as do instances of people telling him that they did not reinvest money in land for fear that any indication of prosperity would lead to a rent increase. “Turkish Aga robs all who seem to have anything,” remarked Bright, recalling no doubt his visit to Alexandria ten years earlier when he had seen the pasha lording his wealth over his impoverished countrymen.<sup>340</sup> Bright arrived in Ireland with a deep antipathy towards landlords, whether English or Irish; he left with an even greater hostility to this social class. He noted with some satisfaction that Bunowen Castle in County Galway had been turned into a workhouse, with paupers eating in the great hall. “A great moral lesson,” he concluded.<sup>341</sup>

Similarly, this visit seemed to vindicate his criticisms of the Church of Ireland. In Tuam, Bright noted that the Catholic Archbishop lived in a simple house with £600 income per annum (reduced to £300 due to the famine) while across the way, the Bishop for the Church of Ireland lived in a palace with an income of £5,000 per year (although the actual amount was far less; the difficulty of collecting Church Rates from an impoverished and generally hostile population meant the bishop’s actual income was much lower, though nowhere near as low as that of his Catholic counterpart). The people of Tuam lived in penury and only grazed their cattle on Sundays, when no distraints could be made for non-payment of Church Rates. The Archbishop seemed to be at one with his flock while the Bishop, he observed, continued to go hunting in the midst of utter desolation, epitomizing everything Bright felt to be wrong with the state of Ireland.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> John Bright *The Diaries of John Bright*, ed. R.A.J. Walling (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1931), 103.

<sup>341</sup> John Bright, *The Diaries of John Bright*, 104.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

Bright, was not in Ireland simply to confirm his preconceived ideas, but to develop a long-term remedy for the betterment of the Irish economy and society. Bright, writes Patrick Joyce, believed in salvation; that people and nations could be rescued and progress achieved.<sup>343</sup> This was particularly true, writes his son Philip Bright, in the case of the Irish. John Bright had, from an early age, seen Irish immigrants arrive to work in the factories of Rochdale and believed them to be as industrious and capable as any other ethnic group.<sup>344</sup> In addition to which, unlike Cobden, he did not believe that Catholicism was an impediment to commercial prosperity. “If Protestantism has not saved the proprietors, why say that Popery has ruined the peasants?” he wrote in his diary.<sup>345</sup> Bright was convinced that land reform and disestablishment were the two crucial and entirely achievable changes that had to be wrought. To this end, he met in Dublin in early September 1849 with some of the leading liberal figures of that city who in turn held a dinner for him, presided over by the Lord-Mayor and attended by fifty notables. There was great support, he wrote to Cobden, for the reforms he believed to be necessary, now that the movement for the repeal of the Act of Union had subsided and other political issues were allowed an airing.<sup>346</sup> Cobden, in turn, was writing to Bright, asking whether there was the possibility of greater cooperation in general between Liberal Members of Parliament and Irish Members.<sup>347</sup>

The immediate result of the support Bright enjoyed for his ideas was the formation of a committee consisting of the Irish Quaker William Perry, the chemist and educationalist Sir Robert Kane, William Hutton, and Professor Hancock, who occupied the Whately Chair of

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<sup>343</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 134.

<sup>344</sup> John Bright, *The Diaries of John Bright*, 96-97.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.* at 104.

<sup>346</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, September 17, 1849, British Library, Add MS 43383, Vol. I (ff 305), 1841-1864.

<sup>347</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 83.

Political Economy at Trinity College. The plan was that the committee would draw up a bill for Irish land reform based mainly on the recommendations of the Devon Commission (which had been all but ignored by Sir Robert Peel, who had commissioned it), as well as whatever other changes the committee thought necessary to put Irish agriculture on a sound footing. It would then fall to Bright to introduce the bill to Parliament. He got as far as completing a rough draft of a potential bill by mid-1850 and corresponded regularly with Jonathan Pim throughout that year, but he would be forced to put his bill on hold when Sharman Crawford managed to launch a similar bill first. Bright was annoyed that Sharman Crawford got his bill out first and also felt that by demanding fairness of rent, fixity of tenure and free sale (the three f's), the bill was too complicated, but he nonetheless lent it his support.<sup>348</sup> Sharman Crawford's bill would ultimately be defeated, but this early effort at land reform would mark the start of a campaign that lasted throughout the rest of Bright's life.

There is a criticism that could be made of Bright. Unlike many other Quakers, he did not take any action that was immediately relevant to famine relief, but rather approached Ireland as fertile ground for the trying out of social, political and economic reform. Christine Kinealy, in her study of the famine, levels this charge specifically at Charles Trevelyan, the undersecretary of the Treasury and his superior Charles Wood, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>349</sup> But more generally, Kinealy sees a concern with this long-term rather than the immediate approach as the great sin committed by most Englishmen who took an interest in the famine. Bright did believe in the importance of relief efforts, as his voting record in Parliament demonstrates, but he also

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<sup>348</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, pp. 84-85; Sidney Lee. "William Sharman Lee (1781–1861), politician and landlord in Ireland." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. January 03, 2008. Oxford University Press, Date of access 21 Nov. 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6648>.

<sup>349</sup> Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion*, 19.

believed it was futile to do so without a greater plan as to how to permanently improve peoples' lives and help them achieve that state of independence, which Bright and his contemporaries so idealised.<sup>350</sup> As he wrote to his mother-in-law, Rachel Priestman, in January 1842, it was laughable that the Tories were handing out blankets to the English poor, but would not help them actually live (in his mind this meant cheap food achieved by corn law repeal).<sup>351</sup>

In the longer term, Bright made a significant contribution to Irish politics, particularly land reform. Prime Minister Gladstone's 1870 Irish Land Act, which legislated for tenant rights and compensation for land improvement, also contained what has become known as the "Bright clause;" a program whereby the government would lend up to 66% of the value of a farm if a tenant wished to become the proprietor.<sup>352</sup> It failed for several reasons, the most basic being that, as the Irish politician and contemporary of Bright, (albeit significantly younger) Charles Stewart Parnell commented, few tenants could raise the money required to take advantage of the program.<sup>353</sup> Still, it was a testament to Bright's continuous interest in improving Ireland, as was his support for the Irish Church Act of 1869, which saw the Church of Ireland disestablished.

He even adopted the cause of the Fenian Prisoners in 1866, arguing for leniency towards members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood who had been arrested for conspiring to carry out an armed rebellion, and warning his government not to make a martyr of them. Bright had seen the enmity between landlord and tenant during his visit to Ireland in 1849, and how hardship and perceived injustice solidified a population's discontent and made positive changes difficult.

Therefore, to excessively punish the Fenian Prisoners would only increase the antagonism felt by

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<sup>350</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social Nineteenth-Century England*, 126.

<sup>351</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, 33.

<sup>352</sup> Thomas E. Hachey, Lawrence E. McCaffrey, *The Irish Experience Since 1800: A Concise History* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), 80.

<sup>353</sup> Charles Parnell, "The Irish Land Question," *The North American Review*, 130, no. 281 (April 1880): 388-406.

the Irish towards Britain. Bright's advocacy of Church of Ireland disestablishment and land reform had followed from a similar thought process. Home rule, though, would prove to be a step too far for Bright; he was a firm unionist, but nonetheless there was, throughout his life, a continuous interest in Ireland that had begun before the Great Famine, but was given a new impetus by that event. Parnell, despite having a far more radical approach to Irish land policy, could not but admit respect for Bright's efforts.<sup>354</sup>

Cobden would not live to see Prime Minister Gladstone enact many of the changes Bright advocated (he died in 1865), but had he done so, he would undoubtedly have supported most of Gladstone's Irish legislation. Cobden came to the conclusion later in life that disestablishment of the Church of Ireland was not of much interest to most of the Irish population, though personally he felt the Church to be an affront to that population, so he would have voted for its disestablishment in 1869.<sup>355</sup> Similarly, it is probable that he would have voted for the 1870 Land Act, since the land question in Ireland and Britain more generally remained of continuing interest to Cobden, though he only intermittently engaged with the issue (although his relative, the political-economist Thorold Rogers attempted to argue otherwise when collecting and editing Cobden's speeches and writings after his death).<sup>356</sup> Many of the legislative changes in Ireland that Cobden would not live to see enacted were propounded not only by Bright and other assorted liberal politicians, but also by a small band of prominent Irish Quakers who had been at the forefront of relief efforts during the famine.

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Avner Offer, *Property and Politics 1870-1914: Landownership, Law, Ideology and Urban Development in England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 28.

#### IV.

The Quaker response to the famine, both from Irish Quakers and those in Britain, was from the start concerned with far more than just immediate relief. In 1846, the first year of the famine, Quaker relief was organized at the local level. Many of the larger meeting houses in cities and towns like Limerick and Mountmellick (an important centre for the textile industry that had a strong Quaker presence) took it upon themselves to organise local relief committees. Most of this early relief took the form of soup shops, a practice that had “become institutionalised” among Quakers.<sup>357</sup> Irish Quakers had been at the forefront of soup distribution during the significant famine of 1740-1741, and during the Wolfe Tone Rebellion of 1798, the Quaker Meeting House in Cork had sold soup for a penny a quart to those suffering hardship as a result of the violence.<sup>358</sup> And in London at the end of the eighteenth-century, Quakers had distributed soup among the silk weavers of Spitalfields who were experiencing a harsh economic downturn.

The soup shop that twenty-four Limerick Quakers established towards the end of 1846 is representative of the early, localized efforts Irish Quakers made. The soup distributed in Limerick was neither free nor unlimited. Instead, as had been done previously, tickets for a quart of soup were issued at the cost of a penny each, though some tickets were given away, or purchased on someone else’s behalf. The principal idea behind this nominal charge was that simply giving away foodstuff was demeaning and destroyed the receivers’ morale. Soup tickets served two other purposes: they rationed the finite amount of resources available, and at the same time they encouraged the better-off citizens of Limerick, both Quaker and non-Quaker, to become involved by purchasing soup tickets those in need. The latter purpose, of getting as

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<sup>357</sup> Helen E. Hatton, *The Greatest Amount of Good: Quaker Relief in Ireland 1654-1921* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), 12.

<sup>358</sup> Charles Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848), 12.



many people involved in relief as possible, would be of central importance to Quaker efforts during the famine. Overall, Limerick Quakers contributed significantly to alleviate the conditions of their community. By March 1847, the fourth month of their soup shop operating, 1,260 quarts of soup were being distributed daily, 500 of those quarts gratuitously. 160 loaves of bread were also gone through on an average day. And the financial cost of this operation was not insignificant. According to the Quakers' meticulous records, as much as £28 was being expended a week or, on average, £100 a month, not including additional contributions from Dublin.<sup>359</sup>

Similar Quaker efforts of providing soup also took place in Cork and, slightly later, on Charles Street in Dublin, where up to 1,500 quarts of soup were distributed daily.<sup>360</sup> Quaker soup shops only worked well in areas where Quakers had a significant presence and even then, there was not enough to satisfy the deprivation that was increasing daily, but it was not an insignificant contribution.<sup>361</sup> It would become a part of the relief policy that the centralized Quaker response to the famine would later follow, while at the same time inspiring not only other philanthropic groups, but also the government's decision to distribute soup themselves. As James S. Donnelly writes, the undersecretary of the Treasury Sir Charles Trevelyan (the de facto director of famine relief) was loathe to interfere in the food economy, but Trevelyan also liked to economise. When Lieutenant-Colonel Jones, a member of the government's relief committee, pointed out in January 1847 that public works projects were not serving any good purpose and that the soup programs of various philanthropic groups (he mentioned the Quakers in particular) were far more effective, Trevelyan was persuaded. Ultimately, the government's soup program would face

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<sup>359</sup> Rob B. Goodbody, 'Limerick Quakers and Famine Relief,' *The Old Limerick Journal* 32 (Winter 1995): 68-74.

<sup>360</sup> Helen E. Hatton, *The Greatest Amount of Good: Quaker Relief in Ireland 1654-1921*, 137-144.

<sup>361</sup> James S. Donnelly, "The Soup Kitchens," In *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland under the Union, 1801-1870*, 307.

difficulties and mismanagement, and be abandoned in favour of a different system of relief, but early on, Quakers had an important influence on government policy, briefly guiding it away from the fashionable economic policy that the government should not intervene in the private market.<sup>362</sup>

The scale of the blight and its effect on Ireland's vulnerable rural population became apparent to the Quakers early on, and to address this more effectively, a centralized Quaker relief body was formed in Dublin in November 1846. The Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends was not an official Quaker organization, unlike its sister organization that was being formed at the same time in London by the Meeting for Sufferings. The independence of the Central Relief Committee can be attributed to the fact that it was created by wealthy Quaker merchants from Dublin, notably the tea merchant Joseph Bewley and the poplin manufacturer Jonathan Pim, who had decided on a bold plan and were aware that their views might not be representative of the views of the Irish Quaker community as a whole. At the Central Relief Committee's first meeting on the 13 of November, when Bewley and Pim were nominated as the committee's secretaries, this fact was acknowledged. The committee stated at this first meeting that whilst its aim as a charity was to alleviate Irish distress, it also wanted to address the "social evils" that the famine had shone a light on. This second aim might be seen as out of order for a charitable body, the committee acknowledged, but argued that there was too great a list of ills afflicting Ireland, including the land laws and the lack of basic education, all of which had impoverished the majority of the population and left them vulnerable to misfortunes like the present famine.<sup>363</sup> Immediate relief was necessary and was a Christian duty, the committee felt,

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<sup>362</sup> James S. Donnelly Jr., "The Administration of Relief, 1846-1847" in *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland under the Union, 1801-1870*, 307.

<sup>363</sup> *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in Ireland in 1846 and 1847* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1852), 3-12.

but if the basic faults in the structure of Ireland's politics, society and economy were not addressed, then it would only be a short time before another relief effort was required. This was a project Jonathan Pim had long engaged with, having put his name to and advocated a plan drawn up by likeminded Quakers for the reform of Irish land laws and the improvement of Irish peasant life twenty years earlier.<sup>364</sup>

Food distribution was the main form that early relief efforts took. And later clothing distribution became important as well, since many of those hit hardest by the blight had pawned most of what they owned, including their clothing. Over 612 grants for clothing were made, many of them in the vicinity of Waterford and Cork.<sup>365</sup> There was much generosity, both among Irish Quakers, as well as those in Britain and America. Already by the end of 1846, before auxiliary committees had been formed to more effectively distribute the donations the Dublin Central Relief Committee was receiving, £1,700 had come from Irish Quakers, £5,000 from British Quakers by way of the London Meeting for Sufferings, and another £16,000 from American Quakers.<sup>366</sup> The sums that would be sent from American Quakers could be staggering. In May 1847 Quakers in Richmond, Virginia sent \$12,772 with a note requesting that the money, "sacredly to be applied to relieve distress, treating all destitute sufferers, without any regard to religious distinctions, as alike to be cared for."<sup>367</sup> And perhaps most significantly, 10,000 tons of food with a value of nearly £100,000 was sent by American Quakers, with the £33,000 shipping costs paid for by the British government.<sup>368</sup> (The Quakers were particularly successful at

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<sup>364</sup> Helen E Hatton. "Jonathan Pim (1806–1885), philanthropist and politician." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 16 Sep. 2019.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-52716>

<sup>365</sup> Christine Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger: The Kindness of Strangers* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 613.

<sup>366</sup> Robin B. Goodbody, *Quaker Relief Work in Ireland's Great Hunger*, 10-15.

<sup>367</sup> Irish Relief Committee, Richmond, Virginia, Letter, May 12, 1847, *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends*, (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1852), 242-243.

<sup>368</sup> Robin B. Goodbody, *Quaker Relief Work in Ireland's Great Hunger*.

enlisting government support, not just with shipping costs, but also with food distribution, convincing the treasury to allow them to deposit their foodstuffs in government depots upon arrival in Ireland and using the receipt for the amount deposited as currency for withdrawing food from any storage facility in Ireland, therefore allowing them to more quickly to distribute aid.) There was only so much Quakers were able or willing to give. “Donor fatigue,” became problematic for many charities, including the Quakers as the famine continued into 1848.<sup>369</sup> Furthermore, impressive as these numbers are, they barely scratched the surface of the problems; a fact the Quakers knew and had predicted before their relief efforts had even begun. Quakers meeting in London at the start of the famine had predicted that they might be able to help only one person in every ten who asked for assistance.<sup>370</sup>

The limitations of immediate philanthropy, as well as the conviction among many leading Quakers in the necessity of long-term improvement, led them to undertake a number of projects. The genesis for these projects was the fact-finding missions that they undertook. Quakers were painfully aware that they lacked a detailed knowledge of the effects that the famine was having. Joseph Bewley, co-secretary of the Central Relief Committee in Dublin, wrote in late 1846 to the London Committee for the Distress in Ireland that, “we have yet a feeble conception of the magnitude and intensity of the suffering around us.”<sup>371</sup> Soliciting information from its auxiliary committees was one means by which the Central Committee gathered information about the famine, whilst another was sending out delegations of both Irish and visiting English Quakers. One consistent remark that these delegations relayed to Dublin was the underutilisations of Ireland’s resources. Echoing Cobden’s complaint, a decade earlier, Robert Barclay Fox, a young

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<sup>369</sup> Cormac O’Grada, *The Great Famine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50.

<sup>370</sup> London Committee, *Address from the Committee of the Society of Friends in London on the Subject of the Distress in Ireland*, 12 Month, 1846.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

shipping broker from Falmouth and a keen gardener, was convinced that in Galway and Mayo, seven-eighths of the cultivable land was uncultivated, with landlords doing little (though he urged his readers, there was still time to effect change). Meanwhile James Hack Tuke, the grandson of William Tuke, founder of the York Retreat for the Mentally Ill, lamented the fact that people were starving in miserable cabins within sight of an ocean filled with shoals of fish that they could not exploit for lack of equipment.<sup>372</sup> Investing capital in Ireland's native industries became central to longer-term Quaker relief efforts. Cobden, as previously mentioned, had long advocated for capital investment, as had countless political-economists like William Nassau Senior who (like Combe and Cobden) felt that the middle-class, with all its good attributes, "is the creature of capital."<sup>373</sup> In regards to the Quaker commentaries on the necessity of investing capital in Irish industry, there is little reference to the desirability of creating a middle-class, but there is no reason to suppose that in their ambition to create a more prosperous Ireland, the Quakers involved did not also hope to one day expand the ranks of the middle-class.

The fishing industry became a significant field of action for Quakers, in large part due to Tuke's urgings. The idea of interest-free loans (which the Central Relief Committee felt encouraged industriousness and preferable to gratuitous relief, which they understood to be morally degrading) was central to this effort. At Claddagh, near Galway, £70 was lent to the fishermen to redeem their equipment from the pawnbroker, enabling 73 boats to resume fishing.<sup>374</sup> Similar loans were later offered to other fishermen in the counties of Mayo, Galway,

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<sup>372</sup> James Hack Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught in the Autumn of 1847* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1848).

<sup>373</sup> R.D. Collison Black, *Economic Thought and the Irish Question 1817-1870*, p. 134; William Nassau Senior Quoted in *The Irish Question: A Commentary on Anglo-Irish Relations and on Social and Political Forces in Ireland in the Age of Reform* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1975 (1965)), 32.

<sup>374</sup> *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in Ireland in 1846 and 1847*, 438-445.

Donegal, Ulster and anywhere else where the Quaker relief committee believed there were fishermen who might benefit from assistance.

It was not just cash that was lent. The Central Relief Committee, through its research and that of various correspondents, knew that even pre-famine, the fishermen's equipment was rudimentary. Distributing hemp to fishermen's wives that they could make into nets became an important part of Quakers' effort. The fishermen would then repay the cost of the hemp with the fish they caught in the new nets. Cork Quakers, in the summer of 1847, provided one ton of hemp, while Waterford Quakers surpassed that, providing two tons of hemp. It was estimated that each new net produced an income of £2 to £4 per month. Similarly, also thanks to Tuke's repeated urgings, funds were provided for the refitting or the purchasing of new yawls or dories. Interestingly at Ring, County Waterford, the Quakers encouraged the fishermen to aspire to owning better boats by purchasing for £60 a boat that their meticulous research had suggested to be the ideal type for the fishermen's purposes.<sup>375</sup>

The Quakers involved in relief had greater plans for rejuvenating Ireland's fishing industry. They sought to establish stations in Ballinakill Bay, Achill Sands, Belmullet and Claddagh on the west coast, and at Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire) on the east coast, where instruction was provided in the latest methods of fishing and fish preservation, whilst the fishermen continued to be kitted out with better equipment. Curing houses and storage facilities were established as well (previously most fishermen had cured and stored their catch at their own home). Additionally, two small trawlers were purchased to provide employment, while at Kingstown, oyster harvesting (of particular interest to Jonathan Pim) was attempted.<sup>376</sup> Smaller actions, like the gratuitous provision of more suitable clothing and, fears of moral degradation

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<sup>375</sup> Helen E. Hatton, *The Greatest Amount of Good: Quaker Relief in Ireland 1654-1921*, 200-223.

<sup>376</sup> Richard S. Harrison, *A Biographical Dictionary of Irish Quakers* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992).

aside, the occasional giving away of nets and similar items, were also undertaken. Overall, these projects were not a success, most failing within two years. The Central Relief Committee ruefully admitted that they did not know much about the business of fishing. Ingrained habits on the part of the fisherman, occasional mismanagement on the part of the supervisors the Quakers hired, and in the west coast, the lack of a market where the fishermen's catch could be sold were some of the major problems encountered. The reliably inhospitable weather, lack of a large population of fish (in contrast to what Tuke had argued), and the rocky sea bottom (which snagged the trawler nets the Quakers tried to introduce) were some of the natural problems encountered.<sup>377</sup> At Claddagh, there was also the significant problem that most of the population only spoke Irish Gaelic, therefore the instruction that the Cornishman Captain Arthur Chard was hired to provide was not taken advantage of as much as it might have been.<sup>378</sup> But as Helen E. Hatton writes, the Quakers who conducted the relief efforts were almost without exception hard-nosed businessmen who were too harsh on themselves.<sup>379</sup>

A similar attempt was made to effect long term improvement in Irish agriculture. Initially it took the form of seed distribution, visiting instructors and occasional grants or loans to both large and small farmers to keep them going (just like the loans that were used to keep the fishermen fishing). The idea of Quakers distributing seeds for turnip and swede, as an alternative to the potato, started in Spring 1847 with the English Quaker William Bennett, a respected educator and author who would later publish a study of vegetarianism, although it was a plan that the government itself had already been contemplating.<sup>380</sup> Indeed, Bennett worried about people

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<sup>377</sup> James Hack Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught in the Autumn of 1847*.

<sup>378</sup> Rob Goodbody, 'Limerick Quakers and Famine Relief,' *The Old Limerick Journal* 32 (Winter 1995), 68-74.

<sup>379</sup> Helen E. Hatton, *The Greatest Amount of Good: Quaker Relief in Ireland 1654-1921*, 200-223.

<sup>380</sup> William Bennett, *Narrative Account of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland, in Connexion with Supplying Small Seed to Some of Remoter Districts* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1847), 8-9.; John Greenleaf Whittier, *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier, Volume III*, ed. John B. Pickard, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1975), 314.

mistaking his efforts as confirmation that the government was going to start distributing seed.<sup>381</sup> Nevertheless he chose to carry out his plan, distributing seed that he had purchased with his own money and the money donated by his friends back in London, while also giving cash to support the various craft production projects that had been established to provide employment for the destitute. Primarily, he concentrated his efforts in Donegal and Mayo, with the help of his son, and eventually met up with William Forster, before returning home to write a damning critique of the state of Irish agriculture.<sup>382</sup> Bennett's efforts at first elicited only a tepid response from the Central Relief Committee since, according to Rob Goodbody, they had good reason to fear that landlords would seize the new crops as compensation for unpaid rent.<sup>383</sup>

This unease among senior Quakers lessened a little over the summer when Sir Randolph Routh, who was in charge of a government programme that sold seed (which as William Bennett noted few farmers would have been able to purchase, even if there had not been a famine), offered 40,000 pounds of unsold seed to the Central Relief Committee without charge.<sup>384</sup> Seed distribution thereafter became central to their efforts. William Todhunter, who was already burdened with the management of the fisheries projects, took on responsibility for seed distribution, coming up with the ingenious idea of posting seeds to farmers, as well as distributing through more normal channels, such as the auxiliary committees. The Waterford Auxiliary Committee was particularly notable for the amount of seed it gave to the cottiers in their area.<sup>385</sup> In 1847, it is estimated 40,000 small farmers benefited from seeds and 9,600 acres

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<sup>381</sup> *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in Ireland in 1846 and 1847*, 161.

<sup>382</sup> William Bennett, *Narrative Account of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland, in Connexion with Supplying Small Seed to Some of Remoter Districts*, 8-9.

<sup>383</sup> Rob Goodbody, "Quakers and the Famine," *History Ireland* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 27-32.

<sup>384</sup> William Bennett, *Narrative Account of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland, in Connexion with Supplying Small Seed to Some of Remoter Districts*, pp. 8-9; Helen E. Hatton *The Greatest Amount of Good: Quaker Relief in Ireland 1654-1921*, 173.

