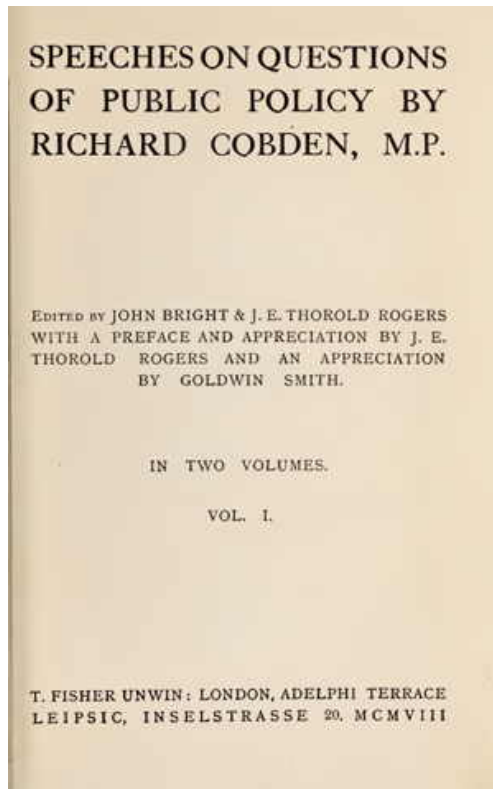


**RICHARD COBDEN,**  
*Speeches on Public Policy*(1908)  
**Two volumes in One**



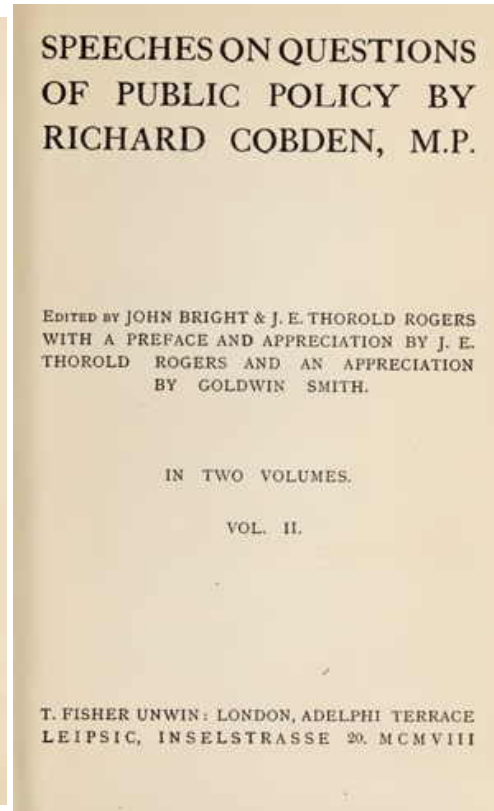
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VOL. I.

T. FISHER UNWIN: LONDON, ADELPHI TERRACE  
LEIPSIK, INSELSTRASSE 20. MCMVIII



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### *Editor's Introduction*

To make this edition useful to scholars and to make it more readable, I have done the following:

1. inserted and highlighted the page numbers of the original edition
  2. not split a word if it has been hyphenated across a new line or page (this will assist in making word searches)
  3. added unique paragraph IDs (which are used in the "citation tool" which is part of the "enhanced HTML" version of this text)
  4. retained the spaces which separate sections of the text
  5. created a "blocktext" for large quotations
  6. moved the Table of Contents to the beginning of the text
  7. placed the footnotes at the end of the book
  8. reformatted margin notes to float within the paragraph
  9. inserted Greek and Hebrew words as images
-

## CONTENTS OF [VOL. I.](#)

- [Preface](#), p. vi
  - [An Appreciation, by Goldwin Smith](#), p. xi
  - [An Appreciation, by J. E. Thorold Rogers](#), p. xiv
  - [FREE TRADE.](#)
    - [I. Her Majesty's Speech.—Amendment on the Address. House of Commons, August 25, 1841](#), p. 1
    - [II. Corn-Laws.—Mr. Villiers' Annual Motion. House Of Commons, February 24, 1842](#), p. 8
    - [III. Distress of the Country. House of Commons, February 17, 1843](#), p. 15
    - [IV. Corn-Laws.—House of Commons, May 15, 1843](#), p. 23
    - [V. London, September 28, 1843](#), p. 33
    - [VI. London, October 13, 1843](#), p. 41
    - [VII. Manchester, October 19, 1843](#), p. 49
    - [VIII. London, February 8, 1844](#), p. 58
    - [IX. Effect of Protective Duties.—House of Commons, March 12, 1844](#), p. 69
    - [X. London, May 8, 1844](#), p. 89
    - [XI. London, July 3, 1844](#), p. 97
    - [XII. Manchester, October 24, 1844](#), p. 108
    - [XIII. London, December 11, 1844](#), p. 116
    - [XIV. London, January 15, 1845](#), p. 126
    - [XV. Agricultural Distress.—House of Commons, March 13, 1845](#), p. 133
    - [XVI. London, June 18, 1845](#), p. 147
    - [XVII. Manchester, October 28, 1845](#), p. 158
    - [XVIII. Birmingham, November 13, 1845](#), p. 165
    - [XIX. London, December 17, 1845](#), p. 173
    - [XX. Manchester, January 15, 1846](#), p. 181
    - [XXI. Corn-Laws.—House of Commons, February 27, 1846](#), p. 188
    - [XXII. Manchester, July 4, 1846](#), p. 199
    - [XXIII. House of Commons, March 8, 1849](#), p. 203
    - [XXIV. Leeds, December 18, 1849](#), p. 211
    - [XXV. Aylesbury, January 9, 1853](#), p. 223
  - [Letter from Mr. Cobden to the Tenant Farmers of England.—To the Farming Tenantry of the United Kingdom](#), p. 230
  - [FINANCE.](#)
    - [I. Manchester, January 27, 1848](#), p. 233
    - [II. Manchester, January 10, 1849](#), p. 242
    - [III. House of Commons, March 8, 1850](#), p. 252
    - [IV. International Reduction of Armaments.—House of Commons, June 17, 1851](#), p. 263
    - [V. House of Commons, December 13, 1852](#), p. 270
    - [VI. House of Commons, April 28, 1853](#), p. 283
    - [VII. House of Commons, July 22, 1864](#), p. 294
  - [Endnote](#)
-

## CONTENTS OF [VOL. II.](#)

- [WAR.](#)
    - [I. Russian War.—House of Commons, December 22, 1854](#), p. 310
    - [II. Russian War.—House of Commons, June 5, 1855](#), p. 321
    - [III. Russian War.—Manchester, March 18, 1857](#), p. 337
    - [I. American War.—House of Commons, April 24, 1863](#), p. 350
    - [II. American War.—Rochdale, November 24, 1863](#), p. 359
    - [China War.—House of Commons, February 26, 1857](#), p. 370
  - [FOREIGN POLICY.](#)
    - [I. House of Commons, June 12, 1849](#), p. 389
    - [II. London, October 8, 1849](#), p. 399
    - [III. London, January 18, 1850](#), p. 405
    - [IV. House of Commons, June 28, 1850](#), p. 415
    - [V. Rochdale, June 6, 1861](#), p. 425
    - [VI. House of Commons, August 1, 1862](#), p. 438
    - [VII. Manchester, October 25, 1862](#), p. 449
    - [VIII. Rochdale, October 29, 1862](#), p. 462
    - [IX. Rochdale, November 23, 1864](#), p. 479
  - [INDIA.](#)
    - [House of Commons, June 27, 1853](#), p. 497
  - [PEACE.](#)
    - [I. Wrexham, November 14, 1850](#), p. 509
    - [II. Manchester, January 27, 1853](#), p. 520
  - [POLICY OF THE WHIG GOVERNMENT.](#)
    - [Manchester, January 23, 1851](#), p. 530
  - [PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.](#)
    - [I. House of Commons, July 6, 1848](#), p. 540
    - [II. London, November 26, 1849](#), p. 549
    - [III. Manchester, December 4, 1851](#), p. 558
    - [IV. Rochdale, August 17, 1859](#), p. 563
    - [V. Rochdale, August 18, 1859](#), p. 578
  - [EDUCATION.](#)
    - [I. Manchester, January 22, 1851](#), p. 589
    - [II. House of Commons, May 22, 1851](#), p. 598
    - [III. Manchester, December 1, 1851](#), p. 604
    - [IV. Barnsley, October 25, 1853](#), p. 611
  - [Index](#), p. 619 to 662
-

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Richard Cobden at about twenty six.

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## Preface ↩

THE Speeches contained in these two volumes have been selected and edited at the instance of the Club which was established for the purpose of inculcating and extending those political principles which are permanently identified with Cobden's career. They form an important part of the collective contribution to political science, which has conferred on their author a reputation, the endurance of which, it may be confidently predicted, is as secure as that of any among the men whose wisdom and prescience have promoted the civilization of the world.

These Speeches are not in any sense compositions. Cobden was, in the strictest meaning of the words, an extempore speaker. He pretended neither to rhetoric nor to epigram, though the reader will find passages in these volumes the unaffected grace of which is as pleasing as the highest art, and illustrations which have all the force of the liveliest humour. But, as a rule, the speech is, as Sir Robert Peel called it, when the speaker's career was in its beginnings, "unadorned." The style is homely, conversational, familiar, and even garrulous. But it is always clear, and invariably suggests such a comprehension of the subject which is discussed, as gives the exposition all the force of a debate. So cogent and exhaustive was Cobden's reasoning, that, in almost every case, they who attempted to resist the effect of his conclusions were constrained to betake themselves to some irrelevant issue, or to awaken some prejudice against him. What he said, too, was stated with great geniality and kindness. It was difficult to refute the speaker, it was impossible to quarrel with the man. He was as popular as he was wise. His manner was as modest as his speech was lucid.

There is no subject which Cobden treated which he did not take care to know perfectly well. He was never unprepared, for he never spoke on any topic with which he was not thoroughly conversant. He read up everything which he talked about. Hence his facts were as indisputable as his inferences were precise. He was never obliged to repudiate a principle which he had once adopted and announced, for he never accepted a compromise on any question of public policy. Hence he has done more than any other statesman to make the administration of public affairs an exact science. And for the same reason, as he entered into Parliament in the full maturity of his powers, he never had to abandon a single position which he accepted, maintained, and affirmed.

Cobden's name is principally identified with the agitation which led to a Free Trade in Food. This is not the place to enter into the history of that great financial reform, because an examination of all the statements which were made in defence of that restrictive policy to which the Corn-laws were the coping-stone, would require, in itself, the space of a special treatise. Most of them, it will be found, are taken [vii] and refuted in the Free-trade speeches with which these volumes commence. A quarter of a century after the final overthrow of the system, we can have no conception of the warmth and vindictiveness with which that system was defended, and of the courage, readiness, and learning which were needed in order to combat protective theories, and finally to overthrow them.

The immediate object of the organisation with which Cobden was associated, was the repeal of all protective taxes. For the purpose of carrying out this work, Cobden sacrificed fortune and health. The labours which he undertook during the campaign against the Corn-laws materially injured a constitution which, like that of all his family, was never robust. The unremitting attention which he gave to the details of an agitation, which confronted such vast and such angry interests, left him no leisure for conducting the affairs of his own manufacture. But once embarked in political life, Cobden could not abandon it, or retreat



from it. He knew very well that after he had organised and carried out the campaign against the Corn-laws, there were other violations of economical laws, which characterised the social system of this country, the correction of which was only less important than the repeal of those monopolies, though the machinery for correcting them was by no means equally available.

He saw, for example, that no ultimate benefit would ensue to the mass of the people by the abolition of all taxes on food, unless what he called by a pardonable metaphor, Free Trade in Land, were also established. By this he meant the removal of that artificial scarcity of marketable land, which is directly traceable to certain usurpations in the real or presumed interest of the aristocracy, by which the devolution of land is regulated according to the custom of primogeniture, and by which estates are restrained from alienation under the covenants of a strict settlement. Thus, in the last year of his life, and in the last speech which he made, he regretted his age and failing physical energies, since he was now debarred from entering on an agitation for the abolition of those customs and privileges which make land the monopoly of the rich, and condemn the English peasantry to hopeless labour.

The same anxiety to carry out Free Trade to its legitimate consequences made Cobden an advocate of Financial Reform, and thus induced him to suggest the extension of one part, which is as yet the least equitable part of our financial system, and even to urge the absolute abandonment of the other part. He wished to see the United Kingdom a free port, rightly recognising that the more fully such a result could be obtained, the greater might be the industry, and the greater must be the affluence of his countrymen. Hence he advocated direct instead of indirect taxation.

Again, Cobden had the greatest anxiety to improve the moral and material condition of the people, and he had certain very definite views as to the machinery by which the improvement could be effected. He was one of the earliest advocates of a system of National Education. But, in the face of facts, he saw that it could be universal, only if it were permanently freed from the risk of denominational intrigue. He knew, again, that excessive taxation presses with increasing weight on those whose income supplies the narrowest margin above the necessities of [viii] life. By far the largest part of the public expenditure is levied for the maintenance of the Services, and he was never weary of demanding that the cost of these Services should be materially reduced. He saw that the apology for these Services was to be found in the Foreign Policy of this country; and from the earliest days of his political career he urged the country to adopt the principle of non-intervention. He clearly understood that if the people of England busied themselves solely with their own defence, the charges on the revenue might be so reduced that the industry and enjoyments of the people would be vastly augmented.

But he founded his arguments on behalf of international amity, justice and peace, on far higher grounds than the material interests of society. He strongly held to the opinion that there is a retribution for national crimes, and he believed that the Foreign Policy of this country had been constantly immoral. He was persuaded that no advantage which can be obtained by war is equal to the loss, misery, and demoralisation which inevitably accompany it; and he knew that every end which warfare aims at can be safely, honourably, and cheaply obtained by arbitration. He denounced war as barbarism, and he saw that the stimulants to war are almost invariably supplied by those violent and self-seeking partisans who appeal to professional prejudice or a sordid patriotism in order to achieve their personal objects. After all means of averting war had failed, after every appeal to international law and public faith had been exhausted, a defensive war might, he held, be just and necessary; and defence, he very easily recognised, was far stronger than attack, far cheaper than aggression.

With the same end, he strove to do away with one of the professional incentives to war, the custom of confiscating unarmed vessels, belonging to the subjects of a belligerent Power, on the high seas. The retention of such a custom by a nation whose mercantile marine is larger than that of any other community was, he saw, an act of astonishing folly, or still more amazing ignorance. To those who argued that the risk of loss by such a nation is a powerful preventive of war, he answered, that war is never desired by a people, but by politicians and military men, whose ambition and cupidity are fired by the prospect of advancement or profit, and it is in the interest of such persons that the present custom is retained. The experience of the late American War has taught US that this barbarous and indefensible practice has other and more serious consequences.

In the same spirit, and with the same purpose, he dissected the motives which induce Governments to contract, and money-dealers to negotiate, Public Loans. He saw that these obligations were generally created in order to subserve some aggressive or tyrannical policy; and he contrasted the inconsistency of the public conscience, which was always ready to sympathise by demonstration with an oppressed people, and yet did not scruple to lend money to the oppressor, in order to enable him to outrage humanity with safety. He held that the men who lend money to profligate Governments occupy exactly the same place with those who make advances for infamous purposes, and that, until such time as the public conscience scouts their proceedings, they should at least be denied sympathy and assistance in recovering principal or interest from their defaulting debtors.

[ix]

To these views of Mr. Cobden on War Expenditure and Foreign Policy, his opponents had nothing to answer, except by charging him with advocating peace at any price. It is almost superfluous to say that the charge was false, and nearly as superfluous to state that they who made it knew it to be false. The reader of these Speeches will find sufficient proof that the speaker put no limit to the necessary cost of defence—that he simply wished to take away the motives and material of aggression.

It was a common saying about Cobden that his range of political action was narrow. A glance at the topics treated in these volumes, a little reflection on their magnitude, will be a sufficient proof that this charge also is unfounded. But Cobden's political speeches cover only a small number of the subjects on which his opinions were strongly and clearly formed. They who had the advantage of his familiar intercourse, and who regularly corresponded with him, know how universal was his knowledge on political subjects, how lucid and sagacious were his interpretations of political events. When, in time to come, his correspondence is given to the world, it will be found to be a copious and profound history of his public life, and of the facts to which he contributed, or which he witnessed. There was hardly a subject of social interest on which he had not thought deeply, on which he did not speak and write wisely. But clear and wise as he was, his manner was inexpressibly gentle and modest.

There is one misstatement which was freely made against Cobden during his lifetime, and which has been reiterated since by such shallow people as form their opinions at secondhand. He was supposed to have been very moderately informed, to have ridiculed all learning, to have despised culture, and to have overvalued the educational importance of modern politics. At the time when it was first promulgated, the calumny was convenient and ingenious. It was intended to discredit Cobden's reputation as a statesman among educated persons. To repeat it now is to be guilty of an act of gross carelessness—an act of which no responsible and competent person would be guilty.

What Cobden did comment on, once and again, in terms of increasing severity, is the utter ignorance, on subjects of great political importance, which prevails among young men who have graduated at the older Universities, and who, under the peculiar parliamentary institutions of this country, are presented to seats in the House of Commons, or purchase admission into it, or succeed to analogous positions in the House of Lords. The system which introduces these personages to the Legislature puts them also into the Administration. Now, Cobden used to argue that the particular knowledge which the older Universities impart to such people, is of absolutely no use to them in the responsible place which they occupy, and that, considering the magnitude of the interests with which they deal, it is of paramount importance that they should have some knowledge of their own country and its history, and should further-more gain similiar information about those other countries with which their own has relations. He commented also on the danger which this country runs by incompetence and ignorance on the part of Ministers and Members of Parliament, and he might, had he wished to strengthen his case, have pointed to the absurd and mischievous misconceptions which prevailed among statesmen and politicians of the academical type [x] as to the circumstances of the American War. Now, Cobden did not stand alone in this judgment. One of the commonest charges against the English is what foreigners call their insular habits, by which is probably meant a boisterous self-complacency, and a contemptuous disregard for the opinions of other nations. There are persons who consider this coarse and ignorant pride patriotic.

But, on the other hand, no man honoured with a more generous and modest deference that culture which he confessed to lack, but which he saw made in certain cases, as it always should be made, the substratum and method of practical experience. The scholarship which was coupled with a knowledge of modern facts, and which was made the means for arranging and illustrating such facts, was in Cobden's eyes an invaluable acquisition. For pedantry he had a hearty contempt. For learning, which is of no age or country, he had an exaggerated respect. But the difference between pedantry and learning lies in the fact that the former is satisfied with a narrow portion of the facts which constitute the history of the human mind, while the latter grasps all the inductions of social philosophy, or at least strives to do so.

If exact and careful knowledge of history constitutes learning, Cobden was, during the years of his political career, the most learned speaker in the House of Commons. Dealing as he did with broad questions of public policy, he got up his case accurately and laboriously. His facts, culled from all sources, were judiciously selected, and were never challenged. A cautious student of political economy, he knew that this science, the difficulty of which he fully recognised, was, or ought to be, eminently inductive, and that an economist without facts is like an engineer without materials or tools.

It was originally intended that all the Speeches contained in these volumes should have had the advantage of Mr. Bright's revision. Mr. Bright has done this service to those which are contained in the first volume. But, after he had given the same assistance to a few sheets in the second, he was unhappily seized with illness, and has been unable to give his further supervision to the work. It is hoped that this loss will not detract too much from the value of this publication.

A few of the Speeches were corrected by the speaker himself. But not a few, delivered on the spur of the occasion, have been extracted from newspaper reports, and have sometimes required the corrections of conjectural criticism. Mr. Cobden was a rapid speaker, and, as his voice became feebler, he was not always easy to report accurately.

The thanks of the Editors are due to the Proprietors of the "Manchester Examiner and Times," who were good enough to put the files of this influential paper at their disposal.

Oxford, *April* 14, 1870.

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## AN APPRECIATION BY GOLDWIN SMITH ↩

THE following paper, inserted here by kind permission of the publishers, appeared originally in Macmillan's Magazine for May, 1865 (the month after Mr. Cobden died):—

The honours paid by men of all parties to Richard Cobden at his death seem to dispose of the charges so constantly levelled against him during his life, of want of chivalry and want of patriotism. Men will honour in his tomb an opponent whom, from extreme difference of opinion, they would not—whom perhaps from the evil exigencies of party they could not—have honoured while he was alive; but they will not honour what is really sordid and mean even in the tomb. Englishmen might forgive and forget, they might even regard with gratitude, the author of patriotic, though misguided counsels, when the lips by which those counsels had been uttered had become suddenly mute: but even when touched by mortality they would not forgive or forget treason.

If "chivalry" means anything, it means the religious consecration of a man's powers to the redress of wrong. The powers consecrated in the Middle Ages were those of the soldier; the wrong redressed was the greatest of which mediæval Christendom could form a conception—the violation of pilgrims on their way to the sepulchre of Christ. In these days the powers to be consecrated are other than those of the soldier; the wrongs to be redressed are different and less romantic. And no powers ever were more thoroughly, or (as religion was at the root of his character) we may say more religiously, consecrated to the redress of wrong than those of Richard Cobden. No Sir Galahad ever sought the Holy Graal with a more disinterested and passionate ardour than he sought cheap bread for the people and social justice. No champion of Christendom ever went forth to combat giants and enchanters with more fervent faith or in a spirit of more intense self-devotion than he went forth to combat the demon of war. Free-trade and Non-intervention are less poetical than "Save the Sepulchre!" The figure of the Manchester cotton-spinner was much less picturesque than that of Tancred. The character of the Crusaders was the same.

It is a different question whether the course which he would have recommended to his country would always have been the most chivalrous. Most of us would probably think that he carried his doctrine of non-intervention too far. The world is still full of armed tyranny and wrong, which can, at present, be kept in check only by the fear of armed intervention. This he did not sufficiently see, and he naturally overrated the efficacy of commercial motives in restraining such military and territorial ambition as that of the French nation. In this he paid his tribute to the infirmity of human nature, which can seldom help treating the new truth as though it were the only truth, and pushing it to its full logical consequences before its hour. Constant collision with one extreme—the extreme of universal meddling and diplomatic wars—almost inevitably drove him into the other extreme. But there was nothing sordid or mean about the motives or the bearing of the man. In opposing wars and the policy which lead to them, he faced odium to which so kindly and genial a nature cannot have been callous, and he flung away prizes which were quite within his reach, and the desire [xii] of which probably no man who enters public life ever entirely casts out of his heart. War ministers and the advocates of a war policy are lavish enough of the blood of other men; but if it is a delusion to think that they thereby display personal courage, or entitle themselves to tax with cowardice an opponent who is stemming the tide of passion on which they Boat to popularity and power. You will find a man ready to declaim in favour of a popular war who, as you may feel sure, would not face the shot, would perhaps not even face the loss of his dinner, possibly not even hot sherry and cold soup. The soldier who bravely shed his blood at Inkerman, and the statesman who endured the reproach of a "cotton-spinner" to prevent the soldier's blood from being shed, had something in common which was not shared by politicians who sat at home and made the war,

much less by those who allowed themselves to be drawn into it against their convictions.

Cobden, when he denounced war, had not before his mind the uprising of a whole nation in a great moral cause. He had before his mind politicians carrying on war with hired soldiers, and money wrung from the people by the hand of power in a cause which, too often, was very far from being moral or even great.

We have said that religion lay at the root of Cobden's character. His firm belief in God was, as all who knew him intimately will agree with us in thinking, a great source of his fearlessness as a social reformer; nor, though absolutely free from any taint of sectarianism or bigotry, did he ever readily take to his heart those whom he believed to be devoid of religion. Not only was he a practical believer in God; he was a Christian in the ordinary sense of the term; and, for that matter, there was no reason why a dean should not attend his funeral, and a bishop be willing to read the service over his grave. He would no more have thought of propagating religion than he would have thought of propagating commerce by any force but that of conviction; but he had a distinct preference for Christian morality and civilization. And therefore, in the case of the war with Russia, besides his dislike of war in general, he could not fail to be specially opposed to one which was to rivet the Mahometan yoke (the foulness of which he had seen with his own eyes in his early travels) on the neck of Christian nations.