<sup>385</sup> Helen E. Hatton, *The Greatest Amount of Good: Quaker Relief in Ireland 1654-1921*, 171.



were planted with the new crops, while in 1848 the Central Relief Committee redoubled its efforts, allocating £5,000 to purchase sixty tons of seed, which benefited 150,000 small farmers who planted close to 32,000 acres.<sup>386</sup>

The most significant Quaker attempt to invest in Irish industry was the creation of model farms, the first on 500 acres of donated land in the impoverished region of Ballina. This was followed by a second model farm, Brookfield, in County Fermanagh that specialised in teaching irrigation methods and a third model farm, at Colmanstown, east Galway, which was the largest and continued operating until 1863.<sup>387</sup> Under no illusions about their prospects of success, the Central Relief Committee recorded that the most they expected to achieve was the instruction of a few men and the setting of an example that might inspire others to attempt multiple-crop farming and other modern agricultural methods. Glasnevin Model Farm, Ireland's first, established outside Dublin in 1838 and later to become Albert Agriculture College, was probably an institution familiar to members of the committee.<sup>388</sup>

Another significant motivating factor for Pim and the Quakers' involvement in agriculture was their antipathy to the government relief works that were in operation. Not a single one of the narratives produced by those who accompanied William Forster in early 1847 was without a withering condemnation of the government's "useless public works." This was a reference to the various projects that the government had sanctioned in late 1846, early 1847, that had intended to serve as the principal means of offering relief to those affected by the

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<sup>386</sup> Rob Goodbody, "Quakers and the Famine," *History Ireland* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 27-32.

<sup>387</sup> Ian Miller, *Reforming Food in Post-Famine Ireland: Medicine, Science and Improvement 1845-1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 48.

<sup>388</sup> Carrie de Silva, *A Short History of Agricultural Education and Research, Some Key Places, People, Publications and Events From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries* (Newport: Harper Adams University College, 2012), 15.

blight.<sup>389</sup> At their height, in spring 1847, public works employed over 500,000 persons on projects like road building, but they also suffered from mismanagement and paid out meagre wages.<sup>390</sup> It was the unproductive nature of the labour that bothered many Quakers. This was an idea going back to Adam Smith's work where he distinguished between productive labour that lead to an increase in something's value and unproductive labour that did not add value (though Smith was not saying unproductive labour was always bad, for instance the work performed by a magistrate was necessary and commendable).<sup>391</sup> Whereas fishing or farming might reap benefits many times greater than the expense and effort expended, the public works, as William Edward Forster noted, produced nothing of value; neither useful infrastructure that would provide economic benefits, nor wages sufficient to maintain the labourer and his family.<sup>392</sup> In fact it took people and families away from productive labour like tending their farms, a fact that the government itself came to realise, albeit not as quickly as certain Quakers did.<sup>393</sup> The subsequent shift in government policy to relying on the poor law, which meant the end of outdoor relief and confined people to work houses as well as denying relief altogether to those who held more than a quarter acre of land, further convinced the Central Relief Committee that it had to make an effort to encourage people to stay on the land.

Longer term plans to change the nature of the Irish land system were left for individual Quakers to carry out. Of these, Jonathan Pim was perhaps the most significant. Well-versed in political economy, he was friends with the notable economist William Neilson Hancock. Pim,

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<sup>389</sup> William Edward Forster, *Narrative of William Edward Forster's Visit in Ireland from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of 1 Month, 1847*.

<sup>390</sup> Cormac O'Grada "Ireland's Great Famine: An Overview," Centre for Economic Research Working Paper, 9.

<sup>391</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1776] 1998), 191.

<sup>392</sup> William Edward Forster, *Narrative of William Edward Forster's Visit in Ireland from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of 1 Month, 1847*.

<sup>393</sup> Cormac O'Grada "Ireland's Great Famine: An Overview," 9-10.

one of the founding members of the Dublin Statistical Society, wanted to see a free trade in land, with freedom being the operative word.<sup>394</sup> His famine relief work had allowed him to see firsthand, the deleterious effect the complex system of encumbrances, entails and uncertainty of ownership had on the Irish tenant farmers, both in normal times and in times of economic distress. What Pim wished to see was land freed from these constraints, and its sale and purchase simplified, hence his call in one pamphlet for a national land registry.<sup>395</sup> Such a simplified system of ownership would then allow those with the capital and the necessary business acumen to come into possession of the land. Otherwise, he felt, much of Ireland's land would continue to be in the hands of those without the means or the will to improve it. Pim had little reverence for the traditional owners of the soil. He went so far as to argue that not only were entails, mortmain and the like "unnatural", but that the soil was in fact the property of the state.<sup>396</sup> Pim argued that the possessor of a plot of land only holds it on the condition that he acts prudently and does not possess the right to designate for decades after his death how it may be used, particularly if such designated usage causes harm to the larger population. The most that a landlord is allowed to do is designate an heir.

Pim, in essence, viewed land ownership as a business venture like any other. As he understood it, if an individual inherited a factory and through their capabilities made it a success, that was good and commendable, but if that same individual failed to turn a profit, he should be able to dispose of it as he saw fit. It would be unnatural if that factory were entailed to that

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<sup>394</sup> Jonathan Pim, *Observations upon Certain Evils Arising out of the Present State of the Laws of Real Property in Ireland*, Dublin, A. Thom., 1847, p. 15.

<sup>395</sup> Jonathan Pim, *Condition and Prospect of Ireland and the Evils Arising From the Present Distribution of Landed Property: With Suggestions For a Remedy* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1848).

<sup>396</sup> Jonathan Pim, *Observations upon Certain Evils Arising out of the Present State of the Laws of Real Property in Ireland*, 12.; Jonathan Pim, *Condition and Prospect of Ireland and the Evils Arising From the Present Distribution of Landed Property: With Suggestions For a Remedy*, 247.

individual and his successors. Why, Pim asked, should land be viewed any differently than a factory? He did not desire government interference in the land market. Unlike Cobden, he did not approve of the French land laws that required the equal division of a landowner's property at death. To Pim, this was simply another form of entail, preventing the disposal of property as the possessor saw fit.<sup>397</sup> But like Cobden, Pim professed admiration for the peasant proprietors on the continent, particularly those in Northern Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland and Norway.

More than twenty years before the famine, Pim and other Irish Quakers (including Joseph Bewley) had penned a petition to Parliament that called for the creation of an "independent yeomanry" in Ireland. They argued that the creation of such small proprietors would not only be economically beneficial, but also increase the lawfulness of the Irish population.<sup>398</sup> This was a point Pim made in his work at the height of the famine. He gathered from the writings of the political economists J.R. McCulloch and John Bowring as well as from the works of Arthur Young, Pim painted a picture of the happy, peaceful and industrious foreign small land owners of Belgium and Switzerland, and suggested that there was no reason the Irish could not obtain this state, provided that his recommendations for security of title, ease of sale and so on were followed.<sup>399</sup>

For Pim (and most Quakers) the middle-class independent entrepreneur was ideal, and he felt that peasant proprietorship could be a means of attaining this state.<sup>400</sup> He was quick to add that he did not view peasant proprietorship as the panacea for all of Ireland's ills and thought that

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<sup>397</sup> Jonathan Pim, *Condition and Prospect of Ireland and the Evils Arising From the Present Distribution of Landed Property: With Suggestions For a Remedy*, 287.

<sup>398</sup> *Statement of Some of the Causes of the Disturbances in Ireland and of the Miserable State of the Peasantry* (Dublin: Bentham and Hardy, 1825) 9.

<sup>399</sup> Jonathan Pim, *Condition and Prospect of Ireland and the Evils Arising From the Present Distribution of Landed Property: With Suggestions For a Remedy*, 67-77.

<sup>400</sup> Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society 1843-50*, 199.

simple freedom of sale in land was of greater importance.<sup>401</sup> Like Cobden, he found himself in the position of extolling the benefits of Continental peasant proprietorship, whilst at the same time arguing for free trade in land, which it can be assumed would favour those already in possession of capital and only further economically marginalise the would-be peasant proprietors. As to what type of legislative assistance might be given to the tenant who cannot purchase a plot of land, this is a question that Pim would not address at length until much later in the 1860s, early 1870s. In 1847, Pim felt that improvements were the landlord's duty or something that landlord and tenant could work out in a contract between themselves but by the time the 1870 Ireland Land Bill was being debated in Parliament, Pim (as a Member of Parliament) was arguing in favour of tenant compensation and in favour of government financial assistance for tenants wishing to purchase a plot of land (the so-called Bright clause).<sup>402</sup> Pim has rightfully been acknowledged for his success in lobbying for the 1849 Encumbered Estates Act, and his call for a free trade in land represented a key stage in the development of political economic thinking on the Irish land question, but unlike Cobden (whom he outlived by nearly twenty years) Pim had the benefit of time for his thinking to develop further and to include a less laissez faire approach to Ireland.<sup>403</sup>

After Jonathan Pim, the Yorkshire Quaker James Hack Tuke (1819-1896) is acknowledged as devoting the most time and thought to the question of Ireland. Tuke was engaged in banking for the greater part of his adult life, but it was philanthropy and Quaker relief

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<sup>401</sup> Jonathan Pim, *Condition and Prospect of Ireland and the Evils Arising From the Present Distribution of Landed Property: With Suggestions For a Remedy*, 289.

<sup>402</sup> Jonathan Pim, *Observations upon Certain Evils Arising out of the Present State of the Laws of Real Property in Ireland*, p. 48; *HC Deb 07 April 1870 vol 200 cc1469*; *HC Deb 07 March 1870 vol 199 cc1413-19*.

<sup>403</sup> Helen Hatton (2004, September 23). Jonathan Pim (1806–1885), philanthropist and politician. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 10 Dec. 2018, from <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-52716>.

missions that absorbed most of his energies.<sup>404</sup> Like Bright, he toured Ireland at the height of the famine, in 1847, and would make many subsequent visits over the following thirty years. Tuke's early work on Ireland, *A Visit to Connaught in Autumn 1847*, is part denunciation of landlord behaviour and part political economic study. Like Pim, he argued that it was the entails and encumbrances on estates that prevented the investment of capital.

Citing the example of Sir R. O'Donnell in Newport, County Mayo, Tuke argued that if that landlord were allowed to dispose of those parts of his estate he could not make profitable, he could then direct his resources towards making the remaining parts of his estate successful and provide better conditions for his tenants.<sup>405</sup> But given the current system of land ownership, Sir R. O'Donnell was unable to do so. Tuke provided abundant additional examples of indebted landlords unable to provide relief to their tenants or to pay the poor law union rates. Not that he was seeking to portray the landlords as blameless. As Christy Miller and Peter Gray note, the fury with which Tuke denounced some landlords (including Sir R. O'Donnell) for evicting their rent delinquent tenants or confiscating their meager crops caused a small scandal.<sup>406</sup> Tuke's report from Connaught, was as effective as Pim's more diplomatic efforts in lobbying for an Encumbered Estates Act. It also helped convince the Central Relief Committee in Dublin to issue a statement on 8 May 1849 which declared that "the potato may grow again," but there would be no improvement in Irish agriculture or in the condition of the people who depend on it

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<sup>404</sup> Christy Miller. "James Hack Tuke (1819–1896), philanthropist." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. September 23, 2004. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 11 Dec. 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27806>.

<sup>405</sup> James Hack Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught in Autumn 1847: A Letter Addressed to the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends* (London, C. Gilpin: 1848), 12-13.

<sup>406</sup> Christy Miller and Peter Gray. "James Hack Tuke(1819–1896), philanthropist." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. September 23, 2004. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 11 Dec. 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27806>.

until the legal system was altered.<sup>407</sup> Tuke's approach to Ireland was equal parts humanitarian concern and desire for long-term reform. As he stated in another pamphlet, from 1847, poor laws and labour rates might be desirable, but the hardship facing the Irish population was potentially fatal and required immediate relief.<sup>408</sup>

Post-famine, Tuke's views developed in a similar way to those of Jonathan Pim and John Bright. Writing in 1880, Tuke reflected on the failure of the 1849 Encumbered Estates Act to attract well-capitalized farmers who would improve the living conditions of those around them and praised the 1870 Irish Land Act as a remedy for some of the defects of the earlier Act.<sup>409</sup> Tuke, like Pim, thought the relationship between tenant and landlord should be viewed like any other "mercantile transaction."<sup>410</sup> He argued, a landlord was a merchant selling the raw material, land, and the tenant was the manufacturer who produced the final product, the produce. Viewed in this way, it would defy reason for the tenant to hand over money for the raw product or the land without any guarantee he would be allowed to use it or enjoy any profit he might reap from it. For Tuke, tenant compensation legislated by Parliament was necessary. He still held out hope for increasing the number of proprietors of the land, believing it would render a multitude of commercial and social benefits. He strongly supported the Bright clause of assisted purchase contained within the 1870 Land Act and deferred to Bright himself on the particulars of how peasant proprietorship might be increased.<sup>411</sup> But Tuke had come to believe, as Pim had, that a free trade in land was not the only cure for Ireland's economic ailments and that the difficulties

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<sup>407</sup> *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in Ireland in 1846 and 1847*, 449.

<sup>408</sup> James Hack Tuke, *James Hack Tuke's Narrative of the Second, Third and Forth Week's of William Forster's Journey in the Distressed in the Distressed Districts in Ireland* in Peter Gray *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society 1843-50*, 261.

<sup>409</sup> James Hack Tuke, *Irish Distress and its Remedies: The Land Question: A Visit to Donegal and Connaught in the Spring of 1880* (London: W. Ridgway, 1880), 100-102.

<sup>410</sup> James Hack Tuke, *Irish Distress and its Remedies: The Land Question: A Visit to Donegal and Connaught in the Spring of 1880*, 105.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.* at 108.

facing the tenant farmers, particularly their relationship with their landlords, could be much improved if the land system was treated as simply another form of commercial activity.

Tuke wrote his 1880 pamphlet *Irish Distress and its Remedies* not simply as a retrospective work on Irish land policy, but rather in response to the severe economic distress the Irish population in the west of the country was facing. Tuke felt that little positive economic change had been effected in that region and that state-supported family emigration was necessary to reduce the number of people trying to subsist on poor quality soil. Furthermore, he found it was objectionable that the better off could emigrate, while the weaker and poorer were left behind.<sup>412</sup> Cobden had suggested the same remedy almost half a century earlier and like Tuke proposed, that resources be made available to Irish immigrants upon arrival in America or Canada to help them settle and prosper.<sup>413</sup> At the time Cobden was writing supporting emigration was a controversial policy and it became more so during the height of the famine, when hundreds of thousands emigrated.

Local newspapers like the Downpatrick Recorder lamented in 1849 that the wealth of the country was being sent to America, while politicians like Lord Grey opposed sponsored emigration on the grounds that it let Irish proprietors shirk their moral responsibility to improve their estates, and would merely saddle Canada and other colonies with disaffected Irish immigrants.<sup>414</sup> Tuke enjoyed, at least in the beginning, a high level of support for his plan. Influential political figures, including the Chief Secretary for Ireland W. E. Forster (who had been among an English Quaker delegation that had visited Ireland during the famine) and the

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<sup>412</sup> James Hack Tuke, *Irish Distress and its Remedies: The Land Question: A Visit to Donegal and Connaught in the Spring of 1880*, 110-116.

<sup>413</sup> Richard Cobden, *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden*, Vol. 2, London, T. Fischer Unwin, 1903, 64-66.

<sup>414</sup> "Emigration from Down," Downpatrick Recorder 14 April 1849 in *The Famine Decade, Contemporary Accounts*, ed. John Killen (Newtownards: Blackstaff Press, 1996), 221; Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics*, 300-308.



Member for Parliament Samuel Whitbread, founded the 'Tuke Committee' to carry out Tuke's plans. A budget of £8,000 allowed 1,300 to emigrate from the counties of Galway and Mayo in early 1882, while an additional 8,000 plus persons emigrated from those same two counties over the following two years at a cost of £68,000, with the government providing over half of the funds.<sup>415</sup> Tuke felt that ten times that number would have to emigrate in order to effect the economic change he desired, but waning public support and the undertaking of other relief works by him when the potato crop failed in the winter of 1884-1885 prevented him from going further with his emigration plan.<sup>416</sup> It remained his firm belief that if assisted emigration were carried out on a larger scale, the benefits of a free trade in land, tenant right and peasant proprietorship would be felt in the west of Ireland.

## V.

To a remarkable degree, Cobden and the Quakers analysed in this section held similar views on Ireland and the famine. A free trade in land was for them the great object they had in mind. Cobden, Bright, Pim and Tuke were well aware of the difficulties that Irish land ownership faced and with the exception of Cobden, had toured the most distressed districts at the height of the famine. To these manufacturers and businessmen, it seemed obvious that land should be treated as a simple commodity to be bought and sold and made profitable by the most capable. Any legal prohibitions that hindered this from taking place (entail, primogeniture) should be swept aside. Cobden and the Quakers were arguing for what Sarah Wilmot has described as the

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<sup>415</sup> Gerard Moran, "James Hack Tuke and His Schemes for Assisted Emigration From the West of Ireland," *History Ireland* 3, no. 21 (June 2013), 30-33.

<sup>416</sup>Ibid.; Miller Christy. "James Hack Tuke (1819–1896), philanthropist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 12 Dec. 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27806>.

nineteenth-century shift in agriculture from a paternal system run by landlords, to a capitalist system increasingly dominated by agricultural scientists and businessmen.<sup>417</sup> Their antipathy towards the landlords for their perceived failure to play a positive role in the economic development of Ireland has been a recurrent theme of this section. In the case of Cobden and Bright, this antipathy predated the famine years and can be dated to the Anti-Corn Law League or earlier, whereas in the case of Tuke, his anger with the Irish landlords can be attributed specifically to his tour of western Ireland in the autumn of 1847 when he saw indebted tenants being evicted by landlords unwilling or unable to help the famine stricken. In their hostility towards the landlords, they were not alone. Many Whig politicians had long been critical of Irish landlords. Furthermore, during the famine as the upper class of Ireland incurred the ire of a “moralist” segment of the Whig government, particularly the Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Wood and the assistant secretary to the Treasury Charles Trevelyan.<sup>418</sup>

Alongside the desirability of a free trade in land, Cobden and the Quakers advocated peasant proprietorship. Cobden’s declaration that “the possession of a piece of land has a tendency to create self-respect, prudence and self-control-and these are root of all wisdom and virtue,” is echoed repeatedly in Jonathan Pim’s own works.<sup>419</sup> Bright, it has been shown, successfully made the advancement of peasant proprietorship an important part of his later political activities, and there is little reason to doubt that had he lived longer, Cobden would have lent Bright his support. For Cobden and the Quakers, the Continent provided positive examples of peasant proprietorship at work, although the possible incompatibility between peasant

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<sup>417</sup> Sarah Wilmot, *The Business of Improvement: Agriculture and Scientific Culture in Britain-c. 1700-1870*, (Bristol: Historical Geography Research Group, 1990), 55, 59.

<sup>418</sup> Peter Gray, “The Triumph of Dogma, Ideology and Famine Relief,” *History Ireland* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1995), 26-34.

<sup>419</sup> Letter Richard Cobden to George Combe, 29 February 1846, Cobden Papers Vol. XIV, (ff.103-106) British Library, Add MS 43660.

proprietorship and a free trade in land is something that was not addressed by the individuals this section addressed. Tuke presented peasant proprietorship as logically following from the failure of a free trade in land to achieve the desired results, but Pim and Cobden seemed to advocate both ideas simultaneously.<sup>420</sup> Perhaps these two seemingly disparate ideas were in fact not that incompatible. Arguably, assisted land purchase could be a way of installing a more capable class of cultivator. What is certain is that neither Cobden nor the Quakers desired a laissez faire approach to the Irish land question and in this sense their thinking was akin to that of recent Whig governments, which in the 1830s had advocated interventionist measures for Ireland, such as railway building and the creation of a Board of Works.<sup>421</sup> In 1847, the Prime Minister Lord John Russell also attempted to legislate a limited form of peasant proprietorship with a Land Reclamation Act to develop wasteland and help tenants purchase plots.<sup>422</sup>

The significant difference in Cobden's approach to Ireland compared to that of the Quakers is that the latter group were acting, at least in part, within a religious tradition. Quakers like Jonathan Pim and Joseph Bewley (the co-secretary of the Central Relief Committee) were the embodiment of mid-Victorian liberalism as much as Cobden was, hence the former's ideas for improvement and self-help chimed so closely with the latter. At the same time, the energy and the willingness with which the Quakers undertook their work owed something to a religious tradition that emphasized compassionate service towards others. As mentioned at the beginning of the section, Quakers had a long history of innovative philanthropy that was rooted in the fundamentals of their faith. Most of those involved in relief projects were active businessmen

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<sup>420</sup> James Hack Tuke, *Irish Distress and its Remedies: The Land Question: A Visit to Donegal and Connaught in the Spring of 1880*, 100-102.

<sup>421</sup> George L. Bernstein, "Liberals, the Irish Famine and the Role of the State," *Irish Historical Studies* 26, no. 116, (November 1995), 514-517.

<sup>422</sup> Peter Gray, "The Triumph of Dogma, Ideology and Famine Relief," *History Ireland* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1995), (26-34).

like the Falmouth shipping broker Robert Barclay Fox who put aside their own work to dedicate themselves to philanthropy. The result was not just the jeopardizing of their financial well-being, but also the loss of their physical health. Joseph Bewley's early death in 1850 has been attributed to overwork, as have the deaths of Jacob Harvey and William Todhunter, while more than a dozen other Quakers died whilst administering relief, most succumbing to the diseases associated with famine, including Abraham Beale, a member of the Cork Relief Committee.<sup>423</sup> The Irish famine saw Quakers attempting, and in some ways succeeding, in employing liberal doctrine in carrying out what was in one sense a religiously motivated act of humanitarianism whilst at the same time contributing to the development of liberal thought on Ireland. The previous section on the repeal of the corn laws also illustrated liberalism and religious belief working well together. In the following section, however, on the Crimean War, Quaker religious belief and liberalism will be shown in conflict.

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<sup>423</sup> Rob Goodbody "Quakers and the Famine," *History Ireland* 6, no, 1 (Spring 1998).

## Chapter Three

### *The Crimean War and Other Wars*

#### I.

The response of Richard Cobden and the Quakers to the Crimean War of 1853-1855 will be the focus of this chapter. Their opposition to the conflict put them in a small minority compared to the majority of politicians and the public who, at least initially, strongly supported the war. Pacifism, a doctrine strongly identified with Quakerism, was central to Cobden's thinking. From his earliest work, *England, Ireland and America* (1835), to his last work, *The Three Panics: An Historical Episode* (1862), Cobden consistently spoke out against what would come to be called militarism, emphasizing instead the importance of commercial development and fiscal retrenchment for governments. Cobden espoused a liberal doctrine that prioritized commerce and failed to find warfare justifiable in most instances. He was not a pacifist in the absolutist sense, which would entail opposing all wars in all circumstances. Instead, Cobden was what Martin Ceadal has labeled a pacificist, or a conditional pacifist, who had identified practical steps that could be taken to render warfare obsolete.<sup>424</sup>

Such a pacifist strand of liberalism seemed to enjoy strong support in 1850s, Britain but it was by no means the sole strand within liberalism. There were other competing ideologies such as the encouragement of liberal government abroad and commercial expansionism which some

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<sup>424</sup> Martin Ceadal, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations 1730-1854* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

liberals of the time felt necessitated military intervention. The Crimean War would starkly illustrate this fact. Part of the intention of this section, therefore, is to illustrate the place of pacifist thinking within liberalism and within the thinking of Richard Cobden.

The ambition of this chapter is greater; the intention is to provide a window into the complexity of Cobden's relationship with the Quakers. Cobden and other pacifist liberals were prevalent in the Peace Society and the Peace Congress Committee, two of the main pacifist bodies in Britain in the 1840s and 1850s, but so too were Quakers. These Quakers endorsed and helped propagate Cobden's political economic precepts using their unique social networks. Indeed, Cobden relied on them to a certain extent, but their thinking also frequently included theologically-based pacifist ideas as well.<sup>425</sup> The conflict that holding two differently derived ideas of pacifism could create became evident during the Crimean War, as this chapter will show. Some Quakers, particularly Joseph Sturge, reverted to a theological-based pacifism that went against the secular, more practical approach to peace that Cobden had long advocated (he was suitably annoyed). But such a reversion to fundamental beliefs was not universal among Quakers. As will be shown in this chapter, Bright was as unsympathetic to Sturge's efforts during the Crimean War as Cobden was.

Reflecting on the Crimean War will be the primary subject of this chapter, however the reaction of Cobden, Bright and the Quakers to other wars that occurred around this time, including the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the American Civil War, will also be examined in order to give greater nuance to the arguments that this chapter will be making. India and the Indian Rebellion illustrate the competing forces within British liberalism and touch on liberalism's somewhat uneasy relationship with the development of the British Empire.

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<sup>425</sup> Richard Cobden Letter to Joseph Sturge 26 July 1846 (Unknown Source).

Meanwhile, reactions to the American Civil War reveal one of the greater disagreements that Cobden and Bright experienced during their long political partnership and which in part can be attributed to Bright's Quakerism. Going beyond the Crimean War will allow a fuller examination of the competing priorities of Cobden, Bright and the Quakers when it came to the issues of war, peace and international affairs more generally.

## II.

The Crimean War was a conflict whose origins were complex and multi-faceted. Successive generations of historians have sought to reveal these origins and apportion blame. A rich historiography exists documenting their efforts. Bernadotte Schmidt offers the traditional view that the cause of the war was due to the dispute between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church within Jerusalem over who was to manage the Holy Sites and have the preferred times of service. The Holy Sites were within the decaying Ottoman Empire and both Nicholas I, as leader of the Orthodox faith and Napoleon III, as self-appointed leader of the Catholic faith, pressured the sultan to favour their particular religion.<sup>426</sup> By ancient law, the Catholic clergy were supposed to be in charge but by custom, for the previous hundred years at least, the Orthodox clergy had been doing most of the upkeep and possessed the keys to most of the important sites.<sup>427</sup> The dominance of the Orthodox clergy made sense, given the fact that their population within the Ottoman Empire (an estimated thirteen million in the mid-nineteenth century), was far greater than that of the Catholic population and constituted the majority of pilgrims to the Holy Sites. Napoleon III, the new leader of France, demanded in 1850 the

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<sup>426</sup> B. E. Schmitt, "The Diplomatic Preliminaries of the Crimean War," *The American Historical Review* 25, no. 1, 1919, 36-67.