Cobden was not wanting in love of his country. He had spent his life in her service, and devoted all his faculties to improving the condition of her people. If he was wanting in professions of love towards her, it was as Cordelia was wanting in professions of love towards Lear. But he loved her in subordination to, or rather as a part of, humanity. He was an intense practical believer in the community of nations, and acted under an intense conviction that the interests, high and low, of each Community were inseparably blended, in the councils of Providence, with those of the rest. If it was of the commercial interests of nations that in public he principally and almost exclusively talked, this was chiefly because his modesty led him to confine himself to his special subject, chiefly because his modesty led him to confine himself to his special subject, and to pay an almost exaggerated deference to others upon theirs. He distinctly saw and deeply felt that commerce was the material basis on which Providence has ordained that a community of a higher kind should be built. And if he recognised the community of nations as above any one nation, did not the Crusaders in the same way recognise a Christendom?

[xiii]

The policy of charity, courtesy, mutual good-will and forbearance which he preached, was, after all, pretty nearly identical with the Christianity which England proclaims not only as her established religion, but as the palladium of her empire. For a moment, in the case of the bombardment of Canton, this policy was decided to be contrary to the national honour; but the decision was reversed in the case of Kagosima. It is a source of national weakness only if the enmity of your neighbours is a source of strength. The Free-trade treaties are fast making England a member of a great commercial confederation, the other members of which could scarcely fail to stand by us in case of an attack on the common trade.

The success, commercial and political, of the French Treaty made Cobden too blind, as we should say, to the menacing magnitude of the French armaments, and to the continued existence of the spirit of aggression which those armaments imply. He was also a little too tolerant of the military despotism of an autocrat who had embraced the doctrines of Free-trade. We have felt this ourselves as strongly as the rest of the world. But it should be remembered (especially when his conduct is compared with that of public men who pretend to be the peculiar representatives of English spirit) that, in his personal bearing

towards the Emperor, he studiously maintained the reserve and the dignity of an English freeman. That he would have advised his country tamely to allow France to commit actual injustice in Europe never was proved, though no doubt these were the questions on which his rational admirers would have most dreaded to see him tried.

If his peace and non-intervention policy was not that of a Chatham, it was at least not that of the mock-Chathams. If he had been Foreign Minister he would not have held out to Denmark expectations of armed assistance; but, on the other hand, he would not have had, when the time of need came, to put her off with sympathetic declamations. He was an "international man," to use the phrase of the French Minister, before the age of international men had fully come. If, with the morning rays of an enlarged morality shining on him he sometimes showed too little regard for the narrow patriotism which had been the most comprehensive virtue of preceding ages, this, again, was a fault in him, but it was one which the next generation will easily forgive.

The Bishop of Oxford calls Cobden "the great Sussex Englishman." The son of an English yeoman, proud of his birth, he has been borne from a most English home to a grave among the English bills. And who will say that he is not worthy of that grave?

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## AN APPRECIATION BY J. E. THOROLD ROGERS ↩

At the time of Cobden's death, Mr. Thorold Rogers was still a clergyman of the Church of England (like Mr. Leslie Stephen, Mr. Goldwin Smith and others, Mr. Thorold Rogers later availed himself of the Clerical Disabilities Act, and resigned his Orders). On Sunday, April 9, 1865, Mr. Thorold Rogers preached at West Lavington Church, Sussex, in the graveyard of which Cobden was buried, a memorial sermon on Richard Cobden, from which the following interesting extract is taken:—

Two days ago, the greatest and wisest men in England gathered in this church and churchyard in order to render the last offices of loving homage to the most single-hearted and generous statesman who has ever lived in the history of mankind. The burial of other men has been solemnized with greater pomp and more numerous attendance, has been marshalled by authority and accompanied by all the circumstances which art could invent in order to shew honour to departed eminence. But on this occasion, as never before, the great concourse of mourners was gathered out of the deep wish felt to do reverence to a man whose memory will live as long as the world shall endure. To that grave in which lies all that was mortal of one whose rare powers of thought and word and deed were joined to vast and varied knowledge, and graced by most winning and gentle manners, men will do pilgrimage in time to come, For it is right and seemly, while we give all honour and glory to God for the fact that He suffers men to largely serve their fellows, and acknowledge always that there cannot be any true good in man's work acknowledge always that there cannot be any true good in man's work God, that we should gratefully recognize man's work, and hold in high honour God's choicest instruments.

Let us reflect on the reasons which roused, and will rouse, these strong feelings of affection towards the man who has gone from among us. In the first place, his whole public life was an earnest and constant endeavour to do true service to man. There have been those who doubted the convictions which he entertained, and resisted the conclusions which he sought to establish, but no man ever ventured to assert that his perseverance and resolution were founded on any but the loftiest and the purest aims. Out of every contest into which he entered with what he believed to be error and wrong, he came forth with unchallenged motives and untarnished reputation. Modest and unassuming in his whole demeanour, he was, as just and true-hearted men should be, jealous in the highest sense of his personal integrity. Wholly indifferent to the hostility which is sure to be the heritage of the courageous and the patient, he was careful lest any charge of self-seeking should even in the smallest measure binder or enfeeble the work which his instincts and his experience equally taught him could be effected only by persistent disinterestedness. And just as in the spiritual life, those only who are pure in heart are blessed with the sight of God, so in the administration of those public affairs which form the largest and most exalted field on which human interests can be consulted and sustained, they are sure to arrive at the wisest and most certain conclusions, and to secure the most solid and lasting benefits to mankind, who are not to be diverted [xv] from their purpose by fear, by flattery, or by self-interest. The advantage of his life, and his public teaching, allowed and admitted to the full even by those who once resisted him and his purposes, has become in the best sense the property of the whole human race, is acknowledged more and more widely among mankind, has called forth the respect and assent of all nations to whom the news of his death has come; but is consecrated by the unswerving integrity of his whole career, by the unflinching purity of his purposes, and by the heroic self-devotion of the last acts of his life. Henceforth he is a true pattern to all who give themselves up to public affairs and the administration of the state, and the great Englishman will be, among all who speak our tongue, and join to make the history of our race, dear to every honest English heart, and helpful to every earnest English will. To



love truth for truth's sake, to resist what conviction suggests is false or wrong, to persevere in a righteous cause, even when it is in the highest degree unpopular or unacceptable, and to be willing to serve men, even when the willingness is slighted or thwarted, are the highest acts of the best life, and fulfil most nearly the spirit of God's commands.

Great as were this man's services to his country and the world, he was at all times ready to welcome those who laboured in other ways to advance the good of their fellows. Every plan which seemed likely to further what was good and true found in him a warm advocate and a judicious critic. Those who had experience of the willing kindness of his heart—and many here must have had such knowledge of him—may not have been aware of how his busy mind and loving nature were always teeming with plans for furthering the highest interests of his fellow-men; of how he mourned over ignorance and sin, and how he longed to help in the great work of supporting and extending the growth of a true godliness. It was, as I have heard him say over and over again, hopeless to expect any good from any man who did not cherish a strong and vital sense of religion, and did not make the revelation of the Gospel and the teaching of Christ the starting-point of all human duty. Too wise and too modest to arrogate, as shallow men do, entire completeness to the office which he was able to fulfil, he welcomed gladly every act of true charity and every honest purpose as a contribution to those great forces which fight with misery, and wrong, and vice. Many men who little imagine that he watched their labours, gained his warmest respect for their genuine service and untiring devotedness. He was full of the humility of true greatness, abounding in the sympathy which always goes with sincere devotedness.

Careful and cautious in the best sense, he had achieved, or possessed naturally, a complete mastery over himself. No one ever heard a hasty word or an angry expression from his lips. The strongest utterance of indignation to which he ever gave vent was called forth by what he felt to be a malicious misconstruction of the character and language of his friends. But free as he was from passion, he had an absolute loathing for deliberate untruth, and he would not hesitate for a moment to sacrifice an intimacy or a familiarity with any one whom he distinctly discovered to be acting treasonably to that which he held in such continual reverence. And on such occasions—there were, as might be expected, some, in so vast and varied an experience of men as his was—he never scrupled to avow the cause of his coldness or aversion, and [xvi] to display the same openness in disclaiming an unwelcome because insincere friend, as in expressing and according the largest good-will to those whom he saw to be fellow-labourers after truth.

This translucent life of his was before the world, and witnessed to by all men. He had hushed into nothingness or into merely occasional bursts of spite the mean envy which disparaged the width of his great mind, or which affected to sneer at the efforts he made to further the general welfare of mankind. He had outlived the rancour of party spirit, and had put to silence the imputation of party interests. Never perhaps and had put to silence the imputation of party interests. Never perhaps did any man so conciliate the respect of those whose policy or whose instincts urged them to conclusions different from his. No earnest and busy worker in the battle of life was ever more blameless and more pure; no man so self-possessed was ever more unaffected.

You who have seen much of the daily doings of his later years can bear testimony to the kindness of his manner, the courtesy of his conduct, the placid gentleness of his address, the unbroken evenness of his temper. No one ever, who came within the sphere of his influence, failed to see how orderly were his doings, and how generous was his estimate of those about him. Full of knowledge and wisdom, tried in the great struggles of his public life, he came in his maturer years to his native place, to exhibit the unvarying graces of a good and honest man, and to practise those rare virtues of simplicity and tranquillity which adorned him even more than his vast knowledge and unparalleled sagacity. Those who merely saw him could hardly credit the large powers which lay hid in so easy and serene a presence.

To us who were honoured with his closer intimacy there is a blank created by his loss which no subsequent friendship can occupy. We cannot imagine any man with such varied gifts, with such signal opportunities, with so wide an experience, with so wise a mind, with so pure and simple a character. Precious as are the memories of our association with him, as lasting as will be the recollection of his profound and sagacious judgments, we who constantly consulted with him on matters of difficult import, feel that the loss of his wise interpretations can be replaced from no living experience. The charms of his graceful simplicity, of his lucid language, his copious knowledge, are no longer available for our instruction. No man's loss could create such a waste, because no man ever occupied so large a space in the habitual thoughts and affectionate intercourse of his more intimate friends. To have lived familiarly within the influences and convictions of a great and true mind, is to live happily indeed, but to live within the range of a great sorrow.

There are not indeed wanting consolations to those who loved and honoured him, He was taken away in the maturity of his judgment, in the fulness of his powers, in the height of his reputation. But his renown is wide as the civilization which he furthered, and the Christianity which he acknowledged and revered. And those who can profit by them will surely take heart by his example and his teaching, by the speech of his lips, and the pattern of his life, and will not fail at all times to look to his character and recall his person, with continual honour to him, and with deep thankfulness to God, who permitted his words and ordered his ways, as He does order all that is good, and true, and honest, and loving.

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## FREE TRADE.

### FREE TRADE. I.

#### HER MAJESTY'S SPEECH.—AMENDMENT ON THE ADDRESS. HOUSE OF COMMONS, AUGUST 25, 1841.↩

[Mr. Cobden was returned to Parliament for the first time in August, 1841, as Member for Stockport. He had previously, in 1837, contested this borough. In the debate on Mr. Baring's Budget, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Melbourne's Government, Lord John Russell avowed that it was the intention of the Government to propose a moderate fixed duty on corn, in lieu of the sliding-scale. These duties were announced on the 7th of May, to be 8*s.* on wheat, 5*s.* on rye, 4*s.* 6*d.* on barley, and 3*s.* 6*d.* on oats. On May 27th, Sir Robert Peel moved a resolution of want of confidence. This resolution was carried by a majority of 1 (312 to 311). On this, Lord Melbourne appealed to the country. When the new Parliament met, Mr. Wortley moved and Lord Bruce seconded an amendment to the Address, to the effect that the Administration did not enjoy the confidence of the country. The amendment was carried by a majority of 91 (360 to 269), and Sir Robert Peel came into office. This statesman continued in office till he repealed those Corn-laws which he took office to maintain.]

I FEEL some difficulty in attempting to treat the question before the House, as there does not seem to be a good understanding of the position in which the House stands with regard to it. Different opinions have been expressed as to the object for which hon. Members have been sent here, and as to the nature of the late general election. It has been said that the elections were not a test of public opinion in reference to the monopolies, but merely in reference to the question of confidence in her Majesty's Ministers. That opinion has been expressed by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Tamworth (Sir R. Peel), and a disposition has been evinced by his followers to take it as his dictum. But we are not then sent here to represent monopoly, and strange would it be did the majority of this House authentically announce that they have been sent here for such a purpose by what is called the 'people of England.'

A recommendation has been made by the Executive to this House, advising us to set about the immediate reduction of taxation; and it is accompanied by an assurance that not only will that reduction not impair the revenue, but increase the resources of the national Exchequer. That, after all, is the nature of the message upon which the late Parliament was dissolved. But how can Gentlemen opposite, notwithstanding what has been said for them, come to this House to maintain taxation in all its inordinate vigour and mischievousness, because they wish for taxation in order to protect monopoly, as well as for the purposes of the State? It is really well that all people have not become enamoured of monopoly.

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There is another difficulty in addressing the House on the present occasion. We are told that the question is not whether the Corn-laws shall be repealed or monopoly abated, but whether the amendment upon the Address shall be agreed to; and hon. Gentlemen opposite, in discussing that question, talked of the wars in Syria and China, and of the affairs of Canada and New York, but never once touched upon those questions which had been recommended to their consideration, and with a view to a diminution of the burdens of the people. But while I give hon. Gentlemen opposite credit for their discretion in excluding those important topics from the discussion, I see no reason why hon. Gentlemen on my side

of the House, who feel that such questions as the Corn-laws are of greater interest to the people than the Chinese or Syrian wars, or any other remote subject of the kind, should not declare their views upon those questions; or why, if the speeches from my side of the House are to meet with no response on the other, we should not discharge our duty towards the people, and pay that respect and deference to her Majesty to which she is entitled, by calmly considering those questions and stating our opinions upon them. I believe it was customary, under the old *régime*, particularly with the Conservative party in this House, to treat the Speech from the Throne as something very nearly appertaining to monarchical dignity. I do not think it was customary, unless with very great reason, to drag in the Ministers of the day, but rather to respond to the Speech from the Throne as something connected with royal dignity, and entitled to that calm discussion which hon. Gentlemen opposite are not willing to accord to the most gracious and, since the time of Alfred, the most popular monarch of these realms.

It has been said that the people of England are not sincere in seeking for a total repeal of the food tax. With all sincerity, I declare that I am for the total repeal of those taxes which affect the price of bread and provisions of every description, and I will not allow it to be said without denying it, that the three millions of people who have petitioned the House for the total repeal of those taxes are not sincere in their prayer. What are those taxes upon food? They are taxes levied upon the great body of the people, and hon. Gentlemen opposite, who show such sympathy for the working classes after they have made them paupers, cannot deny my right to claim on their behalf that those taxes should be a primary consideration. I have heard them called protections; but taxes they are, and taxes they shall be in my mouth, as long as I have the honour of a seat in this House. The bread-tax is a tax primarily levied upon the poorer classes; it is a tax, at the lowest estimate, of 40 per cent. above the price we should pay if there were a free trade in corn. The report upon the handloom weavers puts down 10*s.* as the estimated weekly earnings of a family, and states that in all parts of the United Kingdom that will be found to be not an unfair estimate of the earnings of every labourer's family. It moreover states, that out of 10*s.* each family expends 5*s.* on bread. The tax of 40 per cent. is, therefore, a tax of 2*s.* upon every labouring man's family earning 10*s.* a week, or 20 per cent. upon their earnings. How does it operate as we proceed upwards in society? The man with 40*s.* a week pays an income-tax of 5 per cent.; the man of 250*l.* a year pays but 1 per cent.; and the nobleman, or millionaire, with an income of 200,000*l.* a year, and whose family consumes no more bread than that of the agricultural labourer, pays less than one halfpenny in every 100*l.* [Laughter.] I know not whether the laugh is at the monstrous character of the case, or the humble individual who states it; but I repeat that the tax upon the nobleman is less than one half-penny per cent., while upon the poor man's family it was 20*l.* per cent. I am sure there is not an hon. Member in the House who would dare to bring in a bill [3] to levy an income-tax on all grades of society upon a scale similar to this, and yet I maintain that the bread-tax is such a tax, and is levied not for the purposes of the State, but for the benefit of the richest portion of the community. That is a fair statement of the tax upon bread. I can sympathise with the incredulity of hon. Gentlemen opposite, but if they knew the case as it really is, and felt it as they would if they did know it, they would also feel that they could not lie down to rest in comfort or safety if they voted for such a tax. With the exception of England and of Holland, in no country has any Government, however distressed, ever yet resorted to the monstrous injustice of levying a tax upon bread. Gentlemen will point to the laws affecting the importation of corn in France, Spain, and the United States of America; but in those countries they export corn upon an average, one year with another, and therefore no import duty could operate with them as with us.

But it is said that the working classes have some compensation—some protection extended to them by this law. Hon. Gentlemen on the other side have talked largely at the hustings of their determination to protect the poor; and the noble Lord (Stanley) opposite, at

the election for North Lancashire, eagerly propounded this doctrine of protection. I have heard the noble Lord with my own ears; his case of protection to the labourer was that which I will now unfold. The noble Lord said that the manufacturers wanted to repeal the Corn-laws because they wanted to reduce the rate of wages; that, unless by the repeal of the bread-tax they reduced wages, they could not be better able to compete with foreigners; and that if they did, it could be no benefit to the working man. Let me remind the House, that the parties who have so patiently struggled for three years past for a hearing at your bar, have never been allowed to state their case; that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton (Mr. Charles Villiers)—for whose great and incessant services I, in common with millions of my fellow-countrymen, feel grateful—when he proposed that the case of those millions should be heard at the bar, had the proposition scouted and spurned; and that, when they had denied them a hearing, they proceeded to misrepresent their motives. I will state the case as given by the noble Lord himself. If he can be in error in appreciating the merits of the question, with all his brilliant talents, other hon. Gentlemen opposite will excuse me if I believe that they also are in error. The case was stated by the noble Lord thus:—Those who advocate a repeal of the Corn-laws have again and again announced that their object is to exchange the produce of their industry for the productions of all other countries, and that all duties for protection (so called) levied upon articles in the manufacture of which they are engaged, should be likewise removed, and a free and unfettered intercourse established between all the countries of the earth, as was clearly the design of nature. But we were told by the noble lord the Member for North Lancashire that this means the reduction of wages. If I know anything, it means increased trade, and the claim of a right, besides, to exchange our manufactures for the corn of all other countries, by which we should very much increase the extent of our trade. How can this be done, unless by an increased amount of labour? How can we call into requisition an increased demand for labour without also increasing the rate of wages?

Another prevailing fallacy was mixed up with the noble Lord's statement. The object, he said, was to reduce wages, so as to enable our manufacturers to compete with foreigners. I maintain that we do now compete with them; that we now sell our manufactures in neutral markets in competition with other countries; that we now sell them, in New York, for instance, in competition with all the other countries of the earth. You talk of protection to [4] the home producer, but it should ever be remembered that it is the foreign market which fixes the price of the home market. Would any man think of sending to a distance of 3,000 miles articles for which he could find a better market at home? I see in this fallacy of wages that which is at the bottom of all the opposition to the repeal of the Corn-laws. There are many conscientious upholders of the present system who support them in the supposition that they maintain the rate of wages. I see no relation between the price of food, or of any other article of consumption, and the price of labour, in its wholesome, natural state. In Cuba, or in the slave-holding states of America, I can imagine the price of labour to be affected by the price of food. I can imagine the slave-holder sitting down and estimating the value of herrings and rice. In his case, the price of labour at his command is affected clearly by the price of provisions.

There is another stage in the labour market—I refer to labourers in the agricultural districts—where the amount of wages has reached the very minimum, according to their habits of life. These unfortunate men are told that their wages will rise as the price of provisions advances. Why? Is it because the high price of provisions increases the demand for labour, or is it done from pure charity? But I come to that state of the labour market under which—and God knows how long it will continue under such legislation—the various products of our manufacturing industry are called into existence, and there, I assert, without fear of contradiction, that the rate of wages has no more connection with the price of food than with the moon's changes. There it depends entirely on the demand for labour; there the price of food never becomes an ingredient in testing the value of labour. There the labour

market is, happily, elastic, and will become more so, if you leave it unfettered. But if you continue to legislate in the spirit by which you have so long been animated, you will succeed at last in bringing our commercial and manufacturing population down to the same pitch to which you have reduced our agriculturists, and then these merchants and manufacturers may come forward and give alms to the wretched men in their employment; then it will perhaps be said that ‘with the increase in the price of food arises an increase in the rate of wages.’ It will be doled out as an alms, as a mere act of charity, and not because the working man, as a free agent, is entitled, in return for his labour, to a decent subsistence.

I will now dismiss the question of wages, though it is one which I must say should be again and again mooted in this House. I now come to the consideration of that all-important subject—the existing state of our manufacturing and agricultural labourers—which has already called forth your sympathy, and to which I must again direct your attention. I have lately had an opportunity of obtaining, by peculiar means, access to a report about the state of the labouring population in all parts of the country. A highly important Convocation was held in Manchester a week ago, consisting entirely of the ministers of religion. [Ironical cheers.] I understand those cheers. I will not pause in my statement of facts, but will say a word upon that subject when I have done. I have seen at Manchester a body of ministers of all religious persuasions—not 620, as has been stated, but 650 in number—assembled together from all parts of the country, at an expense of from 3,000*l.* to 4,000*l.*, which was borne by their respective congregations. Those clergymen gathered, not from Yorkshire or Lancashire only—not from Derby or Cheshire only—but from every county of Great Britain—from Caithness to Cornwall,—and stated the most important facts relating to the labouring population in their various districts. I have had an opportunity of examining those statements. I will not trespass on the time and attention of the House by going into those statements in detail; but I will state generally, [5] that, from both the manufacturing and agricultural districts, there was the most unimpeachable testimony that the condition of the great body of her Majesty's labouring subjects had deteriorated wofully within the last ten years, and more especially so within the three years last past; and furthermore, that in proportion as the price of the food of the people had increased, just so had their comforts been diminished. I have seen statements derived from the reports of infirmaries and workhouses, from savings' banks and prisons; and all alike bore testimony, clear and indubitable, that the condition of the great mass of her Majesty's subjects in the lower ranks of life is rapidly deteriorating; that they are now in a worse condition, and receiving less wages; and that their distress and misery result in a greater amount of disease, destitution, and crime than has ever been witnessed at any former period of the history of this country.

One word in reference to the jeers with which the mention of this Convocation has been received. I do not come here to vindicate the conduct of those Christian men in having assembled to take this momentous subject into their consideration. The parties who will more fitly judge them are their own congregations. At that Convocation we had members of the Established Church and of the Church of Rome, Independents, Baptists, members of the Church of Scotland, Seceders, Methodists, and every other denomination with which I am acquainted. If hon. Gentlemen are disposed to impugn the character of those reverend individuals, they will be at the same time casting a reproach and a stigma on the great body of dissenting Christians in this country.

It may be thought that these reverend persons were travelling out of their province. But when I heard these worthy men telling their tales of saddening misery—when I heard them state that members of their congregations would keep away from their places of worship in the morning, and steal out to the house of God at night, wrapped up in a cloak or an outside coat, when a shade was thrown over their misery—when I heard that others were unfitted to receive spiritual consolation because of their being so plunged in physical destitution; that

the Sunday-schools were falling off, because their congregations could not attend—when I heard these things, and was further assured that the provisions monopoly is at the bottom of all the misery under which these poor people labour, I cannot conscientiously say that those ministers were out of their place. When they who sit in high places are oppressive and unjust to the poor, I am glad to see that there are men amongst us who, like Nathan of old, can be found to come forward and exclaim, ‘Thou art the man!’ The religious people of the country have revolted against the infamous injustice of that bread-tax, which is condemned by the immutable morality of the Scriptures. They have prepared and signed a petition to this House, in which they declare that these laws are a violation of the will of the Supreme Being, whose providence watches over His famishing children. You may rely upon it that the time abounds with momentous signs. It is not those 650 ministers only, but 1,500 ministers of the Gospel, whose letters have been read at the Manchester meeting, and who send up their prayers to Heaven daily and hourly that it may be the will of Him who rules both princes and potentates to turn their hearts to justice and mercy.