<sup>427</sup> B. D. Gooch, "A century of historiography on the Origins of the Crimean War," *The American Historical Review* 62 no.1, (October 1956), 33-58.

restoration of traditional Catholic authority over the Holy Sites, to which the Ottomans consented, provoking Russian protestations.<sup>428</sup> The tangled diplomatic negotiations that ensued, complete with military shows of force, would involve not just Russia, France and Turkey, but Britain, Austria and a clutch of smaller nations. The end result of these negotiations would be the Crimean War.

It is the events of this diplomatic dispute, and the background of the states and their representatives who were involved, that divide historic opinion. Most historians are in agreement that the Holy Sites controversy was only a platform upon which greater political issues could be played out. Napoleon III has traditionally borne the brunt of criticism for causing the war. From A.W. Kinglake's, *The Invasion of Crimea*, the first major English study of the war (eight volumes published between 1863 and 1887) to Norman Rich's relatively recent work, *Why the Crimean War?* (1985), Napoleon III has been portrayed as a man who sought to secure his precarious hold on power at home by embarking on an assertive foreign policy that would increase national prestige and more specifically recall the glory days of the first Napoleon. More importantly, he felt that such a policy would undermine the powerful influence of the European nations who had defeated his uncle forty years earlier and since then, kept France in a subjugated position. Meddling in the near East was seen as wise both because it was outside of the sphere of many of the post-Napoleonic war treaties, and involving himself in a religious controversy on the side of the Roman Catholics would curry favour with the religious conservatives at home who were some of his most vocal political opponents.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War? A Cautionary Tale* (London: University Press of New England, 1985), 18-34.

<sup>429</sup> Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War? A Cautionary Tale*, 18-34.



But as Norman Rich admits, all the nations involved were responsible for the failure to avert war. After the Ottomans granted the French what they wanted, the Russian response was aggressive. Prince Menshikov was sent to Constantinople in March 1853 to insist that the Ottomans accept Russia's terms, which at its most basic demanded that they recognize Russia as the sole defender of Christians in the Ottoman Empire and give preference to Orthodox Christians at the Holy Sites. Christians, however, constituted nearly a third of the population, so granting the first part of the demand would constitute for the Turks an absurd concession of political power. When in response the Turks convened a committee to examine the disputants' claims and failed to actually produce a resolution, Russia issued a stern ultimatum with the same demands that Menshikov had conveyed earlier.<sup>430</sup> Austria, who had the greatest desire to maintain the status quo, came close to finding a compromise and managed to get Russia to accept what came to be known as the Vienna Note. But Turkey, emboldened perhaps by the naval fleet that Britain and France (who had recently formed an entente) had sent to the Black Sea and the words of support voiced by Britain's ambassador to the Ottoman court, Stratford Canning, rejected the note. Undoubtedly centuries of Russo-Turkish conflict, in which Turkey had frequently been on the losing side, also contributed to Turkey's unwillingness to compromise now that the country sensed that they had powerful support.<sup>431</sup> Russia further escalated the tension by invading a fringe of the Ottoman Empire, Wallachia and Moldova. Such forceful tactics had been successful before in bringing about resolutions to diplomatic stand-offs and at this point, the nations involved were still professing a desire for peace.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>430</sup>Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> William Young, "Historiography of the Origins of the Crimean War," *International History* (October 2, 2012).

<sup>432</sup> B. D. Gooch "A century of historiography on the Origins of the Crimean War," *The American Historical Review* 62 no. 1, 1956, 33-58; David M. Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (London: Longman, 1994).

That this political gamesmanship would lead to war appeared unlikely, but this is what occurred. Russia was being militaristic and peaceful simultaneously. The Ottomans were increasingly obstinate, with Britain and France standing firmly behind them. Finally, in October 1853, the Ottomans declared war, though it was not until the end of November with the naval battle of Sinope that a Russo-Turkish war began to morph into the Crimean War. Russia, provoked by Ottoman ships sailing close to her Black Sea fleet, pursued the ships and at Sinope annihilated the Ottoman ships present. British public opinion (though not French public opinion) was firmly outraged on Turkey's behalf. Nearly every British periodical from December 1853 onwards referred to the "massacre at Sinope." Some papers, like the *Dublin Evening Mail*, chose to emphasize the heroism of the Turks (who were reported not to be at fault in any way for what occurred), while others, like *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, chose to label Tsar Nicholas a duplicitous brigand and much worse besides.<sup>433</sup> And just as importantly, both the British and French governments felt confirmed in their fear of Russian aggression. At this point it would only be a few months before Britain and France prepared to make war, notwithstanding the fact that Russia complied with a final ultimatum to evacuate the provinces of Wallachia and Moldova. In short, it was a confusing diplomatic dispute over a minor issue that had turned into the full-scale Crimean War.

Cobden's oppositional stance on the Crimean War predated the actual events generally attributed to its outbreak. Cobden was aware, as were others, of a war of influence brewing in the Black Sea and as early as 1835 he published his pamphlet, *England, Ireland and America* in which he expressed his opinion on these games of influence and on those statesmen in England who feared Russian growth and argued that the Ottomans must be supported. Cobden believed

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<sup>433</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, Friday 30 December 1853; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 26 December, 1853.

that Russia, rather than being feared, should be viewed as an increasingly important commercial partner. He admired the rapid growth of such culturally and economically dynamic Russian cities as Odessa.<sup>434</sup> Cobden's letters from his first visit to Russia in late 1847 are equally positive about what he saw, particularly the warm reception his free trade ideas received. He also felt that the physical vastness of Russia and the attachment of its people to their native soil hindered any imperial ambitions that the government might hold.<sup>435</sup> As for the Ottoman Empire, he possessed only withering scorn.

In detail, he describes a once great empire reduced to ruin and an economy that was both corrupt and unproductive.<sup>436</sup> Any talk of reform was nonsense, Cobden felt. The Ottomans were seemingly incapable of civilising and improving their dominions, particularly those in Europe. As Miles Taylor notes, when Cobden met the reforming ruler of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, in 1837, he came away with the impression that Ali was only seeking to foster a native cotton industry for the sake of strengthening his country's defensive position rather than out of any desire to improve the lives of his subjects.<sup>437</sup> Immoral was an adjective he frequently applied to the Ottoman state officials. In a letter written in the months before the Crimean War, Cobden went so far as to suggest that the Ottoman officials were most likely taking bribes from both parties in the dispute over the Holy Sites, while feigning patriotism.<sup>438</sup> Commercially, he wrote, Britain should have little interaction with such a decayed empire and instead should encourage Russia to achieve its full economic potential. The commercial success of Russia might induce less economically assertive countries, including the Ottomans, to make a greater attempt. It was

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<sup>434</sup> Richard Cobden, *England, Ireland and America* (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1835), 33-36.

<sup>435</sup> *The European Diaries of Richard Cobden 1846-1849*, ed. Miles Taylor (Farnham: Scholar Press, 1994), 174-203.

<sup>436</sup> Richard Cobden, *England, Ireland and America*.

<sup>437</sup> *The European Diaries of Richard Cobden, 1846-1849*, 7.

<sup>438</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Henry Richard, 13 September, 1853, British Library, Add. MS 43653.

Cobden's firm belief, as expressed in *England, Ireland and America* and elsewhere, that when a nation directed its resources towards free trade and economic success, there would be only peace abroad and a general improvement in the lives of that country's citizens.<sup>439</sup> Cobden, as a northern industrialist who exalted the value of his chosen profession, believed that if man dedicated himself to commercial activities, unfettered by government legislation or war mongering, an international financial interdependence might be created. War would then be harmful to all and therefore against reason. Cobden's hostility to the Ottomans and reluctance to support them militarily was not due to religious chauvinism or a sense of racial superiority, but instead rooted in a conviction that the Ottoman Empire had a recalcitrant attitude to modern economic principles and the benefits they would confer.<sup>440</sup> Or as Cobden put it, the Ottomans were "a barrier to the progress of commerce and civilisation."<sup>441</sup> Therefore, it made little sense to take their side against a more promising economic partner such as Russia.

Hostility towards government was an additional factor that nudged Cobden toward opposing the Crimean War. Cobden (like Bright) felt that the aristocracy dominated the government, particularly the army and navy, creating as he put it, a "Venetian oligarchy," that was aided and abetted by a servile middle and working class.<sup>442</sup> This oligarchy, he explained to Sturge in a different letter, was possessed by "martial propensities," and was always "in favour of more armaments."<sup>443</sup> The result, he felt, was warfare, national debt, poverty and ignorance.<sup>444</sup> This had been an important theme during the Anti-Corn Law League campaigns that both

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<sup>439</sup> Richard Cobden, *England, Ireland and America*.

<sup>440</sup> Cobden's writings make occasional references to the superior commercial virtues contained within Protestantism while at the same time occasionally expressing sympathy for Britain's Catholic population. See "England, Ireland and America," in *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, Volume 1*, p. 20, 58-59.

<sup>441</sup> "England, Ireland and America," in *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, Volume 1*, p. 19.

<sup>442</sup> *The Letters of Richard Cobden 1848-1853, Volume 2*, 53.

<sup>443</sup> John Morley *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1879), 578.

<sup>444</sup> *The Letters of Richard Cobden 1848-1853, Volume 2*, 53.

Cobden and Bright dedicated themselves to addressing post corn law repeal. Furthermore, both men felt that an aristocratically-dominated government pursued adversarial foreign policies like maintaining the balance of power to mask domestic political issues.<sup>445</sup> Cobden argued strongly that it was the government, with its close ties to the military, which created wars and did not care about the peaceful potential of commerce or the harm done to the economy and the common man by warfare.<sup>446</sup>

The potential debt created by war was a constant worry for Cobden. He believed that war not only negatively affected trade, but also drew a large swathe of Europe into a financially unsustainable militaristic system since historically the loans the government had secured in order to prosecute their wars were provided by a range of countries.<sup>447</sup> Cobden, according to Ralf Raico, saw himself as “waging a war on behalf of the producing classes of Britain against the aristocracy who supported expensive government.”<sup>448</sup> Hence, when the government announced that Britain was to go to war against Russia, Cobden was unwilling to either trust or respect the government’s decision.

Cobden possessed a humanistic concern, as he demonstrated when he stated in one speech, towards the end of the Crimean War, that “the battle plain is the harvest field of the aristocracy watered with the blood of the people.”<sup>449</sup> His earlier concern over what was taking place in Borneo in the late 1840s illustrates well his sensitivity towards the violence of warfare. Admittedly the outrage of prominent liberals like Cobden and fellow Parliamentarian Joseph

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<sup>445</sup> Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: Habits of Heart and Mind*, 147.

<sup>446</sup> It would take a while for Cobden and other members of the peace movement to realize that the common man might desire war as much as the aristocracy. See Edward M. Spiers “War,” *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, ed. Francis O’Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge, University Press, Cambridge, 2010), 84-86.

<sup>447</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, 54.

<sup>448</sup> Ralf Raico, “Classical Liberal Exploitation Theory: A Comment on Professor Liggio’s Paper,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 1 no. 3, 1977, 179-183.

<sup>449</sup> Richard Cobden, “Russian War III., Manchester, March 18, 1857,” *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P. Vol. II* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 337-350.

Hume at the “massacres” in Sarawak, Borneo, perpetrated by Sir James Brooke, was somewhat misguided since the liberal outcry was engineered at least in part by a disgruntled business associate of his, Mr. Wise, and a subsequent inquiry absolved Rajah Brooke of committing a massacre, but Cobden’s reaction to what he understood to have happened was sincere and revealing.<sup>450</sup>

Brooke was emblematic of everything Cobden disliked. Son of an Indian high court judge, he had been a soldier, veteran of the First Anglo-Burmese War (in the early 1850s Cobden was protesting against the Second Anglo-Burmese War) who had turned adventurer, with the help of a substantial inheritance, and managed to convince the Sultan of Brunei to install him as the Rajah of Sarawak, a region of Borneo.<sup>451</sup> Rajah Brooke was accused of massacring hundreds of natives in Sarawak, though he claimed they were pirates. In a series of letters to the peace activist, the Reverend Henry Richard, Cobden lamented the butchery on the coast of Borneo, an unspeakable act on the part of a civilised nation, “1,500 or 2,000 blown to atoms.”<sup>452</sup> Whether Sarawak was a civilised nation or a nation at all was debatable but as Alex Middleton has pointed out many Britons viewed Rajah Brooke as a civilizing agent representing the best qualities of British imperialism; he had also established a liberal western legal system.<sup>453</sup> And, as far as he could determine, there was no justification for what had occurred. A slaughter of innocents, he wrote, on a scale not seen since the Spanish conquistadors decimated the Puebla Indians.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Alex Middleton, Steven Runciman, *The White Rajah: A History of Sarawak 1841-1946*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 92-119.

<sup>451</sup> R. H. W. Reece, ‘Sir James Brooke (1803–1868),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3549>, accessed 15 Oct 2015.

<sup>452</sup> Richard Cobden, Letters to Henry Richard, 26 and 28 November, 1849, (f. 314) British Library, Add MSS 43657 (

<sup>453</sup> Alex Middleton “Raja Brooke and the Victorians,” *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 2, June 2010, 381-400; Steven Runciman, *The White Rajah: A History of Sarawak 1841-1946*, 92-119.

<sup>454</sup> Richard Cobden, Letters to Henry Richard, 26 and 28 November, 1849, (f. 314) British Library, Add MSS 43657.

Worse still, Cobden argued, was the fact that what had happened had failed to stir the public conscience. If the groans are too far away to be heard, he wrote, the public does not care. This was an important point for Cobden that will be looked at in more detail later on. He felt there was too much violent meddling abroad on the part of Britain (of which Rajah Brooke, backed by Royal Navy ships, was a representative) and the public either remained indifferent to what its government was doing or became inordinately enthusiastic without compassion for the suffering inflicted. (The Don Pacifico Affair of 1849, 1850, when the Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston had blockaded the main ports of Greece in retaliation for the supposed ill-treatment of a British citizen, David Pacifico, was another incident of gunboat diplomacy that had incensed Cobden).<sup>455</sup>

It was not simply an issue of Britain tarnishing its image abroad, being unable to go before the world with “clean hands,” it was a severe moral failing that would be punished on the day of divine reckoning. And he believed most assuredly that there would be a divine judgement. Cobden rarely dwelled on the subject of religion either in his public or private writings, but in his letters to Henry Richard relating to Borneo, he declared his disgust at the “men of the world” who say Christian principles should be relied upon, but refuse every attempt to enforce them either in government or society. A man should ensure that he himself is in the “path of God” before talking of such things. Cobden commended St. Paul and the founder of Quakerism, George Fox, in particular as men who both extolled Christian values and actively sought to transmit them to mankind.<sup>456</sup> Cobden had long professed his admiration for the Quaker peace testimony. In 1840, he wrote to Joseph Sturge of his respect for Quakerism and his belief

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<sup>455</sup> David Hannell, “Lord Palmerston and the ‘Don Pacifico Affair’ of 1850: The Ionian Connection,” *European History Quarterly*, 19, no. 4, October 1989, 495-507.

<sup>456</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Henry Richard, 6 December, 1849, British Library, Add MSS 43657 (f. 314).

in the practical utility of the pacifist writings of the early nineteenth-century Quaker Jonathan Dymond (which will be discussed later on in this chapter).<sup>457</sup> At the same time several of his letters to Sturge, in which he professes admiration for Quaker principles, also contain criticisms of Quaker practices.<sup>458</sup>

It is only possible to make a conjecture about Cobden's religious views based upon these letters, but what his response to the Borneo and Rajah Brooke's controversy conveys is not simply compassion for the alleged victims, but a strong sense of Christianity as well. He gives the impression, in condemning professing Christians for being un-Christian, that it is he who knows what is truly Christian. The political-economic case against war (as being against the best interests of mankind, which dominated Cobden's pacifist thinking) disappears in these letters and is replaced by humanistic religious feeling. It is undoubtedly true that when the Crimean War was brewing a mere few years later, these often-hidden feelings influenced his oppositional stance to it.

Another important fact that led Cobden to oppose the Crimean War was his association with the Peace Society and its secretary, the aforementioned Henry Richard (who would later become Sturge's first biographer).<sup>459</sup> The Peace Society founded in 1816, was grounded in Christian pacifism. Many of the founding members were Quakers and Quakers would constitute roughly half of all members of the society in subsequent decades.<sup>460</sup> The Peace Society,

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<sup>457</sup> Letter Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge 6 December 1840, *The Letters of Richard Cobden 1815-1847, Volume 1*, 208-209.

<sup>458</sup> For instance, in one letter, he told Sturge that the plain dress and speech adopted by some Quakers (including by Sturge to some extent) had no historical basis. George Fox, according to Cobden, employed the speech and dress of the common people of his time, not that of the common people two centuries before him. See Letter Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge 29 September 1851, *The Letters of Richard Cobden 1848-1853, Volume 2*, 334-335.

<sup>459</sup> Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1864).

<sup>460</sup> Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730-1854*, 246-247.



however, wished to appeal to a diverse group of people, therefore its charter did not contain an explicit commitment to absolute pacifism (which would have appealed to their Quaker members). Instead the Peace Society's stated mission was to reduce the occurrence of warfare and not necessarily to condemn defensive war, what Ceadel has termed a pacifist position rather than a strictly pacifist one. The bifurcated nature of the Peace Society was reinforced by the creation of two tiers of membership in the Society, with a lower tier requiring members to strive for peace, and a higher tier, the London Committee, requiring its members to pursue absolute pacifism. Therefore, though the Peace Society was rooted in a Christian objection to war and the London Committee had the final say on what actions the society took, it had been established in a way that allowed it to become increasingly populated with more pragmatic, conditional opponents of war, including Cobden.

Cobden had a fruitful relationship with the Peace Society. He worked closely with the Society in pushing for arbitration replacing war as a means for nations to resolve their disputes. Sturge had, in 1841, convinced the Peace Society to endorse the idea of clauses of arbitration being inserted into the commercial treaties that Britain concluded with other nations. These clauses would stipulate that should Britain come into dispute with said nations in the future, arbitration would be resorted to.<sup>461</sup> Cobden was enthusiastic about the idea. Like all peace advocates, writes James R. Andrews, he felt warfare was not something inevitable, but rather something man-made and therefore man could prevent it.<sup>462</sup> Cobden made two motions in Parliament in favour of such arbitration clauses, in 1849 and 1850, and relied on the Peace

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<sup>461</sup> July 1842, *Herald of Peace for the Years 1842 and 1843, New Series, Volume I* (London: Thomas Ward and Co.), 113.

<sup>462</sup> James R. Andrews, "The Rationale of the Nineteenth-Century Pacifism," *Quaker History* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1968) 27.

Society to generate public support for his idea, which he felt was crucial in getting Parliament to support him.<sup>463</sup>

Both motions would garner less than a hundred votes in their favour, but according to David Nicholls, Cobden's advocacy helped make arbitration clauses an acceptable feature of diplomatic relations. The agreement contained in the Convention of 1853 to refer future pecuniary disputes between Great Britain and the United States to two independent commissioners was one example of Cobden's influence, argues Nicholls. The second example was the so-called Clarendon Protocol, requiring the mediation of future disputes between Russia and Turkey, which was inserted into the Treaty of Paris that concluded the Crimean War.<sup>464</sup> Martin Ceadal points out that the Foreign Secretary Lord Clarendon (who is credited with inserting the protocol into the treaty) was already pacifist-leaning before he met with a delegation of peace advocates in Paris. Furthermore, Cobden was only a reluctant supporter of this delegation, initially expressing his opposition to it.<sup>465</sup> Therefore, whilst it's fair to say Cobden was a strong supporter of the idea of arbitration and would continue to advocate its benefits in later years, it is debatable how much of a direct impact he had on diplomatic relations. It is more certain that his belief in the possibilities of arbitration made him disinclined to support the Crimean War.<sup>466</sup>

Cobden's other efforts to encourage pacifism through a change of policy centered on his efforts to reduce the amount spent on the military. A speech on 17 June 1851 is emblematic of

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<sup>463</sup> Letter Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge 13 December 1848, *The Letters of Richard Cobden 1848-1853, Volume 2*, 78.

<sup>464</sup> David Nicholls "Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress Movement 1848-1853" *Journal of British Studies* 30, no. 4, October 1991, 375.

<sup>465</sup> Martin Ceadal, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53-54.

<sup>466</sup> As late as 1861, in response to the strain the Civil War was creating in Anglo-American relations, Cobden was corresponding with Henry Richard and the American Senator Charles Sumner about the benefits of arbitration and the possibility of the Peace Society forming an arbitration committee to promote the benefits of this idea.

his thought. In this speech, Cobden railed against what he termed a seesaw like competition between Britain and France over who possessed the greatest number of armaments. He quoted from both British and French reports on government military expenditure to demonstrate that both countries reacted impulsively to merely the smallest hint of increased militarization from the other. All of this, stated Cobden, at the expense of increased taxation upon the population and panic.<sup>467</sup> He would further develop this point in his last published work, *The Three Panics*, a pamphlet deriding the periodic outbreaks of fear at perceived French militarization.<sup>468</sup>

The world, he told Parliament in that same June 1851 speech, has become more international, with mail traveling faster between nations and more foreign languages heard at home and therefore, “the government of the age should put itself in harmony with the spirit of the age.”<sup>469</sup> It should be more internationalist in outlook. To Cobden, this meant increased cooperation between countries, reduction in armaments and above all else, prioritizing commerce. In an earlier speech to parliament, on 12 June 1849, he had presented the case of Schleswig and Holstein as the best example of the “barbarous, demoralizing and unjust” nature of warfare and the spending on warfare. Such a petty conflict, as he understood it, had caused economic stress from Spain to England because certain statesmen refused to abandon older, baser impulses.<sup>470</sup> Even earlier, in his pamphlet, *England, Ireland and America*, published in 1835, Cobden had carefully analyzed the vast British expenditures on maintaining military power globally and contrasted this with the miniscule amount the United States spent on its own military, and found that the frequently cited reason for sustaining a large military force (for the

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<sup>467</sup> *HC Deb 17 June 1851 vol 117 cc915-30*.

<sup>468</sup> Richard Cobden, “The Three Panics: An Historical Episode,” in *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden*, Vol. II., F. ed. W. Chesson, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 537-705.

<sup>469</sup> Richard Cobden, “House of Commons, June 17, 1851,” *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy*, Vol. II, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 263-270.

<sup>470</sup> Richard Cobden, House of Commons, June 12, 1849, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy*, Vol. II, 389-399.

protection of commerce) was false, since despite its limited might, commercially the United States was growing exponentially. It was commercialism that Cobden believed should be at the centre of mankind's actions and armaments spending did nothing to aid this endeavour, in fact it retarded it because the antagonism it produced between nations hindered the arrival of a pacific free trade world.<sup>471</sup> The notion of the wastefulness of military spending was already present in Cobden's thought and in subsequent years, prior to the Crimean War and at the behest of peace groups, Cobden stated before parliament his desire to see a reduction in armaments expenditure.

It is unsurprising that when war came, Cobden was vocal in his opposition to it and in spite of criticism from a patriotic public, continued throughout the war to denounce its continuance. His previous derision of the public's fear of a French invasion led by Napoleon III should have prepared him for the criticism he was to receive. *The Westmorland Gazette*, in early 1853, accused the Peace Society of inviting a French invasion, whilst in the same issue it carried a feature entitled, "A Radical Lecture for Mr. Cobden." In it, Cobden was accused of not respecting the unique moral qualities that war produced in individuals and of forming a "clique of crotchereers" in Parliament to go against the desire of the government and the nation to defend itself against its enemies.<sup>472</sup> More hostile yet was a piece in the *Dublin University Magazine*, reprinted in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* and again appearing in early 1853, that bellowed about the shallowness of Richard Cobden and the Manchester School. Cobden was informed that he was vastly inferior to the venerable, recently deceased political commentator, William Cobbett, that he had only managed to emerge as a "third rate tribune" because there was a

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<sup>471</sup> Richard Cobden, *England, Ireland and America*, 389-399.

<sup>472</sup> *Westmorland Gazette*, 19 September, 1853.

temporary absence of better persons available and that the “quixotic quietism which this un-English demagogue professed” would not be tolerated.<sup>473</sup>

The vitriol that Cobden and other peace advocates endured due to their opposition to the Crimean War was quite staggering and sustained throughout the course of the war. Hundreds of articles appeared in dozens of periodicals that routinely labeled the peace advocates “the peace at any price party” or the “pro-Russia party.” The idea that Cobden and his supporters were un-English was strongly implied, as was the idea that pacifists were mentally impaired. *The Leeds Times*, a radical middle-class publication that had previously endorsed some elements of Chartism and whose former editor, Samuel Smiles (of *Self-Help* fame) was a correspondent of Cobden’s, said as much when, reporting on a speech Cobden made, it noted that he did not look himself. Some articles, like the one in *The Leeds Times* were gentle, noting what Cobden had achieved, but restating the popular mood of the time; that this was a war for freedom from Russian despotism, “that we are not fighting now for ourselves, but for our children.”<sup>474</sup> *Bell’s Weekly Messenger*, castigated him for “how thoroughly you despise the best feelings of your fellow countrymen, when their views happen not to square with your class prejudices” and even alleged that Cobden supported Russia because the Tsar had offered him duty-free exportation of calico products to Turkey when Russia emerged victorious.<sup>475</sup> (Class prejudice is a valid charge one could levy against Cobden, though there is no evidence he had been offered a financial incentive to support Russia, or indeed that he wanted Russia to be the victor).