And now, having told you what has been done by these men, and in what spirit they have proceeded, we cannot for a moment doubt that these men were in earnest; neither can we doubt that these are men to make very efficient emissaries in this great cause. Remember what has been done in the Anti-Slavery question. Where is the difference between stealing a man and making him labour, on the one hand, or robbing voluntary labourers, on the other, of the fruits of their labour? [6] The noble Lord opposite (Lord Stanley) knows something of the ability of these men to give efficacy to their strong convictions. When the noble Lord proposed his Emancipation Bill in 1833, he broadly stated, that from the moment that the religious community took up the question, from that moment it was settled. I believe that the result will be the same here.

Let me remind hon. Members of the qualities which pervade the minds of their countrymen. They have great deference for power and rank, and respect for wealth—perhaps too much; they have a most profound attachment to the laws and institutions of the country. But it must be remembered that there is another attribute peculiar to the minds of Englishmen—a veneration for sacred things, far beyond their deference to human authority. Once infringe upon that, and their respect for you and yours will vanish like chaff in the whirlwind. What must be the feeling of the country when they find upon this occasion that the most kind, and benevolent, and generous recommendation of her Majesty, that you should take the Cornlaws into your wise consideration, with a view to relieving the heavy burdens under which her poor people suffer, of diminishing labour and insufficient food—what will be said by the country at large when they find this gracious recommendation from the Crown scouted and scorned by the majority of this House? What will be their feelings of indignation when they find a question of this magnitude treated as of secondary importance to the question whether a gentleman with a white hat, on that side, or a gentleman with a black hat, on this side of the House, shall hold the patronage of office? The people of this country will regard the transaction—if Parliamentary language will permit me to say so—as the most factious proceeding which has ever characterised the conduct of this House.

If I turn to a declaration made elsewhere—in a place which, in conformity with the rules of the House, I will not particularise—when I find an illustrious Duke stating that the condition of the labouring population in this country is enviable compared with that of any other population in Europe, and that every labouring man in this country, who has industry and sobriety to recommend him, can attain to a competence—what, I ask, will be the feelings of the country at large upon hearing such a declaration? Are hon. Gentlemen disposed to respond to that sentiment, and accept it as their own? Let them remember that about ten years since the same illustrious individual stated that the old borough-mongering Parliament, under which we then suffered, was the perfection of human wisdom. Yes; and I shall not be

surprised if this doctrine of yesterday, meeting a similar and still more remarkable fate, may be the forerunner of a far greater change than that contemplated by her Majesty's Ministers.

Let me, before I sit down, say one word to the right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) opposite. I have heard some allusions made here to the opinions of Mr. Huskisson. The right hon. Baronet the Member for Tamworth is fond of appearing under the sanction of that distinguished statesman. I am most anxious that he should not fall into the error of appearing in his cast-off garments, and fancying himself arrayed in his mantle—that when he gives us the last will and testament of that distinguished statesman, he should know that an important codicil was added to that will, which I will now present him. I heard Mr. Huskisson's opinion in 1828 quoted. It is deeply to be lamented that after that period he sanctioned, by joining the Duke of Wellington's Administration, a line of policy to which he had strongly objected. But when he spoke last in the House on the subject of the Corn-laws, on the 25th of March, 1830, upon the occasion of Mr. Poulett Thomson's motion on the subject, Mr. Huskisson gave his opinion in these terms—'It is my distinct conviction that we cannot maintain the present Corn-laws, and at the same time maintain the permanent [7] prosperity and prevalent contentment of the country. That these laws may be repealed without injury to our landed interests is my firm belief.' Here is the last codicil to the will of Huskisson. I protest in his name, in many respects illustrious, though not of uniform brightness, against the misrepresentation of his opinion. When Mr. Huskisson spoke in 1830—and I would strongly recommend the whole of that speech to hon. Members' attentive perusal—there was by no means the same amount of distress prevalent as that from which the country is now suffering, nor was there anything like the same gloom in her prospects. But if Mr. Huskisson spoke so despondingly then, what would he have said had he lived in 1841, and seen the accumulated difficulties under which the country now labours,—if, instead of the Bank of England, with 10,000,000*l.* or 12,000,000*l.* of treasure, and money in abundance at 3 per cent., he saw scarcely half that amount of treasure, and the interest raised to 5 per cent.? What would have been his opinion of the Corn-laws, had he lived to see all these things accomplished? I am earnestly impressed by a desire to record his solemn conviction on this subject.

The right hon. Baronet opposite possesses at this moment the power to do immense service to his country. Let the right hon. Baronet refer back to 1830, and consider what were then the circumstances of the country, compared with what they are now. What is the cause of our elevation from that prostration to which the country had fallen in 1830? It was clearly not a natural or legitimate trade which then sprung up. From 1831 to 1836 the increase of our exports, compared with our imports, amounted to 20,000,000*l.* official value. But all these goods were sent to America, where they were neither sold nor consumed, but despatched in exchange for bank and railway shares, and State bonds. That is not legitimate trade; it is over-speculation; the goods are not paid for.

It should be borne in mind, too, that from the period of 1831 to 1836 there was an extension of the banking system in this country, increasing the number of banks by nearly 100, and extending their capital by nearly 60,000,000*l.* The increase of the export and home trade thus factitiously created, accompanied with a fortuitous series of unexampled harvests, created a state of prosperity which enabled the Government of the day to move tranquilly on in carrying the Reform Bill and amending the Poor-law; but it was a fictitious prosperity.

Has the right hon. Baronet, then, any plan—I will not ask him to divulge it at present—but has he any plan by which, in 1841, he can raise up a real prosperity in the country? If not, can he hope even to raise up a factitious prosperity? If so, it will only lead to a recoil which will be infinitely more disastrous than that under which we are now suffering.



Thank God, Ministers in this country require money, and glad I am that they cannot get it but through the prosperity of the trading and manufacturing interests. The landholder who spends his money in Paris or Naples cannot find revenue for the Minister. The revenue flourishes when the trading and commercial community are prosperous, and when the farmers are crying out under excessive distress; and, on the other hand, just in proportion as the land-owner feels prosperous on account of the starvation of the millions, the revenue of the State falls off.

Having made these few remarks, though not, I must be allowed to say, in a party spirit (for I call myself neither Whig nor Tory; I am a free-trader, and such I shall always be ready to avow myself), I have only, in conclusion, to observe, that while I am proud to acknowledge the virtue of the Whig Ministry in coming out from the ranks of the monopolists, and advancing three parts out of four towards my own position, yet, if the right hon. Baronet opposite advances one step farther, I will be the first to meet half way and shake hands with him.

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**FREE TRADE. II.**  
**CORN-LAWS.—MR. VILLIERS' ANNUAL MOTION.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, FEBRUARY 24, 1842.** ↩

[On Feb. 18, 1842, Mr. Villiers proposed his annual motion, to the effect, 'that all duties payable on the importation of corn, grain, meal, and flour, do now cease and determine.' After five days' debate, the motion was negatived by a majority of 303 (393 to 90), on Feb. 24. Mr. Cobden was one of the tellers. The majority of the Conservative party voted or paired; but 108 of the Opposition were absent. On the last day of the debate, Mr Ferrand, Member for Knaresborough, made a violent personal attack on Mr. Cobden. In explanation, Mr. Cobden stated, once for all, that he intended never to be driven into personal altercation with any Member of the House. He was advised by Mr. Byng, then the senior Member of the House, to be utterly indifferent to Mr. Ferrand's personalities. Shortly after the rejection of Mr. Villiers' motion, Sir R. Peel made certain alterations in the sliding-scale, the maximum duties on wheat, barley, rye, oats, peas, and beans, from foreign countries, being 20*s.*, 11*s.*, 11*s.* 6*d.*, 8*s.*, and 11*s.* 6*d.* the quarter, and from British colonies, 5*s.*, 2*s.* 6*d.*, 3*s.*, 2*s.*, and 3*s.*; a shilling duty being payable when wheat rose to 73*s.*, barley to 37*s.*, oats to 27*s.*, rye, peas, and beans, to 42*s.*, if the corn was of foreign origin, while, if colonial corn were imported, the shilling duty commenced on wheat at 58*s.*, and a 6*d.* duty on barley at 31*s.*, oats at 33*s.*, rye, peas, and beans at 34*s.* Similar duties were to be levied on meal and flour.]

If the hon. Gentleman (Sir Howard Douglas) who has just sat down will give the House another promise, that when he speaks he will always speak to the subject, the House will have a more satisfactory prospect of his future addresses. I have sat here seven nights, listening to the discussion on what should have been the question of the Corn-laws, and I must say that I think my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton (Mr. C. Villiers) has just grounds for complaint, that in all those seven nights scarcely two hours have been given to the subject of the bread-tax. Our trade with China, the war in Syria, the bandying of compliments between parties and partisans, have occupied our attention much and often, but very little has been said on the question really before the House. I may venture to say that not one speaker on the other side of the House has yet grappled with the question so ably propounded by my hon. Friend, which is—How far, how just, how honest, and how expedient it was to have any tax whatever laid upon the food of the people? That is the question to be decided; and when I heard the right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) so openly express his sympathy for the working classes of this country, I expected that the right hon. Baronet would not have finished his last speech on this question without at least giving some little consideration to the claims [9] of the working man in connection with the Corn-laws.

To this view of the subject I will therefore proceed to call the attention of the Committee; and I call upon hon. Gentlemen to meet me upon neutral ground in discussing the question in connection with the interests of those working classes, who have no representatives in this House. While I hear herein strong expressions of sympathy for those who have become paupers, I will ask hon. Gentlemen to give some attention to the case of the hard-working man before he reaches that state of abject pauperism in which he can only receive sympathy. In reading the debates upon the passing of the first stringent Corn-law of 1814, I am much struck to find that all parties who took part in that discussion were agreed upon one point,—it was that the price of food regulated the rate of wages. That principle was laid down, not by one side of the House, but by men of no mean eminence on each side, and of course of opposite opinions in other respects. Mr. Horner and Mr. Baring, Mr. F. Lewis, the present Lord Western, Mr. (now Sir) G. Philips, were all agreed on that head, though some advocated

and others opposed the measure. One of the speakers, indeed, went so far as to make a laboured computation to show the exact proportion which the price of food would bear to the rate of wages. The same delusion existed out of doors too. A petition was presented to the House in 1815, signed by the most intelligent of the manufacturing and working classes, praying that the Corn Bill might not be passed, because it would so raise the rate of wages, that the manufacturers of this country would not be able to compete with the manufacturers abroad. In reading the debates of that date, I have been filled with the deepest sorrow to find how those who passed that measure were deluded. But I believe that they were labouring under an honest delusion. I firmly believe, that if they had been cognisant of the facts now before the House, they would never have passed that Corn Bill. Every party in the House was then deluded: but there was one party, that most interested, the working classes, who were not deluded. The great multitude of the nation, without the aid of learning, said—with that intuitive and instructive sagacity which had given rise to the adage, ‘The voice of the people is the voice of God’—what the effect of the measure would be upon wages, and therefore it was, that when that law was passed this House was surrounded by the multitudes of London, whom you were compelled to keep from your doors by the point of the bayonet. Yes, and no sooner was the law passed than there arose disturbances and tumults everywhere, and in London bloodshed and murder ensued; for a coroner's jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against the soldiers who were called out and fired upon the people. The same hostility to the measure spread throughout the whole of the north of England; so that then, from the year 1815 down to 1819, when the memorable meeting was held at Peter's-field in Manchester, there never was a great public meeting at which there were not borne banners inscribed with the words ‘No Corn-laws.’

There was no mistake in the minds of the multitude then, and let not hon. Gentlemen suppose that there is any now. The people may not be crying out exclusively for the repeal of the Corn-laws, because they have looked beyond that question, and have seen greater evils even than this, which they wish to have remedied at the same time; and, now that the cries for ‘Universal Suffrage’ and ‘The Charter’ are heard, let not hon. Gentlemen deceive themselves by supposing that, because the members of the Anti-Corn-law League have sometimes found themselves getting into collision with the Chartists, that therefore the Chartists, or the working men generally, were favourable to the Corn-laws. If one thing is more surprising than others in the facts which I have mentioned, it is to find in this [10] House, where lecturers of all things in the world are so much decried, the ignorance which prevails upon this question amongst hon. Members on the other side of the House. [Oh! oh!] Yes, I have never seen their ignorance equalled amongst any equal number of working men in the North of England. Do you think that the fallacy of 1815, which I heard put forth so boldly last week, that wages rose and fell with the price of bread, can now prevail in the minds of working men, after the experience of the last three years? Has not the price of bread been higher during that time than for any three consecutive years for the last twenty years? And yet trade has suffered a greater decline in every branch of industry than in any preceding three years. Still there are hon. Gentlemen on the other side of the House, with the Reports of Committees in existence and before them proving all this, prepared to support a bill, which, in their ignorance—for I cannot call it anything else—they believe will keep up the price of labour.

I am told that the price of labour in other countries is so low that we must keep up the price of bread here, to prevent wages going down to the same level. But I am prepared to prove, from documents emanating from this House, that labour is cheaper here than in other countries. I hear a sound of dissent; but I would ask those who dissent, do they consider the quality of the labour? By this test, which is the only fair one, it will be proved that the labour of England is the cheapest labour in the world. The Committee on machinery, last session but one, demonstrated that fact beyond all dispute. They reported that labour on the continent

was actually dearer than in England in every branch of industry. Spinners, manufacturers, machine-makers, all agreed that one Englishman on the Continent was worth three native workmen, whether in Germany, France, or Belgium. If they are not, would Englishmen be found in every large town on the Continent? Let us go to any populous place, from Calais to Vienna, and we should not visit any city with 10,000 inhabitants without finding Englishmen who are earning thrice the wages the natives earn, and yet their employers declare that they are the cheapest labourers. Yet we are told that the object of the repeal of the Corn-laws is to lower wages here to the level of continental wages.

Have low wages ever proved the prosperity of our manufactures? In every period when wages have dropped, it has been found that the manufacturing interest dropped also; and I hope that the manufacturers will have credit for taking a rather more enlightened view of their own interest than to conclude that the impoverishment of the multitude, who are the great consumers of all that they produce, could ever tend to promote the prosperity of our manufacturers. I will tell the House, that by deteriorating that population, of which they ought to be so proud, they will run the risk of spoiling not merely the animal but the intellectual creature, and that it is not a potato-fed race that will ever lead the way in arts, arms, or commerce. To have a useful and a prosperous people, we must take care that they are well fed.

But to come to the assumption that the manufacturers do want to reduce the rate of wages, and that the Corn-law will keep them up, we are still going to pass a law which will tax the food of our industrious and hard-working people; and what must be the result? The right hon. Baronet, in answer to a fallacy so often uttered on the other side of the House, said, 'We do now compete with the foreigner: we export to the extent of 40,000,000*l.* or 50,000,000*l.* a year.' That is true; but how? By taxing the bones and muscles of the people to double the amount of good supposed to be done to them by the Corn-laws. A double weight being put upon them, they are told to run a race with the labourers of Germany and France. We exult in a people who can labour so; but I would ask, with [11] Mr. Deacon Hume, Whose are the energies which belonged to the British people, their own property or that of others? Think you, that for giving them an opportunity merely to strive and struggle for an existence, you may take one-half of what they earn? Is that doing justice to the high-mettled racer? You do not treat your horses so; you give them food, at all events, in proportion to their strength and their toil. But Englishmen, actually, are worse treated; tens of thousands of them were last winter worse off than your dogs and your horses.

Well, what is the pretence upon which you propose to tax them? We have been told by the right hon. Gentleman that his object is to fix a certain price for corn: and hearing that proposition from a Prime Minister, and listening to the debates, I have been almost led to believe that we are gone back to the times of the Edwards, when Parliament was engaged in fixing the price of a table-cloth, or a napkin, or a pair of shoes. But is this House a corn-market? Is not your present occupation better fitted for the merchant and the exchange? We do not act in this way with respect to cotton, or iron, or copper, or tin. But how are we to fix the price of corn? The right hon. Baronet, taking the average of ten years at 56*s.* 10*d.*, proposes to keep the price of wheat at from 54*s.* to 58*s.* Now Lord Willoughby D'Eresby will not be content with less than 58*s.* Some hon. Members opposite are for the same price at the lowest; and I see by the newspapers that the Duke of Buckingham, at a meeting of farmers held at Aylesbury on the preceding day, said the price ought to be 60*s.* But there is one hon. Gentleman, whom I hope I shall have the pleasure to hear by-and-by go more into detail as to the market price which he intends to secure for his commodity in the market. I see in that little but very useful book, the *Parliamentary Companion*, which contains most accurate information, and in which some of the Members of this House give very nice descriptions of themselves, under the head of Mr. Cayley, M.P. for North Yorkshire (p. 134), the following

entry:—'Is an advocate for such a course of legislation, with regard to agriculture, as will keep wheat at 64s. per quarter, new milk cheese at from 52s. to 60s. per cwt., wool and butter at 1s. per lb. each, and other produce in proportion.'

Now it is all very amusing, exceedingly amusing, to find still that there are gentlemen, at large, too, who will argue that Parliament should interpose and fix the price at which they should sell their own goods. That is very amusing indeed; but when we find the Prime Minister of this great country coming down to parliament and avowing such a principle, it becomes anything but amusing. I will ask the right hon. Baronet, is he prepared to carry out this principle in respect to cotton and wool? I pause for a reply.

[Sir R. Peel: 'I have said that it was impossible to fix the price of food by any legislative enactment.']

Then upon what are we now legislating? I thank the right hon. Baronet for that avowal. Will he oblige me still further by not trying to do it? But supposing he will try, all I ask of him is—and again I shall pause for a reply—will he try to legislate to keep up the price of cottons, woollens, silks, and such like goods? There is no reply. Then we have come to this, that we are not legislating for the universal people. Here is the simple, open avowal, that we are met here to legislate for a class against the people. I do not marvel, therefore, though I have seen it with the deepest regret and indignation, that the House has been surrounded during this debate by an immense body of the police force. (A laugh.) I cannot let this subject drop with a laugh. It is no laughing business to those who have no wheat to sell, and no money to purchase food to sustain life.

I will refer the House to the great fall in the price of cotton. At this day, in Manchester, the price of that article [12] is 30 per cent. less than it was ten years back. It is the same with respect to ironmongery. During the average of the last ten years it has also fallen 30 per cent., and yet with this great reduction of price the man engaged as an iron-monger is to take his goods and to exchange them with the agriculturist for the produce of the land at the present high price of corn. Is this fair and reasonable? Can it be called legislation at all? Sure I am that it is not honest legislation. It is no answer to this argument, if the Prime Minister of this country comes forward and declares that he has not the power to obviate this evil; yet it is not too much to assert that the man placed in that high and responsible situation should step forward to stay the progress of such unjust and partial legislation.

I have only yet touched the skirts of the question. I would remind the House that it will not be a laughing question before it is settled. I would ask the right hon. Baronet whether, whilst fixing the scale of prices for wheat, he intends to introduce to the House a sliding scale for wages as well? I know only one class of the community whose wages are secured by the sliding scale, and those are the clergy of this country. I would ask what is to be done with the artisan; I know that I shall be told that a resolution has been passed declaring that the scale of wages cannot be kept up. I am well acquainted with the answer which the poor distressed hand-loom weavers got when they addressed the House and claimed its protection. They were told that the House had been studying political economy, and that the weavers had entirely mistaken their position, and that their wages could not be maintained up to a certain price. That was the answer which those poor men received. Why, I will ask, should a law be passed to keep up the price of wheat, whilst you admit that wages cannot be also sustained at a certain price? It is not complicated statistics, learned references to authorities, or figures nicely dovetailed, that will satisfy the starving people of this country, and convince them that a band of dishonest confederates had not been leagued together for the purpose of upholding the interests of one body against the general good of the country.

We have been told that the land of this country is subjected to peculiarly heavy burdens? But what is the nature of those burdens? A facetious gentleman near me has attempted an explanation of this matter, and has declared that 'the heavy burdens' meant only heavy mortgages. The country has a right to expect that the right hon. Baronet will inform the House what those burdens are to which the landed interest is exposed. When questioned on this point, the right hon. Baronet states that there exist a variety of opinions on the subject; and that is the only explanation that can be obtained. I boldly declare that for every one burden imposed on the land I am able to show ten exemptions.

I will refer to the speech of the hon. Member for Renfrewshire (Mr. Stewart). He complained of the delay which had occurred in obtaining a return moved for some time back with reference to the land-tax to which the land abroad was subjected. I should like to know why our Consuls abroad have not made some official return on the subject. They surely might have forwarded the Government the desired information. Being without any official intelligence on this point, it will not be in my power to give the House any explicit information on the subject. With reference to the land-tax in France, it has been stated by M. Humann, in the Chamber of Deputies, that the land-tax paid in France was 25 per cent. upon the value of the soil, and equal to 40 per cent. of the whole revenue of the country. In this country the land-tax amounts to 1,900,000*l.*, and the value of the landed property, as stated by one of your own men, Mr. Macqueen, was about 230,000,000*l.* This tax is but a mere fraction compared to the duty [13] levied in this country on the poor man's tobacco. I think that if the right hon. Baronet does not soon propound his views on this subject to the House, he will be treating them with great disrespect.

I look back to the past debate with feelings not altogether devoid of satisfaction. Many important admissions have been made. I never heard it admitted, until the right hon. Baronet made the admission, that the tax upon food actually contributes to the revenue of the proprietors of the land. What are the peculiar burdens imposed on land which led to the introduction of the present tax on corn? I have a right to demand an answer on this point. The only plea for levying such a tax is to benefit one class of society.

It has been admitted by the head of the Government that this country never can be entirely independent of the foreign grower of corn; that our state was a kind of supplementary dependence; that in some years we must look abroad for a supply of food, and that this is when we want it. I perfectly agree with the right hon. Baronet, that corn ought only to be admitted free of all restrictions when it is 'wanted.' That is, the particular moment or crisis when it is desirable to open our ports for the admission of foreign corn. But I would ask the House and the Government of the country, who are to decide when the corn is wanted? Is it those who need food and are starving, or those who fare sumptuously every day and roll in all the luxuries of life? What right has the right hon. Baronet to attempt to gauge the appetite of the people? It is an inordinate assumption of power to do so. Such a thing cannot be tolerated under the most monstrous system of despotism which the imagination of man has ever conceived. Do we sit here for the purpose of deciding when the people of this country want food? What do the Members of this House know of want? It is not for them to say when the starving people of this country ought to have food doled out to them. The people are the best judges upon that point.

The right hon. Baronet has been guilty of having made contradictory statements with reference to the condition of the hand-loom weavers. What is the state of the poor in Ireland? I refer to the work of Mr. Inglis. That gentleman declared, at the conclusion of his publication, that one-third of the people of Ireland are perishing for want of the common necessaries of life.

I have heard other admissions during the debate, some of a very startling character, with reference to which I will make an observation. It has been affirmed by the right hon. Baronet the Paymaster of the Forces (Sir E. Knatchbull), that a tax upon corn is necessary in order to enable the landed interest to maintain their rank in society. I do not think that the noble Lord (Stanley) who sits near the right hon. Baronet the Paymaster of the Forces, is dealing fairly by the people of England. It was very justly observed some years ago by the *Times* newspaper, that the Corn-laws were nothing but an extension of the Pension List; but it might have been added that it was also an extension of a system of pauperism to the whole of the landed aristocracy. If this country is to be ground down by an oligarchy, we had better at once adopt the system pursued in ancient Venice, where the nobles entered their names in the Golden Book, and took the money directly out of the people's pockets. It would be more honest to imitate those nobles openly, than do so in a covert manner. But one class will not submit to be heavily taxed, whilst the other lives in opulence and splendour.

The right hon. Baronet is not ignorant of the state of the commercial and manufacturing interests of the country. He is not legislating in the dark. I will tell the right hon. Baronet, that bad as trade is now, it will soon be much worse. The Government must be aware that the measure proposed for the settlement of the Corn-law question will not extend the commerce of the country. The [14] House has been told that the measure must be pushed forward without any delay, and this is the result of a communication which the right hon. Baronet has received from the corn-dealers. But I would ask, why there should not be corn-merchants as well as tea-merchants? Why should not the corn-merchants be able to bring back, in exchange for other commodities, a cargo of corn, as well as a cargo of sugar or of tea? If something is not done, we shall see our large capitalists struggling against bankruptcy. In the last speech which the right hon. Baronet addressed to the House, he adopted an apologetic tone of reasoning. An excuse might be offered for the right hon. Baronet if he had been placed in his present position by the people, or by the Queen; but he has placed himself in his present situation.

With reference to the proposition of the noble Lord (J. Russell) the Member for the City of London, I must say that although it is not good, it is infinitely better than the measure submitted to the House by the hon. Gentleman opposite. The right hon. Baronet has been reconstructing his party ever since the carrying of the Reform Bill. He must know that his party is composed of monopolists in corn, tea, sugar, timber, coffee, and the franchise. Out of that band of monopolists the right hon. Baronet has formed the party which supported him, and which formed his Government. They bribed, they intimidated, until they got possession of office.

I will say a word to the noble Lord and his right hon. associates on this (the Opposition) side of the House, who, whilst advocating generally Free-trade principles, have manifested a squeamishness in supporting the motion for a total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws. With all deference to them, that shows too great sympathy with the few, and too little with the many who are suffering. I would ask them, if they had had the power of rescinding the Corn-law Bill by their votes in 1815, would they then have talked of compensation, or of a nine or ten years' diminishing duty? No, they would not. Why then, I would ask, do they now think that twenty-seven years' unjust enjoyment entitles them to an increased benefit in the shape of compensation? I have frequently known the difficulty met before. I give hon. Gentlemen and noble Lords on my side of the House full credit for sincerity, but, for their benefit, I will state the answer I once heard given to the difficulty on the hustings, an answer which was most satisfactory to my mind. On the hustings, there was a great difficulty amongst Whiggish gentlemen. They we [1] ' I may explain, for the benefit of those unacquainted with the Lancashire dialect, that the meaning was, all at once; and so the Corn-laws were. They were put on in 1815 at once, and against the remonstrances of the people.

Let them, then, abolish the law with as little ceremony.

I will not further detain the House. The question resolves itself into a very narrow compass. If you find that there are exclusive burdens on the land, do not put a tax upon the bread of the people, but remove the burdens. If you are not prepared to ameliorate the condition of the people, beware of your own position—nay, you must take care that even this House may not fall under the heap of obloquy which the injustice you are perpetuating will thrust upon you.

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**FREE TRADE. III.**  
**DISTRESS OF THE COUNTRY.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, FEBRUARY 17, 1843.** ↩

[The Queen's Speech, read Feb. 2, 1843, 'regretted the diminished receipt from some of the ordinary sources of revenue, and feared that it must be in part attributed to the reduced consumption of many articles, caused by the depression of the manufacturing industry of the country which has so long prevailed.' On this statement Lord Howick moved, on Feb. 13, that the House be resolved into a Committee of the whole House, to consider this part of the Speech. Lord Howick's motion was rejected by 115 votes (306 to 191). The peculiarity of the debate, however, was, that Sir Robert Peel imagined that Mr. Cobden had charged him with being personally responsible for the distress of the country. Sir Robert Peel had been greatly affected by the murder of his private secretary in the preceding month (Jan. 24), who was shot by one Macnaghten. It was believed that the secretary was shot by mistake for the Minister. Mr. Cobden disclaimed using the term 'individually or personally responsible' in any other sense than that of Ministerial responsibility. It should be added that the allusion to 'an eminent and learned Lord,' is to Lord Brougham, who insinuated that the attempt of Macnaghten was stimulated by the language of the League. His words were 'that ministers of religion did not scruple to utter words—calculated to produce fatal effects (he would not say had produced them), but calculated to produce the taking away of innocent life.']

WE have heard much objection made to the form of this motion. We have heard it charged as being a party motion. Now, Sir, I can, at all events, say it is not a party motion as far as I am concerned. I was absent from town when it was put on the books. I am no party man in this matter in any degree; and if I have any objection to the motion it is this, that whereas it is a motion to inquire into the manufacturing distress of the country, it should have been a motion to inquire into manufacturing and agricultural distress. If the motion had been so framed, we should not have had the words 'manufactures' and 'agriculture' bandied between the two sides of the House, but we should have had the Gentlemen on the other side of the House put in their proper position as defendants, to justify the operation of the law as it affects their own immediate interests.

I ask you, are the agricultural districts of the country in such a state now, that you are entitled to say that this law—for this has been made a Corn-law debate—that this law, which injures the manufacturers, has benefited the agriculturists? There is the hon. Member for Dorsetshire (Mr. Bankes), one of the most clamorous assailants of the Anti-Corn-law League, he will probably speak on this question—there is plenty of time, the debate may be adjourned, if necessary—and when he speaks he [16] can answer me, and correct me if I am wrong. Take the district of Dorsetshire which the hon. Gentleman represents. Take his own property. I ask him, are the labourers on his estates receiving more than the miserable pittance of 8s. a week at this moment? I ask him to contradict me, if he can, when I state that the labourers in his neighbourhood are the worst paid, the worst clad, and the most illiterate portion of the population of this country. I tell him that the peasantry on his own estates, earning these 8s. a week, if their families average the usual number of five, that then the head of each of these families is sustained at less cost than the cost of the maintenance of each person in the county gaol of Dorsetshire, and I ask you—you with your peasantry at your own doors, living worse than paupers and felons—I ask you, are you entitled to assert, and will you maintain, that the present state of things is for the benefit of the agriculturists? I put you on your defence—I call on you to prove the benefit which this law confers on the agriculturists. Mind, I do not call you agriculturists. The landlords are not agriculturists; that

is an abuse of terms which has been too long tolerated. The agriculturists are they who cultivate the land, who work at it either with their hands or their heads, and employ their capital on it; you are the owners of the land, who may be living at London or Paris: to call yourselves agriculturists is just as absurd as if shipowners were to call themselves sailors. I deal with the agriculturists, and not with the landowners—not with the rent-owners; and I tell you that you cannot show me that the labouring classes on farms are as well off as the much-deplored manufacturing population.

I myself employ a number of men; my concern is in the country, like your own. I have a number of labourers like yours; unskilled labourers, as unskilled as your own. I employ them in washing, cleansing, wheeling, and preparing materials, and I pay them 12s. a week; but I have no protection. Take Devonshire, Sussex, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, and other agricultural counties, which send up their squires to this House to support this odious system, and any of these counties will show you a larger ratio of paupers than the manufacturing districts. Take Dorset; there has just been laid on the table of the House a Return of the population and revenue, and here we find, that in the year 1840, the very year in which we were blessed with wheat at 66s. a quarter, one out of every seven of the population in Dorsetshire was a pauper. And if we go to Sussex and the rest of the counties which send representatives to support this system for the benefit of the agriculturists, there we shall invariably find the largest amount of pauperism.

I will turn to the farmers. The hon. Gentleman, and other hon. Gentlemen, are pleased to designate me as the archenemy of the farmers. Sir, I have as good a right as any hon. Gentleman in this House to identify myself with the order of farmers. I am a farmer's son. The hon. Member for Sussex has been speaking to you as the farmers' friend; I am the son of a Sussex farmer; my ancestors were all yeomen of the class who have been suffering under this system; my family suffered under it, and I have therefore as good or a better right than any of you to stand up as the farmer's friend, and to represent his wrongs in this House. Now, I ask you, what benefits have the farmers had from this protection of which you speak so much? I put you on your defence, and I again call on you to show how the farmers can possibly derive higher profits from your law to enhance the price of the produce of the soil of this land? You must answer this question; this has not been shown yet at any of your agricultural meetings, where you tell the farmers that you must sink or swim together, and that you both row in the same boat. But the time is coming, and on the next quarter-day you will be called upon to show the farmer—upon whom some little enlightenment is now creeping—to show how he hitherto has gained, or can [17] gain, any benefit from this legislation. You will have to answer this question from the intelligent farmer:—

'If there be more farmers than farms, then will not the competition amongst us for your farms raise the rent of land? and will there not be a proportionate value of the produce to whatever value you may give it in your Acts of Parliament?'

The same intelligent farmer may tell you:—

'If there were more farms than farmers, and if you raised the value of your produce, you would be bidding against each other for farmers, and then I could understand how the farmers could get some benefit in the shape of extra profit, for you would be compelled to pay them better for cultivating your farms.'

Now all this has been made as clear as noon-day.

The hon. Member for Dorsetshire has maligned the Anti-Corn-law League, as an association for disseminating, not useful, but disagreeable knowledge. Every farmer in Dorsetshire has had a packet; every county voter of Dorsetshire has received a packet,

containing about a dozen little tracts. This has not been left to casual distribution; it has not even been entrusted to the Post-office; but special agents have gone from door to door, climbing the mountains and penetrating the valleys. There is not a freeholder in the country who does not know as much about the matter as we ourselves. Do you think we shall hear next year, at the agricultural meeting at Blandford, the hon. Member for Dorsetshire telling his hearers that ‘the Corn-law is the sun of our social system; that it gilds the spire of the church, the dome of the palace, and the thatch of the cottage’? There will be some black sheep, who will shout out, ‘and the chimney of the landlord.’ We have had during this debate a great deal of criminating language cast at this body. Far be it from me to enter into such extraneous matter as the objects and proceedings of that body. I shall not think it necessary to answer the very amusing gossip in a stage coach which has been related to us. But attacks have been made upon this body at other times. The right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) made a dark insinuation against it at the close of last session, when there was no one to answer it; and we have had the cry raised since, ‘that the Anti-Corn-law League is an incendiary and revolutionary body.’ We took no pains to refute that charge. How have the public treated your accusations? The shrewd and sagacious people of England and Scotland have given bail for the morality and good conduct of the maligned body to the amount of 50,000*l.*; and let the same slander go forth another year, and I am sure that the people will then enter into recognizances for the same body to the extent of 100,000*l.* No, it is not necessary that I should enter into the defence of such a body.

There has been an attempt, an alleged attempt, made to identify the members of this body with a most odious—a most horrible—I might say, a most maniacal transaction which has lately occurred. An attempt has been made in another place—reported to have been made—to suggest that the proceedings of the League were to be connected with that horrible transaction. I do not—I cannot—believe that this report is a correct one; I cannot believe that either the language or the spirit of the remarks attributed to an eminent and a learned Lord (Brougham) are founded on anything that really took place. If they were uttered, I can only attribute them to the ebullition of an ill-regulated intellect, not to a malicious spirit. This trick of charging the consequence of injustice upon the victims of injustice is as old as injustice itself. Who does not remember that, when this infamous law was enacted in 1815, Mr. Baring, now Lord Ashburton, was charged, in this House, by one of the Ministers of the day, with having caused all the riots, murders, and bloodshed which ensued in the metropolis, merely because he had been one of the most pertinacious opponents of the law, denounced it in [18] the House as a mere scheme to raise rents at the expense of the commercial classes, and the welfare of the community. Sir, if there be anything which can add to the gratification I feel at having taken an active part in this body, it is the high character of those with whom I have been associated. Yes, tested by their utility, tested by their public character and private worth, they might justly be compared to the Members of this House, or of another more illustrious assembly. But enough of this subject.

I will now turn my attention to the question before the House. Last session the Anti-Corn-law party put the question, What was to be done for the country? That is the question I now put. I say to the Government—I say to the right hon. Gentleman opposite—What do you now think of the condition of our trade, and the condition of the country? I gather from what has fallen from hon. Members on the other side, that this motion is to be resisted. The motion is to be resisted; but what are the reasons for resisting it? How is the question met by the Government? It is alleged that there is a great discrepancy of opinion on this side of the House. I admit it. There is such a discrepancy between some Gentlemen on this side and myself, between the noble Lord (Worsley), the Member for North Lincolnshire, and myself; there is as great a difference of opinion as between me and the Gentlemen on the other side. The party on our side is as the hon. Gentleman opposite described it—it is broken into atoms, and may never be reunited. But does that diminish the responsibility of the Government,

which is strong in proportion as the Opposition, is weak? Are we never to escape from this mode of evading responsibility—this bandying of accusations about Whigs, Tories, and Radicals, and their differences of opinion? Is that cry always to be repeated and relied on? How long, I ask, is this course to be continued? How long is the argument to be used? If it be continued, what defence will it be for the Government? There always have been differences of opinion on both sides of the House, but that can be no excuse for the right hon. Baronet at the head of the Government, who took the reins of power into his hands on the avowed responsibility of bringing forward measures to meet the exigencies of the moment. But there is not one measure of importance adopted by the Government which has not been taken out of the school of the Free-traders. The colleagues of the right hon. Baronet who have spoken on this occasion have introduced the Corn-laws into this debate, and have discussed that subject in connection with the present distress. But what says the right hon. Member the Vice-President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Gladstone)? Why, he says that there are not two opinions on the subject of free-trade. What says the right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) at the head of the Government? Why, he says that on this point we are all agreed. And the right hon. Baronet the Secretary of the Home Department (Sir J. Graham) says that the principles of free-trade are the principles of common sense. And last night, to my amazement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Goulburn) said, there are not two opinions on the subject, and there never was any dispute about it. The noble Lord the Member for North Lancashire (Stanley), who has not yet spoken, will, I believe, justify by his vote the same principles. Again, the right hon. Gentleman the Paymaster of the Forces (Sir E. Knatchbull) must adopt the same course. That right hon. Gentleman, and that noble Lord, may not have avowed free-trade principles; but they must, as men of morality, carry those principles into effect, for both of them have averred that the Corn-laws raise rent. The right hon. Gentleman the Paymaster of the Forces has expressly declared in this House that the Corn-laws were passed to maintain country gentlemen in their station in the country. The noble Lord the Member for North Lancashire has said that the Corn-laws raise the price of food, and [19] that they do not raise wages; the noble Lord, therefore, says that the landed gentlemen increase their rents at the expense of the profits of the middle classes. They must carry their principle into their conduct. Now, taking the four Members of the Cabinet who have avowed free-trade principles, and assuming that the two others by their addresses must be favourable to them, I ask, why do they not carry their principles into effect? How am I met? The right hon. Gentleman the Vice-President of the Board of Trade admits the justice of the principles of Free Trade. He says that he does not want monopoly; but then he applies these just principles only in the abstract. Now, I do not want abstractions. Every moment that we pass here, which is not devoted to providing for the welfare of the community, is lost time. I tell the hon. Member that I am a practical man. I am not an abstract Member, and I ask what we have here to do with abstractions? The right hon. Gentleman is a free-trader only in the abstract. We have nothing, I repeat, to do with abstractions here. The right hon. Gentleman used another plea. He said that the system has been continued for centuries, and cannot now be abandoned. If the Attorney-General be in the House (and I hope he is), what would he say to such a plea in an action of trover? Would he admit the plea? Would he say, 'I know that you have right and justice on your side in the abstract, but then the unjust possession has been for so long a time continued that it cannot be at once abandoned?' What would be the verdict in such a case? The verdict would not be an abstract verdict, but one of restitution, of total and immediate restitution. The right hon. Gentleman has made the admission that these principles must be carried out, and he says that the Corn-laws are temporary. I ask why the Corn-laws are temporary? Just laws are not temporary. It is the essence of just laws to be eternal. You have laws on your statute-book against murder and robbery, and no man says they should not be continued. Why, then, are the Corn-laws to be temporary? Because the Corn-laws are unjust; because they are neither right nor expedient. They were passed to give a benefit to the country gentlemen, and raise them in society at the expense of the rest of the community.

The hon. Member for Bridport (Mr. Baillie-Cochrane) made last night a declaration against the Anti-Corn-law League, but he pronounced it with such gentle accents, he put so much sweetness into his denunciation, that he deprived it of its effect. That hon. Member is a young man, and perhaps is not aware of the force of what he said. But that hon. Gentleman, too, made an admission which will not sustain your system. The hon. Member said, that if the Corn-laws were repealed, the aristocracy would be forced to reduce their rents, and could not live as an aristocracy. The Gentlemen who make those admissions are the real incendiaries, the real revolutionists, and the real destroyers of the aristocracy. I must put the honest part of the aristocracy on their guard against them, and must tell them not to allow themselves to be included with those who fear destruction from the repeal of the Corn-laws. They must know that an aristocracy cannot maintain its station on wealth moistened with the orphans' and the widows' tears, and taken from the crust of the peasant. The question has been brought before the country, and the decision must be adverse to them. The people are well aware of their conduct. They may talk about an increase of one or two mills, or of the increase of joint-stock banks, but I call attention to the condition of the country, and I ask you if it is not worse now than it was six months ago? It has been going on from bad to worse. And what is the remedy you propose? what are the proceedings by which you propose to give relief to the country? Is it an abstraction? You cannot say that we are at the close of the session, or that you are overloaded with public and private business. Never before were there so few measures of importance under the consideration of Parliament at such a period. Have you devised some plan, then, of giving relief to the country? If you have not, I tell you emphatically that you are violating your duty to your country; you are neglecting your duty to your Sovereign if you continue to hold office one moment after you can find no remedy for the national distress. The right hon. Gentleman, however, proposes nothing. The measures which he has brought forward since he has held office have not remedied the distress of the country. It may be said of me, that I am a prophet who fulfils his own prophecy; but I tell you your proceedings will lead from bad to worse; that more confusion will come; there are germs of it sown in the north of England. Yes, not in the cotton district. The danger which menaces you will come from the agricultural districts, for the next time there is any outbreak, the destitute hands of the agricultural districts will be added to the destitute hands of the manufacturing districts.

Does the right hon. Gentleman, who must know the state of the country, doubt whether this be the fact? I receive correspondence from every part of the country—but what is my correspondence to his?—and he must know that what I say is the fact. It is time, then, to give up bandying the terms 'Whig' and 'Tory' about from one side of the House to the other, and to engage in a serious inquiry into the present condition of the country. The right hon. Baronet cannot conceal from himself what is that condition: capital is melting away, pauperism is increasing, trade and manufactures are not reviving. What worse description can be given of our condition? and what can be expected, if such a state of things continues, but the disruption and dissolution of the State? When the agitation was begun for the repeal of the Corn-laws, four years ago, the right hon. Baronet met our complaints by entering into many details, showing that our commerce was increasing, that the savings' banks were prospering, that the revenue was improving, and that consumption was augmenting. When a deputation of manufacturers waited upon him to represent the hopeless state of trade, he refused to listen to their representations, or he met them with details of an extraordinary increase in the consumption of the people and in the revenue, and with many official statements full of hope. I ask the right hon. Baronet, can he take the same ground now? Can he tell the country and his Sovereign when this state of things is likely to terminate; or what other remedy has he for this than that we propose? Can he find a better?

If you (Sir Robert Peel) try any other remedy than ours, what chance have you for mitigating the condition of the country? You took the Corn-laws into your own hands after a fashion of your own, and amended them according to your own views. You said that you were uninfluenced in what you did by any pressure from without on your judgment. You acted on your own judgment, and would follow no other, and you are responsible for the consequences of your act. You said that your object was to find more employment for the increasing population. Who so likely, however, to tell you what markets could be extended as those who are engaged in carrying on the trade and manufactures of the country? I will not say that the mercantile and manufacturing body, as a whole, agree with me in my views of the Corn-laws; but the right hon. Baronet must know that all parties in the manufacturing and commercial districts disapprove of his laws. I do not speak of the League—I speak of the great body of commercial men; and I ask, where will you find on any exchange in England, Scotland, or Ireland, where ‘merchants do congregate,’ and manufacturers meet, twelve men favourable to the Corn-law which you forced on the community, in obedience to your own judgment, and contrary to ours? You passed the law, you refused to listen to the manufacturers, and I throw on you [21] all the responsibility of your own measure. The law has not given the promised extension to our trade: it has ruined the Corn-law speculators. (A laugh.) You may laugh; but is it a triumph to ruin the corn-dealers, or cause a loss of 2,000,000*l.* of money? When you have ruined the corn speculators, who will supply you with foreign wheat? The Corn-law is in such a state that no regular merchant will engage in the corn trade. Ask any merchant, and you will find that no man, let his trade be what it will, sends abroad orders for corn as he sends abroad orders for sugar and coffee. No merchant dares to engage in the corn trade. I was offered, or rather the Anti-Corn-law League was offered, a contribution of wheat from one of the Western States of America, on condition that we should pay the expense of transport down the Mississippi. On calculating the cost of transport, we found it would not pay the expense of carriage. On taking the 20*s.* duty into consideration and the expense of carriage, we found that when it was sold here there would not be one farthing for the League! When such is the case, how can such merchants as the Barings, or the Browns of Liverpool, send out orders for corn, when there is no certainty whether they shall have to pay 20*s.* duty, or any less sum, when it arrives? Such a law defies calculation, and puts an end to trade.

Take, again, the article sugar. The right hon. Gentleman by his tariff reduced the duties on 700 articles, and he carefully omitted those two articles which are supplied by North and South America, the only two countries the trade of which can resuscitate our present declining manufactures. Yes, the right hon. Baronet altered the duties on 700 articles. He took the duty off caviare and cassava powder, but he left corn and sugar oppressed with heavy monopoly duties. The right hon. Baronet reduced the charges on drugs, which was not unimportant, but he excluded those two vital commodities which the merchants of the country know can alone supply any extension to our trade. I will not say that this was done with a design of injuring our trade, but it was done. The right hon. Baronet acted on his own judgment, and he retained the duty on the two articles on which a reduction of duty was desired, and he reduced the duties on those on which there was not a possibility of the change being of much service to the country. It was folly or ignorance. (Oh! oh!) Yes, it was folly or ignorance to amend our system of duties, and leave out of consideration sugar and corn. The reduction of the duties on drugs and such things was a proper task for some under-Secretary of State, dealing with the sweepings of office; but it was unworthy of any Minister, and was devoid of any plan. It was one of the least useful changes that ever was proposed by any Government. There is also the case of timber. I admit that the reduction of the duty on timber is a good thing; but you reduced the duty when there are 10,000 houses standing empty within a radius of twenty miles of Manchester, and when there are crowds of ships rotting in our ports. At the same time, you denied our merchants the means of traffic, by refusing to reduce the duties on the two most bulky articles which our ships carry. You reduced your

timber duties when there were no factories to build, and when there was no employment for ships. That is the scheme of the right hon. Baronet—the only plan which he has to propose for the benefit of the country. Can he not try some other plan? Does he repudiate that which has been suggested by the hon. Member for Whitehaven (Mr. Attwood)? and will he have nothing to do with altering the currency, to which he is invited by the hon. Member for Birmingham (Mr. Muntz)? The hon. Member for Shrewsbury (Mr. Disraeli), too, and the organs of his party in the press, have plans, but he will adopt none of them. It is his duty, he says, to judge independently, and act without reference to any pressure; and I must [22] tell the right hon. Baronet that it is the duty of every honest and independent Member to hold him individually responsible for the present position of the country.

I am not a party man. Hon. Members know that I am not. But this I will tell the right hon. Baronet, that let who will be in office, whether Whigs or Tories, I will not sit in the House a day longer than I can, in what I believe to be the interest of my constituents, not vote for or against Whigs or Tories, as I may think right. I tell the right hon. Gentleman that I, for one, care nothing for Whigs or Tories. I have said that I never will help to bring back the Whigs: but I tell him that the whole responsibility of the lamentable and dangerous state of the country rests with him. It ill becomes him to throw that responsibility on any one at this side. I say there never has been violence, tumult, or confusion, except at periods when there has been an excessive want of employment, and a scarcity of the necessaries of life. The right hon. Baronet has the power in his hands to do as he pleases. If he will not, he has the privilege, which he told the noble Lord (Palmerston), the late Secretary for Foreign Affairs, he had, namely, that of resigning the office which gives him the power. I say that this is his duty. It is his duty to resign office the moment he finds he has not power to carry out to the fullest extent those measures which he believes to be for the benefit of the country. But whether he does so or not, I have faith in the electoral body—I have faith in the middle classes, backed by the more intelligent of the working classes, and led by the more honest section of the aristocracy—I have faith in the great body of the community that they will force the Government, whether of the right hon. Gentleman or of any other party, to the practical adoption of those principles which are now generally believed to be essential to the welfare of this country. The right hon. Gentleman has admitted the justice, the policy, and expediency of our principles. He has admitted, then, that they must in the end be triumphant. I repeat, I trust in the middle classes, in the electoral body, in the better portion of the working classes, and in the honest part of the aristocracy, to force the right hon. Baronet, or his successors, to put in practice those principles, the justice, policy, and reasonableness of which he has himself admitted.

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**FREE TRADE. IV.**  
**CORN-LAWS.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, MAY 15, 1843.** ↩

[Spoken during the debate on Mr. Villiers' annual motion. After the discussion had been carried on for five nights, the motion was negatived by a majority of 256 votes (381 to 125).]