Part of the problem for those who advocated peace was that the confused diplomatic dispute that had morphed into a war had also morphed, in the eyes of many members of the

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<sup>473</sup> *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, Thursday 31 March, 1853.

<sup>474</sup> *The Leeds Times*.

<sup>475</sup> *Bell’s Weekly Messenger*, 10 November, 1855.

British public, from a dispute centred around the Black Sea, into a much larger conflict against an evil empire, Russia, that was intent on unlimited expansion. In part, this was due to the efforts of exiled Eastern European nationalists, none more so than Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian politician who led the 1848 revolt against Austria that had only been quelled with Russian assistance and whose speeches and writings were frequently printed in many major English language publications. The *Leicestershire Mercury*, a liberal publication catering to a readership that tended to be of the radical, nonconformist variety, reported in its coverage of one of his speeches in Glasgow, attended by a crowd as large as those that the Anti-Corn Law League had enjoyed a decade earlier, that Kossuth neatly tied together the cause of Turkey with Hungarian and Polish freedom.<sup>476</sup> Both Russia and Austria are despotisms, Kossuth stated, intent on assassinating the sick man of Europe that is Turkey, only an independent Poland and Hungary could ensure Turkish security. And if Britain doubted the aims of Russia, look no further than the brutal suppression of the revolution in his own country of Hungary.<sup>477</sup> It was an idea picked up by various popular newspapers such as the radical working-class publication, *Reynold's News*, which asserted in an article railing against the pacifism of the Manchester School, a call for Hungarian independence from Austrian tyranny.<sup>478</sup> The British government appeared to subscribe to this idea when it approved the formation of a Polish division to fight in the Crimea under the name of the Division of the Cossacks under the Sultan, led by Count Zamoyski, another exiled eastern European nationalist.<sup>479</sup> Cobden and other peace activists were confronted with a powerful argument in favour of war that they had not reckoned upon and which increased

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<sup>476</sup> James R. Moore, *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism, Party Politics and Urban Governance in Late Nineteenth Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 278.

<sup>477</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, Saturday 15 July, 1855.

<sup>478</sup> *Reynold's News*, January 8, 1854.

<sup>479</sup> *Suffolk Chronicle*, December 1, 1855.

the volume of criticism they received, but nonetheless Cobden kept advancing his reasons in favour of peace.

The reasons for his opposition included those mentioned above, but he also stated a simpler idea: that he could not and would not believe, as many, including Prime Minister Palmerston did, that such a conflict would bring the benefit of freedom to those people of Russia. If anything, he felt that the war would only increase the despotism within that country. This stance, noted Anthony Howe, would sever Cobden's links with many of his former radical liberal compatriots who attempted to impress upon him the potential good of such a conflict.<sup>480</sup> Many fellow liberals, already at odds with Cobden pre-Crimea over his free trade pacifism, had been impressed by the messages of men like Kossuth, and imagined liberating countries like Poland and Hungary from the grip of despots. Importantly, as Miles Taylor explains, the vociferous campaign to impress on the public the goodness of Turkey, led by the Turkophile diplomat and writer David Urquhart, who disliked Russia as much as Cobden disliked Turkey, had helped radical politicians and the public to accept the Eastern European nationalist viewpoint that Russia was a dangerous, barbaric nation.<sup>481</sup>

It also damaged Cobden's principal strategy in the months leading up to the outbreak of war, which consisted of emphasizing that Russia was the more civilised of the disputing nations, and reiterating his disdain for fighting alongside the Ottomans. In a letter written in 1849 he told Henry Richard that he was not the only one prejudiced against Ottoman culture, listing several venerable publications that also took a dim view of the Ottomans, but by mid-1854, this was no longer the case. Nevertheless, Cobden would remain as intractable on this point<sup>482</sup> as he was in

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<sup>480</sup> Anthony Howe, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, eds. Anthony Howe, Simon Morgan (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 14-15.

<sup>481</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, 239.

<sup>482</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Henry Richard, 13 September, 1849, (f. 314) British Library, Add MS 43657/

finding the whole notion of liberating Europe from barbarism absurd. Such a view, within the context of Cobden's thought, is understandable. As previously stated, he believed that war making was an old-fashioned way for a nation to conduct itself that reinforced the power of elites, who had a vested interest in it, and through the suspicion and enmity it generated, created barriers to free trade and the peaceful, global harmony it promised. As Peter Cain notes, Cobden wished to see barriers between nations brought down, for the world to become one large workshop with each country producing what it produced best.<sup>483</sup> For this reason, Cobden had little enthusiasm for the nationalist movements on the continent. But in the confused rhetoric of the Crimean war, with ideas of Turkophilia, European liberation and much else in play, Cobden's political-economic arguments and anti-Turkish stance failed to make any inroads against the nations' desire for war.

As the war went on and the din of patriotism within Britain lessened a little, Cobden enunciated additional reasons for his pacifist stand. The first of these he stated at Manchester on 18 March 1857, where he was aiding John Bright in his parliamentary re-election by defending him against critics who denounced his opposition to the war. It was Cobden's opinion that it was the duty of a Member of Parliament to act rationally and independently of his fellow Members in the best interest of the section of the populace that he represented when approaching the issue put before him. To Cobden it was unforgivable that a person would act blindly along party lines. For the Crimean war he set aside his pre-existing peaceful liberalism and claimed that the war did not rationally make sense and could not be endorsed. To go against reason and the interests of one's constituents as he understood them was a violation of the nature of representative government.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Peter Cain, "Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden," *British Journal of International Studies*, 5 no.3, (October 1979), 230-232.

<sup>484</sup> Richard Cobden, "Russia War Speech, Manchester, March 18, 1857," *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy*, Vol. II, 337-350.



Cobden's emphasis on properly representing the people was an idea he had stated years earlier during his campaigning against the corn laws and which at this time he continued to hold dear.

Cobden also put forward the idea that British politicians were overeager to wage war. In Parliament, on 5 June 1855, he posited a hypothetical situation. Imagine, he said, that Britain was Prussia. Prussia, he explains, is geographically proximate to Russia, which possesses a population five times larger. Prussia does not have the benefit of being an island nation with natural ramparts in the form of the seas. If it goes to war, it must fully commit all its resources, including human capital, which is already subject to conscription. Every horse and carriage would be used. If Britain faced the necessity of making such a total commitment when going to war, it would think more rationally.<sup>485</sup> It was for this reason, he argued, that Prussia and Austria carefully contemplated taking part on Britain's side during the Crimean War, but with the awareness of total commitment providing clarity, decided to abstain. British politicians, he told Parliament, should think with such clarity. Cobden was lamenting, like many critics of British foreign policy before him, that the geography of the nation encouraged militarism because the horrors of war were not taking place on home soil and warfare was viewed therefore as more like a form of sport than the horrific event that it was.<sup>486</sup> He made a similar complaint with the public indifference to the massacres in Borneo, as this section has already mentioned. In short, it was another simple but crucial idea that Cobden proposed. Greater reasoning would point to the benefits of peace.

Cobden's Parliamentary Speech on 5 June 1855 also contained a definite statement of the ways in which his ideas on peace and war differed from that of the Quakers. As mentioned above, this speech contained his hypothetical notion of Britain as Prussia, as well as his favourite

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<sup>485</sup> Richard Cobden, "House of Commons, June 5, 1855," *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy, Vol. II*, 321-337.

<sup>486</sup> Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention*, 99-103.

description of war and the diplomacy leading up to war as seesaw-like. But though he remained firmly opposed to the Crimean War, he also declared to Parliament that he was not opposed to war as a matter of faith or principle, but rather as a matter of common sense. Put another way, Cobden stated that he would not condemn all wars outright, but only those wars that diverged from reason. He was not opposed to wars that were absolutely imperative, such as defensive wars to preserve the nation (and hence why Cobden could not fully embrace the doctrines of the Peace Society). “Let the blood of the Englishmen be for England,” he cried.<sup>487</sup> If Russia was invading Portsmouth he would not be talking of peace, but be in the field or helping in a hospital.

Cobden’s criteria for judging whether a conflict was imperative involved a rigorous degree of reasoning, central to which was the maxim that commercial progress should be of the upmost importance to mankind, that it was the ultimate rubric for judging the goodness of an action. But it was not commercial progress alone that concerned him. It was the attendant benefits it offered as well. In line with Adam Smith, whose work greatly influenced his thinking, Cobden believed that when individuals pursued their own interests (particularly their own financial interests), unfettered as much as possible by unnatural government interference or disruptive events like warfare, mankind would achieve a kind of harmony and experience the greatest amount of happiness possible.<sup>488</sup> Therefore, the circumstances had to be exceptional in order to warrant a war taking place and impeding this march towards harmony.

For Cobden, none of the wars that Britain waged over the past century met this criteria, especially not the Crimean War. Reflecting on the death of the Duke of Wellington in 1852, Cobden took umbrage at the suggestion that Wellington had defended the nation from a threat

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<sup>487</sup> Richard Cobden, “House of Commons, June 5, 1855,” *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy, Vol. II*, 321-337.

<sup>488</sup> Donald Winch. “Adam Smith (bap. 1723, d. 1790).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oct. 2007. 23 Oct. 2015 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25767>.

during the Napoleonic Wars. Merely an instance of “king and oligarchy,” starting something for no good reason he felt. Likewise, the Battle of Trafalgar was totally unnecessary. Britain was as safe then as if it had been on another planet. A map, suggested Cobden, should be put up with red dots indicating where Britain had fought her wars since 1698 and it will be shown that they had taken place everywhere but here at home.<sup>489</sup> In short, Cobden’s pacifism was not of the same type as that of the Quakers, for whom peace and opposition to all wars were fundamental beliefs. Rather, Cobden had to reach his pacifist position through studying, observing and reasoning. This is a divergence in thought that the remainder of this section will address.

### III.

In Parliament on 31 March 1854, three days after war was declared, John Bright, Cobden’s constant ally, prefaced his opposition to the declaration by saying that he was arguing his position not based upon his Quaker beliefs, which dictated opposition to war at all times and under all circumstances. He instead argued for peace on the grounds that the war was unnecessary. The closest Bright came in that speech to invoking Christianity, which most Quakers understood as prohibiting violence, was in his concluding remarks when he stated that the government should base “its policy on the unchangeable foundation of Christian morality.”<sup>490</sup> As James Andrew explains in his essay, “The Rationale of Nineteenth Century Pacifism,” invoking a plea for Christian morality was a means for pacifists, many of them Quakers, to avoid the subject of their minority religious beliefs, with which the majority of people felt at odds. It

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<sup>489</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Henry Richard, 29 September, 1852, (f. 314) British Library, Add MS 43657

<sup>490</sup> John Bright, “House of Commons, March 31, 1854,” *Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. On Public Questions* (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1907), 124-149.

was practical and strategic, writes Andrew, for men such as Bright to appeal for peace on the basis of financial cost, anti-foreign interventionism and the vaguest of Christian principles.<sup>491</sup>

Bright was raised in a home that was liberal and progressive, but also devout in its Quaker faith. George Fox's 1659 epistle, "Ye are called to peace," which is fundamental to that faith, was no doubt ingrained in his thought. In the epistle, Fox describes the two states man can be in, which are either Adam without the fall or Adam with the fall. Adam with the fall is the postlapsarian state where man has turned away from God and Christ and engages in strife and warfare, whereas Adam without the fall is the prelapsarian state where man follows the direction of God and Christ and rises above human wrangling and violent conflict.<sup>492</sup> When Bright disparages the intrigues of diplomacy and the monuments of war, it is possible to imagine this epistle ingrained upon his mind. But for the sake of his call to peace and perhaps because he himself had doubts about the doctrine, he circumvented directly invoking his faith in the hope of winning a greater number of converts to his cause. In some ways, his arguments in favour of peace echoed those of Cobden, but in other ways they differed significantly.

As was the case with Cobden, Bright had an intense dislike of the Ottoman Empire. In Parliament, three days after Britain declared war on Russia, Bright expressed his doubts about whether the so-called empire, which he believed existed more on paper than in reality, would survive the war.<sup>493</sup> Like Cobden, Bright had travelled in his youth through the Ottoman Empire and disdainfully recorded what he saw there. "We feel a sadness of the soul," he wrote upon entering Palestine, which he understood to be God's once favoured place now ruined, while in

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<sup>491</sup> James Andrew, "The Rationale of Nineteenth Century Pacifism," *Quaker History*, 57, no. 1, (Spring 1968), 17-27.

<sup>492</sup> George Fox "Ye are Called to Peace," *Collected Works of George Fox* (Fort Fairfield: New Foundation Publication, 1990, (1658)), 387-389.

<sup>493</sup> John Bright, "House of Commons, March 31, 1854," *Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. On Public Questions*, 124-149.

Alexandria he recorded extreme poverty and obscene wealth accumulation on the part of the local “pacha.”<sup>494</sup> There is, cautions Keith Robbins, a strong xenophobia contained in Bright’s travel diaries.<sup>495</sup> From Lisbon to Athens to Jerusalem he frequently compared what he saw unfavourably with the equivalent back home. “In Portugal,” Bright wrote, “there is everything to be observed which is likely to render one more attached to one’s own country.”<sup>496</sup> But there were also more astute observations. Bright felt that in many of the countries he travelled through there was the potential for commercial and cultural greatness if only a better system of governance was put in place. This attention to the politics of the places he visited was undoubtedly important in shaping Bright’s lifelong view of the Ottomans. At Constantinople, based upon his conversations with local merchants, he formed the opinion that the Ottoman government was oppressive in the extreme, with its citizens insecure both in their property and their life. Either one could be forfeited by an official on little more than a whim. Bright felt that there was no reason to believe that Turkey would in the immediate future become a civilised nation, by which he meant a liberal state and valuable trading partner for Britain.<sup>497</sup>

This impression of the Ottoman Empire as unregenerate was important because twenty years later, many pro-war liberals argued that of the two belligerent nations, Russia and Turkey, it was Turkey that showed the greater likelihood of becoming a so-called civilised nation and therefore deserved Britain’s support and Bright found himself at odds with many former political allies.<sup>498</sup> But he held firm to his youthful view, that the Ottoman Empire was decaying and not worth defending. In one vivid letter to the northern businessman and political agitator, William

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<sup>494</sup> *The Diaries of John Bright, With a Foreword by Philip Bright*, ed. W.A.J. Walling, 35.

<sup>495</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 9-17.

<sup>496</sup> *The Diaries of John Bright*, 21.

<sup>497</sup> *The Diaries of John Bright*, 40-41.

<sup>498</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, 220-260.

Hargreaves, Bright recalls that he dreamed of Turkey. In this dream, he imagined a Turk falling asleep after his pipe and coffee and having his own dreams. The Turk dreamed of a beast in the desert surrounded by bones and felt melancholy. He awoke, cursed Russian, French power, then after smoking his pipe a little more, returned to his slumbers. The Turk then dreamed of a sky of vultures and eagles looking for prey. All was dark on the plain, there were struggling, “dim vast shapes,” shouting and wailing men, a “festival of death.”<sup>499</sup> Bright’s letter, besides graphically prophesying the human suffering Britain was about to experience, also confirms how strongly he felt that Turkey was in a moribund state.

Illustrating the barbarity of Turkey was an approach favoured more by Cobden than Bright however. Instead, Bright chose to attack the prevailing political argument that defending Turkey was necessary to maintain the global balance of power.<sup>500</sup> Bright was a free-trader who, according to Nicholas Elliot, found the idea of having a global balance through any means other than trade a delusion.<sup>501</sup> What about the French invasion of Algeria, he asked, or the Mexican-American War. Neither event triggered calls for intervention and did nothing to create global disharmony.<sup>502</sup> The government should worry instead, he argued, about the weakening of the Austrian economy or exponential growth of America, both physically and commercially. It was America, he wrote in one letter to Cobden, which, by working peacefully and industriously, was “winning it [supremacy] all over the world.”<sup>503</sup> (Cobden had made the same observation in his early pamphlet, *England, Ireland and America*.) To Bright, these happenings were what had the

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<sup>499</sup> John Bright, Letter to William Hargreaves, 1854, British Library Add MS 62079 (f. 192).

<sup>500</sup> John Bright, “House of Commons, March 31, 1854,” *Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. On Public Questions*, 129-149.

<sup>501</sup> Nicholas Elliot, “John Bright: Voice of Victorian Liberalism,” *The Freeman: Ideas on Liberty* 38, no. 8, 1988, 304-308.

<sup>502</sup> John Bright, “House of Commons, March 31, 1854,” *Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. On Public Questions*, 129-149.

<sup>503</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden 30 December 1853, quoted in G.M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1913), 229-230.

potential to truly disturb the balance of power, but no military intervention could remedy this fact and would instead merely serve to harm the economy, by leading the government into debt as it took out loans in order to purchase armaments and other pieces of military equipment. Bright estimated that the war would cost £50 million (it ended up costing in excess of £70 million) and although the government introduced a direct tax to procure the funds rather than borrowing on the international market, this remedy was just as bad in Bright's view.<sup>504</sup> The economic distress caused by war and the preparation for war figure prominently in Bright's diaries and letters at this time. In this respect, Bright's thoughts were similar to Cobden's, as both believed in peace by way of free trade and both viewed the Crimean War as being antagonistic to this process as well as misguided.

Bright also challenged the government over the course of events leading up to Britain's declaration of war. In an infamous letter (it was subsequently published on 4 November 1854) declining an invitation by Absalom Watkins, a respected businessman and liberal politician, to explain at a Manchester fundraiser for war widows and orphans why he opposed the war, Bright stated that his opposition centred on two questions; was the war necessary and why did it happen at all when Russia had accepted the Vienna Note which had been drawn up in that city in July 1853 by Austria, Britain and France and which had offered a resolution of the dispute? These were rhetorical questions: obviously the war was unnecessary. It was "imbecility," on the part of Britain to side with Turkey after Russia had accepted the note and Turkey then decided for whatever reason it was dissatisfied with the terms. Primarily though, Bright blamed the undemocratic French for causing mischief.<sup>505</sup> A month later in Parliament, Bright, still trying to understand why the Vienna Note was rejected, blamed Britain's entrance into the war almost

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<sup>504</sup> *The Manchester Examiner and Times*, Saturday, 4 November 1854.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

exclusively on the actions of his government. “I am prepared to stake my reputation for accuracy and for a knowledge of the English language,” he declared, on the diplomatic correspondence demonstrating that it was Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, the ambassador to Turkey and the Earl of Clarendon, the Foreign Secretary, whose actions led to Britain being at war. Bright argued that every time a diplomatic solution was agreed upon by the other countries to the dispute, it was rejected by Britain’s representatives, even those compromises that Britain herself had initially suggested and which other countries had taken up. Carry on the war if you must, he said, to obtain that security you believe necessary, but then stop, do not continue the war for the sake of political advantage at home.<sup>506</sup>

Bright strongly suspected that this was the case. In May 1854, with the defeat of the government’s Scotch Education Bill, Bright noted in his diary that the war was the only thing that ensured the government survived. And earlier in 1853 he had written to Cobden that in part, the Tories only wanted a war because the government wanted peace.<sup>507</sup> But Bright, in the early days of the hostilities, chose to act in public as if he accepted at face value the government’s professed aim of simply maintaining Turkish integrity, delivering a *Memorial in Favour of Peace from the Commercial Men of Manchester* to the Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen, entreating him to seek peace as soon as the stated objectives of the war were achieved. “It is not required by national honour or national interest to make demands beyond the necessity of the case,” it read, going on to appeal to the justice, moderation and Christian statesmanship of Lord Aberdeen.<sup>508</sup> Arguably, Bright’s belief that Lord Aberdeen might prevent war and then later his

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<sup>506</sup> John Bright, “House of Commons, December 22, 1854,” *Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. On Public Questions*, 149-153.

<sup>507</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden 30 December 1853, quoted in G. M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 229-230.

<sup>508</sup> John Bright, Letter to Joseph Sturge, British Library, Sturge Paper Vol. II (ff. 147) Add MS 43723.



hope that Lord Aberdeen would bring a quick peace, restrained Bright from being too forthright in arguing the cause of peace.

At the same time, there was throughout the war a lack of vigorous opposition on the part of Bright that is difficult to explain. He did deliver some of the finest oratorical performances of his political career during the war years, juxtaposing political-economic arguments with strikingly humanistic imagery. In his famed speech on 23 February 1855 (giving support to a potential peace settlement with Russia), he told Parliament that “the angel of death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings...he takes his victims from the castle of the noble, the mansion of the wealthy, and the cottage of the poor and lowly and it is on behalf of all these classes that I make this solemn appeal.”<sup>509</sup> This humanism, evidenced here and elsewhere is genuine, but as A.J.P. Taylor has remarked, Bright only made four speeches concerning the war between 1854 and 1856, and with the exception of his letter to Absalom Watkins, did not publish his opinions. Furthermore, according to Taylor, a not insignificant portion of what he did say in regards to the war was aimed at absolving himself of any responsibility for its outbreak.<sup>510</sup> It is doubtful that he was concerned about being unpopular and harming his future prospects as a politician. His letters from the early 1850s make it clear that he was weary of political life and not overly concerned with how his reputation stood in this respect (though he did want to know what was being said of him). It is the great paradox of Bright’s life, as historians have remarked, that although he was being reviled by the public and press during the Crimean War, his popularity actually increased within Parliament. Leading political figures such as Lord Aberdeen, William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli became

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<sup>509</sup> John Bright, “House of Commons, 23 February 1855,” *Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. On Public Questions*, (London, 1907), 155-158.

<sup>510</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, “John Bright and the Crimean War,” *Essays in English History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976).

friends of his and a decade later he became President of the Board of Trade. So there was no pragmatic reason for his silence.

There are numerous examples of his reluctance to participate in the peace movement, particularly in the years leading up to the Crimean War. His strong disinclination to attend a large peace conference planned for October 1853 had puzzled family members,<sup>511</sup> whilst that same year he had refused Joseph Sturge's solicitation for a donation to the Peace Society, sternly informing him that he gave his time and £500 a year to his Parliamentary career and therefore was at liberty to do as he pleased.<sup>512</sup> This was in marked contrast to Cobden who was very much following and questioning the diplomatic and political intrigues that were taking place towards the end of 1853 and who was growing increasingly alarmed at the prospect of war while Bright, according to Keith Robbins, was more interested in a new barouche he had purchased, remaining convinced war was not likely.<sup>513</sup>

In fairness to Bright, he had in the years after corn law repeal, dedicated a considerable amount of time to parliamentary reform whereas Cobden had prioritized free trade and peace. In one letter, written around the time Bright had bought his barouche, in 1853, Bright commended Cobden's pacifism, but reminded him that reform was no less important. Bright might not have predicted a future war, but he did tell Cobden that reform would unite people and create a bulwark against whatever Parliament got up to in the next session.<sup>514</sup> It was a question of political priorities for Bright. If he did not believe war likely and domestic issues concerned him more, then for Bright to take only a distant interest in peace makes sense. Additionally, it should

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<sup>511</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, 99.

<sup>512</sup> John Bright, Letter to Joseph Sturge, 1853, Sturge Paper Vol. II (f. 147), British Library, Add MS.43723.

<sup>513</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, 99.

<sup>514</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, August 14, 1853, Bright Papers, Vol. II (ff. 323), British Library, Add MS 43384.

be remembered, Bright would suffer a mental breakdown in 1856, but in his letters to Cobden in the years prior, he frequently expressed his fatigue with public life and the nature of politics. A hint of that future mental exhaustion is present. This does not fully explain why, a few grandiloquent speeches aside, he did not vigorously press the cause of peace during the war years.

One additional explanation is that Bright, like Cobden, was aware of how much support the war had and found it difficult to will himself to continue opposing it. "I am in danger of becoming not so much hopeless as indifferent to my countrymen who are currently celebrating military success," he wrote to Cobden, while to Joseph Sturge he said that there was little point in protesting the war, afterwards they will see how wrong it was.<sup>515</sup> Waiting until the hostilities bankrupted Britain or some great military disaster befell her forces would provide him with proof of the folly of warfare. It was a strategy that tempted Bright. At the same time, the great clamour of national patriotism occasionally enraged him and kept him far more willing to keep protesting than Cobden was. It is a curious fact, commented upon by many historians, that as the war went on, Cobden retreated from his position as leader of the small anti-war party in Parliament and Bright assumed his place.<sup>516</sup> Admittedly his public efforts were minimal but he did not give in to despair and in private he fumed against his countryman to a degree that even took Cobden aback. "The country is drunk just now and will hear nothing against its passion,"<sup>517</sup> was one eloquent phrase he used to describe the patriotic national mood, whilst in another letter he simply

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<sup>515</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, September 1, 1855.; John Bright, Letter to Joseph Sturge, 1854, British Library, Add MS 43723, Vol. II (ff. 147).

<sup>516</sup> Paul Adelman, *Victorian Radicalism: The Middle Class Experience 1830-1914* (London: Longman Higher Education, 1984).

<sup>517</sup> *The Diaries of John Bright*, 178.

described the war and Britain's alliance with France as, "doubly stupid."<sup>518</sup> The word stupid occurs frequently throughout his private writings, as he struggled to understand how anyone could support the war<sup>519</sup> and came to feel "ashamed, disgusted of my countrymen."<sup>520</sup> Bright had always been the more combative personality, willing to give and receive verbal blows. But in calmer moods he believed that the issue was not that the British public were simply bloodthirsty militants, but rather that they were ignorant and easily misled.