I THINK we may fairly consider the speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham (Mr. Muntz) as an episode in this debate. I was going to remark, that by hon. Gentlemen opposite, and by many upon this side of the House, although we have had five nights' debate, the question proposed by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton (Mr. Villiers) has been scarcely touched: that is, How far you are justified in maintaining a law which restricts the supply of food to be obtained by the people of this country.

In supporting the present Corn-law, you support a law which inflicts scarcity on the people. You do that, or you do nothing. You cannot operate in any way by this law, but by inflicting scarcity on the people. Entertain that proposition. In fact, you cannot escape it. And if it is true, how many of you will dare to vote for the continuance of the present law? You cannot enhance the price of corn, or of any other article, but by restricting the supply. Are you justified in doing this, for the purpose of raising your prices?

Without attributing motives to hon. Gentlemen opposite, I tell them (and they may rely upon it as being true) that they are in a false position when they have to deprecate the imputation of motives. We never hear of a just judge on the Bench fearing the imputation of motives. But I will not impute motives, although they have been imputed by hon. and right hon. Gentlemen opposite. Dowries, settlements, mortgages, have all been avowed as motives from the benches opposite; but I will take things as I find them. Upon what ground do you raise the price of corn? For the benefit of the agricultural interest. You have not, in the whole course of the debate, touched upon the farmers' or agricultural labourers' interest in this question. No; hon. Gentlemen opposite, who represent counties, instead of taking up the old theme, and showing the benefit of this law to farmers and to farmers' labourers, have been smitten with a new light. They have taken the statistics of commerce and the cotton trade to argue from. Will the hon. Member for Shoreham, who took the statistics which the right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) four years ago cast aside, tell the House how it is you do not take the agricultural view of the question, and show the farmers' interest in it? There is something ominous in your [24] course. Shall I tell you the reason? Because the present condition of the farmers and labourers of this country is the severest condemnation of the Corn-laws that can possibly be uttered. During the whole operation of this law, or during that time when prices were highest under this law, the condition of the agricultural labourers was at the worst. An hon. Gentleman opposite says 'No.' Has he looked at the state of pauperism of this country in the last Return which was laid before the House? There he will find that up to Lady-day, 1840, the proportion of paupers in the different counties in this country, showed that the ten which stood highest in the list were ten of the purely agricultural counties, and that after your law had for three years maintained corn at 67s. per quarter. If anything could have benefited the labourer, it should have been three years of high prices, and after trade had suffered the greatest depression in consequence of your law. If the agricultural labourer had not prospered up to the year 1840, what has been his condition since? The returns of pauperism show an increase in the number of the poor; and what is the present condition of the labourer in the agricultural districts? Is not crime increasing in the same proportion as pauperism has



increased? I heard it stated that the actual returns of your petty sessions and your assizes furnish no criterion as to the state of demoralisation in your districts; nay, I heard that such was the extent of petty pilfering and crime, that you were obliged to wink at it, or you would not be able to carry out the business of your criminal courts. I hear that both in Somersetshire and in Wiltshire. Hon. Gentlemen may cry 'No, no,' but there is an intelligent audience outside which knows that I am stating the truth. And what are the crimes these poor people are brought up for? Why, one old woman for stealing sticks of the value of 1½*d.* was sentenced to a fine of 15*s.* Another case was a charge for stealing turnptops; and at Chichester an individual has been convicted of stealing mould from the Duke of Richmond. Such is the state of poverty and distress, that they are glad to steal the very earth. Again, what was the fact urged by the hon. Member for Dorsetshire (Mr. Bankes), in extenuation of the condition of his labouring poor, but this: that he allowed them to gather up the sticks that were blown from the trees in his park? It was brought forward as a proof of the hon. Member's benevolence, that he allowed his labourers to gather the crows' nests which were blown from the trees. And what does all this argue? Why, it argues that which you cannot deny, namely, that the agricultural peasantry of this country are in a state of the deepest suffering at this moment, and that, if there has been any benefit from the Corn-laws, they, at least, have not derived one particle of a share of it.

I now come to the farmer; and I ask how it is that you, who support this law, have not adduced the case of the farmer? Are there no farmer's friends present who will state his condition? You know that his capital is wasting away—that he cannot employ his labourers—and why? Because that money which should go to pay them is absorbed in your rents. Hon. Gentlemen opposite cry 'No, no;' but the farmers of this country will corroborate me, and that you well know. Does the hon. and gallant Member for Sussex (Col. Wyndham) say 'No'? If so, I leave the farmers of Sussex to say whether I am uttering the truth or not. The hon. and gallant Member tells me to go to Sussex. I mean to do so, and perhaps the hon. and gallant Member will meet me there. Now, I want to ask what benefit the farmer ever derived from the Corn-laws? I have asked the question of hundreds, nay, thousands of farmers; and, as I am now in the presence of landlords, I ask it of you. I ask you to go back to the Corn-law of 1815. What was the object of the Corn-law of 1815? Why, to keep up the price of wheat at 80*s.* per quarter. Did it ever produce that effect? No; for in 1822, [25] seven years afterwards, wheat was sold as low as 42*s.*; and yet your agents and valuers valued to your tenants upon the calculation that they would get 80*s.* per quarter for their wheat. You cannot deny that. And what was the consequence? Why, in 1822, the farmers were ruined by hundreds and thousands. One newspaper in Norwich contained 120 advertisements of the sale of stock in one day. The farmers then came to ask you for another law. You appointed Committees, you went through the farce of inquiring into agricultural distress, and you passed another law, that of the year 1828, giving the sliding-scale protection, to secure them 64*s.* per quarter for their wheat; and then, again, the red-tape men went about to value your farms, on the calculation that the price obtained would be 64*s.* Another seven years elapsed, and then wheat was selling at 36*s.* Then came general distress, again, and an application for a fresh Committee. You gave them another Act; and I now come to the Act passed in 1842 by the right hon. Baronet at the head of the Government; and now the farmers are again distressed, and blame the right hon. Baronet for deceiving them. They do blame, and they are justified in blaming, the right hon. Baronet, and I will tell you why. The right hon. Baronet, in the speech in which he proposed that law, said that he intended it to give to the farmer, as far as legislation could give it, 56*s.* per quarter for his corn. Now, the right hon. Baronet will remember that I called his attention at the time to that point. I saw the importance of it then, and I see it now, and I wish the House to see clearly how the matter stands. The right hon. Baronet said, that on taking a comprehensive view of the cost of production and the then state of the country, he thought, if he could secure the farmer a price not rising higher than 58*s.*, nor going lower than 54*s.*, that these were about the prices the farmer ought to obtain. It is true that

afterwards, in the course of the same speech, the right hon. Baronet said that no legislation could secure that price.

Now I do not charge the right hon. Baronet with intending to deceive the farmers; I do not attribute motives to the right hon. Baronet; but this I do say, that in dealing with plain and simple men—men accustomed to straightforward and intelligible language, this was certain, however intended, to mislead the farmers in their calculations. But it was a most convenient thing for the landlords to go to the tenant with a promise to secure him 56s. per quarter for his wheat, and it was very convenient for the right hon. Baronet to say, at the same time, that though the law purports to give you 56s. per quarter, still I have not the power to secure it to you. And now, what is the price? 45s. or 46s. instead of 56s. The right hon. Baronet distinctly says now he never intended to maintain the price, and that he could not maintain it. Now, then, I ask, what is this legislation for? I ask what it means?—what it has meant from 1815 downwards? I will not say what the motives of its promoters have been; but the effect has been one continued juggle played off upon the farmers, in order to enable the landlords to obtain artificial rents. These being paid out of the farmer's capital, loss falls on him, while the landlords are enabled to profit by it, owing to the competition among tenants for farms.

We will not separate this night until we have a perfect understanding of what you do purpose to do for the farmer. I ask the right hon. Baronet opposite, when he talks of the prices which the farmers should obtain, whether he can prevent wheat from falling as low as 36s.?—whether he can ensure it from falling as low as 30s.? As the right hon. Gentleman says nothing, I will assume that this House cannot secure to the farmer a price of even 30s. per quarter. Let this go forth; let there be, if you please, no ambiguity on the point—no more deception; let the farmer perfectly understand that his prosperity depends upon that of his customers—that the [26] insane policy of this House has been to ruin his customers, and that Acts of Parliament to keep up prices are mere frauds to put rents into the landlord's pockets, and enable him to juggle his tenants. Now we shall soon be able to dispose of some other sophistries upon the Corn-laws. We are told that the Corn-laws are intended to compensate certain parties for excessive burthens; that is to say, that the landowners, who have had the absolute command of the legislature of the country, and who, to a late period, did not permit a man to vote in this House unless he swore he was a landowner, have been such disinterested angels (for no human beings would do as much) as to lay excessive burthens upon their own shoulders; and when they find it necessary to re-adjust taxation and relieve themselves, they do it by passing a Corn-law, and then come forward and confess that the law is inoperative. Now, in the first place, I say that the disinterestedness of the landlords on this presumption surpasses all human perfection; it is perfectly angelical.

But, unfortunately, the contrary to the proposition of excessive burthens falling on land is so notorious, that to say a word upon the subject would be a work of supererogation. Let a copy of the statutes be sent, if it were possible, to another planet, without one word of comment, and the inhabitants of that sphere would at once say, 'These laws were passed by landlords.' The partiality of your legislation is notorious; but, if you had been really so disinterested, is it not likely, when you found out your real condition, that you would have put taxation fairly upon the shoulders of the people, instead of substituting a clumsy law, which you admit does not reimburse you at all?

Now we come to another view of this question. We have the confessions of the right hon. Baronet the Paymaster of the Forces (Sir E. Knatchbull), and of the hon. Member for Wiltshire (Mr. Bennett); the one to the effect that the Corn-law goes to pay marriage settlements, and the other that it goes to pay mortgages. Now, if it goes to pay these, how can it pay the farmer? And if you cannot insure the operation of the law, if, after you have passed it, you are obliged to confess that you cannot insure its operation, who then pays the dowries and the settlements? Surely, in that case, they must be paid out of the pockets of the farmers.

You have confessed that a law cannot secure prices, but as mortgages and settlements are paid, then I say that you have confessed that the money comes from the farmers; and surely this is sufficient to account for their distress. I contend, then, that if this law creates a profit at all, that profit passes into rent. And this proposition rests on more than the admission of the Paymaster of the Forces, or of the hon. Member for Wiltshire. We have other acknowledgments of the fact coming from still higher authority. See a transaction of Mr. Gladstone, of Fasque, in Kincardineshire, of which I have an account in a paper in my pocket. Mr. Gladstone was applied to to reduce his rents, and he writes a letter to his agent telling him—and his confession is worth something, as coming from a prudent and sagacious merchant—telling him that he does not look at the alteration in the Corn-law as calculated to reduce prices, and that consequently he does not feel himself bound to reduce his rents. Now this is a clear admission that the benefit from the law goes into the shape of rent. But this is not all. There is his Grace the Duke of Richmond. The other day he was visiting his tenants in Scotland, dining with them, and looking over his estates, and in one of his speeches he told them, whilst speaking of the alteration in the Corn-law, that he was not the man to hold his tenants to any bargain they had made under circumstances which had been altered, and that if they wished it he was willing that they should throw up their leases and return their farms into his hands. Now what does that amount to? Why, merely that the Corn-law influences the rent. It means [27] that or nothing; although I must say such a speech shows very little care for the farmer, who perhaps a dozen years ago purchased stock and went into his farm, and is now told, when probably the price of his stock has fallen 40 per cent., that if he pleases he may sell off, leave his farm, retire from his connection with the noble Duke, and get another landlord where he may. All this shows, then, that if the Corn-law operates to cause a profit at all, it also operates to put that profit into the pockets of the landlord.

Now do not suppose that I wish to deprive you of your rents; I wish you to have your rents; but what I say is, don't come here to raise them by legislative enactments. I think you may have as good rents without a Corn-law as with it; but what I say is this, that when you come here to raise the price of corn under the pretence of helping the farmer and the farm-labourer, whilst in reality you are only going to help yourselves, then, I say, you are neither dealing fairly by the farmer, nor yet by the country at large; and, mind me, this is just the position in which you stand with the country. You have deceived the farmers, and, feeling that you have deceived them, they have a right to ask, how you intend to benefit them? Nay, more, they have a right to inquire into your rentals, and find out how you have benefited yourselves. Yes, I say they have a right to inquire into your rentals. The hon. Member for Sussex (Colonel Wyndham) laughs, and truly it would be laughable enough were he to come to me to inquire into the profits of my business; but, then, he should remember that I do not ask for a law to enhance the profits of my business. He, on the contrary, is the strenuous supporter of a law, which, in its effect—whatever may be its intention—benefits his own class and no other class whatever. This language, I dare say, is new to the House. I dare say it is strange and unexpected in this place; but it is the language I am accustomed to use on this subject out of doors, and I do not wish to say anything behind your backs that I am not prepared to say before your faces.

And here let me ask what progress has been made in rents? Since 1793, rents in this country have doubled. I have returns in my pocket sent in by the clergy of Scotland, from which it appears that the rental of that country has increased in the same time threefold. In England, rents have not increased to that extent; but I can say with safety that they have more than doubled; and there is something beyond even this. You have had a considerable advance in rents since 1828. There has been a great rise since that year. I hold in my hand a return of the rents of the corporation lands of the city of Lincoln since 1828. I see the hon. Member for Lincoln (Colonel Sibthorp) in his place. Now I have a return of the property of the city corporation; it is nearly all agricultural property, and I find that that rental has increased 50

per cent. since the year 1829. Now I do not say that the whole rental of the kingdom has increased in the same proportion, but I do say that we have a right to inquire what is the increase in that rental. The hon. Member for Lincoln says he won't tell me; but I will tell him that nothing is so easy to learn as the history of rents in this country, for there is scarcely a village in England in which there is not some old man who can tell what was the price of land in his parish through many succeeding years. I say it is the business of the farmer and the poor labourer to know the progress which rents have made since the Corn-law passed, and if they find that whilst in the one case they are losing all their capital, and in the other their condition is deteriorating, and they are obliged to put up with a potato diet—if they find, I say, that whilst this has been going on, rents have increased and are increasing, then, I contend, they will have a proof that this law was passed for the landlords, and that it operates for their benefit, and their benefit only. I know that this is a sore subject; but I am bound [28] to make it known that this is not the only way in which you have profited by political delusions.

I will now show you another view of the question. You have made the Cornlaw the subject of political outcry in the counties. You have made it a Church and State question, and at the same time you have made the farmers your stepping-stones to political power. And for what has this been done? I will take the last general election. At the last election the 'farmers' friends' were running through the country, and, with the purest and most disinterested intentions, no doubt, were making all sorts of promises to the agriculturists. Well, here are some of them, sitting in this House. Here they are, some of them sitting on the Treasury Bench. The right hon. Baronet at the head of the Government (Sir R. Peel) made a speech at Tamworth as the 'farmers' friend.' The hon. Member for Essex (Sir John Tyrell) says he quoted it repeatedly, but I don't think he quotes it now. As for the right hon. Baronet, however, with all his ability, and with his thirty years' Parliamentary experience, he might probably have obtained the situation he now holds whatever might have been the circumstances of the time. The post was due to him, perhaps, for his talents; so of him I shall say no more just now. But there is another right hon. Baronet very near him—I mean the Paymaster of the Forces (Sir E. Knatchbull). There is no disturbing force in him. The right hon. Member is the 'farmers' friend.' There he sits. O, I was struck, the other night, at the fervour with which the hon. Member for Wallingford (Mr. Blackstone) apostrophised this 'farmers' friend,' when, with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, he said, 'O if the Paymaster of the Forces were himself again! A few years back, he would not have treated the farmer so.' [Question!] Ay, it is not a very pleasant one, certainly; but it is the question. I do not complain of the Paymaster of the Forces; I have no reason. He has made a speech which is more to the point, which is better calculated to serve the cause which I uphold than anything that has occurred in this debate, excepting, perhaps, his own explanation. I don't complain of him; I pass on. There is a noble Duke (Newcastle) who is a 'farmers' friend,' and he has a son (Lord Lincoln) in the Woods and Forests. The noble Lord, I dare say, performs his duty efficiently; but I want to show the farmers of England—of whom there is not one genuine specimen in this House—who they are who profit by this law. Well, then, there is a noble Duke (Buckingham) who is the 'farmers' friend' *par excellence*. He has reached the summit of rank already. He has no son requiring a place under Government. But one prize he had not, and that he soon obtained—I mean the blue riband. Now these are but the outward and visible signs of the gains of this triumph; but whilst all this patronage, and all these honours, have been showered on the 'farmers' friends,' what have the farmers got themselves? You think this is not the question; but I can tell you we have no hope of the salvation of the country but by showing the farmers how you have cajoled them. You taught the farmers to believe, that if they elected you, their 'friends,' to Parliament, you would speedily repay them for their trouble. They allowed themselves to be driven to the poll by their landlords, who raised this cry; they believed the landlords could keep up the price of corn by Act of Parliament. Will you now confess that you cannot? You have confessed by your silence that

you cannot guarantee the farmer even 30s.: quarter. That delusion is at an end.

How is it, now, that the farmers cannot carry on their business without political intermeddling, like other people? 'Throw the land out of cultivation,' by removing the Corn-law! who say that? The worst farmers in the country,—the landlords, rather, of the worst-farmed land. Who tells us that the land will not be thrown out of cultivation? The landlords of the best-farmed land. I put one prophecy against the other. Let the question be decided, as other matters [29] are, by competition. I object to your pretences for keeping up the price of corn. Those who are most rampant for protection are the landlords, I repeat, of the worst-farmed land—the Members for Wilts, Dorset, Bucks, Somersetshire, and Devonshire—where you may see the worst farming in the kingdom; and why is it so? Not because the tenants are inferior to those elsewhere—Englishmen are much the same anywhere; but the reason is, because they are under political landlords,—men who will not give their tenants a tenure, but with a view to general elections. You say 'No,' but I will prove it. Go into the country yourselves, and where you find the best-farmed land there you will find the longest leases. The Lothians, Northumberland, Norfolk, Lincoln. [No.] What, no leases in Lincolnshire?

[Colonel Sibthorp: 'Not long leases.']

Exactly; I mentioned Lincoln last, as being nearer south. Well, on the estates of the Duke of Northumberland, for example, you will find no long leases, and the worst farming; and you will find with long leases good farming, even in the midst of bad; and *vice versâ*. This is unpalatable, of course. Hon. Gentlemen say it is not true. I ask them if they expect farmers to farm well without long leases? Can you really expect tenants to lay out capital in draining and improvements without long leases? I should feel insulted if anybody offered me a farm, expecting me to lay out money, without the security of a lease. What is the language of the farmers themselves? You must not treat them now as if they believed you the 'farmers' friends.' Did you hear the petition I presented from Dorsetshire, agreed to at a meeting of 3000 farmers and others, and signed by the chairman, a landholder, for the total repeal of the Corn-laws?

But this cannot be treated as a farmer's question. We shall have it put upon a proper footing from this very night. The Corn-law, if it does anything, raises rents. I do not come here to tell you it does so. I do not think you understand your own interests. But I know this, that you inflict the greatest possible amount of evil upon the manufacturing and commercial community, and do no good either to the farmer or the farmer's labourer. It may be a very unpalatable question; but what, I ask, are the terms which you wish to make, under the new law, with your tenants? I do not like the language I have heard upon the subject from landowners. The right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) said, the protection had been reduced; but I have heard little talk, at least in public, about reducing rents. However, I have heard a great deal about the farmers 'improving and curtailing their expenses.' What says the Member for Worcestershire (Mr. Barneby)?—

'I have been in Yorkshire, and the worst land there produces as much as the best in this country.'

What, again, was the language of a noble Earl (Verulam) at St. Alban's?—

'You must no longer sit before your doors, with your pipes in your mouths, and drinking your ale; but you must at once bestir yourselves.'

What said the Member for Somersetshire (Mr. Miles), who sometimes appears here in the character of the 'farmers' friend?'—that

'In Scotland they have double our crops, and that this might be secured in this country by improved husbandry.'

Now, this is not fair language on the part of landowners to farmers; for if protection be reduced, the farmers have a right to reduced rents; and if not, let us hear what is the intention of the Corn-law?

We have heard a great deal of ambiguous language during the debate from the right hon. Vice-President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Gladstone), but we have not yet heard what the Cornlaw and the tariff have done. At one time, we hear an avowal of reduced prices; next (like putting forward one [30] foot, and then withdrawing it, and advancing the other to erase the foot-trace), we hear that credit was not taken for that. This might not be intended, but it certainly is calculated to deceive the farmers. But the right hon. Gentleman said, 'Whether the tariff has reduced prices or not, prices had been reduced, and there has been no reason to complain.' This sort of ambiguity is not the way now to deal with the farmers. Gentlemen must not regard this as a battle between the farmers and the manufacturers. We propose to make good friends with the farmers. Yes; we are their best friends, their only friends, their best customers; and I can tell you this, they are beginning to be sick of the political landlords.

There is a small section of this House now setting themselves up as the real farmers' friends, upon the ruins of the old friendship: and I can say this, that so badly have they been treated, that they are now inclined to suspect even these new friends; and they say, 'What are they after? Don't you think they want to get up a party? Are they not wishing to make themselves trouble-some to the Minister, that he may fancy it worth while to offer them something?' The farmers are now disposed to distrust everybody who promises them anything; and the reason they are ready to look on us with friendly eyes is, that we never promised them anything. We tell them distinctly that legislation can do nothing for them. It is a fraud. They must never allow bargaining for leases and rents to be mixed up with politics. They must deal with their landlords as with their wheelwrights and saddlers, with a view to business, and business alone.

I am fully aware that I have said more than may be quite agreeable to hon. Gentlemen opposite. I think it is but fair to exculpate ourselves from the imputations that have been cast upon us by the right hon. Gentleman (Sir R. Peel), and the Vice-President of the Board of Trade, that we are seeking a monopoly for ourselves, as well as to deprive others of their monopoly. But what I have to say is this—we want no monopoly; and this I know, that the moment I go amongst the farmers, and say we are for free trade in coffee, in sugar, in manufactures, in everything, that the farmers, like honest and just men as they are, will at once exclaim, 'That is right, that is fair!' Now I not only say this, but I complain of something else. There was a singular evasion of the question by the right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel), when he talked of colonial manufactures and colonial produce, and mixed them up with the corn question. But what we want is a free trade in everything. The policy of the right hon. Gentleman amalgamated duties for the purposes of protection, and duties for the purposes of revenue, and he would have it believed that we could not carry free trade without interfering with the custom-house duties. Now, we do not want to touch her Majesty at all by what we do. We do not want to touch duties simply for revenue; but we want to prevent certain parties from having a revenue which is of benefit to themselves, but advantage to none else. On the contrary, what we seek for is the improvement of her Majesty's revenue; what we wish to gain is that improvement. We say that your monopoly gives you a temporary advantage—a temporary, not a permanent advantage, and that you thereby cripple the resources of the revenue.

What is the amount of all these protecting duties? This morning I went through the whole of those revenue returns, and how much do you think they amounted to? To two millions per annum, and this included the timber duties, and every other article to which you for your own views give protection. This is the entire question. What is, I ask, the difficulty of abolishing protecting duties on manufactures? How much do they produce to the Customs? Less than 350,000*l.* a-year. Then the right hon. Gentleman has spoken of the cotton trade. How much is paid, think you, for the protection of cotton goods? By [31] the last returns, 8150*l.* a-year. There is no difficulty in a Prime Minister, in a Minister of capacious mind, of enlarged views, of one whose genius leads him to deal with something better than caviare and other trifling articles. Such a Minister would, I say, find no difficulty in sweeping away the protecting duties.

Then the right hon. Gentleman spoke of subverting the whole of our colonial system. What does he mean by subverting the whole of our colonial system? We do profess to subvert the colonial monopolies. It is true that we would do that; but that is not subverting the colonial system. What we would do must benefit the revenue, and not injure. The equalization of the duty on sugar would increase the revenue, as it has been proved by Mr. M'Gregor, to an amount of not less than 3,000,000*l.* a-year. Take away the monopoly, and you benefit the revenue. You might, too, do the same with coffee. You might increase the revenue to the amount of 300,000*l.* a-year by the equalization of the duty on coffee. Would it be an injury to the colonies that you left them to all the enjoyments of a free trade? Where is the value of our possessions, if they are not able to supply us with articles as cheap and as good as come from other countries? They pay us the same price for our cottons as other countries, and no more. If they cannot supply us with sugar, surely they can supply us with something else.

There can, then, be no difficulty in the way of the Exchequer which need prevent you from carrying the principle of free trade. I want the Anti-Corn-law League to be known as the Free-trade League. I know that hon. Gentlemen opposite think that all we want to do is to take away the corn monopoly. The public mind is urged on by us against that key-stone in the arch of monopoly; but I can tell hon. Gentlemen opposite, that that organization never will be dispersed until there is a total abrogation of every monopoly. There has been a great deal of talk of free trade being theoretically and in the abstract right. Does the right hon. Gentleman know what that would lead to? If free trade be theoretically right—if it is as old as truth itself, why is it not applicable to the state and circumstances of this country? What! truth not applicable; then there must be something very false in your system, if truth cannot harmonise with it. Our object is to make you conform to truth, by making you dispense with your monopolies, and bringing your legislation within the bounds of justice. I thank you for the admission that we have a true cause, and, armed with the truth of that cause, I appeal to the friends of humanity, I appeal to those on the other side who profess and practise benevolence, I appeal to certain Members on the other side of the House, and I appeal especially to a certain noble Lord (Lord Ashley), and I ask him, can he carry out his schemes of benevolence if he votes for any restriction on the supply of the people's food? If he should vote against the present motion, I ask him, will not he and his friends be viewed with suspicion in the manufacturing districts?

We often hear a great deal about charity, but what have we to do with charity? Yes, I say, what have we to do with charity in this House? The people ask for justice, and not charity. We are bound to deal out justice; how can charity be dealt out to an entire nation? Where a nation is the recipients, it is difficult to imagine who can be the donors. I, therefore, exhort the advocates of religion, the advocates of education, the friends of moral and physical improvement, to reflect upon the vote, which they are about to give. I ask, what will the country say if such Members, patching up a measure of detail, are found voting in the

approaching division against the motion of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton? I call upon them, therefore, to separate themselves from those with whom they are accustomed to act, unless they are prepared to lose all the influence which they have laboured so hard to acquire in the manufacturing districts. I call upon [32] them to support the present measure if they hope to be useful.

There are 7,000,000 or 8,000,000 people without wheaten bread. If the people continue to descend in the scale of physical comfort, and to eat potatoes, the hope of moral improvement which the friends of humanity indulge must be altogether disappointed. The right hon. Gentleman the President of the Board of Trade said, that the importation of 600,000 quarters of wheat would be a national calamity; but how otherwise are the people to be supported? The Poor-law Commissioners told them that they must add a county as large as Warwick to the territorial extent of the country, or the population of the land must descend to a lower scale of food. They will go on multiplying; no scheme has yet been devised to stop that. You have attempted to bring down the population to the supply; but the evil which you sought to inflict upon them has recoiled upon yourselves.

I have now a word to say to the noble Lord (J. Russell) the Member for London. The noble Lord will not vote for this motion; he says he objects to the repeal of the Corn-laws, but prefers a fixed duty to the sliding-scale. Now, I think the noble Lord has not treated the great party on this side of the House, nor the country, well, in not stating explicitly the grounds on which he would retain any portion of this obnoxious law. He talked of the exclusive burdens to which he said the land was subject; but he did not specify those burdens. I have the greatest respect for the noble Lord, but I venture to tell him that I think it is due to his own reputation, and to the party which acknowledges him for its leader, that he should distinctly state the grounds on which he advocates the imposition of a duty on the importation of corn. As far as I know the feeling out of doors, whatever may be the fate of the motion, however small the numbers in its favour may be, it will not have the slightest effect upon the progress of public opinion on the question. The League will go on as they have hitherto done. In the course of our agitation we may probably dissolve Parliaments and destroy Ministries, but still public opinion upon the subject cannot be checked by the division, whatever it may be, and, if there be any force in truth and justice, we shall go on to an ultimate and not distant triumph.

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**FREE TRADE. V.**  
**LONDON, SEPTEMBER 28, 1843.** ↩

[The systematic agitation for the repeal of the Corn-laws commenced with a meeting held at King-street, Manchester, on Dec. 20th, 1838. In course of time considerable funds were collected, in order to carry on the movement. In 1843, the League hired Covent Garden Theatre, and employed it for the purpose of metropolitan meetings, besides organising a complete staff of lecturers throughout the country, and establishing a newspaper which should report speeches and disseminate information on the subject. In the speech printed below, when Mr. Cobden said that the League had resolved to petition the House of Commons no longer, the audience, almost in one mass, rose and burst into a series of the most enthusiastic cheers, which lasted for several minutes, accompanied by waving of hats and handkerchiefs, and other tokens of satisfaction.]

It would be no impeachment of the nerves of the most practised speaker if he felt a little daunted at such a meeting as this. I thought our last gathering at Drury Lane a most imposing one, but that could not be compared with the sublime spectacle which now presents itself before me. My business to-night is purely of a practical nature, and I am glad it is so, for I am altogether a practical man. I do not know that I should have deemed it necessary to trouble you with one word of argument on the general question of the Cornlaws or Free Trade; but we meet at the present moment under rather different circumstances from those under which we last parted, and I will, therefore, detain you for a moment before I enter into the practical details which I have to bring before you. You will have observed in the monopolist newspapers that our opponents place considerable reliance, in seeking to make out a case, upon the recent revival of trade and manufactures, for they tell you that this revival will not only terminate our agitation, but that it is the best possible refutation of the truth of our principles. Now I tell them that it will not put an end to our agitation, and I am prepared to show them and you that it is a triumphant proof of the truth of our principles. I admit the partial revival of trade and manufactures; I wish I could say it was a general revival. I wish I could say it was half as extensive as these monopolist exaggerations represent it to be.

What is the cause of the revival? I am not in the habit of troubling such meetings as this with reading statistical documents—they are generally most inappropriate—but by way of showing you what the cause of the recent revival of trade is, as an illustration better than any other I could give you of the truth of our principles, I will just ask your attention to one short statistical statement. The average price of wheat in the three years, 1839, 1840, and 1841, was *67s. 1d.*; the price in 1839 being [34] *70s. 6d.*, the price in 1840, *66s. 4d.*; and the price in 1841, *64s. 5d.* These three years were years of unparalleled suffering and distress in this country. Last autumn Providence blessed us with an abundant harvest, and this, in connection with an importation of foreign corn to the extent of three millions, so reduced the price of wheat, that the average price of that article for the first six months of the present year has been only *47s. 7d.* Now, if there had been no revival of trade, under such circumstances, I should not have dared to appear before you. I should have deserved, indeed, the character of an impostor, as to all that I have said on this subject, had there been no revival of trade under such circumstances. You will have observed from what I have said, that wheat was about *20s.* a quarter less for the first six months of the present year than for the three years, 1839, 1840, and 1841; and while there was this reduction in the price of wheat, there was, at the same time, a reduction in the price of all other kinds of grain by *8s.* a quarter.

In order to understand the magnitude and importance of the subject with which we have to deal—there are some who think we over-estimate its importance; I think that up to the present time we have under-estimated it—in order to understand the matter better, I will mention, that the estimated consumption of grain per annum in this country is twenty million quarters of wheat, and forty millions of quarters of all other kinds of grain. It follows, therefore, that the additional cost of grain in each of the three years of distress was, say—twenty millions of quarters of wheat, at 20*s.* a quarter, twenty millions sterling; forty millions of quarters of all other kinds of grain at 8*s.*, sixteen millions sterling; together, thirty-six millions sterling. But grain is not the only article of agricultural produce, though grain governs the price of the other articles. It is estimated that the consumption of potatoes, meat, cheese, and all other articles of agricultural produce, is equal to the same quantity of grain (sixty millions of quarters); and the price of the one being, as I have said, governed by the other, taking the advance in price as equal to 8*s.* a quarter, here is a further addition of twenty-four millions sterling, making a total of sixty millions sterling per annum, or thirty millions for the half year, or five millions per month. All this difference in price was left in the pockets of the people the first six months of the present year; which saving, after supplying food and other articles of agricultural produce, they were thus able to spend in other ways, in buying articles of linen and cotton manufacture, hats, bonnets, and so forth. This accounts for the increased demand we have noticed for the labour of those who make linen and cotton goods, hats, bonnets, and so forth; and this accounts, too, for the people being able to buy an extra quantity of tea, sugar, and other articles in the cheap year, beyond what they consume in dear years, and this again accounts for the foreign trade in those articles also improving.

This, I say, accounts for the partial revival we have observed in our trade; but, then, this revival has been accompanied by a corresponding depression of the agricultural interest. The agricultural and the manufacturing interests would seem to be like the two buckets in a draw-well, the one going down empty as the other comes up full. In proportion as there is a revival of manufactures, consequent upon moderate prices in food, we hear the cry of agricultural distress. This has always been so much the case, that I challenge any one to point out an instance, ever since these Corn-laws were introduced, where-in the agriculturists and the manufacturers have had simultaneous prosperity. Now, I ask, is this a natural state of things? Is this alternation of distress—this intermittent fever, now attacking the one great portion of the body politic, and then the other—this distress falling on the farmer at a time when [35] Heaven has blessed him with an abundant harvest—is this a natural state of things? And yet in every instance where the farmers have been plunged in the greatest distress and suffering, it has been in the midst of the most bountiful harvest, and in the most genial seasons. Any man who takes these facts alone must have a very undue and irreverent notion of the great Creator of the world, if he supposes that this is a natural or a designed state of things. No; there is an unnatural cause for this unnatural state of things, and that unnatural cause is the law which interferes with the wisdom of the Divine Providence, and substitutes the law of wicked men for the law of nature.

During the three years to which I have been adverting, the owners of the soil might have expected to have suffered in consequence of the bad seasons; but what has been the fact? The landlords have been revelling in prosperity—in a bloated and diseased prosperity—at the very time when the people have been suffering the greatest privations and want of food. Rents have been rising. I say it boldly—it cannot be denied—rents have been generally, if not universally, raised during the three years of which I have been speaking. How stands the case of the landowner during the years of short crops and suffering to the whole community? He then extorts his rents from the distress of the operative, from the capital of the employer, or from the savings of those who are living upon the accumulations of themselves or their forefathers. And when the season is favourable—when Heaven smiles upon the fields, and

our harvests are again abundant—the landlord extorts his rent from the distress and the capital of the farmer. Nobody can deny that for a series of years the landowners have been raising their rents, not from the legitimate prosperity of the tillers of the soil, or the prosperity of the manufacturing classes. They have been raising their rents from the capital and the labour of the trading community, or from the capital of their own deluded victims, the farmers. The landowners—Oh, shame upon the order! I say shame upon the landowners and their order, unless they shall speedily rescue themselves from this pitiable—if they deserve pity—this degrading dilemma. The landowners will very soon be ashamed to hold up their heads and own themselves to be English landowners and members of our aristocracy in any enlightened and civilised country in Europe.

Do I seek to injure the landowners even pecuniarily? I have never owned it where I should have been most ready to tell them my opinions to their face—in the House of Commons. The landowners have nothing pecuniarily, they have nothing ultimately, to dread from a free trade in corn. But under Free Trade, instead of extorting their rents from the distress of every class in the country, they would be thrown back upon their own resources. Now there are riches slumbering in the soil—if the owners employ their capital and their intelligence, as other classes are forced to do, in other pursuits—there are undeveloped bounties even on the surface of the earth, and there are ten times more beneath the surface, which would make them richer, happier, and better men, if they would cast aside this monopoly. Last week, in addressing the farmers of Cheshire, I said I would bring a jury of Scotch agriculturists before the House of Commons—if their verdict could be taken there—who would state upon oath that the surface of Cheshire would, if properly cultivated, yield three times the amount of its present produce. If you were travelling by the railroad, and marked the country from Stafford to Whitmore, and then from Whitmore to Crewe, and thence the thirty miles to Manchester, I challenge all England to show such a disgraceful picture—threefourths of the finest fields left to the undisputed dominion of rushes—not a shilling spent in draining, although it is now universally acknowledged that draining is the means of doubling the [36] productions of such soils—hedge-rows of every imaginable shape but a straight line, and fields of every conceivable form but the right one. And these are the men who content themselves with sluggish indolence, and draw from the impoverishment of the people; who pick the pockets of the handloom weavers rather than by a right application of their intellect and their capital, double the quantity of grain, or butter, or cheese, which the land is capable of providing. And thus, if Free Trade did compel them to sell their articles at a less price, it would be the means of enabling the people of the country to have a double supply of food. The home market for food would be doubled, and the landowner might become an honest politician.

We are now told that the present state of the manufacturing and trading classes will put an end to the agitation for the repeal of the Corn-laws. Why, gentlemen, I think we have a few mementoes left yet to remind us that we have a Corn-law monopoly in the shape of an income-tax; in our extra poors' rates, extra county-rates, extra taxation for the five thousand troops which were added to the army in 1839, on the first outbreak consequent upon the famine which overspread the land. We have these, and other memorials of monopoly; and if some of us have survived the hurricane, can we forget the thousands and tens of thousands who fell victims to the distress of 1839, 1840, and 1841? Shall we forget that 500,000 of our countrymen have, since the August of 1838, expatriated themselves from their native soil, to seek in more hospitable lands the food denied them here? Can we forget the hundreds who have dropped into a premature grave, famine-stricken, since that time? Can we forget the scores who, by the records of the coroners' courts, have died by their own hands, to escape a lingering death by starvation? No; if we could be selfish enough—we, who have braved the storm and outlived the hurricane—ourselves to forget these things, we ought to be reminded of these events. But that we are not going to forget them, and that we will make this the

occasion for redoubling our exertions, the plan which I shall have the pleasure of laying before you, and submitting to your approbation as the plan of the League for future proceedings, will be sufficient to demonstrate.

You have heard that we have distributed a vast amount of useful knowledge on the subject of the existing monopoly. We should be bad husbandmen if we allowed the harvest which is ripening around us to be overspread by weeds or gathered by others than by ourselves.

The League proposes to take another step in giving a direction to the legislative power of this country. We propose to draw the bonds more closely between the League and the electoral body of the country, by the course of proceedings which I shall submit to you. We regard the electors of the country as possessing in their own hands absolute dominion within these realms. The laws of the country, whether good or bad, are but the breath of their nostrils. It is not our fault if the electoral body is not exactly as we should have wished to have found it—we must work with the instruments we have, unless others will find us better ones. We are not in fault if the electoral body is so distributed as to give by its scattered and detached fragments the greatest advantages to our enemies, who are the enemies of the human race, in meeting us in the field of combat. We must make the best use we can of it as it is. The plan of the League is to bring the more powerful sections of the electoral body into a union with the more vulnerable portions. What is the use of Manchester and Birmingham, and Glasgow and Edinburgh, possessing an overwhelming majority—which no monopolist will dare to face at another election—if their voices are to be counterbalanced, probably by the intriguers living in some small borough which has for electoral purposes the same weight as Manchester or Birmingham? But we will bring the great majority of the electors in the [37] large boroughs into union with those in the smaller ones. Do you suppose that because the small boroughs have not always resisted the influences exercised upon them, they are without sympathy with the condition of other bodies of their countrymen? I have the means of knowing the reverse to be the case. I have been to your cathedral cities and to your rural boroughs, which are now represented by monopolists; and I have heard upon the best authority that three-fourths of the inhabitants are heart and soul Free Traders.

We propose—we, the League, propose a plan. And don't suppose that means a few men from Manchester. The League is composed, I hope, of this meeting to begin with. It contains a great majority of the electors in the great towns and cities I have mentioned. This is the League, and before long I hope it will comprise every man in the country, unless he either believes that he has an interest in monopoly, or because the marks of stupidity are so strongly imprinted on his countenance as to hold out a continual running invitation, 'Come rob me.' We propose to provide a copy of every registrationlist for every borough and county in the United Kingdom, as soon as the present registration shall have been completed. We intend to bring these registers to a central office in London. We then propose to open a correspondence the most extensive that ever was contemplated, and that ever, I am sure, was undertaken. Those electors amount to 800,000; but I will take 300,000, excluding those in the already safe boroughs, as forming the number necessary to constitute the returns of a majority in the House of Commons. We propose to correspond with these 300,000 to begin with. And when I say correspond, don't let any timid, cautious friends fancy that we are going to commit them by forming ourselves into a 'Corresponding Society.' I am going to tell you what we mean to correspond about. We propose to keep people well informed as to the progress of our question by means of the penny postage, which has not yet been sufficiently used. I may say, in a parenthesis, that the Duke of Buckingham presided at a public meeting at Salt Hill, to celebrate the defeat of the Great Western Railway. He was a sagacious man, for the railways and the penny postage will pull down his monopoly. We intend, then, to keep the constituencies well informed by means of the penny postage, enclosing the useful

information connected with the question, and tracts bearing the most recent illustrations of it together. What could be more desirable than tomorrow to send to those 300,000 electors copies of the newspapers containing the best reports of this meeting? But we propose to send them one letter a week, and that will cost twopence for the stamp and the enclosure. That will be 2500*l*. I mention this by way of illustration and preface to what I am going to tell you before I conclude. Besides this correspondence, we intend to visit every borough in the kingdom, not by agents—we will go ourselves, because we want the thing well done. We will specially invite the electors to meet such deputations without distinction of party—we know nothing of party in this agitation,—and having met the electors, we shall have a little business to transact with them. In the first place, we shall urge upon our friends to organise themselves, and to commence a canvass of their boroughs to ascertain the number of Free Traders, and in every case where it is possible to obtain a majority of the electors in favour of Free Trade; that majority to memorialise their members, where they have not voted rightly, to vote in favour of Mr. Villiers' motion, which will be brought on early next session. Besides that, the deputation will urge upon the electors to have a Free-trade candidate ready to supplant every monopolist who still retains a seat for a borough; and the League will pledge itself, where a borough constituency finds itself at a loss for a candidate, to furnish it with one, and to give to every borough in which a vacancy [38] occurs an opportunity for its electors to record their votes in favour of Free-trade principles. [A Voice: 'The City!'] We'll talk of that by-and-by.

Now, it may be objected to us—and it has been objected—that by such means no good can be accomplished. If it cannot be accomplished by such means, it cannot be righteously accomplished at all. But it can be accomplished by such means, and we have hitherto been unfairly dealt with in our struggle with the constituencies. The last general election disclosed an amount of bribery, corruption, and intimidation, involving brutal violence, even to homicide; and the present Parliament is the creature of that vile system. And shall such a system be continued? No; not against the League. Whenever we have a voice—and we will have one in every borough when an election takes place—we will see if we cannot put down this system of bribery, and I think we may manage effectually to muzzle the intimidators. The system itself got its death-blow at the last election. It was found, in the first place, too costly. The rents would not stand such an experiment again for either party. In the next, Mr. Roebuck's exposure—and thanks to him for making it—shamed even shameless men in the House of Commons. In the next, Lord John Russell's new law—I wonder they ever let him pass it—presents the means of putting down bribery, if fairly used; but beyond that we have a better and a wiser resort than any. Hitherto the bribers and the bribees have been suffered to escape with impunity. They have been brought before the House of Commons, a Committee has decided upon the case, the petitioner has had the satisfaction of unseating the member, and was saddled with the same expense, and was at liberty to stand again; but the House of Commons took no steps to punish those by whose guilt the system was carried on. By that means they were accessories after the fact; and little better, indeed, could be expected from such a House of Commons. Now, we will try the experiment of a criminal court against these gentry. The man who bribes, or offers a bribe, is guilty of a misdemeanour, and liable to a heavy fine, and also liable to a severe imprisonment. I have heard an objection made that you cannot obtain a conviction in such a case. You cannot obtain a conviction! why not? Will a jury of our countrymen find a verdict of guilty against the hapless wretch who steals a morsel of bread for his famishing children, and will they not convict those whose guilt was of tenfold criminality—who would buy and sell that franchise upon which the bread of that poor creature depends? I say, yes. The juries of this country are precisely the class which will convict in such cases; and it is upon a jury of the country that we mainly rely for putting down bribery, and abating the flagrant system of intimidation for the future. Yes, a jury of our country saved our liberties in times past from a despotic monarchy, and again from corrupt and tyrannical administrations; and it will save us from the worse danger to our liberties—

from the taint that has been eating into the electoral bodies of the kingdom.

It is not the intention of the League to recommend any further petitioning to the House of Commons. So soon as the proceedings in reference to the electoral body to which I have alluded shall have reached such a point as to warrant the step, the Council will recommend the electors, not to petition Parliament—of that enough has been done already—but to memorialise the Queen, that she will be pleased to dissolve the present Parliament, which, like everything generated in corruption, must necessarily be short-lived, and to give to the electors an opportunity of sending men to make laws, with the advantages of the lights and experience which they have acquired, since, under a delusion, they were induced at the last election to return the majority of the present House of Commons.

I have now told you the plan which we have to submit to you, the sanction [39] of which we have to ask you to-night; and as a means of carrying on these proceedings, and to furnish the money for doing so, the Council are resolved to raise the sum of 100,000*l.* Yes, it may save a waste of ink to-morrow, by telling the monopolist scribes that the money will be raised, and that hereafter, as heretofore, the men who have taken the greatest amount of labour, and who will continue to do so in the cause, and who did so before they were ever heard of beyond the precincts of their own localities, will, as they did from the beginning, lead the van in the amount of their subscriptions for the great object which we have in view. We offer to every one the opportunity of registering his name, or her name, on this muster-roll of commercial freedom; and we do so with the perfect assurance that it is the last time we shall have to call upon our friends for a sacrifice in the cause. I feel bound, in making this statement, to take care that there shall be no misunderstanding in the minds of any party as to the money which shall be subscribed, or the conditions on which it shall be raised. We ask no one to give us money unless they are fully convinced that we are in earnest in the principles which we advocate. We ask none to contribute unless they believe that the characters, personal, private, and public, of the men who shall be hereafter taking the responsible part in this agitation, are such as they can approve and trust; and we do not ask anybody to join us now who will not be prepared, when the time shall come, to give full effect to his opinions and convictions by standing firm to the principles upon which the League is founded. Let there be no misunderstanding as to that. This is not a party move, to serve any existing political organisation; we care nothing for political parties. As they at present stand, there is very little indeed to choose between the two great parties. Let a statesman of established reputation, of whatever side in politics, take the step for perfect freedom of trade, he shall have the support of the League. We have given but a slight specimen of what we shall be able to do when a Minister, whether Whig or Tory, shall adopt such a course. He shall have the support of the League to carry such a measure, whatever his other political opinions may be.

We do not seek to interfere with any man's political opinions; there are no ulterior objects in the view of this Association. I say it solemnly, on behalf of the men with whom I am daily associating, that they have no second or collateral object in view that I am acquainted with. The single and undisguised object of the League is to put down commercial monopoly; but that cannot be done by saddling upon our backs a fixed duty on corn, which means a differential duty on sugar, on coffee, and monopoly in every other article. The Corn-law is the great tree of Monopoly, under whose baneful shadow every other restriction exists. Cut it down by the roots, and it will destroy the others in its fall. The sole object of the League is to put an end to and extinguish, at once and for ever, the principle of maintaining taxes for the benefit of a particular class. The object is to make the revenue what it ought to be—a stream flowing into the Queen's Exchequer, and not a penny of it intercepted by the Duke of Buckingham, or Sir E. Knatchbull, to pay off their endowments or their settlements; by Lord Mountcashel to discharge his burthens or his mortgages; or by any other person, or for the maintenance of any object whatsoever.

I have told you the object of the League; but it is no fault of ours if our enemies, by their opposition to our just demands, give rise to a struggle on other points with which this agitation has nothing to do. It is no fault of ours if with this agitation should be mixed up the question of rents, and should mingle in a degree that would render it difficult to separate the rights of property from the claims of those who labour under the grievance of these intolerable exactions. It is no fault of ours if the nobility of this country should become as much detested at their own baronial hall doors as were the noblesse of France previous to the Revolution. We are responsible for none of these things. The fault lies with those who support monopoly, who are deaf to reason and justice, and who place themselves upon a pedestal of injustice; a pedestal which is always liable to fall, and always certain to bring down those who stand upon it.