This is an idea that both Bright and Cobden were deeply attached to both before the Crimean War and especially when it was taking place, and which manifested itself in their desire to found a cheap daily newspaper for the general public that would correctly educate them. There is an obvious arrogance running through Bright's writings on the subject, the assumption that only the views of himself and his associates were correct. He was wont to describe the general public as unwise or unreceptive to truth, and felt that the newspapers favoured profit over principle and perpetuated untruths.<sup>521</sup> Cobden, meanwhile, felt that Palmerston and the pro-war party had been aided in duping people into supporting the war by a complicit press. *The Times's* enthusiastic support for Riazat Brooke and veneration of Palmerston during the Don Pacifico incident particularly irked him. The newspaper Bright and Cobden helped to found in 1856, *The Morning Star*, which went through several editors including Bright's relative, the respected Quaker Samuel Lucas, was, in Bright's words, aimed at making people see "common sense."<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, September 1, 1855, Bright Papers, Vol. II (ff. 323), British Library, Add MS 43384.

<sup>519</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, 117.

<sup>520</sup> John Bright, Letter to Richard Cobden, October 17, 1854, Bright Papers, Vol. I. (ff. 305), British Library, Add MS 43383.

<sup>521</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, 114-115.

<sup>522</sup> John Bright, Letter to Joseph Sturge, October 2, 1853, Sturge Paper, Vol. II (ff. 147), British Library Add MS 43723.

More important than the moderately successful newspaper they were involved with was the leading role they played alongside veteran radicals like Francis Place in repealing the one-penny stamp duty in 1856. As Cobden explained it “the stamp [duty] makes the daily papers the instrument and servant of oligarchy,” since only those people, the upper class, can afford to purchase them and therefore the newspapers tailor their content towards their views.<sup>523</sup> Additionally the existence of the stamp duty tax allowed newspapers to be shipped freely across the country so papers like *The Times* could penetrate into the furthest corners of the country and perpetuate their views, which Cobden and Bright loathed and blamed for all manner of evils. Stamp duty repeal was an important campaign that Bright supported in Parliament during the Crimean War, undoubtedly galvanized just as much by an antipathy to the war enthusiasm of the newspapers as by the newspapers’ negative comments on him.<sup>524</sup>

There was no explicitly Quaker element to Bright’s opposition to the Crimean War prior to his withdrawal from public life at the end of 1856 due to mental exhaustion, but there was one element of his thoughts on the war that owed much to his dissenting religious background. He took issue with the religious dimension that entered the rhetoric of those in favour of the war. Like Cobden, he felt that warfare was in most instances against Christian principle and was opposed to the views of Evangelicals like the politician Lord Shaftesbury, who had clashed with Bright periodically over the corn laws and factory legislation. Shaftesbury argued in his speeches and writings that of the two belligerent nations, Russia and Turkey, it was Turkey that was the most religiously tolerant, since it allowed the Bible Society (an Evangelical organisation) to operate more or less freely within its empire whilst Tsar Nicholas had actually banned the

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<sup>523</sup> Richard Cobden, Quoted in A.E. Musson, *Trade Union and Social History* (London: Routledge, 2006 (1974)), 169.

<sup>524</sup> Donald Read, *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), 184-187.

Bible Society. Therefore, supporting Turkey was a Christian act and the Crimean War was given a strong moral hue.<sup>525</sup>

This line of reasoning annoyed Bright considerably, but what particularly upset him was the fact that the Church of England, the established church, endorsed and supported it. On 26 April 1854, a day of national humiliation and prayer was held in support of the war. Bright was livid, as his diary attests, writing that such an event mocked the religious public, wooing it into supporting the government's "wicked policy."<sup>526</sup> The real humiliation was in supporting a pointless war while praying was similar to a burglar praying for divine assistance with his illegal endeavour. "The public sentiment is demoralized and Christianity is impeded, and its character tarnished by impiety of this kind."<sup>527</sup> Bright was a devout Christian and a dissenter.

Undoubtedly some people of the Anglican faith also found this intertwining of government, warfare and religion troublesome, but when Bright fumes at and mocks the day of national prayer and humiliation, it is quickly recalled how in his youth he denounced church rates while standing on a tombstone in Rochdale, or later in Parliament advocated church disestablishment. This antipathy to established religion, cultivated in him from his earliest years, reveals itself in the context of the Crimean War.

The absence of an expressly Quaker view on the Crimean War in John Bright's thought is due to the fact that Bright quite simply did not believe in the absolute pacifist principle. As he candidly admitted to Joseph Sturge, "I have never advocated the extreme peace principle, the non-resistance principle in public, or in private...I don't know whether I could logically maintain

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<sup>525</sup> Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Works of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury* (London: Cassell and Company Limited, 1896), 488.

<sup>526</sup> *The Diaries of John Bright*, London, 169.

<sup>527</sup> *The Diaries of John Bright*, London, 169-170.

it.”<sup>528</sup> The Crimean war was “contrary to the national interest,” he continued in the same letter and also against the “professed” principles of the nation and for these reasons alone, Bright concluded, he opposed them. Bright’s Quaker faith was not as lax as that of someone like Henry Ashworth. As Keith Robbins explains, Bright found Quaker principles sound, but the polity and organization of the society faulty.<sup>529</sup> Furthermore, to doubt certain aspects of one’s religion, for instance to find the pacifist stipulation within Quakerism good in principle but troublesome in reality, is common enough. Bright’s strong aversion to war was a product both of an interpretation of the Bible instilled in him from childhood onwards and from his study of political economy.

In 1882 he resigned his cabinet position as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster over his government’s decision to bombard Alexandria, yet as will be revealed later on in this section, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Federal Government during the American Civil War of 1861-1865 and before that he had condoned the suppression of the Indian Mutiny in 1858.<sup>530</sup> Supporting the suppression of the Indian Mutiny had been one of the conditions of his selection to stand as a Parliamentary candidate at Birmingham in 1858 after he lost his Manchester seat, but not even his harshest critics would have accused him of compromising his principles. For better or worse Bright was always steadfast in his political convictions, acting as he saw fit and strongly guided, but not ruled by his Quaker faith. It would be Joseph Sturge who would embody the absolute pacifist principle of Quakerism.

In late 1857 John Bright, still recovering from his mental breakdown, wrote a startlingly forthright letter to Joseph Sturge. After declining to attend a peace meeting at Manchester, he

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<sup>528</sup> John Bright, Letter to Joseph Sturge, 24 September 1854, Quoted in Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations 1730-1854*, 350.

<sup>529</sup> Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, 118.

<sup>530</sup> Roland Quinault, “John Bright and Joseph Chamberlain,” *The Historical Journal* 28 no.03, (1985), 623-646.

went on to say that the Peace Society, Peace Conference and other similar organisations had been useless in recent years, perhaps even harmful to what it was they hoped to achieve. The humanitarian, financial and personal justice arguments these pacifist groups put forward had all been connected to an interpretation of the Bible that most people rejected. The recent war had demonstrated that those professing a great love of the Gospel also liked warfare. Maybe, Bright suggested, reiterating a familiar argument of his, a great national catastrophe will make people see their error, but he was not convinced. Bright concluded his letter by saying that he did not wish to work at an “impossible cause,” using an “impossible method,” but admitted that he admired Sturge’s efforts.<sup>531</sup>

Joseph Sturge, as has already been shown, did not mind adopting a seemingly impossible cause or, with his uncompromising approach, using a seemingly impossible method, and his significant involvement in the peace movement is further proof of this. Martin Ceadel, in his authoritative study of the Peace Society, goes so far as to argue that Sturge epitomized an entire phase in the history of that organisation. He writes that the quiet early years of the London-based Society gave way in the 1830s to the demands of a group of politically engaged provincial businessmen, led by Sturge, for more assertive action in the promotion of peace. That Sturge became involved in the Peace Society was almost inevitable, given that it was an organization heavily populated by Quakers who were upholding the testimony of their faith against warfare and violence by working towards its abolition. The evangelical within Sturge was also important, explains Alex Tyrrell. For Sturge and other evangelicals, the Biblical passage, “therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin,” (James 4:17) was a great motivator, it drove them to relentlessly do good works and oppose what they perceived as

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<sup>531</sup> John Bright, Letter to Joseph Sturge, 1857, Sturge Papers, Vol. II (ff 147) British Library, Add MS 43723.



evil.<sup>532</sup> Pacifism and the Peace Society in particular attracted support from many religious denominations that found war un-Christian, but as a member of a religious group steeped in the absolute peace principle and an evangelical, Sturge undoubtedly felt doubly sure that it was his duty to promote pacifism. He did not, however, become deeply involved in the promotion of peace until later in life, in the 1840s, when he was approaching his fiftieth year. Abolitionism had been Sturge's primary concern during the previous decade, and Chartism and suffrage took up a considerable amount of his time in the early 1840s.

Regardless though of which causes he prioritized, pacifism had never been far from Sturge's thoughts and actions throughout his life. According to one of his early biographers, Stephen Hobhouse, Sturge was a pacifist from early childhood, refusing to fight with his schoolmates. In 1813 at the age of twenty, he suffered to have some of his sheep confiscated rather than serve in the militia or pay a penalty of approximately £10. This was in keeping with the official Quaker position to neither bear arms nor, by paying a penalty, give indirect support to violent acts. Sturge also became one of the early members of the Peace Society around this time.<sup>533</sup> Joining in 1818, he set up auxiliary peace societies in Worcester and Birmingham. Later, as an alderman for Birmingham, he persuaded the town council to carry a motion in 1839 disapproving of the importation of armed police from London to quell Chartist disturbances. He did not mind policeman carrying staffs, Sturge told the council, he would happily do so himself as a special constable, but at the same time he would rather lose all his worldly goods than take a person's life in defending them. Sturge also made sure that the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery

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<sup>532</sup> Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London: Christopher Helm, 1987), 180.

<sup>533</sup> Stephen Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge, His Life and Work* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1919), 1-13.

Society he had helped to found in the mid-1830s used methods that were “moral, religious and pacific.”<sup>534</sup>

Significantly, he quarrelled in 1839 with Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton. Buxton was an esteemed philanthropist and politician and a relation of some of the most prominent members of the Quaker community (though he himself was a member of the Church of England) over the methods of Buxton’s Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and the Civilisation of Africa.<sup>535</sup> Buxton’s organization was putting together a mission to explore the Niger River and establish a settlement where agricultural and commercial development would encourage the native population to turn away from the lucrative slave trade. Sturge’s objection to Buxton’s plan, besides the fact that he had been working on a similar scheme, was that Buxton’s expedition would be armed. “Now I believe that those views,” he wrote to fellow Quaker John Joseph Gurney, explaining his pacifism, “are not only strictly scriptural but constitute one of the most important testimonies of the Society of Friends.”<sup>536</sup> In late middle-age Sturge subscribed absolutely to the Quaker peace testimony, refusing to associate himself in any way with violence, but in the years leading up to the Crimean War, his pacifism developed and became more full-bodied.

The most important development in Sturge’s thinking on the subject of peace was an exposure to and adoption of the idea of international arbitration. During a lengthy visit to the United States in 1841 to promote the cause of abolition, he met Judge William Jay, one of the founders of the American Bible Society and a devoted abolitionist, as well as the son of Judge

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid. at 115.

<sup>535</sup> Mary Blouet Olwyn. “Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, first baronet (1786–1845).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. May 2010. 30 Nov. 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4247>.

<sup>536</sup> Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain*, 93.

John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. William Jay had also developed a theory of arbitration that would resolve disputes between nations and ensure universal peace. He shared his soon to be published work with Sturge, who found that, “this idea is beautifully simple and of easy application.”<sup>537</sup> Jay’s work *War and Peace: The Evils of the First and a Plan for Preserving the Last* was bound to appeal to Sturge.

Throughout history, Jay wrote, seemingly powerless men, like the Apostles or Martin Luther or more recently the six British Quakers who met on 7 July 1783 to declare they would abolish slavery, had achieved their worthy aims not with armies, but with Biblical faith instead. And war was an evil, a kind of lust that must be opposed. At considerable length Jay lamented the tyranny of war, the human cost and the immorality associated with it and, in keeping with fashionable political-economic thinking, the financial cost. More rewarding and noble education and infrastructure projects could have been pursued, he wrote, had money not been squandered on armaments. Jay’s peace preservation idea was rather simple. If an individual was assaulted and he was a sensible person, that individual would not try to seek revenge on the assailant; rather he would seek redress in a court of law. The same thinking should apply to nations, Jay argued, or in other words, there should be an international court of justice, such as Bentham had proposed. Jay felt that establishing such a court would take too long and therefore proposed that when nations entered into treaties, a clause of arbitration should be inserted, which would stipulate that should those nations come into conflict, they would appeal to a third party to mediate. In times of war, Jay argued, all manner of alliances are entered into by nations, so why are alliances for the preservation of peace not created? Striving for peace was a sacred duty, Jay

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<sup>537</sup> Joseph Sturge, *A Visit to the United States in 1841* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1842), 57.

concluded. It should be promoted through voluntary associations, the pulpit and the press, and the governments of the world converted to the idea of arbitration as the means of achieving it.<sup>538</sup>

It was Sturge who took up the task of propagating Jay's ideas. The lengthy section of Jay's *War and Peace* that Sturge attached as an appendix to his account of his visit to the United States attests to the high regard, he held it in. Even before Sturge had returned home, he was promoting arbitration. At an American Peace Society meeting held in Boston on 29 July he proposed that Jay's ideas should be considered and that an international peace convention, with arbitration as the main topic be held in London. Both ideas were agreed upon at Boston.<sup>539</sup> Sturge made a similar proposal to a meeting of the London Peace Society soon after his return home. On 14 May 1842, he told the meeting that there was a mood in England for peace, regardless of what the corrupt warmongering newspapers might lead one to believe and, in a rare display of moderation, Sturge said the Society should hold a convention with other peace groups, even if those groups did not believe as fully as they did that all war was "opposed to the spirit and precepts of Christianity."<sup>540</sup> Sturge emphasized the importance of William Jay's ideas on peace and arbitration and at the meeting it was agreed that an international peace convention should be held.

Starting from this meeting onwards, the degree to which Sturge would shape the character of the Society's thinking is significant. He would lead a change in the collective thinking of the Society from the idea of quiet non-resistance and a faith in divine protection for the peacemakers, to a belief that arbitration was the means of rendering peace to mankind.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> William Jay, *War and Peace: The Evils of the First and a Plan for Preserving the Last* (New York: Wiley and Putman, 1842).

<sup>539</sup> Joseph Sturge, *A Visit to the United States in 1841*, 139-140.

<sup>540</sup> July 1842, *Herald of Peace for the Years 1842 and 1843, New Series, Volume I* (London: Thomas Ward and Co.), 113.

<sup>541</sup> Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention*, 350-353.

Sturge would invigorate the Society with this idea as well as with the international conventions he helped to organise. Christian faith was at the core of Sturge's thinking, but the importance of Jay's arbitration idea was significant as well. And above all else Sturge had a remarkable degree of willpower to see universal peace realised.

Sturge also gained a valuable ally, Elihu Burritt, during these years. Burritt was a pious, self-educated New England blacksmith who enjoyed incredible success as a travelling lecturer, speaking initially on the popular topic of self-help, but later focusing exclusively on the subject of pacifism. In the 1840s he had settled in Britain. It was Burritt and Sturge (with support from Cobden) who organised the International Peace Congresses that took place after 1843 and, with their religious enthusiasm, made people see the possibility of creating the "Kingdom of God on earth."<sup>542</sup>

The first International Peace Congress, was held in London in June 1843 and would set the pattern for the subsequent conventions, held annually, up until 1853. The desirability of Jay's arbitration plan was again spoken of by Sturge and accepted by the convention as an important idea worth promoting. Sturge also spoke of peace through free trade, which undoubtedly pleased Cobden, who was also attending the convention, and he condemned Britain's recent wars in China, Afghanistan and with the Ameers of Scinde.

But religious sentiment, specifically of the Quaker variety, was very present. William Forster, a well-known Quaker who had acted as clerk at the Friends Yearly Meetings on several occasions, made two motions. He proposed that children should not be trained in war and that arms manufacturing was un-Christian.<sup>543</sup> The Quaker community had already agreed decades

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<sup>542</sup> Stephen Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge, His Life and Work*, 120.

<sup>543</sup> August 1843, *Herald of Peace for the Years 1842 and 1843, New Series, Volume I* (London: Thomas Ward and Co.).

earlier that both of these activities violated their principles and now the peace convention reached the same conclusion. The religious element of the conventions, both in 1843 and later, was strong. The American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier, describing the 1848 convention in Brussels wrote, "Let Cobden cipher, and Vincent rant/Let Sturge preach peace to democratic throngs/And Burritt stammering through his hundred tongues/Repeat, in all, his ghostly lessons o'er/Times to the pauses of the battery's roar/Check ban or Kaiser with the barricade/ of 'olive leaves' and resolutions made/Spike guns with pointed Scripture-text..."<sup>544</sup> Not only does Whittier capture the excitement of this convention, but he also illustrates the centrality of religion in the peace movement of which Sturge was at the forefront. Of the four men mentioned in his poem, all but Cobden were pacifists on religious grounds. (Henry Vincent had been a prominent Chartist who had mellowed somewhat and was a Quaker in all but name).<sup>545</sup>

The religious emphasis could not last though. The celebrated writer Victor Hugo, who chaired the 1849 congress in Paris, had warned the English delegates that their custom of opening the convention with a silent prayer would be laughed at if they pursued it in Paris. It was at the Paris congress that a change to a more earthbound pacifism started to take place, with Cobden making a secular argument in favour of peace that was well received.<sup>546</sup> Cobden undoubtedly found war offensive to the Christian values that he held, but he also believed in the value of economic prosperity as a generator of human happiness and progress, and wanted to remove impediments to it such as militarism and protectionism. He was pragmatic, as he had made clear a few years earlier in an 1842 speech at the same meeting of the Peace Society where

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<sup>544</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier, "The Peace Convention at Brussels," *The Poetical Works, Volume IV* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), 40-50.

<sup>545</sup> Albert Nicholson, Eileen Groth Lyon. "Henry Vincent, (1813–1878), radical." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. Oxford University Press. Date of access 7 Aug. 2019, <https://www.oxforddnb.com>.

<sup>546</sup> Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention*, 335.

Sturge had set forth his views on arbitration for the first time. Christian peace would not occur by a miracle, but by free trade, Cobden had told those assembled.<sup>547</sup>

Men like Sturge, Burritt and Vincent, who felt that promoting pacifism was a Christian duty and argued along Christian lines, did promote practical measures to achieve their aim as well though. Sturge spent a decade organising these international congresses as well as peace meetings at home and writing letters to the *Herald of Peace*, in which he argued that free trade and arbitration would create peace. There is also an argument to be made that he may have influenced Cobden. Sturge, as Hobhouse has pointed out, introduced Jay's arbitration theory to the Peace Society and subsequently, on 12 June 1849, Cobden made a motion in Parliament in favour of arbitration that was similar in content to what Jay had proposed.<sup>548</sup> Crucially however, pacifism was a religious belief for Sturge, his understanding of Christianity was always juxtaposed with the practical arguments he made and it is clear that religious belief trumped other considerations. Sturge's abandonment of free trade, much to Cobden's dismay, when he felt that a discriminatory duty on slave grown sugar would be the best means of ending what he understood as the immoral slavery system, was an earlier example of this.<sup>549</sup> His response to the Crimean war was an even starker example of religious considerations dominating his actions.

Sturge became infamous with the public in the months before the Crimean war for undertaking a mission to Russia, to plead with the Tsar to maintain peace. Alex Tyrrell has noted that there was a vigorous effort being made in late 1853 by the Peace Society and other associated peace groups to stop Britain's drift to war. Specifically, in October of that year there was the peace rally held at Edinburgh, which Bright only reluctantly attended. This meeting at

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<sup>547</sup> July 1842, *Herald of Peace for the Years 1842 and 1843, New Series, Volume I* (London, Thomas Ward and Co.), 113.

<sup>548</sup> Stephen Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge, His Life and Work* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1919), 156.

<sup>549</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Joseph Sturge, 26 February 1841, British Library, Add MS 50131 (ff. 327).

Edinburgh was successful, with thousands attending and gave pacifists hope that they would succeed. Henry Richard, as secretary of the Peace Society, devised the strategy of inundating every possible home throughout Britain with peace literature and over two hundred thousand pamphlets were sent to homes in Scotland.<sup>550</sup> But Sturge did not agree on the efficacy of the strategy. As the public mood for war accelerated with the news of the “massacre at Sinope,” he felt compelled to organise a Quaker mission to the Tsar. There were historic and contemporary precedents for such an action. Quakers had long been in the habit of making appeals to monarchs on a range of issues, from the founders of the religion, George Fox and William Penn pleading for peace in the turbulent seventeenth century, to some of Sturge’s contemporaries touring European royal courts promoting abolitionism. Cobden, in a letter to a friend, expressed concern and even disdain in regards to Sturge’s planned mission, writing that it would undermine the more serious and effective work Sturge could be performing on behalf of peace, concluding disdainfully that inner-light blinds external reason.<sup>551</sup> This was a longstanding complaint Cobden had with Sturge, notwithstanding how closely they had worked together for peace over the years. He felt that Sturge spent too long engaged internationally on various peace projects, when the greatest perpetrators of war were the British government and its people. “The English people of all classes are so [ready] to throw up their caps for any hero of the sword.”<sup>552</sup> It was this bellicosity that needed addressing he argued and if curbed, it would represent a very tangible step towards universal peace.

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<sup>550</sup> Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain*, 209.

<sup>551</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter 10 January, 1854, *The Letters of Richard Cobden*, Vol. 3: 1854-1859 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

<sup>552</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Joseph Sturge, 11 March 1850 Richard Cobden, British Library, Add MS 50131 (ff. 327).



Cobden's criticism seems harsh, given the amount of time Sturge did dedicate to domestic peace efforts, but more importantly he had missed or had chosen to ignore the fact that Sturge was looking at the impending war from a religious perspective. As Hobhouse explains, "humanity does not progress to greater perfection merely or chiefly by achieved success, but rather by moral effort put forth and repeated again and again in the midst of apparent failure."<sup>553</sup> It was the "lesson of the Cross," the sacrifice made for the sake of mankind, that inspired Sturge even though with regards to his mission to Russia, he knew it was surely hopeless. Throughout his life Sturge believed, like many other men and women, in the desirability of advancing mankind to a higher level of Christian perfection, creating the Kingdom of God on earth, and whilst he hoped for success and had at one point believed that his pacifism would succeed, it was the attempt that mattered just as much. The striving for temperance, peace and so on would improve the moral quality of those around him, advance the state of humanity. Hence why Sturge and those he worked alongside earned the title, the "moral radical party." It was an evangelical outlook, but for Sturge it was infused with Quaker theology as well. Cobden might scoff at the Quaker idea of inner light, but undoubtedly it was the Quaker doctrine of contemplation in order to discover the divine will that convinced Sturge of his Christian duties.

The actual events of Sturge's futile mission to the Tsar are of secondary importance when placed alongside what motivated him, though they should be mentioned. Sturge was accompanied by fellow Quakers Robert Charleton, a Bristol pin manufacturer and respected Quaker minister who worked tirelessly to promote teetotalism and pacifism, and Henry Pease, a wealthy industrialist and brother of Joseph Pease, the first Quaker to sit in Parliament. They made the arduous journey in January 1854, first by train through Germany and then by sled to St.

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<sup>553</sup> Stephen Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge, His Life and Work*, 149.

Petersburg, armed with a memorial drafted by a Quaker committee. The memorial they presented on the 24 of January was strictly centred on religious principles. It entreated the emperor “to exchange an earthly for a heavenly crown,” that it was his duty to keep his nation at peace, to stop his people suffering morally and physically.<sup>554</sup> The memorial entreated him to prevent the evil of war and to remember how much God loves the peacemakers, that love and peace were Christ-like.

Tsar Nicholas gave the deputation an interview and allowed Sturge to read the memorial. He was said to have appeared respectful towards the Quakers’ point of view, but as might be expected, replied that he saw no way to avoid war and blamed other nations for acting in a way that compelled him to fight for Russia’s honour and national interests. As Robert Charleton would note, the closest his deputation came to mentioning politics was when it ventured forth the idea, in reply to the Tsar, that Islam was a religion that condoned warfare, whereas Christianity only condoned peace.<sup>555</sup> That was the entirety of the Quaker deputation’s interview.

Having received a formal written reply, they made their way back to England. Sturge, Charleton and Pease knew their mission had not achieved anything tangible except the satisfaction of having raised their objection to the course of current events. But it has already been argued that Sturge was acting on religious principles, to a degree that neither Cobden nor Bright for that matter were, and in this sense he was successful. As Sturge explained earlier in his 1841 protest against Britain’s war with China over the opium trade, the important act was to absolve oneself of responsibility, to absolve one’s conscience. In this sense he was adhering to Quaker teaching. Quakerism had a long tradition of bearing witness against events, such as wars

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<sup>554</sup> Joseph Sturge, *Some Account of a Deputation From the Religious Society of Friends to the Emperor of Russia* (London: Edward Thomas, 1854), 5.

<sup>555</sup> Stephen Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge, His Life and Work*, 145-150.

or systems, such as slavery, that it found antithetical to its beliefs and registering its disapproval. Sometimes this disapproval was transmitted into a positive campaign for change: Samuel Tuke's founding of a Quaker home for the humanitarian treatment of the mentally ill was a notable success, but at other times it was simply a desire to register dissent. Sturge registered his dissent with his mission to Tsar Nicholas.

This was not the end of his activities in relation to the Crimean War however. Sturge, alongside Cobden and Bright, was instrumental in founding the aforementioned *Morning Star* newspaper by acting as one of its primary fundraisers and helping to lay the groundwork for its launch in the final months of the war.<sup>556</sup> He was more unwavering than Cobden in his belief that an affordable daily paper that took a pacifist line would find a receptive audience and convince people of the folly of warfare.<sup>557</sup> At the conclusion of the war Sturge was also more convinced than Cobden in the wisdom of pressuring the government to insert a clause in the peace treaty, which was being drawn up in Paris, that would refer future disputes between nations to arbitration before armed conflict was resorted to. A memorial signed by Sturge and Henry Richard implored their government to direct their plenipotentiaries at the peace treaty negotiations to insert just such a clause.<sup>558</sup>

Sturge however went further. He met with Prime Minister Palmerston as part of a large delegation to make the case for arbitration and then travelled to the peace negotiations with Richard and the MP Charles Hindsley, where they found the foreign minister, Lord Clarendon, receptive towards their ideas.<sup>559</sup> Cobden had in the past been a strong advocate of arbitration as a

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<sup>556</sup> Stephen Frick "Joseph Sturge and the Crimean War. II. The Founding of the *Morning Star*," *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, 53 no 4 (1975), 339-357

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.* at 35.

<sup>558</sup> Stephen Frick "Joseph Sturge, Henry Richard and the Herald of Peace: Pacifist Response to the Crimean War," (PhD Thesis, Cornell University, 1971), 255-259.

<sup>559</sup> Martin Ceadal, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945*, 53-54.

means of avoiding conflict but he was hesitant about supporting the efforts of Sturge and other peace advocates in the final days of the Crimean War. It was only with reluctance that he was part of the delegation that met with Lord Palmerston. Martin Ceadal's argument that Cobden had reached the conclusion that it was unwise for pacifists to continue protesting the war once hostilities had commenced provides a plausible explanation for why he felt it was similarly unwise to discuss peace schemes when the war was not yet concluded.<sup>560</sup>

The wider Quaker to the Crimean War was expressed most publicly through two acts. The first was Joseph Sturge's mission to the Tsar. As mentioned previously, it was officially endorsed by the Society of Friends. The Meeting for Sufferings, the committee that runs the day to day business of the Quaker community, heard Sturge's proposal for a deputation to the Tsar in early January 1854 and on the seventeenth of January gave its assent to the mission.<sup>561</sup> The address that Tsar Nicholas was read was drawn up by forty-seven Quakers who restricted themselves to reiterating the theological argument of their society that war was un-Christian.<sup>562</sup> The second very public instance of Quaker opposition to the war, again orchestrated by the Meeting for Sufferings, was an official declaration printed in late 1854 and intended for wide distribution. Approximately 200,000 copies were printed and extracts placed in local newspapers, whilst translated versions were distributed abroad in French and German.

Entitled, *A Christian Appeal from the Society of Friends To Their Fellow Countrymen on the Present War*, it was similar to the address that was read to the Tsar. It was centred on the Christian pacifist argument that war was "unlawful under the Gospel Dispensation," which proclaimed Christ as the prince of peace who by his example encouraged goodwill between all

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> Peter Brock, *The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660--1914* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1990), 268.

<sup>562</sup> Paul Huddie, 'The Society of Friends in Ireland and the Crimean War, 1854-1856,' *Quaker History*, 102 no. 2, (2013), 1-11.

men. The Old Testament, it was explained, made allowances for war, but the New Testament with its call “to love thy enemies,” did not.<sup>563</sup> The Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus imparted some of his most important teachings to his followers, included the instruction to love one’s enemies, “And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.”<sup>564</sup>

This idea was crucial to Quaker thinking on peace. As an earlier pamphlet, *The Unlawfulness of all Wars and Fighting under the Gospel*, which was circulated at Yearly Meeting in 1841 (and which was possibly written with the help of Joseph Sturge) explained more fully, forgiveness of injury was crucial: it erased feelings of vengefulness and vindictiveness, which gave rise to violence and armed conflict, and lead one away from the peaceful spirit of Christ.<sup>565</sup> And as both works stressed, love and forgiveness as well as meekness are Christ-like virtues to be practiced both by individuals and nations that profess themselves Christian. There could be no distinction. (It was the principle that guided Sturge’s actions throughout his life). And most importantly, if these virtues were faithfully followed there would be only peace between men as well as nations. In other words, the appeal was admonishing the public for turning its back on true Christian principles. The human and financial cost of war were mentioned as well, but the religious objection to war was the central message of the appeal as it had been in earlier Quaker declarations condemning past conflicts.

Beyond these two actions, intended to make the Society of Friends position on the war known to a larger, non-Quaker audience, there were also more exclusively Quaker activities that

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<sup>563</sup> *A Christian Appeal From the Society of Friends to their Fellow Countrymen on the Present War*, London, 8 December 1854, British Library, L.7.a.3.(99.).

<sup>564</sup> Luke 6:29.

<sup>565</sup> Thomas Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920: The Transformation of a Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 242-243; *The Unlawfulness of All Wars and Fighting Under the Gospel Dispensation* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1841), 4.

took place. First there was an epistle issued at the Yearly Meeting in 1854. The epistle, a statement of church doctrine as significant for Quakers as a Papal Encyclical would have been for Catholics, reminded the attendees that there was “no plea of necessity or policy,” that justified this war violating the pacifist teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>566</sup> More importantly, the Quaker community took steps to ensure its members were not associated with the conflict. The Meeting for Sufferings issued a notice on 13 December 1854 reminding its members to disassociate themselves from the war and to hold firm to their pacifism, which was the truth. As Godly Quakers, the notice explained, they must be patient and gentle in order to teach those that “oppose themselves.”<sup>567</sup> Failure to follow this advice, Quakers knew, could lead to expulsion from the society.

As Paul Huddie explains, in his study of Irish Quakers and the Crimean War, this notice was simply stating an age-old doctrine, the ninth query of the advices and queries of Quakerism, a collection of writings containing the official doctrines and rules of the society. The ninth query concerned Quakerism’s pacifist stand. Members were forbidden to carry arms as soldiers or generally to be connected with the military establishment in any way, including handling goods that were obtained as prizes in a military victory. And according to Huddie, Quakers were careful to follow this rule. In Ireland, only two Quakers were disciplined for breaching the ninth query during the war, the most serious case involving the Malcolmson brothers, shipping merchants who allowed two of their ships to be used as military transports.<sup>568</sup> Similarly, in

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<sup>566</sup> From an Epistle Issued by Yearly Meeting, 1854, *Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, Held in London, To The Quarterly and Monthly Meetings Held in Great Britain, Ireland and Elsewhere, From 1681-1857, Inclusive: With an Historical Introduction, And a Chapter Comprising Some of the Early Epistles and Records of the Society of Friends of the Yearly Meeting. In Two Volumes. Vol. II.* (London: Edward Marsh, 1858), 380.

<sup>567</sup> *Extracts from Approved Documents of the Religious Society of Friends Relating to the Christian Doctrine*, London, Religious Society of Friends Tracts, British Library, 4151.6.3(20.).

<sup>568</sup> Paul Huddie, “The Society of Friends in Ireland and the Crimean War, 1854-1856,” *Quaker History*, 102 no.2, (Fall 2013): 1-11.

England there were only a few cases of this query being violated, the most interesting being the Quaker firm of C. and J. Clark who admitted to supplying sheepskin coats for the army, but argued successfully that they were the only firm who could fulfill the order and that if they had not done so, the troops in Crimea would have frozen to death. To secure their humanitarian image, the firm donated its profits from the order to charity.<sup>569</sup> The greatest confirmation that the Quaker community generally followed their religious principles, is evidenced by their refusal to take part in the day of national prayer and humiliation that marked the start of the war, a fact several newspapers commented upon with mild hostility.<sup>570</sup>

It could be argued that the Quaker response to the Crimean War was muted, limited to two public acts of condemnation and ensuring its members maintained the society's religious stance against war, but this would be to take a narrow view of the nature of Quakerism. Besides the practical difficulty of a religious denomination as small as the Quaker's making a significant impact on public opinion, there were several other issues at play. One of these was, according to Elizabeth Isichei, a mood of mild indifference among some Quakers towards their peace testimony. Pacifism was, in a sense, a "hereditary obligation."<sup>571</sup> Out of a sense of obligation many Quakers contributed significant funding to the nineteenth-century peace movement, particularly the Peace Society, but there was a dearth of individual Quakers who made a substantial contribution either to the intellectual or practical development of the peace movement. Joseph Sturge, William Allan, one of the founders of the Peace Society and Jonathan Dymond, who laid the intellectual groundwork for that society, are some notable exceptions. Active involvement in the peace movement was a minority activity among Quakers, she argues

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<sup>569</sup> Peter Brock, *The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660-1914*, 270-290.

<sup>570</sup> Paul Huddie, 'The Society of Friends in Ireland and the Crimean War, 1854-1856,' *Quaker History*, 102 no. 2, (Fall 2013), 1-11.

<sup>571</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 226.

with some justification.<sup>572</sup> Thomas Kennedy explains this fact by pointing to the infrequency with which pacifism was discussed at Quaker meetings (particularly in the nineteenth century) and noting that it was not until 1911 that George Fox's statement on peace appeared for the first time in official Quaker literature.<sup>573</sup> This chapter has shown that the Quakers were more active in promoting peace than Kennedy gives them credit, but at the same time, Kennedy's work offers a possible reason why many Quakers treated their sects peace testimony with some indifference. It was not strongly emphasised.

A greater problem was simply a question of belief in Quakerism's peace principle. Bright was far from alone in finding himself doubting whether absolute pacifism was possible. Henry Ashworth, who did not publicly take any stance against the Crimean War though he privately despaired at Britain's militarism, wrote to Cobden that he was "not so sanguine as to expect that the sword will be permanently sheathed upon the high principles of Christian morality."<sup>574</sup> Ashworth, in this letter, was taking issue specifically with the Christian pacifism of the Society of Friends. This was an issue for many Quakers who sought to actively promote peace.

William Penn, one of the most important thinkers in the development of Quaker theology and the founder of the American colony of Pennsylvania had drawn up an innovative peace plan that started with the belief that the New Testament forbade war and violence, before moving into more practical, secular territory. Penn had proposed the creation of a European diet to mediate disputes between nations and levy sanctions and a little later, in the early eighteenth-century John Bellers, an esteemed Quaker cloth merchant, philanthropist and writer, had similarly

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid. 219-227.

<sup>573</sup> Thomas Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920: The Transformation of a Religious Community*, 238.

<sup>574</sup> Henry Ashworth, Letter to Richard Cobden, September 22 1849, British Library, Cobden Papers Vol. VII., Correspondence with Henry Ashworth-Add MSS 43653, f. 325.



proposed the creation of a European federation with a supreme court to settle disputes and avert wars.<sup>575</sup> Both Penn and Bellers believed in a theological basis for rejecting violence and war, but felt that the achievement of peace required a more worldly plan. Bellers provided a detailed analysis of the economic cost of war which is remarkably similar to what Cobden would produce more than a century later.<sup>576</sup> Officially, the Quaker peace doctrine rarely strayed beyond the Christian objection to war. Occasionally, as in the 1842 pamphlet issued by the Yearly Meeting, *The Unlawfulness of all Wars and Fighting under the Gospel*, which discussed the idea of international arbitration, secular thinking appears, but primarily it was the notion of war as un-Christian, coupled with the idea that God protects the peaceful, that predominated in official Quaker thought and practice. It was not the best strategy to follow for those Quakers who wished to promote pacifism since it was unlikely to win over the support of the majority of the population who found war compatible with Christianity and were unconvinced that God would protect the peaceful.

Admittedly, Quakers like Thomas Hancock found Christian pacifism and divine protection perfectly practicable in the modern world. Hancock (1783-1849), a physician who wrote extensively on Quaker doctrine as well as abolition and pacifism, edited a collection of Quaker memoirs of the brutal 1798 uprising in Ireland against British rule.<sup>577</sup> Entitled *The Principles of Peace Exemplified in the Conduct of the Society of Friends During the Rebellion of*

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<sup>575</sup> Peter Brock, *The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660—1914*, 79; Tim Hitchcock. "John Bellers, (1654–1725), political economist and cloth merchant." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. September 23, 2004. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 5 Feb. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com>; Margaret Esther Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War: An Account of Their Principles and Practice* (London: Swarthmore Press, 1923), 166.

<sup>576</sup> Margaret Esther Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War: An Account of Their Principles and Practice* (London: Swarthmore Press, 1923), 167.

<sup>577</sup> Karl Magee. "Thomas Hancock, (1783–1849), physician." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. September 23, 2004. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 30 Jan. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12187>.

*the Year 1798* (1826), it concerned Quakers who had resided near Wexford, where the worst of the fighting and atrocities occurred in the spring and summer months. Hancock provided numerous examples of Quakers surviving the atrocities carried out by both sides because they earned a reputation for complete disengagement from the conflict. Instead the Quakers earned the respect of all by their steadfast piety and charity towards all. For Hancock, this vindicated him in his belief that the Quaker peace principle was the surest way for both individuals and nations to remain unbothered and that God loved the peacemakers and protected them.

Pacifism, for Hancock, was a matter of faith, although he cannot help admitting that sometimes individuals might be called upon to be martyrs for peace and the promotion of Christianity over the evils of mankind.<sup>578</sup> This is a point made by the Quaker diarist Mary Leadbeater, of Ballitore, who experienced much of the violence of 1798 and part of whose journal Hancock used for his book. In the fuller account of the rebellion provided by her diary, which was published after her death, Leadbeater records weeks of extreme violence and the danger she and other Ballitore residents faced. Ballitore was a Quaker stronghold, the site of a famous Quaker school started by her grandfather and she and her fellow Quakers faithfully upheld their peace testimony.<sup>579</sup> Mary Leadbeater was sure that providence would protect her and her kind, and that God was providing them with an opportunity to display their Christian sympathy towards those suffering, as well as an opportunity for reflection. At the same time, she

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<sup>578</sup> Thomas Hancock, *The Principles of Peace Exemplified in the Conduct of the Society of Friends During the Rebellion in the Year 1798* (London: R. Clay, 1828).

<sup>579</sup> Peter Lamb. "Abraham Shackleton, (1696–1771), schoolmaster." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 12 Jul. 2019, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25185>.

recorded many instances where she felt sure she was about to die at the hands of the rebels or the royalists.<sup>580</sup> Evident faith co-existed uneasily with the reality of living amidst civil unrest.

Inspiring though these stories of heroism during the 1798 rebellion might be and however much Quakers like Thomas Hancock found in them a confirmation of the practicality of a faith in absolute pacifism and divine protection, many other Quakers did not. Sturge might be prepared to undertake futile missions for the sake of his faith, but Ashworth and Bright were not. As Isichei points out this was part of the schism in the Victorian Quaker peace testimony, between a faith-based approach and a practical, frequently liberal-politics based approach to peace. When trying to compare the pacifism of Cobden with that of the Quaker community therefore, it's not a question of Cobden thought this and the Quakers thought that. Rather, it is necessary to first determine which side of this schism particular Quakers fell on before then identifying to what degree their thought overlapped with that of Cobden, and liberal pacifist ideas more generally. Bright was a liberal, fully attuned to Cobden intellectually (Quakerism was of secondary importance to him) during the Crimean War, whereas Sturge, as he had done with corn law repeal, chose to act on faith and abandoned liberal principles.

#### IV.

The response of Bright and Sturge to the Indian Rebellion of 1857, or Mutiny as it was then called, was an even starker illustration of the differences in their views on peace. The uprising in May 1857 by sepoys, native troops from the Bengal Army in Meerut, was ostensibly over their refusal to bite the cap off their ammunition cartridges, which they believed was sealed with either cow or pig fat. Cow fat offended the religious beliefs of the Hindu sepoys while pig

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<sup>580</sup> Mary Leadbeater, *The Leadbeater Papers: The Annals of Ballitore* (London: Ball and Daldry, 1862).

fat equally offended the religious beliefs of the Muslim sepoy. Lack of discipline within the Bengal army and increasing discontent with British policy in India were the greater motivating factors behind the uprising. Following the revolt in Meerut, there was a general uprising of sepoy in the northern Indian province of Uttar Pradesh that was extremely brutal. British soldiers and civilians were massacred and Delhi was seized. Britain experienced, in the words of Christopher Herbert, “a national trauma,” that was out of all proportion to the number of Britons killed in the rebellion.<sup>581</sup>

The sensationalism of the newspaper coverage was partly to blame. The *Illustrated London News* was prodigious in producing accounts of rape, murder and mutilation by the sepoy and book-length accounts published shortly after the mutiny’s suppression were equally fantastic, such as that produced by the Reverend Hollis Read, which told of children being forced to eat their murdered parents. No less sensational were the reports of British retaliation against the sepoy, including mass slaughter and the forced drinking of blood.<sup>582</sup> There was a degree of truth in these reports. No instances of forced cannibalism have ever been verified nor have most historians accepted the accounts of mass rapes, but massacres were carried out by both sides. And most importantly, in mid-1857, the public consciousness was saturated with horror at the purported events.

John Bright, at this time, was seeking election to Parliament. He had lost his Manchester seat the previous year, but thanks to Sturge had been nominated to stand for Birmingham, which was a safe liberal seat. One condition of his nomination by the liberal committee of that city was that he must vote for the suppression of the Indian Rebellion. The committee admired Bright’s

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<sup>581</sup> Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>582</sup> A. J. O. Taylor, ed., *A Companion to the Indian Mutiny of 1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22.

commitment to Parliamentary reform, but was wary of his pacifism. Bright telegraphed in reply that it would lead to “anarchy” if the rebellion was allowed to succeed and that it would be a “mercy to India to suppress it.” British misrule was responsible for the revolt in India he felt, but if civilians were being slaughtered, then military force was necessary.<sup>583</sup> And in future, he promised he would campaign for a reform of governance in India, which he had in fact already been doing.

A concern in the late 1840s with the reliability of the cotton supply from North America led him to view India as a possible alternative supplier, provided that the poor infrastructure and misgovernance he saw there was remedied. In 1849 he raised in Parliament the question of railway building and more substantially in 1851, he spoke at length in Parliament on the subject of the renewal of the East India Company charter, criticising the Company’s structure as inimical to good governance and asking the government to consult a wide variety of experts on India, not just those men connected with the East India Company.<sup>584</sup> Bright furthered his criticism of the East India Company when in 1855 he sat on a commission investigating the use of torture by East India Company officials.

Meanwhile, outside of Parliament, Bright involved himself in the activities of the India Reform Society, whose chairman he would serve as from 1855 to 1861. The writer and reformer John Dickinson, whose views aligned closely with those of Bright, had founded the Society to advocate for an increase in India’s commercial productivity (especially its cotton production) by an improvement in that country’s infrastructure and governance. Bright, like Dickinson, did not oppose the suppression of the 1857 rebellion, but wanted the public to focus its attention not on

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<sup>583</sup> *The Diaries of John Bright*, London, p. 231; Miles Taylor. “John Bright (1811–1889).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Sept. 2013. 27 Jan. 2016 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3421>>.

<sup>584</sup> *HC Deb 13 February 1849 vol 102 cc647-8*; *HC Deb 03 April 1851 vol 115 cc997-1004*.

retribution, but on reform.<sup>585</sup> In subsequent decades Bright would conclude that security of land tenure (like in Ireland) and decentralisation of government, which he felt to be what Indians preferred, were required. As late as 1883 he was arguing for land banks in India.<sup>586</sup> In short, Bright was deeply invested in Indian reform and although as a Quaker and a certain type of liberal he opposed warfare and violence in most instances, he had no qualms about suppressing the rebellion if he felt it was necessary.

Cobden's views on the Indian rebellion, as might be expected, aligned closely with those of Bright. He made it clear that the rebellion must be put down, "shoot the miscreants" he wrote in one letter.<sup>587</sup> Cobden's views on India were generally more nuanced however. Perhaps prompted by the advent of the Second Burmese War of 1852-1853, which he denounced as both immoral and financially ruinous, he had taken an interest in the question of how India was administered.<sup>588</sup> In 1853, Cobden sat on the Committee on Indian Territories, which was tasked with gathering facts that could be used for drawing up a piece of legislation that would overhaul the government of India (it was still under the control of the East India Company). At the time, Cobden felt that if the East India Company's mandate to govern was taken away and India was subjected to Crown rule, it would benefit from "enlightened public opinion," which would act as a check on dubious wars and the squandering of financial resources that could otherwise be used to make improvements.<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Robert Harrison. "John Dickinson (1815–1876), writer on India." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. October 04, 2007. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 27 Mar. 2019. [www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7606](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7606).

<sup>586</sup> James Laverne Sturgis, *John Bright and The Empire* (London: Athlone Press, 1969), 55-56.

<sup>587</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Joseph Sturge 1 July 1857 *Letters of Richard Cobden Volume III: 1854-1859* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 331.

<sup>588</sup> Richard Cobden. *How Wars Are Got up in India: The Origin of the Burmese War* (London: William and Frederick G. Chase, 1853).

<sup>589</sup> *HC Deb 27 June 1853 vol 128 cc814-834*.

But by the time of the rebellion, he was writing to Joseph Sturge that he did not subscribe to the popular argument that India was being governed for the benefit of the Indians.<sup>590</sup> In fact Cobden, forever wary of colonial adventures, felt it was against nature and reason for the British to govern a people different in language, race and religion.<sup>591</sup> In short Cobden was unsure about how India should be governed or whether it should be governed at all. But his pragmatic response to the rebellion, that it would be an act of “humanity” to suppress it, was nearly identical to Bright’s response when he said it would be “a mercy” to suppress it.<sup>592</sup>

The use of the words “mercy” and “humanity” should not obscure the fact that Bright and Cobden had less high-minded motives for wanting to see the rebellion suppressed. Both were interested in the possibility of India providing an alternative supply of cotton. Cobden in particular, as this thesis has already pointed out, tended to see other states as producers of the raw materials that industrial Britain required. This less benign interest in seeing India restored to peacefulness touches upon the “Imperialism of Free Trade” thesis produced by Robinson and Gallagher. Robinson and Gallagher argued that in the nineteenth century, Britain engaged in two forms of empire building, an informal one based on economic and cultural expansion and a formal one, based on territorial acquisition. The latter form of empire building was the type that Cobden and likeminded liberals frequently railed against, but, per Robinson and Gallagher, an informal empire was Britain’s preferred choice and formal expansion was adopted only as a last resort.<sup>593</sup> Britain’s involvement in India up to the time of the rebellion tended to be of the informal, empire building type, with private investment encouraged and, in some cases,

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<sup>590</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Joseph Sturge 6 January 1858, *Letters of Richard Cobden Volume III: 1854-1859*, 357.

<sup>591</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Joseph Sturge 1 July 1857, *Letters of Richard Cobden Volume III: 1854-1859*, 331.

<sup>592</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to John Hamilton 18 September 1857, *Letters of Richard Cobden Volume III: 1854-1859* 345.; *The Diaries of John Bright*, 231.

<sup>593</sup> John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade” *The Economic History Review*, 6 no. 1, (1953): 1-15.

subsidized by the government. Both Bright and Cobden supported this informal expansion to varying degrees. As R. J. Moore notes, they had called on the government to offer would-be investors in India a guaranteed return on their investments.<sup>594</sup> And at the height of the cotton shortage in Lancashire caused by the American Civil war, Cobden had declared that the extent of the calamity necessitated government intervention in Indian cotton cultivation and a departure from free trade principles.<sup>595</sup> In an earlier letter to Colonel Fitzmayer, Cobden had admitted that the practicalities of Indian political and economic life were not easily compatible with his abstract principles (i.e. free trade).<sup>596</sup>

There are critics of the Robinson and Gallagher thesis, but it is important to acknowledge that Bright's and Cobden's support for the suppression was more complex than it initially appears.<sup>597</sup> They were motivated both by humanitarian and economic motives. Furthermore, this support for the suppression reveals that Bright and Cobden were not pacifists in the strict sense, as defined by Martin Ceadel, but rather pacificists or conditional pacifists. If an event seemed to require military force, as the Indian mutiny did, they had no scruples about calling for its use.<sup>598</sup>

Sturge, as the absolute pacifist, could be relied upon to disagree. He sought to create a pressure group to stop the injustice of the suppression (as he perceived it) and give Indians good

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<sup>594</sup> R. J. Moore, "Imperialism and 'Free Trade' Policy in India, 1853-1854" *The Economic History Review* 17 no. 1, (August 1964), 140.

<sup>595</sup> Paul Harnetty, "The Imperialism of Free Trade: Lancashire, India, and the Cotton Supply, 1861-1865" *Journal of British Studies*, 6 no. 1, (1966), 84.

<sup>596</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Colonel Fitzmayer, 16 October 1857, quoted in R. J. Moore "Imperialism and 'Free Trade' Policy in India, 1853-1854" 145.; This acknowledgement of practical difficulties and Cobden's support for various government interventions in Indian affairs contradicts Peter Cain's assessment that Cobden rarely went against his fundamental beliefs or that he lacked any serious policy ideas regarding India. See Peter Cain "Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden," *British Journal of International Studies* 5 no. 3, (October 1979): 247.

<sup>597</sup> D. C. M. Platt, "The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations," *The Economic History Review* 21 no. 2 (August 1968), 296-306; Oliver MacDonagh "The Anti-Imperialism of Free-Trade," *The Economic History Review*, 14 no. 3, (August 1962) 489-501.