Gentlemen, I have said my say. There are others to follow me, and I will only say, unfeignedly, that we are engaged in an agitation which has no ulterior views, and that while so engaged we are utterly regardless of the imputations that may be cast upon us by our opponents. I could spare the monopolist prints oceans of ink, and great midnight labour in preparing their vituperations, if I could only make them believe that their attacks upon me fall as harmless as the water-drops from the sky do. We have no desire to be politicians. I say it, without affectation, that there is not a man amongst us who aims at making a political life his profession. We are aware that this great question must be carried in Parliament, not by us, but by some statesman of established reputation; but while we possess the power that we do possess out of doors—and it is nothing to what it will be twelve months hence—the cause shall never be surrendered to any Minister, to promote the purpose of any political party; and, so far as the labour goes, so long as I am blessed with health, I shall give it cheerfully; nay, I shall consider it a privilege to labour in the cause. If I were not convinced that the question comprises a great moral principle, and involves the greatest moral world's revolution that was ever yet accomplished for mankind, I should not take the part I do in this agitation.

Free Trade! What is it? Why, breaking down the barriers that separate nations; those barriers, behind which nestle the feelings of pride, revenge, hatred, and jealousy, which every now and then burst their bounds, and deluge whole countries with blood; those feelings which nourish the poison of war and conquest, which assert that without conquest we can have no trade, which foster that lust for conquest and dominion which sends forth your warrior chiefs to scatter devastation through other lands, and then calls them back that they may be enthroned securely in your passions, but only to harass and oppress you at home. It is because I think I have a full apprehension of the moral bearing of this question, that I take a pride and gratification in forming one in the present agitation; and I invite you all to take a part in it, for there is room and glory and fame enough for all as soon as we have achieved the great triumph of the downfall of the Cornlaws.

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**FREE TRADE. VI.**  
**LONDON, OCTOBER 13, 1843.**↵

[After the death of Sir Matthew Wood, and, consequently, on a vacancy in the representation of the City of London, two candidates—Mr. Pattison, Free Trader, and Mr. Thomas Baring, a Protectionist—came forward as rival candidates. Mr. Pattison was returned by a narrow majority, and the victory was deemed significant. The day after this meeting, the League resolved to raise 100,000*l.*, 12,600*l.* of which was subscribed in Manchester in a single day.]

WE do not seek to disguise the fact that our object here is to discuss with you—to entreat with you—to canvass you on the important election about to take place. Our meetings, gentlemen, are always canvassing meetings; we have no other object in our meetings than to influence the electoral voice, and every voter of the City of London has received a circular, requesting his presence here. The question we have to submit is not very well fitted for declamatory appeals; and if we would make a good use of the short time we have, to address ourselves to your judgments, we must beg your attention to what may appear very dry matter. We have come here to ask you to consider whether you will give your votes in favour of Monopoly or Free Trade. Now, by free trade I do not mean the throwing down of all custom-houses. One of your candidates, Mr. Baring—in pure ignorance, I presume, for I will not suppose he would insult you by inventing such a statement—actually says that free trade means the abolition of all custom-house duties. We have said, thousands of times, that our object is not to take away the Queen's officers from the custom-house, but to take those officers away who sit at the receipt of custom to take tithe and toll for the benefit of peculiar classes.

There is something so obviously honest and just in what we advocate, that there has been no writer, seated in the quietude of his closet, who has discussed the matter—there is no writer, I say, with a name having pretensions to last beyond the year of the publication of his works, who does not agree with us in our doctrines. Nay, we have lived to see practical statesmen, while they hold office, actually driven by the force of argument and the intelligence of the age, to admit the justice of our principles, while they have basely condescended to practise their direct opposite. Nay, more, your candidates, both of them, stand upon the same ground as to avowal of principle. The difference is, that one will honestly and consistently carry out his opinions—the other refuses to do so. Now, our business is to ask you, whether you will take a man for your representative who, acknowledging free trade to be just—though I confess I believe he does not know much about it—yet refuses to act up to his professions? Will you take him, or a man who, after avowing our principles, [42] will go into Parliament pledged and determined to carry them out?

Our chairman has said that Mr. Baring admits our principles to be true in the abstract—that is, that his own principles are untrue in the abstract. Did you ever hear of a father teaching his children to obey the Ten Commandments—in the abstract? Did you ever know the plea to go down at the Old Bailey, after a verdict of guilty had been returned, of ‘Oh, I did steal the pocket-handkerchief—but only in the abstract’? Is monopoly an abstraction? If it be, I have done with Mr. Baring and this election; but the abstraction presents itself in bodily form under the shape of certain monopolists, who diminish, by one-half, your supply of sugar, and cut off large slices from your loaves. Now, that is no abstraction.



Let us for a moment condescend to meet the arguments of our opponents, although, in point of fact, these gentlemen have put themselves out of court by their own admission. What are the grounds upon which they refuse to carry into practice principles which they admit to be true in theory? Why (they say), to start with, that, if you do give up monopoly, it will be impossible for you to raise the national revenue. Now, if I understand this, it is, that we have so much taxation to pay to the Queen for the support of our naval, military, and civil establishments, that we never can get on unless we place a burden of nearly equal weight on our shoulders in the shape of contributions payable to the Duke of Buckingham and Co. What does it mean, if it does not mean that? It is a poor compliment to the present age that this argument was never discovered until our own day; for when monopoly was first established, nobody thought of making use of that argument.

Now, let us see how the imposition of monopolies can aid the revenue. Take corn, and go back only to the time of your own memory. During the four years of 1834, 1835, 1836, and 1837, the average price of corn was 45s. It so happened that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had, during these years, a surplus of revenue; he could afford to come forward and remit taxation. But then we had the four years of 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, when monopoly did its worst for the people, but when, according to the arguments of its supporters, it should have done its best for the revenue. And what was the result? Why, a declining revenue. And when corn cost 65s. per quarter, the Premier admitted that the ability of the working classes to pay any more taxation was exhausted, and that he had no alternative but to levy an income-tax upon the middle classes. Now, I like to go to facts and experience, in preference to authority; and I take this experience, as a much better guide in forming my opinions, than anything Mr. Baring can say.

And now then for sugar. Here we have another great monopoly. And let me remind you, citizens of London, that you are fighting sugar monopolists in the City rather than bread monopolists—that aristocracy of the sugar-hogshead, to which I have so often referred—that is the monopoly which you have now to deal with—a most ignoble oligarchy. Mincing-lane cries aloud for protection. And what has sugar done for the revenue? What is the price of sugar in bond? 21s. per cwt. What do you pay for it? 41s. per cwt. Here you have 20s. additional on three or four millions of cwts.; an item worth fighting for, is it not? And you, the shopkeepers, butchers and bakers, grocers and drapers of London, what good do you obtain from this monopoly? There is this mysterious character, Monopoly, sitting at your tea-tables, and for every lump of sugar put into your cup, presto!—there is another taken out of the basin. And when your wives and children look up, and ask for the lump of sugar which they have earned, and which they think fairly belongs to themselves, this mysterious assailant, Monopoly, says he takes it for your protection. Well, now, what does the revenue lose by sugar? Mr. Macgregor, the Secretary [43] to the Board of Trade, in his evidence before the Import Duties Committee in 1840, showed that, if the monopoly in sugar were abated, the people would have double the quantity at the same price, and that three millions of money additional would be poured into the Exchequer. Mr. Macgregor is still the Secretary of the Board of Trade, and most fit he is to fill the situation. Such was his evidence, and in it is published to the world our condemnation of the present system.

Now, what is the pretence for monopoly in sugar? They cannot say that it benefits the revenue; neither is it intended to benefit the farmer in England, or the negro in the West Indies. What, then, is the pretence set up? Why, that we must not buy slave-grown sugar. I believe that the ambassador from the Brazils is here at present, and I think I can imagine an interview between him and the President of the Board of Trade. His Excellency is admitted to an interview, with all the courtesy due to his rank. He delivers his credentials; he has come to arrange a treaty of commerce. I think I see the President of the Board of Trade calling up a solemn, earnest, pious expression, and saying, 'You are from the Brazils; we shall be happy

to trade with you, but we cannot conscientiously receive slave-grown produce.' His Excellency is a good man of business (most men are who come to us from abroad to settle commercial matters); so he says, 'Well, then, we will see if we can trade together in some other way. What have you to sell us?' 'Why,' returns the President of the Board of Trade, 'cotton goods; in these articles we are the largest exporters in the world.' 'Indeed,' exclaims his Excellency, 'cotton, did you say? Where is cotton brought from?' 'Why,' replies the Minister, 'hem!—chiefly from the United States;' and at once the question will be, 'Pray, is it free-grown cotton, or slave-grown cotton?' Now, I leave you to imagine the answer, and I leave you also to picture the countenance of the President of the Board of Trade. [At this moment something gave way at the back of the stage, and a trifling interruption ensued.] Do not be afraid (continued the hon. Gentleman), it is only a form which has fallen; it is symptomatic of the fall of the monopolists. Now, have any of you had your humanity entrapped and your sympathies bamboozled by these appeals against slave-grown produce? Do you know how the law stands with regard to the sugar trade at present? We send our manufactures to Brazil, as it is; we bring back Brazilian sugar; that sugar is refined in this country—refined in bonded warehouses, that is, warehouses where English people are not allowed to get at it—and it is then sent abroad by our merchants, by those very men who are now preaching against the consumption of slave-grown sugar. Ay, those very men and their connections who are loudest in their appeals against slave-grown sugar have bonded warehouses in Liverpool and London, and send this sugar to Russia, to China, to Turkey, to Poland, to Egypt; in short, to any country under the sun; to countries, too, having a population of 500,000,000; and yet these men will not allow you to have slave-grown sugar here. And why is it so? Because the 27,000,000 of people here are what the 500,000,000 of people of whom I have spoken are not—the slaves of this sugar oligarchy. Because over you they possess a power which they do not over others. Oh, hypocrites! The Mahometans have gradations of punishment in a future state for different kinds of sins, and the very lowest depth of all is assigned to hypocrites. I should not wonder, when the Turks hear of Mr. Baring, and the arguments uttered in the House of Commons, if they were to offer up prayers for the poor hypocrites of this country. And these are the grounds on which, in this eighteen hundred and forty-third year, you are called upon to return a man to Parliament to uphold monopoly, in order that a few men in the City may sell you your sugar 20*s.* per cwt. dearer than the natural price of the market of [44] the world. It is a dirty, a base and sor-did conspiracy. I have said it before, and I will say it now, I would rather be governed for a time by a despot like Mehemet Ali—a despot, yet a man of genius—than I would knuckle down to a sordid aristocracy, such as the sugar oligarchy. Thus the men who maintain monopoly by such arguments are the men from whom you might expect to hear complaints, that we, happening to have for half the year our domiciles in Lancashire, should presume to have a voice in the election here.

I see by to-day's paper that Mr. Baring says that we have no direct interest in this election. What, is there a law passed which I am not called upon to obey in Lancashire as well as here? Does the sugar oligarchy content itself with plundering its own constituents and neighbours? No, they plunder Lancashire too. And oh, this comes well from the monopolists. It is but consistent that the men who would cut us off from the intercourse of the world, should attempt to cut off Middlesex from Lancashire. The project shows the extent and range of their intellects. It is carrying out their principles; it is letting us know fully and clearly what they would be at. But when I speak of these men, do not let me be misunderstood as having implied that the larger, or even a large portion of the merchants of your city, are on the side of restriction. I deny that the monopolists of the City have the best or richest men in their ranks. I can appeal to the declarations and writings of some of the most eminent and wealthy men among them for proof that they possess different sympathies from the monopolists, and very different grades of intelligence. There are men in the City who know well the direct and the immediate connection between the prosperity of the great

manufacturing districts and this great metropolis. There was one man in particular—I allude to Mr. Rothschild—who was a man possessing an intellect that would have made him great in any walk of life, and who saw and grasped the commercial operations of the world. He knew well that he, sitting here in London, was but the minister, the passive instrument for effecting the exchange between the manufacturing districts and the great producing countries of the Continent. In his evidence before the Bank Committee in 1832, are these words:—

'What I receive in large sums, other people receive in small sums; I buy on the Exchange bills drawn from Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, and other places, and which come to every banker and merchant in London. I purchase 6000*l.* or 7000*l.*, and sometimes 10,000*l.* of those bills in a week, and I send them to the Continent to my houses; my houses purchase against them bills upon this country, which are purchased for wine, wool, and other commodities.'

Mr. Rothschild, had he been living now, would not have come forward and said, 'Lancashire, I have no sympathy with you;' and I am happy to add that one bearing his name, and I believe his son, is one of the warmest supporters of Mr. Pattison.

There is another gentleman in the City, who, if wealth commands respect, has riches enough, and who, if intelligence has any claim on your admiration, can bear comparison with any that can be opposed to him—I allude to Mr. Samuel Jones Lloyd. In a pamphlet written by this gentleman in 1840, he says:—

'Who can fail to feel an interest in that great hive of industry? That noble, though new-born metropolis of trade, which presents so splendid a concentration of the most ennobling qualities of man—honesty, industry, intelligence, energy, enterprise, steadiness of purpose, freedom of thought, liberality of sentiment. As an Englishman, I may be proud of the town and trade of Manchester. Again, the prosperity of Manchester is another expression for the well-being of England. When that great town, and the immense population dependent upon it, cease to advance in prosperity and wealth, the star of England has culminated. Failing trade will [45] soon undermine the foundation on which every other interest rests. Our teeming population, deprived of employment, will soon convert this fair and happy land into a warren of paupers. Nor can the retrograde movement stop even at this stage. A dense population, maddened by disappointment, and rendered desperate by irremediable want, will soon fall into a state, from the contemplation of which one may well turn away.'

I am reading the opinion of one entitled to take his place with the wealthiest and, I opine, with the most intelligent of your City merchants and bankers; but this is not a question which has to be settled by great, rich merchants only. Are there not other classes as deeply interested in the matter as are these?

I see in this election a disposition to make it a property election; and, by way of stimulating the zeal of men of property, we are told that this is an Anti-Corn-law League election, and that the men of the League have a disposition to subvert property; and I am specially charged with having said something calculated to loosen the bonds which bind men to observe the rights of property. Now, gentlemen, I think, if anybody in the country can say he is the advocate of the rights of property, I am the man. Why, my whole labour in public, for the last five years, has been to restore the rights of property to those unjustly deprived of them. As there is one particular property which Mr. T. Baring seems to have lost sight of, I don't know that I could do better than refer him to Adam Smith. That writer says:—

'The property which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable. The patrimony of a poor man lies in the strength and dexterity of his hands, and to hinder him from employing this strength and dexterity in what manner he thinks

proper without injury to his neighbour, is a plain violation of the most sacred property. It is a manifest encroachment upon the just liberty both of the workman and of those who might be disposed to employ him.'

Now, having thus the countenance of Adam Smith for the assertion, I must say I think that Mr. T. Baring, his aiders and abettors, in so far as they support the Corn-laws and other monopolies, violate the right of property in the labouring man; and by so doing, I tell them now, as I did at the last meeting, that they thus undermine the rights of property of all kinds.

But allow me, gentlemen, to recall your attention for a moment to the interests of the great body of the electors in the metropolis. I will leave these millionnaires to take care of themselves, which they can do very well; but will take the shopkeeper, skilled artisan, and labourer, and ask what interest they can have in any support of monopoly? Can you, in the metropolis, be any longer hoodwinked by those who say that the abolition of the corn and sugar monopoly is a manufacturers' question? I should like to ask the shopkeepers what kind of trade they have had for the last five years? I would ask them, when communing with their wives and families, what do they calculate as the return of the year and the prospect of the next? They may not have felt the revulsion as soon as the manufacturers; but how, I should like to know, how long was it after our first deputation of 1839 that the cause which was at work with us began to prey on their interests? Why, is there a trade you carry on in the metropolis, of the wholesale and manufacturing kind, that has not the best customers in the manufacturing districts? Take the bookselling trade, which appeals to the minds of the people. I venture to say that one-half of the popular literature that is furnished by London finds its way into the manufacturing districts. I take the distillers, the brewers, the wholesale chemists, the silversmiths and jewellers; and do you find that the travellers of those houses go to the county of the Duke of Buckingham for orders?—are they not rather packed off straight for Manchester, or Glasgow, or Liverpool, or some such emporium of manufactures? Well, take [46] again your domestic trade. Do you depend for customers on the half-score of gentlemen who are sugar monopolists, or on the general passers-by before your doors? How often do you see one of those sugar lords in your shop; and when you do, do they give you twice the price for your goods that they make you pay for their sugar? Your traders are supporters of traders; but not a twentieth, or fiftieth, or one hundredth of those who uphold trades and manufactures are landlords or sugar lords, who, nevertheless, cause all the mischief they can to the community. And when that mischief has gone so far that it reaches the revenue, your business is overhauled—you have a tax upon income to meet, and pleasant surcharges, in order to make up what the great monopolists have taken from the Queen's Exchequer. Will you have again skilled artisans—men who surpass all other workmen in the more delicate and refined manufactures, and whose full employment can be alone secured by a full demand in the manufacturing as well as in other districts? How can any one, then, have the impudence, the effrontery to draw a distinction between the interests of the people of London and of the people of Lancashire? I will take your most fashionable streets—Regentstreet, if you choose—and I will ask, do the shopkeepers in that street number amongst their best customers the landlords or the sugar lords? I called on a jeweller there the other day, and I asked him what sort of season he had. 'Very poor,' he replied. 'How is that,' said I, 'rents are pretty good this year?' 'I don't care,' said he, 'if I never see a lord come into my shop, for even if they buy they don't pay me. The people we rely on for custom are,' added he, 'those brought up by the Birmingham Railway; but there lately have not been so many as there used to be, and our trade will never be what it was until we get these summer birds again to pluck.'

But I should only waste your time if I adduced any arguments to prove that your interest, or any interest in the community save that of the monopolists, is not benefited by monopoly. And the object of this meeting is to call upon the electors to vindicate your rights, and to assert the interests of the whole community. Now how are you to do that? Why, first, every

voter will, I hope, promptly register his vote in favour of Mr. Pattison. Oh, what a bright muster-roll of votes we shall have against monopoly! I trust that those who live at a distance will make a pilgrimage in the cause of Free Trade. If you who have not votes live outside the City districts, look up the Liverymen, and see that they vote in favour of Free Trade. I see, by the papers, that the Attorney-General has turned canvasser. Well, now, I should think that any of our friends of the League will make as good a canvasser as the Attorney-General. It is not merely Lancashire that looks to you. This meeting is an unique mode of canvassing. The attention of the civilised world is fixed upon our struggle. A friend of mine went to America some time ago, for the purpose of indoctrinating the people there with a horror of slavery. The first thing he saw in the newspapers was a denunciation of his proceeding, and a desire expressed that he should go home and emancipate the white slaves of England, who were taxed in their food. What does Commodore Napier say as to his reception in Egypt by the shrewd old Turk, Mehemet Ali? 'Our system,' said he, 'may be a bad one, but we have grown under it; and when I send wheat to England I find I cannot sell it at a profit, for there is a monopoly in bread there.' In the *National* I was reading the other day this statement (and that, be it remembered, is the ultra-Liberal journal of France): 'You' (speaking of England) 'should erase from your standard the lion, and place in its stead the starving operative craving a morsel of bread.' This is the way that foreigners speak of us; this is the way in which our missionaries are met. It is now for you, the voters of London, to decide whether you will submit your [47] necks voluntarily to this bondage—whether you will bow before this Juggernaut, or, by an effort worthy of yourselves and of the occasion, strike off for ever the fetters that have manacled this country.

Gentlemen, it may be done, and it will be done. I tell you it is a winning game. It is a 100 to 1, if we all exert ourselves, that we shall succeed; but our opponent, on this occasion, is one who, if we credit reports, either by himself or his agents, resorted, in another place, to practices which we must not allow in the City of London. Now, we must all know what was done in Yarmouth in 1835. I may be told that our present candidate knew nothing about it. The question naturally arises, who did it? It is my firm belief that no corruption ever takes place but that the candidate knows it and pays for it. I say that, after having been a candidate myself. I never paid 10*l.* without knowing for what; and I don't think that 12,000*l.* would be advanced by a candidate without value received. Now, I see by the newspapers that the same practice is likely to be resorted to in a small portion of London. Considering that it is the largest, it is one of the honestest constituencies in the kingdom; but there is a slight canker eating into one of the extremities of the metropolis. But I think it right to warn all parties likely to be implicated of the danger which they will run now, beyond what they ever did before, in taking bribes or treats. In the first place, if a poor voter be told 'Let it be: it will be all right, when the time fixed by law after the election is over;' I must tell him that there is no time after the election for head-money or any other money. The League is determined on putting down bribery as one of its noble objects; and the plan we have determined on for effecting this purpose we mean to put in force at the present election. It is our intention to prosecute criminally every one against whom we think can be established the charge of taking, offering, giving, or offering to take a bribe. It is, in the next place, the intention of the League to offer a reward of 100*l.* for such evidence as may lead to the conviction of such parties as are charged with those acts. Let, therefore, the poorest voter know, that if he offers his vote for a sum of money, it is an indictable offence; and if any one offers money to him, that is also an indictable offence. Indeed, if any one should offer a poor voter money, I should recommend him instantly to seize him by the collar, hand him over to a police-officer, and take him before the nearest magistrate, seeing that he does not destroy any papers or take anything out of his pocket by the way. But I think we shall succeed in putting down bribery in the City.

I shall not say anything about petitions to unseat a candidate, because we do not intend that Mr. Baring shall win; but whether he win or lose, every man against whom a charge can be established of taking a bribe, giving a bribe, or offering a bribe, shall be prosecuted criminally in a court of law. The penalty has been, in ordinary cases, that the culprit should kick his heels for twelve months within the four walls of a gaol. Now we should much prefer to prosecute the man who offers a bribe, to him who receives it; and, therefore, I advise the poor elector, who may get 30s., to keep a sharp look-out and see if he cannot honestly get 100l. Why, is it not astonishing that we should have Acts of Parliament on Acts of Parliament, that we should have hundreds of them, in fact, one after another, until they have become a laughing-stock in the House of Commons, and that yet no one should have thought before of this plan of putting down bribery? An anecdote is told of Chancellor Thurlow, before his elevation to the peerage, that, defining bribery very minutely, and after the fashion of technical lawyers, some wag said of the display, 'he has taken a great deal of pains to define what bribery is, as if there was anybody in the House that did not understand it.' And this, gentlemen, is our plan for [48] putting an end to bribery—not going to a Committee of the House of Commons, but straight to a jury of our countrymen. We will do that in every place where bribery is carried on; and we have a list, and pretty minute particulars, of all the transactions that took place at the last election.

Can any man deny that the object we seek is as pure as the means by which we hope to effect it? They may talk as they please of our violence, and of the revolutionary character of our proceedings. Why, our tactics from the first have been most peaceable. We have been accused of being, on that account, somewhat lukewarm, and that, having some property, and belonging to the middle classes, we did not appeal sufficiently strong to the physical force of the country. I can forgive a candidate at a losing election for some fictions; but Mr. Baring has not exhibited a very brilliant fancy in his inventions. When he talked of the guillotine and a sanguinary revolution, it was but a poor travestie of a travestie acted in the House of Commons—the assassination farce. Gentlemen, our object is what I have always declared it—the benefit of the whole community. I admit that some may suffer a temporary loss from the abolition of a monopoly, but I venture to say that, in the end, there will be no class that will not be permanently benefited by the removal of those unjust laws.

Mind you, I do not come here as the opponent of the farmers and agriculturists; I come charged with the authority of twenty-five county meetings in the open air, every one of which pledged itself to seek the abolition of those laws. I say, therefore, that, in voting for Free Trade, you will not be merely promoting your own interest, but the best interests of every class. With such an object, I expect you will act like men having justice and humanity to guide and direct you; and the next time I appear before a London audience, I hope I shall have to congratulate you on that triumph which will be hailed through the length and breadth of the land; for the result of your contest will be as a knell of despair throughout the kingdom, or the proud signal of a speedy triumph.