<sup>598</sup> Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730-1854*, 356-360.



government, and to this effect organised a meeting on 13 September in Manchester that was attended by a mere twenty-seven people. According to Henry Richard, president of the Peace Society, Sturge seemed to think that showing sympathy towards the Indian population, acknowledging their historic grievances and looking for ways to make amends would help abate the violence there, or at least help avert future violence.<sup>599</sup> Undeterred by the tepid response to his initial efforts, Sturge then set about organising a mission to India with Richard to report on the atrocities carried out by the British forces. Cobden informed Sturge that he could not think of two people less suited for the task they proposed and managed, with the help of others, to talk him out of such a plan.<sup>600</sup> Sturge does not seem to have given the perpetration of atrocities by the sepoy much thought or, like during the Crimean War, regarded the certainty of failure in swaying public opinion as a deterrent. His actions were dictated by a belief system that was devoutly Quaker; it required absolute pacifism and bearing witness against actions that were understood to contradict the lessons of scripture. If anything, he wrote in January 1858, the violence in India had convinced him of the necessity of the Quaker absolute peace principle.<sup>601</sup>

Evangelical fervour reinforced Sturge's beliefs. It drove him to attempt to actively counter what he thought was evil. Interestingly, most evangelicals, many of whom Sturge had worked with for abolitionism, temperance and education reform, were ardent supporters of the suppression of the mutiny. Missionaries had been allowed to work in India since 1813 (though with some sensible restrictions on their activities) and the general public opinion of many members of the missionary community and their supporters was that the mutiny was a test of their faith and zeal to convert. The Reverend Hollis Read was not the only clergyman

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<sup>599</sup> Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1864), 24.

<sup>600</sup> Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain*, 165.

<sup>601</sup> Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, 523.

celebrating the brutal suppression of the mutiny or urging a redoubling of efforts to convert the Indians to Christianity, though privately many devout Christians actually suffered a crisis of faith, horrified at this evidence of the original sinfulness of mankind and fearing that the English were not God's chosen people.<sup>602</sup> The point in mentioning evangelicalism is that it illustrates the fact that in addition to holding pacifist beliefs that were at odds with those of other pacifist liberals (who were themselves at odds with liberal thought generally), Sturge's pacifism was also at odds with a religious group (evangelicals) with whom he otherwise had a close affinity.

## V.

John Bright's more conditional, secular approach to peace is further evidenced during the American Civil War. As Margaret E. Hirst perceptively notes, Bright judged each conflict on its own terms, weighing up (and usually rejecting) the claims of its proponents.<sup>603</sup> In the case of the civil war, however, Bright was notably staunch in his support for the Northern states against the Southern states. This went against the public mood. British conservatives tended to see the conflict as the natural result of having too much democracy in government, while a series of actions taken by the Northern states in 1861, including the Morrill Tariff (a tariff on imported manufactured goods), the blockading of Southern ports and the boarding of the British vessel RMS Trent eroded public goodwill that had previously existed towards the north.<sup>604</sup> Perhaps the numerous travelogues British visitors to America had produced in increasing numbers since the

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<sup>602</sup> Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma*, 32.

<sup>603</sup> Margaret E. Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War: An Account of their Peace Principles and Practice* (London: The Swarthmore Press, 1923), 274-276.

<sup>604</sup> Donald Bellows "A Study of British Conservative Reaction to the American Civil War," *The Journal of Southern History*, 51 no. 4, (November 1985), 506.; Hugh Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 128.

1830s, which frequently depicted the political situation there as fragile, had conditioned people to expect and accept some sort of rupture.<sup>605</sup>

There was also some strong sympathy to be found for the Southern states. This support could be found not just among the anti-democratic English aristocrats of the southern counties, as depicted in traditional histories of British reactions to the civil war, but also to a degree among Lancashire factory workers, Manchester Unitarians, the ranks of the Liberal Party and sundry other places.<sup>606</sup> Then Chancellor of the Exchequer and future Liberal Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone famously said that however people might feel about the Civil War, the South had established a viable nation as well as a functioning military, and therefore a separation between North and South should be mediated.<sup>607</sup> Furthermore, as Christopher Ewan notes, the march of Northern troops into Virginia during the summer of 1861 and their subsequent defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run on the 21 July made the South look like a valiant underdog resisting an aggressor.<sup>608</sup>

Bright did not possess any Southern sympathies or the hesitancy of some of his political allies. At a speech in his Birmingham constituency he declared that he could not tolerate the existence of a nation founded solely for the purpose of upholding slavery.<sup>609</sup> Bright had no

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<sup>605</sup> Donald Bellows "A Study of British Conservative Reaction to the American Civil War." *The Journal of Southern History* 51 no. 4, (November 1985): 509.

<sup>606</sup> R. J. M. Blackett *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 4-5, 34-35.

<sup>607</sup> H. C. G. Matthew "William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), prime minister and author." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. May 19, 2011. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 29 Mar. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10787>.

<sup>608</sup> Christopher Ewan "The Emancipation Proclamation and British Public Opinion," *The Historian* 67 no.1, (Spring 2005): 5.

<sup>609</sup> John Bright "VI: America II.: The War and the Supply of Cotton," in *The Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. on Questions of Public Questions* (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1907), 75-85.

doubt slavery was the root cause of the American civil war.<sup>610</sup> At a banquet held in his honour at Rochdale in December 1861, Bright told the attendees that slavery had been a festering issue in American politics for the last thirty years. Now that the majority wished to limit the expansion of slavery, a Southern minority had decided to secede.<sup>611</sup> For Bright, the issue was as simple as that. While such a view did enjoy some support in Britain, for instance in the liberal leaning *Punch* magazine which had for years depicted how the slavery question deranged American public life,<sup>612</sup> it was not the majority view. Bright himself admitted that the English people might be confused as to the cause of the conflict since the North initially made little reference to emancipating slaves, while the South talked of economic questions.<sup>613</sup> And in his 1861 inaugural address, President Lincoln had explicitly stated that he did not intend to interfere with the institution of slavery in those Southern states.<sup>614</sup> But according to Bright, it was the inability of Southern politicians to dominate the federal government, rather than any immediate threat to the institution of slavery in their states, that pushed them towards succession.

The egregiousness of a state founded for the sole purpose of maintaining slavery was part of the reason for his unflagging support of the North. As a Quaker whose religious denomination had spent many decades successfully campaigning against slavery, Bright had an abhorrence of slavery and was a correspondent of notable American abolitionists including

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<sup>610</sup> Fellow liberal John Stuart Mill was in agreement with Bright on this point. Mill was convinced that slavery was at the heart of the conflict and that the South was fighting for slavery. See "The Contest in America," in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXI-Essays on Equality, Law and Education*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1984), 132.

<sup>611</sup> George Barnett Smith, *The Life and Speeches of the Right Honourable John Bright, Volume II* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1881), 82.

<sup>612</sup> Christopher Ewan, "The Emancipation Proclamation and British Public Opinion," *The Historian* 67 no. 1, (Spring 2005), 5.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.* at 1.

<sup>614</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861, Washington DC," *Lincoln Speeches*, ed. Allen C. Guezelo, (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 112-114.

Senator Charles Sumner and William Lloyd Garrison.<sup>615</sup> Most significantly, he was acquainted with the former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, having hosted Douglass at his home on one of his visits to England and provided an introduction for an edition of his *Life and Times*.<sup>616</sup> And of course Bright had had a decades long relationship with Joseph Sturge (who had passed away in 1859) who had been crucial in shaping the British abolitionist movement. But Bright also had political motives for supporting the Northern states.

Bright, like many liberals, including Cobden, desired greater enfranchisement at home and looked to the democracy and republicanism of the United States for inspiration. America, to him, represented a possible political future, whereas his own country represented the politics of the past, that is the politics of aristocratic government and limited franchise. The succeeding Southern states, according to Bright, were imperiling the future of popular democratic government.<sup>617</sup> This was an argument made by President Lincoln on numerous occasions. Lincoln, according to James M. McPherson, feared that if the South were allowed to secede then the American republic would collapse. With its collapse would go popular suffrage and the Constitution, and the hand of reactionary anti-democrats worldwide would be strengthened.<sup>618</sup> For Bright supporting the North was not simply about supporting the government that did not condone the institution of slavery; it was also about supporting the beacon of democratic, republican government.

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<sup>615</sup> <sup>615</sup> Massachusetts Historical Society Ms. N-1276.

<sup>616</sup> Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass From 1817 to 1882 Written by Himself. Illustrated. With an Introduction by The Right Hon. John Bright, M.P.*, ed. John Lobb (London: Christian Age Office, 1882); Thomas Hahn "John Bright's Letter to America at Rush Rees Library," *University of Rochester Library Bulletin*, XXX, no. 1 (Autumn 1977).

<sup>617</sup> George Macaulay Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 311.

<sup>618</sup> James M. McPherson, "The Whole Family of Mankind: Lincoln and the Last Best Hope Abroad" in *The Union, the Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim*, ed. Robert E. May (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 146-148.

Despite this stance Bright did not condone the bloodshed of the Civil War. Instead he walked a fine line, abhorring the violence, but hoping emancipation of the slaves and triumph of liberal government might be the positive end result. Bright characterised his stance as being neutral in action, but not neutral in sympathy or opinion.<sup>619</sup> Engendering sympathy for the North was an important part of his political activities during this period in time. For instance at a public meeting held by the Trade's Union of London he appealed to the audiences' love of freedom and exhorted them to support the North, the champion of freedom.<sup>620</sup> Similarly, two years earlier, he told an audience that if they wished to stay true to themselves and the spirit of the (1832) Reform Act, which had increased the franchise in Britain, they must have no sympathy for the Southern states.<sup>621</sup> Bright more explicitly lauded the virtues of American society in an 1863 speech at Rochdale. In that speech, he praised the equality of rights and opportunity he believed to exist there, and called America a "lifeboat" for Europeans fleeing political turmoil at home.<sup>622</sup> Slavery, Bright stated, was the great issue of the Civil War, but so too was the continuance of a free and liberal government that gave mankind hope for the future. Therefore, the Northern states deserved all the support Britain could muster.<sup>623</sup> Or as he expressed it in one Parliamentary speech, America deserved "the generous forbearance and sympathy of Englishmen."<sup>624</sup>

Keeping his government neutral was an equally important objective Bright kept in view. In one remarkable speech, in February 1862, he castigated his government for its behaviour towards the United States, by which he meant the North. Bright believed that certain politicians

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<sup>619</sup> George Barnett Smith, *The Life and Speeches of the Right Honourable John Bright, Volume II*, 82.

<sup>620</sup> John Bright, "America-III.: The Struggle in America" in *The Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. on Questions of Public Questions*, 85.

<sup>621</sup> John Bright, "Extract from a Speech Delivered at a Meeting at Rochdale," in *Speeches of John Bright, M.P., on the American Question* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1865), 7.

<sup>622</sup> John Bright, "Speech on Slavery and Succession," in *Speeches of John Bright, M.P., on the American Question*, 139.

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.* at 146-147.

<sup>624</sup> *HC Deb 27 March 1863 vol 170 cc61-69.*

and periodicals sympathetic to them stirred up fears of war with the United States by expressing the opinion that the North was ruled either by a mob or by a demagogue. In fact, Bright argued, the North was a perfectly functioning democracy with a balanced constitution. The reasonableness of that country was evidenced by the fact that despite having no precedent in American law, the government acceded to British demands to hand over the two Southern diplomats it arrested when it boarded the British ship RMS Trent. America, he concluded, deserved to be treated neutrally. But if that was not reason enough, he added, it was in Britain's best interest to remain neutral too. Pulling out a well-rehearsed peace argument, Bright cited the economic cost inflicted by warfare or merely by the talk of warfare.<sup>625</sup> These were points Bright did not tire of making in Parliament during the Civil War years.

He did not simply desire neutrality with the United States however. Bright wanted friendly neutrality as well. To his mind this could be achieved in part by preventing the building of warships for the South. Taking such an action, Bright argued in Parliament, would not be a great burden for Britain, but would create goodwill in the North and keep Britain from becoming embroiled in an acrimonious dispute.<sup>626</sup> Less than two weeks earlier, on 13 March 1863, Senator Charles Sumner asked for Bright's help on this very point, asking him to do something to ease the "bitterness" Americans felt towards Britain.<sup>627</sup>

But Bright was not an uncritical supporter of the North either. For example, he criticised in Parliament the American Secretary of State, William Henry Seward, for his complaint that Britain was shipping munitions to the South. Quite correctly Bright pointed out that such shipments were not prohibited under international law, as defined by the 1856 Declaration of

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<sup>625</sup> *HC Deb 17 February 1862 vol 165 cc380-90.*

<sup>626</sup> *HC Deb 27 March 1863 vol 170 cc61-69.*

<sup>627</sup> Charles Sumner, Letter to John Bright 13 March 1863, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner, Vol. 2*, ed. Beverley Wilson Palmer, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 273.

Paris.<sup>628</sup> More directly, he wrote numerous letters in 1861 and 1862 to Charles Sumner stating that the Morrill Tariff had soured relations between America and Britain.<sup>629</sup> Neutrality clearly required the active participation of both sides. Bright could lecture public audiences as to why the North should be supported or debate in Parliament the desirability of neutrality, but America must not make his task too difficult, he felt.

It is possible to speculate on how Bright would have acted had he been an American rather than a Briton. At that late 1861 banquet in Rochdale, Bright chastised *The Times* newspaper for proposing that the Northern and Southern states should go their separate ways. A great nation, he told the attendees, cannot simply be broken up. He then went on to compare what was unfolding in America to an insurrection in Ireland. Who would argue that it should not be suppressed, he asked? Or imagine, Bright suggested, that the nobility of Russia did not desire the emancipation of their serfs. Would an uprising by these nobles be applauded by anyone in this country?<sup>630</sup> Bright's reference to these real and hypothetical insurrections implies that he saw the American conflict in a similar light. And given his pragmatic decision to support the suppression of the Indian rebellion, it is possible he would have taken a similar view of the Southern states succeeding and would supported the North's use of force. Interestingly, if Bright had adopted this position, he would have found himself in agreement with the American Peace Society, which declared that it was opposed to wars between states, not civil wars.<sup>631</sup>

Cobden was not so quick to support the North, nor was he as certain as Bright of the North's ability to win the war. John Morley, his first biographer, attributed Cobden's hesitancy

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<sup>628</sup> *HC Deb 27 March 1863 vol 170 cc61-69.*

<sup>629</sup> George Macaulay Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 302-326.

<sup>630</sup> John Bright, "America I.: The 'Trent' Affair" in *Selected Speeches of the Right Honourable John Bright on Public Questions* (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1907), 64-65, 71-75.

<sup>631</sup> Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and international Relations 1854-1945.*



to several factors, including the greater support his free trade ideas had received in the South and the fact that the North appeared to have provoked the conflict by refusing to allow the South to secede.<sup>632</sup> Based upon his reading of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which characterized the Federal government as a contract that states had freely entered into and could leave whenever they wished, Cobden did not initially believe the North was justified in using force to maintain the union of states.<sup>633</sup> Perhaps most significantly, writes Morley, there was Cobden's unwillingness to believe that a country whose government he had idealized as much as Bright had, could dissolve into acrimony and civil war.<sup>634</sup>

A more convincing explanation for his hesitancy towards the Northern cause is that Cobden was more firmly committed to peace than Bright was. This is a point made by William Dyer Grampp in his classic study *The Manchester School of Economics*, which argues that pacifism was an abiding concern for Cobden, more so than free trade policy.<sup>635</sup> F. H. Hinsley, writing shortly after Grampp, makes a similar argument. Hinsley would not go so far as to call Cobden a pacifist in the strictest sense of the word, but nonetheless he noted that Cobden "worked for free trade because he wanted peace, not for peace because he wanted free trade."<sup>636</sup> His economic ideas were "subordinated" to a theory of pacific foreign relations.<sup>637</sup> This is not to say that Bright did not wish to create a peaceful world, but as this chapter has established he had other, competing concerns. Therefore, when war erupted in America, Bright found it easier to sympathize with the North since she embodied the principles he valued most highly, democracy

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<sup>632</sup> John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 835-837.

<sup>633</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to William Hargreaves, 21 June 1861 in John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 849-850.

<sup>634</sup> John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 835-838.

<sup>635</sup> William Dyer Grampp *The Manchester School of Economics*, 101-102, 128.

<sup>636</sup> F. H. Hinsley *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 96.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*

and abolitionism. Cobden on the other hand had to find a way to work around his most cherished of principles, pacifism, or something close to pacifism.

Slavery and its possible abolition did not concern Cobden as much. In 1861 he told the American general and politician John Fremont that emancipation of the slaves by force was not worth the cost in human suffering.<sup>638</sup> Or as he put it more bluntly in a letter to William Evans, the American slavery question was not one which an Englishman had any business addressing.<sup>639</sup> This was despite the fact that Cobden professed to abhor slavery as much as Bright did, at one point describing slavery as an “odious institution so out of time and place in a Christian and democratic community.”<sup>640</sup> Such a sentiment from Cobden was undoubtedly genuine, but it would prove to be subordinate to his greater concern, peace. This greater commitment to peace and lesser commitment to abolitionism explains somewhat the early stance he took on the war, namely Cobden’s hope for a peaceful separation of North and South.<sup>641</sup> His letters during the early stages of the Civil War contain numerous expressions of his desire for North and South to separate.<sup>642</sup> It was only Northern pride and fear of diminishing her international stature that prevented her from letting the South go her separate way, Cobden felt.<sup>643</sup> In a similar vain, he briefly toyed with the idea of North and South mediating their differences.<sup>644</sup>

This prioritizing of peace does not mean, however, that Morley and other biographers were wrong in attributing Cobden’s wariness towards the North to other causes. Cobden was also afflicted by the same qualms about the North as many of his contemporaries were. The Morill

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<sup>638</sup>Letter to Charles Sumner 13 February 1863 in Stephen Hobhouse *Richard Cobden: International Man*, 369-370.

<sup>639</sup> Letter to William Evans 9 December 1862 in *Letters of Richard Cobden Vol. 4: 1860-1865*, 346-347.

<sup>640</sup>Letter to Henry Richard 5 September 1856 in J.A. Hobson *Richard Cobden: International Man*, 170.

<sup>641</sup> Nicholas Edsall, *Richard Cobden: Independent Radical* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 378.

<sup>642</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Henry Ashworth 13 December 1861 in *Letters of Richard Cobden Vol. 4: 1860-1865*, p. 242.

<sup>643</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Louis Mallet 1 May 1861 in *Letters of Richard Cobden Vol. 4: 1860-1865*, 174.

<sup>644</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Henry Richard 18 December 1861.

Tariff and the North's blockade of Southern ports particularly vexed him, according to Marc-William Palen.<sup>645</sup> Furthermore, he continued throughout the war to express his frustration at the "great incapacity" of the North, whether on questions of economic policy or military strategy.<sup>646</sup> As Stephen Meardon points out, Cobden never fully discarded his wariness towards the North.<sup>647</sup>

But despite these qualms and deep-seated aversion to warfare, he came to be a supporter of the North. It is unlikely, as suggested by Morley, that this change in attitude towards the North was due solely to Bright's remonstrances.<sup>648</sup> More convincingly, Edsall suggests that Cobden's change in attitude towards the North was due to a process of internal reasoning. Specifically, explains Meardon, Cobden managed to convince himself that contrary to what he had initially believed, the North was not the aggressor in its conflict with the South.<sup>649</sup> By 1864 he had become convinced that the South was in fact the aggressor, since she had fired the first shots when she bombarded Fort Sumter in April 1861.<sup>650</sup> And even earlier, he had dropped the idea of a states' right to secede, telling an audience at Rochdale that it did not make sense to talk of a separation between North and South when at the same time people were talking enthusiastically of Italian unification.<sup>651</sup> If Cobden "wavered", as Morley and his other contemporary, the writer and journalist Goldwin Smith have argued, then it was only briefly.<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Marc-William Palen, *The 'Conspiracy' of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalisation, 1846-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 51.

<sup>646</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to John Bright 29 December 1862, *Letters of Richard Cobden Vol. 4: 1860-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 354.

<sup>647</sup> Stephen Meardon "Richard Cobden's American Quandary: Negotiating Peace, Free Trade and Anti-Slavery," *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, 225.

<sup>648</sup> John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 837.

<sup>649</sup> Stephen Meardon, "Richard Cobden's American Quandary: Negotiating Peace, Free Trade and Anti-Slavery," *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, 24-25.

<sup>650</sup> "Mr. Cobden and the American Question." *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 4 April 1864.

<sup>651</sup> *New York Times* 13 November 1862.

<sup>652</sup> Goldwin Smith, *Reminiscences* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), 320.

Having overcome some of his hesitancy towards the North, Cobden was at pains to maintain British neutrality during the Civil War. As has already been established by this thesis, Cobden very much desired peace for its own sake. But he also was aware that any intervention by Britain would benefit the South more than the North.<sup>653</sup> To this end, he sought to counter the activities of the “mischief-makers” on both sides of the Atlantic, whom he felt desired war. These troublemakers were similar to those identified by Bright.<sup>654</sup> According to Cobden, they included the Prime Minister Lord Palmerston and the American Foreign Secretary William Seward in America, although he also felt, as he had felt during the Crimean War, that the newspapers were at fault too. He viewed *The Times* in London and the *New York Herald* as particularly mischievous.<sup>655</sup> Various letters to Sumner in 1861, 1862 decried the acrimonious tone of these publications and sought to assure him of his desire and the desire of millions of Britons for peace with the Northern States.

Cobden made some of his most forceful arguments for neutrality in Parliament. Like Bright, he appealed to British self-interest, arguing that with £100 million plus worth of shipping on the seas, it was imperative that Britain avoid taking any action that would jeopardize its security. At the same time, he made a strong argument for fairness. America, he argued in an April 1863 speech, had stayed strictly neutral during the 1837 Canadian Rebellion, as well as during the Crimean War, and maintained a friendly tone in its diplomatic relations with Britain.<sup>656</sup> Could anyone in the House, asked Cobden in another Parliamentary speech, name a single complaint Britain made to America regarding her neutrality during the Crimean War that

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<sup>653</sup> *New York Times*, 13 November 1862.

<sup>654</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Charles Sumner 29 November 1861 Quoted in J.A. Hobson *Richard Cobden, International Man*, 345.

<sup>655</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Charles Sumner 27 November 1861 Quoted in J.A. Hobson *Richard Cobden, International Man*, 344.

<sup>656</sup> *HC Deb 24 April 1863 vol 170 cc723-37*.

she did not seek to address willingly and swiftly?<sup>657</sup> Only an “honourable reciprocity” was appropriate now that Britain and America found themselves in reversed roles. Such bellicosity as displayed by certain Members of Parliament was inappropriate, Cobden stated.<sup>658</sup> These two speeches echo the speech Bright made in Parliament a year earlier, when he argued that America deserved to be treated in a fair and neutral way.<sup>659</sup>

Cobden, like Bright, made it clear that Sumner and other Americans who desired peace had to meet him half way, to strive for peace on their end.<sup>660</sup> For example, during the Trent affair, Cobden wrote to Sumner that the United States might be legally correct in its actions, but that it was bad policy to act the way it had. It would merely serve to increase the likelihood of Anglo-American conflict by exciting the warlike tendencies of certain members of his government, as well as of the general public.<sup>661</sup> Similarly, he warned the American general Winfield Scott that a blockade of the Southern ports, by denying European manufacturers the raw materials they required, would lead to economic crisis, unemployment and popular discontent with the North. The chances of conflict between Britain and the United States would be significantly increased.<sup>662</sup> And in one of his last letters to Sumner, he expressed his disappointment that Sumner had written an article justifying the North’s decision to retain possession of the Confederate ship Florida, which had been captured in questionable circumstances in the harbor of Port Salvador, Brazil.<sup>663</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> *HC Deb 23 July 1863 vol 172 cc1259-1265.*

<sup>658</sup> *HC Deb 24 April 1863 vol 170 cc723-37.*

<sup>659</sup> *HC Deb 17 February 1862 vol 165 cc380-90.*

<sup>660</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Charles Sumner 29 November 1861 Quoted in J.A. Hobson *Richard Cobden, International Man*, 345.

<sup>661</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Charles Sumner, 17 December 1861 Quoted in John Morley *Life of Richard Cobden*, 857.

<sup>662</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Winfield Scott 6 December 1861, *Letters of Richard Cobden Vol. 4: 1860-1865*, 235.

<sup>663</sup> Edward L Pierce, *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner Vol. IV. 1860-1874* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1894), 201; John Morley, *Life of Richard Cobden*, 923-924.

At the same time Cobden also chose to expend his energies during the Civil War years in different ways from Bright by taking up the issue of maritime law and international law more generally. Cobden felt it was in the best interest of mankind that the articles of commerce required for its sustenance or for the carrying on of business (he was thinking specifically of raw cotton) should continue to be available.<sup>664</sup> Keeping commercial activity as regular as possible was essential for his global free trade vision. If all the nations of the world were to become interdependent with each country producing what it produced best, or as Cobden put it “the principle of the division of labour carried over the whole world,” there had to be a structure in place, a set of international laws, to ensure that acts of belligerence by one or more of the world’s nations did not cause excessive disruption.<sup>665</sup> As has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis, free trade between nations was only the tip of the iceberg for Cobden. Its achievement, he felt, would facilitate prosperity, peace, morality and “civilisation” more generally. Therefore, if he could not prevent the occurrence of warfare, Cobden at least hoped to minimize the harm it inflicted on the free trade future he was trying to create.

Cobden argued for three things in respect to maritime law: exempting private property from being captured at sea, exempting neutral ships from being boarded by belligerents and the limiting of blockades to strictly military targets. These were not novel concepts, either to Cobden or his contemporaries. The 1856 Declaration of Paris, which had been signed by Britain and fifty-four other states immediately after The Treaty of Paris (ending the Crimean War), already contained principles that strongly favoured the rights of neutral states during times of

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<sup>664</sup> Richard Cobden, *Maritime Law and Belligerent Rights; Speech Advocating a Reform of International Maritime Law Delivered to the Manchester Chamber of Commerce on Friday, October 25, 1862* (Manchester: A. Ireland and Co., 1862), 18.

<sup>665</sup> Richard Cobden, *Maritime Law and Belligerent Rights; Speech Advocating a Reform of International Maritime Law Delivered to the Manchester Chamber of Commerce on Friday, October 25, 1862* (Manchester: A. Ireland and Co., 1862), 18-19.

war. The Declaration included the abolishment of privateering, protection of commercial goods of a non-military nature from capture and, perhaps less agreeably to Cobden, the principle that blockades were only legitimate if effectively enforced.<sup>666</sup> The United States had not been a signatory to the Declaration but in practice abided by its principles. Interestingly, during the negotiations surrounding the Declaration of Paris the United States had proposed the so-called Marcy Amendment, which would have exempted all non-contraband goods from seizure by belligerents during a time of war. Cobden, Jan Morris Lemnitzer notes, was enthusiastic supporter of the amendment and voiced support for it in Parliament.<sup>667</sup>

There had also been more specific acts of neutrality on the part of Britain. For instance, during the 1859 Second War of Italian Independence between Austria and France and Sardinia, Britain released a declaration of her neutrality and signaled her intent to abide by the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1819 (which prohibited British subjects from serving in foreign armies).<sup>668</sup> Or there was the determined pursuit of a policy of neutrality by Lord Palmerston and other politicians during the First Schleswig-Holstein War despite widespread public sympathy for the Danish.<sup>669</sup> As Maartje Abbenhuis remarks, the doctrine of neutrality was in the ascendant in the years following the Crimean War, both for Britain and other European states. This was despite the fact that there was a considerable amount of political and military conflict on the continent, as well as Britain's continued prosecution of wars in the Far East.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>666</sup> British State Papers 1856, Vol.LXI, 155-158.

<sup>667</sup> Jan Morris Lenmitzer, *Law, Power and The End of Privateering* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 90-93.

<sup>668</sup> Maartje Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics, 1815-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 105-106.

<sup>669</sup> Shelton Hardaway Short, *British Attitudes to the Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 1969, University of Edinburgh, PhD Dissertation, 3, 108, 116.

<sup>670</sup> Maartje Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics, 1815-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 96-106.

Cobden's attempt to shape British maritime policy, like much else he attempted to achieve post corn law repeal, was not successful, although he did take tangible steps to achieve his aims. One plan that he devised was to unite the various British chambers of commerce in agitating for a reform in maritime law that would ensure the freedom of trade during times of war.<sup>671</sup> This was part of a wider attempt to unite the business community behind him. Cobden felt that having such extra-parliamentary support for his ideas would be the most effective means of achieving his aims and to this end, he used his oratorical abilities, newspaper articles and private correspondence to argue that it was in the interest of the business community to support him.<sup>672</sup>

Cobden did garner significant support, both from within the business community and from outside of it, for exempting private property from capture at sea and for the continuance of regular trade during wartime. His most tangible success occurred whilst negotiating the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty. He convinced the British to accept a French proposal that coal should not be treated as war material and therefore its export should not be halted in times of war.<sup>673</sup> Cobden's stance on blockades proved more controversial. It was not just his old antagonist, Lord Palmerston, who spoke against his call for blockades to be abolished. Even Bright felt their abolition unrealistic. Bright agreed with Cobden that the blockading of Southern ports and the hardship they rendered to the English manufacturing districts gave his government an incentive to pick a quarrel with the North in order that Britain might reopen commerce with the South. He also agreed with Cobden that physically blockading Southern ports by sinking ships was "barbarous." But at the same time, Bright confessed to Sumner that he did not see how the North

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<sup>671</sup> Richard Cobden, Letter to Duncan McLaren, 25 October 1862, West Sussex Record Office, Mss 45.

<sup>672</sup> "Introduction" in *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Vol. 4: 1860-1865*, ed Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan, xxxlx.

<sup>673</sup> Jan Morris Lenmitzer, *Law, Power and The End of Privateering*, 112



could successfully wage its war without using such tactics.<sup>674</sup> He realised the grimness of the situation, but reasoned that this was the price paid in times of war. In this sense, according to Meardon, Bright's views reflected that of his government and the majority of British politicians.<sup>675</sup>

Bright also appeared more attuned to the practical difficulties of what Cobden proposed. If neutral nations were to be allowed to continue trading with the South then who, he wondered, would be in charge of inspecting the shipments to make sure they were of a non-military nature? Presumably it would be the North, but would this not lead to new quarrels between the North and other nations? Or how about the tariffs on what was imported to the South? Would they have to be paid twice, once to the North after inspection of the cargo and a second time on arrival in a Southern port?<sup>676</sup> Cobden, however, seemed more concerned with developing a general theory of maritime law that would allow trade with all its attendant benefits to continue rather than with thinking through the issue on a practical level.

And furthermore Cobden, at this stage in his life, did not have the vigour to pursue maritime law as well as he might have at an earlier time. Repeated physical ailments kept him away from Parliament and when he was in attendance, other issues concerned him equally, including his longstanding desire for a reduction in armaments spending and his concern that appropriate funding was directed towards remedying the distress in the manufacturing districts that was a consequence of the supply of cotton from the American South drying up. There was also the outbreak of the Second Schleswig-Holstein War in 1864, which threatened to involve

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<sup>674</sup> John Bright, Letter to Charles Sumner 21 December 1861, Quoted *Proceeding of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Vol. 45 (October 1911-June 1912): 155-156.

<sup>675</sup> Stephen Meardon, "Richard Cobden's American Quandary: Negotiating Peace, Free Trade and Anti-Slavery," *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, 221-222.

<sup>676</sup> John Bright, Letter to Charles Sumner 21 December 1861, Quoted *Proceeding of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 45 (October 1911-June 1912): 154-155.

Britain and which Cobden, as might be expected, was determined to keep his government disentangled from.<sup>677</sup>

Bright and Cobden held similar views on the Civil War. It has been argued that the disagreements that arose between them on this issue could be traced back to longstanding differences. Cobden had long prioritized peace, whereas Bright had long prioritized enfranchisement and, to a lesser degree, abolitionism. This does not mean that Bright endorsed the violence of the Civil War or that Cobden did not wish to see the slaves in America freed. But it did mean that when faced with such a cataclysmic event, which touched on so many competing radical, liberal interests including free trade, pacifism and abolitionism, each individual's priorities became apparent and dictated their actions<sup>678</sup> Bright, because his priorities aligned closely with those of the North, was an early and enthusiastic supporter of one of the belligerents, whereas Cobden came around more slowly and continued to argue for peace, or at least a tempering of the violence. But both became identified as strong supporters of the North and among fellow Parliamentarians, earned the label the "Members for America." It was only on the feasibility of reforming maritime law that Cobden and Bright disagreed.

Bright's greater interest in the abolition of slavery compared to Cobden (and hence stronger support for the North) was reflective of the attitude of the majority of Quakers during this time. It also presented for Quakers the dilemma of reconciling their peace testimony with their desire for abolitionism. John Greenleaf Whittier, the American Quaker poet, took a similar view to that of his friend John Bright. He argued in one poem for "embodied public charity" towards the North, in other words, doing everything short of providing military assistance to help

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<sup>677</sup> *HC Deb 05 July 1864 vol 176 cc826-243.*

<sup>678</sup> Stephen Meardon, "Richard Cobden's American Quandary: Negotiating Peace, Free Trade and Anti-Slavery," *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, 208-211, 25-26.

defeat the South. Whittier recommended in particular that Quakers should work in hospitals tending to ill and wounded soldiers.<sup>679</sup>

Several Quaker women carried out exactly this kind of work. Some, like Abigail Hopper Gibbons, were motivated by high-minded ideals similar to those of Bright and Whittier. Gibbons was a well-known abolitionist, philanthropist and educator, and the daughter of an equally renowned abolitionist, Isaac Hopper.<sup>680</sup> For Gibbons, nursing Northern soldiers can be understood as an extension of her abolitionist activities. On the other hand, there was Cornelia Hancock, who would distinguish herself, like Gibbons, not just as a nurse to wounded soldiers, but also as a nurse to slaves who had fled north and were being taken care of in what was called the Contraband Hospital. In one letter, she wondered where those dedicated abolitionists had gone now that Washington D.C. was full of fleeing slaves requiring medical care and other assistance.<sup>681</sup> Hancock did not appear to have been motivated by such high-minded motives as Gibbons. She would instead present her decision to become a nurse as a logical response to seeing every male she knew going into the Union Army.<sup>682</sup>

Many more Quakers tended to fall on either side of the middle path Whittier advocated. The literature that was produced by the Yearly Meetings and other official Quaker bodies in America and Britain stressed, as always, the importance of the peace testimony. There were many Quakers who did take up arms for the North, perhaps as many as several thousand according to Jacquelyn Nelson in her study of Indiana Quakers, although Rufus Tudor suggests a

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<sup>679</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier "Anniversary Poem" *Poems of John Greenleaf Whittier*. (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1872), 267-268; Ean High "In War Time: Whittier's Civil War Address and the Quaker Periodical Press," *Quaker Studies* 19, no.2, (2015), 337-388.

<sup>680</sup> Sharon Hill "Isaac Tatem Hopper (1771-1852)" in *Encyclopedia of Emancipation and Abolition in the Transatlantic World*, ed. Junius Rodriguez, (London: Routledge, 2015), 300-301.

<sup>681</sup> Cornelia Hancock, Letter January 1864, Cornelia Hancock Papers, James S. Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan, M-358.

<sup>682</sup> Cornelia Hancock, *Letters of a Civil War Nurse: Cornelia Hancock, 1863-1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 2.

lower number.<sup>683</sup> Some of these Quakers were like Cornelia Hancock's brother and came from a family that was only nominally Quaker. But just as often, it would seem, Quakers enlisted out of a conviction that fighting for abolitionism was of greater importance than preserving their sect's peace testimony. The work of Thomas C. Kennedy, in which he argues that pacifism was not a strong feature of nineteenth-century Quaker life, offers a partial explanation of why this was the case.<sup>684</sup> Tudor, in his own work, makes a similar point, suggesting that few Quakers were familiar with the work of their venerable co-religionist Jonathan Dymond on pacifism.<sup>685</sup> A more straightforward explanation is the sheer importance of the abolitionist movement within Quakerism, which this thesis has already discussed in several places.

## VI.

Looking at the relationship between Cobden and the Quakers in the context of the Crimean War has revealed the varieties of liberal thought that existed during this time period. Generally, the aristocratic Whigs and assorted radicals who dominated the liberal ranks, managed to unite around the issues of parliamentary reform, free trade and fiscal responsibility, as well as a lesser commitment to the Church of England than the Conservatives. However, Cobden's brand of pacifism proved more contentious. It has been argued that post corn law repeal, many liberals seemed to endorse Cobden's pacifist arguments, but when the Crimean War was unfolding, a significant number of liberals, like the Member of Parliament Arthur

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<sup>683</sup> Jacquelyn Nelson, "Military and Civilian Support for the Civil War By the Society of Friends in Indiana," *Quaker History* 76 no. 1, (Spring 1987), 51.; Tudor based his estimate only on the official Quaker records, whereas Nelson provides evidence that many Quaker meetings chose to overlook members who had enlisted. Rufus Matthew Tudor *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (London: Macmillan., 1921), 728-730.

<sup>684</sup> Thomas C. Kennedy, *British Quakerism, 1860-1920: The Transformation of a Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9, 252-256.

<sup>685</sup> Rufus Matthew Tudor, *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, 728.

Roebuck, were attracted by the idea of standing up to Russia, a foreign despot that liberals felt had helped crush their revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1848. Support for the development of liberal government abroad seemed to trump any pacifist considerations.

Looking at Cobden and the Quakers' responses to the Indian Rebellion and American Civil War has further revealed the less than unified nature of liberalisms' views on peace and war. Cobden, despite the great cost he incurred for maintaining his pacifist views during the Crimean War, supported the suppression of the Rebellion on the grounds of pragmatism. It has also been argued that Cobden and Bright had an economic motive for wanting the Rebellion suppressed and such a motive touches upon the Imperialism of Free Trade hypothesis proposed by Robinson and Gallagher. Finally, it has been shown that the response of British liberalism to the American Civil war was somewhat mixed. Liberals like John Bright, because they strongly identified with the democratic government of America and the abolitionist movement, were enthusiastic supporters of the North whilst other liberals were more hesitant, either because the South was more receptive to free trade ideas or because, in the case of Cobden, they were more firmly attached to a pacifist doctrine.

Meanwhile, the Quakers' response to the wars looked at in this chapter has demonstrated the role religion played within liberalism as well as the complicated nature of the Quaker peace testimony. Admittedly, it has been pointed out, Quaker opposition to warfare was unique: for example, at the start of the Crimean War most other religious denominations supported it to varying degrees. But Quakers, like other dissenting religious groups, had been vital to liberalism and had shaped its thinking. Particularly, as the earlier section of this thesis has shown in the context of the corn laws, religion added a moral dimension to the economic arguments that were being advanced; it was a bit more difficult to accuse free trade liberals of wanting to serve their

own financial interests when dissenting ministers, or a morally upright Quaker like Joseph Sturge, were declaring that their aim was not material prosperity alone, but rather equalizing God's gifts. In exchange for this moral contribution, liberalism in turn adopted causes that were important to dissenters, such as the removal of continuing civil disabilities for those outside the Church of England, non-denominational education and so on.<sup>686</sup>

In the context of peace, this relationship continued as well, particularly the working together of Quakers and liberals. But, as this section has suggested, the tension between Quakers like Sturge holding absolute pacifist beliefs grounded in theology and Cobden, who advanced the cause of peace along secular lines, was always present. The Crimean War merely provided a stark illustration of this fact. Quakers had been happy to contribute funds to campaigns for the promotion of international arbitration and armament reductions, but when war came, many Quakers fell back on their religious beliefs and in the case of Sturge, Charleton and Pease, engaged in an impossible final effort to avoid the hostilities, while peaceful liberals like Cobden, realising how isolated they were, quickly fell silent.

John Bright's response to the Crimean War, however, has revealed that Quakerism was not united in its devotion to the principle of absolute pacifism. Bright's reticence in response to the war and occasional hostility to the peace principle or outright rejection of it during the Indian Mutiny was undoubtedly representative of the views of many other Quakers. The American Civil War has further illustrated the complicated nature of the Quaker peace testimony by revealing that many Quakers, because of their deep concern for abolitionism, chose to ignore their peace testimony and support the Northern states in a direct or indirect way. This section

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<sup>686</sup> Ian Bradley, *The Optimists* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 100-110.

therefore has shown not simply the ways in which Quakers engaged with liberal ideas on peace, but also the schism inherent in that religious group as well.

## Conclusion

This thesis has sought to create a picture of mid-nineteenth century British liberalism. To achieve this, the intellectual and political affinities and antipathies between the liberal politician Richard Cobden and members of the Quaker community have been examined in the context of repeal of the Corn Laws, opposition to the Crimean War and other wars, and responses to the Irish potato famine. These events were selected on the basis that they involved Cobden engaging in a meaningful way with prominent, politically liberal Quakers. Addressing these events, it has been suggested, led Cobden and certain Quakers, like John Bright, to develop new ideas on economic policy, foreign intervention, human welfare and politics in general. Examining these new ideas has in turn offered a new insight into some of the bigger themes within liberalism during this period.

The heterogeneous nature of politics during this time and how liberalism in particular was a “casserole” of not entirely agreeable ingredients has been one of the recurring themes of this thesis.<sup>687</sup> It has been illustrated that there was no definitive set of liberal doctrines. Rather, to be liberal was an attitude and included the selective adoption of a variety of ideas. For instance, the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham was consulted when the question of pauperism became pressing, as is evidenced by the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, but when foreign nationalists like Lajos Kossuth or Giuseppe Mazzini spoke of liberating the Hungarian and Italian people, respectively, from oppressive foreign despots, military

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<sup>687</sup> Jon Parry, *The Rise and Fall in Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.



intervention seemed a duty for many liberals and Bentham's inclination towards pacifism was ignored.<sup>688</sup> On the subject of pacifism, Cobden would prove to be more consistent than many of his fellow liberals. Similarly, free trade thinking might appear to be the most consistent feature of liberalism, but few liberals followed such a doctrine in all circumstances as this thesis has shown with reference to Irish policy. Therefore, any attempt to ascribe a certain influence to Cobden and the Quakers over the development of liberal thought in Britain must be tempered by the fact that liberalism was not a unified system of thought and their influence did not extend to all individuals who identified as liberal. At the same time, this thesis has argued that there were significant ways in which Cobden and the Quakers did contribute to the development of liberalism.

The role of Cobden and the Quakers in popularizing ideas of political economy and making free trade an important feature of liberalism was a crucial argument that the first section of the thesis has made. Operating within the framework of the Anti-Corn Law League, Cobden delivered hundreds of speeches to crowds that could exceed ten thousand in number, while the league published dozens of booklets and pamphlets of his writings. The positive message he conveyed had much to do with increasing the popularity both of the league and of himself. Cobden, it has been demonstrated, had a Smithian belief that the economy would keep improving, not believing like Ricardo that wages would tend towards the subsistence level, nor worrying like Malthus that greater prosperity would increase the population to the point that it would outstrip the food supply. It was Cobden's belief that the only thing that stood in the way of this unlimited growth (and hence prosperity for all) was government interference that went

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<sup>688</sup> Peter Mandler. "Sir Edwin Chadwick (1800–1890), social reformer and civil servant." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 16 Sep. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-5013>.

beyond the bare minimum required to ensure the security of individuals and their property. It was a simple, but effective message.

The Quakers, it has been argued, helped disseminate this message to a wider audience. For instance, Ashworth tailored Cobden's free trade message to suit the religious by substituting euphemisms like distributing God's gifts equally in the place of free trade.<sup>689</sup> Asworth was aware of how talk of profits and losses could unsettle the religiously minded. Bright meanwhile tapped into longstanding dissenter grievances with the upper-classes (who were seen as allied with an oppressive established church) by building upon Cobden's message that repeal of the corn laws was not so much about bringing a benefit to manufacturers like himself, but about confronting an egregious example of self-serving aristocratic legislation. Bright's inquiry into the Game Laws has been portrayed as a continuation of his attack on the upper-classes. The Quakers were sincere in their religious beliefs and the benefits that the corn law repeal and laissez faire economic practices would render.

At the same time however, the case of Joseph Sturge has revealed that otherwise strongly committed advocates of free trade did not unquestionably support it. Sturge fell out with the repeal movement when he voiced support for tariffs against slave grown sugar, arguing that abolition of slavery was more important than economic policy. This minor dispute within the free trade movement illustrates that a diverse group of supporters, including an evangelical Quaker abolitionist like Sturge, could be recruited, but that their support might be conditional on

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<sup>689</sup>Henry Ashworth, Letter to Richard Cobden, April 1842, Correspondence with Richard Cobden Vol. VII 1841-1859, f. 325, British Library, Add MSS 43653.

such economic doctrines conforming to their preexisting beliefs. This has been further illustrated in the second chapter of this thesis on Ireland and the famine.

It has been argued that the reason why Quakers such as the future MP Jonathan Pim, who was liberal in politics and normally an advocate of free trade and self-help, were so willing to act to alleviate the Irish famine, was partly due to their Quakerism. Quakerism emphasised philanthropy. Such a doctrine was rooted in New Testament theology, but its practice was developed in response to the deprivations early Quakers suffered as a result of religious persecution in the seventeenth-century. At the same time, it has been suggested that such philanthropy should not obscure the fact that many Quakers involved in famine relief were also concerned with creating a healthy Irish economy in which they could flourish.

This desire to effect improvement in Ireland's economy and reduce the likelihood of a future famine led several Quakers to advocate for land reform, which was a significant and often overlooked contribution Quakers made to mid-nineteenth century liberal political discourse. In particular the role of Pim, the co-secretary of the central relief committee in Dublin, in advocating for reform of the Irish land system, has been almost entirely ignored by historians with the exception of R. D. Collison Black.<sup>690</sup> But as this thesis has shown, Pim was a tireless and lifelong advocate for the necessity of addressing the issue of unproductive and indebted Irish estates. He authored several articulate essays on the importance of treating land as a commodity

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<sup>690</sup> R.D. Collison Black, *Economic Thought and the Irish Question, 1817-1870*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

that could be bought and sold like any other. The 1848 and 1849 Encumbered Estates Acts, which Cobden supported, were drafted with Pim's input.

In order to better coordinate their relief efforts, the Quakers accumulated a vast knowledge of land practices that helped inform public debate on the condition of Ireland, which the famine had made so pressing. James Hack Tuke, largely forgotten now, became an expert on the subject whose views were solicited by government officials and whose program of assisted emigration for Irish families received financing from government. His ideas have drawn the ire of some historians, but Tuke's belief that Irish land was too crowded to sustain its population was widely supported at the time. Similarly, it has been shown that Bright was in the vanguard of Irish policy when he got the so-called Bright clause inserted into Gladstone's 1870 Land Act, which instituted a scheme for tenant farmers to be loaned the money to buy their plots. As this thesis has demonstrated, Bright had been engaged in a decades-long struggle to get a piece of legislation passed that would encourage greater land ownership, something that his experience of famine-stricken Ireland had convinced him was necessary to improve the condition and security of the Irish farmer.

Bright and the other Quakers involved in land reform were only a small part of the land reform movement that would become central to liberalism, but it has been argued that in their efforts, they represented some of its main strands. Pim expressed the view that a free trade in land was necessary. Tuke believed that emigration was essential. Meanwhile, Bright focused on peasant proprietorship. For this reason, the thesis has argued that the Quakers' involvement in famine relief is an important subject both because of the innovativeness of their efforts, and because their thinking about the condition of Ireland provides a window into liberal thought on Ireland. Cobden, as this thesis has shown, expressed support for free trade in land and peasant

proprietorship. He also looked to European systems of land ownership as possible models to emulate. However, he did not develop ideas on Irish land reform to the extent that certain Quakers did.

The third chapter on the Crimean War has illustrated the place of pacifism both within Victorian culture and within liberalism. As this thesis has shown, pacifism in nineteenth-century Britain consisted of two distinct strands. The first strand, was theologically grounded, absolute pacifism, which was central to Quakerism and enjoyed some support among other dissenting Christian groups and individuals. The second strand was based upon secular reasoning and in most cases stressed the desirability of peace, rather than pacifism in all circumstances. Utilitarian thinking could be found in this second strand, but increasingly, Cobden's free trade, peace doctrine came to dominate it. For a time, this Cobdenite pacifism became an important component of liberal thinking both in Britain and abroad, particularly in France. But the Crimean War revealed that free trade and peace were not as popular as Cobden believed. Whereas he had argued that the benefits of international trade alone would improve the conditions of people both in Britain and abroad, many liberals succumbed to the arguments of foreign nationalists that there were states, in this case the Russian Empire, that acted as a block on progress and could only be removed by force.<sup>691</sup> Liberalism's abandonment of Cobdenite pacifism and preference for both free trade and use of military force was already in the offing, as the Opium War had

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<sup>691</sup> J.S. Mill's 1859 essay "A Few Words Non-Intervention," in which he enumerated the virtues of a non-interventionist foreign policy but made an exception for the removal of despotic regimes that oppressed the people other nations, is typical of this strand of liberal thinking.

demonstrated, but the almost complete lack of support Cobden received from liberals in his opposition to the Crimean war and vilification by the press starkly demonstrated this point.

Responses to the Indian Mutiny and American Civil War have further demonstrated the complexity of pacifist thinking within British political culture. Only Sturge, the absolute pacifist, would oppose the suppression of the Mutiny. Cobden and Bright, for all their distaste of military conquest and foreign expansion, supported the suppression on the grounds of pragmatism. Bright and Cobden, it has been suggested, were not simply concerned about human welfare, but were equally concerned with developing India's economic resources. This second concern, it has been argued, touches on the imperialism of free trade hypothesis, advanced by Robinson and Gallagher and others, which argues that imperialism could frequently be of an informal variety, based on economic and cultural expansion.<sup>692</sup>

My examination of responses to the American Civil War, however, has revealed one of the deepest disagreements between Bright and Cobden. Whereas Cobden was reluctant to voice support for either side and sought innovative ways to keep commerce unaffected by the conflict, Bright, either out of a Quaker desire to see the slaves of America emancipated or because he had a greater admiration for American democratic ideals, was notably staunch in his support for the northern states. What this disagreement reveals is that even when two political figures fundamentally agree on a doctrine (in this case peace and free trade), their commitment to it could waver when faced with competing concerns.

In short, by focusing on Cobden and a number of critical Quaker figures, this thesis has provided a series of valuable insights on mid-nineteenth century liberal politics that differs from

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<sup>692</sup>John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade" *The Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (August 1955), 1-15; Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism, 1750-1850*.

previous studies of this period, and allows the thoughts and actions of lesser-known figures to be revealed. Such an approach, it has been argued, has provided an alternative and richer understanding of mid-nineteenth century liberal politics. Placing Quakers and their interaction with Cobden at the centre of corn law repeal has revealed a greater depth to the repeal movement than simply a contest between the landed elite in Westminster, and the mill owners in Manchester. Similarly, focusing so extensively on Quakers has shifted the focus away from the callous attitude of government towards Irish famine relief and revealed other types of relief efforts, while also revealing expressions of liberal thought on the land question that have rarely been noticed, but which deserve to be studied by historians as much as have Gladstone's Irish land reform bills. And finally, looking at the intersection of liberal thought, pacifism and Quaker religious practice in the context of opposition to the Crimean War, Indian Mutiny and American Civil War has offered a new understanding of the place of pacifist ideas within Victorian political culture.

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