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**FREE TRADE. VII.**  
**MANCHESTER, OCTOBER 19, 1843.**↩

AFTER many wanderings in distant counties, I really feel myself revived on finding myself once more amongst my old friends, with the same smiling faces, the same hearts in the same places, and in this cradle of the agitation of the Anti-Corn-law League. You have heard something said of the labours which some of us have undergone for this cause. I don't know —if we could have foreseen, five years ago next month, the arduous duties upon which we were entering—whether we should have had the moral courage to undertake them. I believe we are all now willing to admit that, when we commenced the agitation of the Anti-Corn-law League, we had not the same comprehensive views of the interests and objects involved in the agitation that we now have. I am afraid, if we must confess the truth, that most of us entered upon this struggle with the belief that we had some distinct class interest in the question, and that we should carry it by a manifestation of our will in this district against the will and consent of other portions of the community. I believe that was our impression. If there is one thing which more than another has elevated and dignified and ennobled this agitation, it is that, in the progress of the last five years, we have found, gradually but steadily, that every interest and every object, which every part of the community can justly seek, harmonises perfectly with the views of the Anti-Corn law League.

I cannot help referring to the remarks which have been made by my friend Mr. Pearson, upon a subject which does not usually come under our consideration; but if there was one point which might be considered more than another likely to be a stumbling-block in the way of Free Traders, it is that question which he has so ably handled to-night; and as I know that monopoly has been drawing upon the humane feelings of the community in order to sustain its sugar monopoly, by pretending commiseration for the slaves, I am very glad indeed that this ground has been so completely and effectually cut from under them by one whose motives must be above suspicion, for he took a part in the abolition of slavery many years ago. But how few of us there were who, five years ago, believed that, in seeking the repeal of the Corn-law, we were also seeking the benefit of the agriculturists! And if we had not had the five years' experience we have—if we had not persevered for the five years that we have been in existence as a League—we should not have had the opportunity of demonstrating the benefits which agriculture will receive from the adoption of the principles of Free Trade. This only proves, gentlemen, that what is true requires but time to establish it in men's minds. Time and truth against all the world. But you must have time; and that time which destroys everything else only establishes truth. We had at the commencement of our career to en [50] counter the agriculturists, flushed with prosperity from high prices; and they believed that their prosperity would be permanent, as many of us believed that our adversity would be permanent. But it has been found that what then injured us reacted upon those who thought that they had an interest in injuring us. There is nothing inconsistent in our position to say that the agriculturists have derived no benefit from the injury inflicted upon us.

We are told sometimes that we are inconsistent, because we don't admit that the agriculturists benefit by our injury. It would be very monstrous indeed, in the moral government of this world, if one class of the community could permanently benefit at the expense of the misery and suffering of the rest. But, gentlemen, here is this important distinction to be borne in mind, that although agriculturists may not benefit themselves ultimately, that is no reason why they should not inflict great misery upon us. You may strike a blow, and, though that blow may be mortal to another, its recoil may be mortal to yourselves; but it is no less a mortal blow to him you strike, because you strike yourselves

also. Now, we required this experience to show the agriculturist that his permanent interest is in the prosperity of his customers, and if we have done nothing else in the five years that we have been in existence than to show the agriculturists what is their true interest, and to show them also what they are capable of doing upon the soil, we should have spent all our money and all our labour to very good purpose. I have been into most parts of the country amongst the agriculturists,—I may say, by the way, that I have been exceedingly well received by the great body of the agriculturists—that I have no reason to complain of the courtesy either of the land-owners or the farmers in any part where I have been—that I have found men, noblemen and gentlemen, directly opposed to me and my views, who have yet not hesitated on many occasions to take the chair at our meetings, and to secure a fair hearing and fair play for all parties; and this I venture to say, that there is not a county in England where I have been to address a meeting, where I should not be as well received at any farmers' market ordinary, as any landowner professing to be a 'farmer's friend' in that county.

Well, I have naturally taken some interest since my return in what has been going on in the counties that I have visited; and I say that, if our agitation has had no other advantage than in the stimulus it has given to the agricultural community, our money and our time will have been well expended. I never take up a newspaper now from the agricultural districts, containing a report of one of their agricultural meetings (and this is the period of the year when they are holding them in all parts), but I find, mingled with occasional apprehensions of what the League is going to do, one universal cry—'Improve your agriculture.' There is not one of the Members of Parliament, who sit on the monopolist benches, and who has gone amongst his constituents to attend their agricultural dinners, but has carried with him some one panacea or other that is to enable farmers to brave the rivalry which they now see is inevitable with foreign countries. One says, 'Subsoil your land;' another, 'Thorough-drain your land;' another, 'Grub up your fences;' another, 'Take care and improve the breed of stock;' another, 'You have not good farmsteads for your manure;' and one worthy gentleman of my own county, Sussex, Sir Charles Burrell, has gone back to the nostrum, that the farmers must take to growing white carrots. Well, it is something, at all events, to find that there is now acknowledged to be room for improvement in British agriculture.

But we have further acknowledgments, which are very important indeed in our case. I took up a newspaper—I had one sent to me yesterday—from Essex. There I find that a meeting has been held in Colchester, and the gentle [51] man who presides (the president of the East Essex Agricultural Society) is the gentleman who signed the printed circular that was sent round throughout that division of the county, begging the farmers and agriculturists generally to come up and put me down when I visited Colchester. Now, I'll give you the opinion of this gentleman upon the Corn-law:—

'Mr. Bawtry said he had no pretensions to be a prophet; but if so, he should predict that, at no very distant period, agriculture would be left to stand upon its own legs—that the adventitious protection which it now derived from legislative enactments would be withdrawn; and, therefore, the question for the farmers was, how should they be best prepared to meet the crisis?'

Well, what is his remedy?—

'He thought it would be at once admitted that their sole consideration must be to make up the deficiency in the value of agricultural produce, by increasing the amount of production.'

Now, gentlemen, this is an important admission—that they have not hitherto done as much as they might have done to improve the cultivation; and it is an admission, too, that they are only now stimulated to make by our agitation.



But what can be done? I don't come here to talk agriculture to you on my own knowledge; but I quote from the speeches of gentlemen opposed to us at their agricultural meetings. What then can be done? I see that a Mr. Fisher Hobbes (and I may tell you that Mr. Fisher Hobbes wrote a letter in the newspapers against me in Essex, and that he is one of the most eminent agriculturists there) says, at the same dinner,—

'He was aware that a spirit of improvement was abroad. Much was said about the tenant-farmers doing more. He agreed they might do more: the soil of the country was capable of greater production, if he said one-fourth more, he should be within compass. But that could not be done by the tenant-farmer alone: they must have confidence; it must be done by leases; by draining, by extending the length of fields, by knocking down hedgerows, and clearing away trees which now shielded the corn. They did not want trees, which, if they stood for forty years, were not in a much better position, but were only worth, perhaps, 2s., while at the same time they were reducing the value of the crop from 20s. to 30s. a-year.'

Well, gentlemen, here is some homage paid, at all events, to the Anti-Corn-law agitation—the admission, by one of the highest authorities in Essex, that the land can produce one-fourth more than it has produced. I see at the meeting of the Liverpool Association, Lord Stanley makes a similar statement; and a Mr. Binns, who was one of the judges of stock, at the same meeting declares that the land is capable of producing double as much—as much again as it now produces. Well, now, let us take the lowest estimate—let us suppose that one-fourth more can be produced. We produce only about twenty million quarters of wheat; it appears, now, that the land can produce, and ought to produce, five million quarters of wheat more. That would have saved us all the famine we went through for four years after the beginning of our agitation. Why has this not been produced? Lord Stanley says, in his speech at Liverpool, 'The farmers must not, now-a-days, stand, as their fathers and grandfathers did, with their hands behind their backs, fast asleep.' But I want to ask Lord Stanley why the farmers' fathers and grandfathers stood fast asleep, with their hands behind their backs? I charge Lord Stanley, who came down to Lancaster and talked about Tamboff being able to send here an enormous quantity of wheat—a man who, knowing better (I cannot charge him with ignorance)—a man who, knowing better all the while, pandered to the very ignorance he is now complaining of in the farmers, by telling them that a single province in Russia could send 38,000,000 quarters of corn here to swamp them. I charge it upon Lord Stanley, and others of his class and [52] order, the politicians who tell the farmer not to rely upon his own exertions, but upon Parliamentary protection; I charge it on these men that they are responsible for the farmers having stood with their hands behind their backs.

Well, gentlemen, then it seems that one of the effects of the agitation of the League is, that agriculture is to improve, and we are to have at least one-fourth more corn produced at home—we may have double; with all my heart, and we may then do very well without going 3000 or 4000 miles for corn; but, in the name of common sense and common justice, I say, don't starve the people here till your prating statesmen, that come down once a year to talk at their agricultural dinners, have devised some plan by which the people may be fed at home, according to their notions of production—don't presume entirely to stop any inlet for corn from abroad which the people here may require to keep them from starvation. I have never been one who believed that the repeal of the Corn-laws would throw an acre of land out of cultivation. But not only now does it appear that land is not to be thrown out of cultivation, but, if we may take the testimony of these gentlemen themselves, all that is required is free trade in corn, in order that they may produce one-fourth more than they do now. And that, recollect, when we are told by the very same parties—and their newspapers are now rife with the same arguments—that our object is to bring agricultural labourers into the manufacturing

districts in order to reduce wages there. But what do these very gentlemen admit? That you must increase cultivation, and that increased cultivation, as they well know, can only go on by additional employment of labour upon the soil. You must have more labour to lay down the draining tiles of which Lord Stanley speaks, and which he recommended to the land-owners of Yorkshire and Lancashire. You cannot grub up hedges, you cannot grub up thorns, you cannot drain or ditch, or make any improvement, but you must call into employment more agricultural labour. Our object, therefore, is not to diminish the demand for labour in the agricultural districts, but I verily believe, if the principles of Free Trade were fairly carried out, they would give just as much stimulus to the demand for labour in the agricultural as in the manufacturing districts. Oh, but it is pleasant to find gentlemen who have been asleep (for they have been quite as much asleep as the farmers have), going down to their agricultural dinners, and paying these tributes to the men of Manchester, who, by these fly-flappers, have managed to rouse them into a little activity. These squires at dinner remind me of the story of Rip Van Winkle, who awoke from his thirty years' sleep, rubbing his eyes, and looking about him for his old scenes and old connections, and wondering where he was. So these squires are rubbing their eyes, and opening them, for the first time, to a sense of their real situation. Having worked round our agitation to this point, I think that, so far as argument goes, our labours are nearly at an end. I think the whole case, so far as discussion goes, is given up, by the reports of the late agricultural meetings.

We are the great agricultural improvers of this country. Amongst the other glories which will attach to the name of Manchester will be this, that the Manchester men not only brought manufactures to perfection, but that they made the agriculturists also, in spite of themselves, bring their trade to perfection. Now, though the agriculturists have much to learn, and many improvements to make, they are doubtless very much in advance of most of the agriculturists in other countries. The only fault is, that they don't keep so much in advance as the manufacturers do. But that they are in advance of most other countries I think we have sufficient proof; and I was reading an American paper this very morning which gives an illustration of that in a way that must be quite consolatory to those [53] squires who are afraid that they cannot compete with the Americans. I see that at an agricultural meeting in the State of New York, held at Rochester, on the 20th September, Mr. Wadsworth, their president, in the course of his speech, said, in speaking of this country,—

'We have tried the English in the field of war and on the ocean, and the result had been such that neither might be ashamed. But there was a more appropriate field of contest—the ploughed field—and while England could raise forty bushels on an acre, whilst we could raise but fifteen, we must acknowledge that she was pretty hard to whip, meet her where we may.'

Well, then, gentlemen, we are constantly met and taunted with this objection:—'If you are not going to get corn cheap, what's the advantage to be?—how are you to be able to reduce wages, and so compete with the foreigner?' Now, you know this has been a weak invention of the enemy, in order to lead the working classes upon a wrong scent; but I think the experience of the last twelvemonth has had one good effect, at all events, that of convincing the working people in this district that lower-priced food does not mean also employment at lower wages. The object of Free Trade is not to take foreign corn, and to prevent the home-grown corn from being sold; but we have gone upon the assumption—I don't know whether we are correct or not, but I am afraid we are—that the people of this country have never been sufficiently fed with good wheaten bread. We have had a notion that, to four millions at least in Ireland (and Ireland has its Corn-law as well as England), wheaten bread is a luxury only seen occasionally, and never tasted; and we have a notion that there are one and a half or two millions at the least in this country, who eat a great deal too much of that root, against the use of which I join somewhat in Cobbett's prejudice—the potato—unless it is accompanied with a good joint of roast beef,—and too little wheaten bread. Well, the object of the Free Traders

is (it may be very trite to tell you, but we must reiterate these old arguments, for they are always the best arguments), that these people may all be able to get a bit of wheaten bread if they like to work for it. And this, without preventing the farmers at home from sending their corn to market, but by enabling the whole of the working-classes to purchase more of the necessaries and comforts of life. Now I heard this case put at Doncaster the other day, by Mr. Wrightson, the member for Northallerton—a most estimable man and a large landed proprietor in the West Riding of Yorkshire—as properly as I have heard it put for a long time. He says:—

'The great delusion of our landed gentry is this: they think, if they can prevent the hand-loom weaver exchanging his web for the corn of America, that they keep that man at home, a customer to themselves. Now (he says) that is our greatest delusion. If we would allow that man to exchange his web for American corn, he would then have a considerable surplus of earnings to lay out with us for fresh meat, for vegetables, for butter, milk, cheese, and other things. But if we prevent that man exchanging his web for the corn of America, we deprive ourselves of him as a customer for those articles, and we are obliged to subsist him altogether as a pauper.'

And, gentlemen, I may say it is a matter of proud congratulation to us that we find in this country men of the stamp of Mr. Wrightson, and of that noble Earl who joined him on that occasion at the meeting at Doncaster. It is a subject of proud congratulation for us that we have men of that stamp belonging to our landed aristocracy. I have myself always had the impression that we should find such men come out to join us. It is something peculiar to the English character, to individuality of character, that you will find men, whatever may be their apparent motives for going with their order, who will have the moral courage to come out and join the people; and I augur well from the presence of [54] Lord Fitzwilliam at our meeting. I hope Lord Spencer will be the next to follow. I hope that such a manly example as has been set by Mr. Samuel Jones Loyd in London,—for most manly it was in a gentleman of his reputation, and of his notorious wealth, to join the League at the very moment that it was suffering under the opprobrium attempted to be fastened upon it by a millionaire of the City,—a most manly act it was of Mr. Samuel Jones Loyd at that time to throw himself into the ranks of the Leaguers; and, I say, I hope the example of such men as my Lord Fitzwilliam and Mr. S. J. Loyd will be followed by others nearer home, in Manchester.

I can make allowance for, and can duly appreciate, the causes which may deter gentlemen of influence—gentlemen to whom parties look up, whom a wide circle respect and follow in every movement; I can make allowance for the caution with which they may hesitate to join such a body as the Anti-Corn-law League; but I put it to them, whatever their political opinions may be, whether the time is not now come at which they can with safety and propriety join us as a body, and whether we have not given them guarantee sufficient, by the prudence and the caution, and, I will say, the self-denial with which we have carried on our proceedings, that they will run no risk, whatever opinions they may have on other subjects than that of Free Trade, of having those opinions in the slightest degree offended, or prejudiced in any way, by joining us forthwith in this agitation.

Gentlemen, I think our proceedings have now been brought to that point where we have disseminated sufficient knowledge through the country, that we see the harvest now ripening for the sickle, and we must be prepared with the husbandman to gather in the harvest. It has been under that impression that the Council of the Anti-Corn-law League has determined on a course of action which I will just now briefly refer to, as the course which we intend to pursue in future. It has been thought that we have distributed information sufficient amongst the electoral body to have given us a very considerable and preponderating strength amongst the electors. The next step must be to organise and render efficient that strength amongst the electors. Now, we have gone to work in this agitation with the full conviction that we may

carry out the principles of Free Trade with the present constitution of Parliament. We may be right, or we may be wrong; we are not responsible for the Parliament as it exists; we did not make the present constituencies as they are; we did not distribute the franchise as it is distributed; but as we find the constituencies, we, as practical men, must go to work upon them; and through the constituencies, through the electoral body, is the only righteous and just means of carrying the repeal of the Corn-laws. Now, I have never doubted that the object may be gained through the present electoral body. I have always found, on looking back to the history of past events, that public opinion, when well expressed, could carry its end in this country, even when the constituency was not one-hundredth part so favourable to the expression of public opinion as it is now. Well, on looking at the present state of the constituencies of this country, the Council of the League remembered that we have certain very large constituencies, which are generally favourable to Free Trade. We have such places as Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, and a great many others, where there will never be another contest on the subject of Free Trade. I venture to say, too, that not one of the boroughs in Scotland will have to fight a battle in favour of Free Trade. But the representatives of these large boroughs are countervailed in Parliament by the votes of smaller constituencies, like St. Albans and Sudbury. How do you get over that difficulty? Why, do you believe that the electors of Sudbury and St. Albans are more favourable to monopoly in their hearts than the electors of Manchester [55] or Birmingham? No; they are just as intelligent, just as rightly disposed as we are; but they are not placed in such a favourable position for giving expression to their opinions. How is that to be remedied? I say, lay Manchester and Birmingham alongside of St. Albans and Sudbury, and you will give them a moral influence and support, and, by persevering in a local way, you will beat down the influence of the local monopolist squire who has been hitherto able to domineer over the inhabitants of those small boroughs. I speak of these boroughs merely as a type of others, where there has been no countervailing power to step in and prevent the neighbouring tyrants from domineering over the constituencies.

The Council of the League have, therefore, determined that their future operations shall be strictly electoral. You have heard that we intend to arrange in London a collection of all the registration lists as soon as they are published in December; we will have in a central office in London every registration list in the United Kingdom. We will have a ledger, and a large one, too, and we will first of all record, in the very first page, the City of London, provided it returns Mr. Pattison; and if not, we will have Manchester first. In this ledger we shall enter first, in due succession, each in a page, every borough that is perfectly safe in its representation for Free Trade. There will be a second list—a second class—those boroughs that send Members to Parliament who are moderate monopolists, who have notions about differential duties and fixed duties; and we will have another class, for those who are out-and-out monopolists. Well, we may tick off those boroughs that are safe; we go to work in the next place in those boroughs that are represented by moderate monopolists, to make them send Free Traders, and we will urge upon them in particular to canvass the electors, and send up a majority of their signatures requiring their Members to vote for Mr. Villiers' motion at the beginning of next session. We will make a selection of so many boroughs as shall be sufficient to give us a majority in the House; and I take it that those boroughs will not require to have more than 300,000 electors, and upon those 300,000 electors we will begin our fire. We will give them, through the penny postage, full acquaintance with all our proceedings; we will furnish them with arguments, put them in possession of the latest tactics of the enemy, so that they shall have the refutation of the youngest-born fallacy always at their fingers' ends. We intend to visit them by deputation. If my friend Bright takes one set, and I take another, we may get over a great many of them. And we will take somebody else with us. We will convene these meetings from London; we will send our circulars from London; there shall be no party work, the business shall not go into the hands of local cliques at all. We will take a room, and meet the electors by appointment there, without the co-operation of any local

leaders, so as to excite no jealousy on either side. And when we have got them there, we shall try and put this Free Trade question upon neutral grounds, and see if we cannot find honest men in all parties who will join us in putting down monopoly. We will organise them; we will not go without leaving traces behind us, and we will leave an organisation to work after we are gone; and we shall take care to bring away with us a list of the best men in the borough, with whom we may correspond on particular business. I was told by an old electioneerer in London, one who had dipped his fingers pretty deep into the system we are going to put down,—'You will frighten them more than anything, if you carry out that part of your plan of going down to see the electors.' It is the very thing we intend to do; and we will do it ourselves, too. It is not merely intimidation we have to contend with in these small boroughs; the system of bribery at the last election was carried out to an extent which few [56] people in this Hall, perhaps hardly one, have ever dreamt of even in your worst suspicions. The boroughs were literally put up to auction at the Carlton Club—ay, and at the Reform Club, too—at the last general election; a price was fixed upon them; and men went up to London to these cliques and coteries to know how much they could buy boroughs for. We have got an alteration of the law, which enables any public body that determines to take that patriotic task in hand, to prosecute these bribers in a way that they very little dreamt of when they passed that law. Now, we intend, as one of the glorious objects of the Anti-Corn-law League, to put down for ever the system of bribery in this country. We can expose the intimidators, and raise a pretty loud cry against them; and we will expose them wherever they are found exercising their tyrannical acts. But the bribers we can and will put down by a jury of our countrymen.

I have often expressed my astonishment that no society was ever formed similar to the Anti-Felony Societies in the agricultural districts for the prosecution of sheep-stealers, whose object was to put down bribery. Nothing is so simple; it ought to be done in London by the House of Commons. But what is the process now? A man gets into Parliament by bribery; the defeated candidate petitions the House to unseat him; a Committee is appointed to examine into the case; the whole system of bribery is laid bare in that Committee; the scoundrels who have been the actors in it are there, blocking up the lobbies of the House, enough to make a man's blood run chill as he passes them; there they are, day after day, exposing their acts of perjury and subornation; while the result is, the Committee declares the sitting Member unseated; the candidate who petitioned has to pay just the same expense as the man who is unseated, and he may go and stand again if he likes, and go through the same ordeal for his pains. What does a Committee of the House of Commons do when these men are proved guilty of the worst crime that can be conceived,—for what crime can be more heinous than buying and selling the franchises, by which the laws of this country are framed? If a man has his pocket picked of his handkerchief, if the felony is made public, he is bound to prosecute, otherwise he is held to be an accessory after the fact; and if he had taken his passage to America, the magistrates would make him stop and prosecute the felon. Yet the House of Commons allows all these nefarious practices to go on under its own roof, and never takes one step to vindicate its character with the country. I told them in the House, on the occasion of Lord Dungannon's exposure,—Sir Robert Peel was present,—'If you do not order your Attorney-General to prosecute these men, I will belong to a society out of doors that shall undertake that task for him.'

The thing can be done; you may put down bribery. It has been practised to an extent of which you are perfectly unconscious. With the exception of some of the new boroughs—and even some of them have been touched with this canker—there is hardly a pure borough to be found in the south of England. To put the system down there will require a vigorous effort; and the plan that the League has now adopted in London will, I hope, do more than anything else that could be done to convince these traffickers in seats that we are in earnest. There is a placard now spread throughout London, headed with the Queen's arms, offering a reward of 100*l.* for the evidence that shall go to convict any one who is guilty of either offering or

taking a bribe. The course is by indictment in a criminal court, and a conviction ensures the offender twelve months' imprisonment, at least; and I hope that we shall manage to bring some high game before a jury of our countrymen. You will not convict men before a Committee of the House of Commons. There was Lord Dungan. non, who wrote a cheque for 700*l.*, and [57] sent to his agent; that agent was proved to have just handed over the money to the men who voted for Lord Dungannon; Lord Dungannon is unseated, he is incompetent to sit again during this Parliament, and yet the Committee declared there is no proof that bribery was practised with the cognizance of Lord Dungannon. Now, I would like to see some of these Lord Dungannons brought before a jury—an honest jury—of twelve of our countrymen. Well, gentlemen, the object we have in view is to remove a mighty injustice, and the effort that it will require will be commensurate. But the effort will be made, and of its success I entertain no doubt whatever.

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**FREE TRADE. VIII.**  
**LONDON, FEBRUARY 8, 1844.** ↩

SINCE I last had the pleasure of meeting you here, I have had the honour of addressing many large assemblies of my fellow-countrymen; but I can assure you I return to this magnificent gathering with increased surprise and gratification at the ardour and enthusiasm that I see to prevail in the metropolis. I am told that we are favoured this night with the attendance of many visitors who are neither very well informed, nor, of course, very much convinced on our question. Now, will you, who sit on the front form in our seminary, condescend to make a little allowance if I give to these young pupils a lesson in the elementary principles of Free Trade, and endeavour to send them away as efficient missionaries as doubtless you have been in our cause? But then, I hope our good friends the reporters will spare their fingers, that they may not convict me of tautology. We will begin at the beginning. Now, we are 'Free Traders;' and what is Free Trade? Not the pulling down of all customhouses, as some of our wise opponents the dukes and earls have lately been trying to persuade the agricultural labourers; I should think it would do with nobody else. By Free Trade we mean the abolition of all protective duties. It is very possible that our children, or at all events their offspring, may be wise enough to dispense with customhouse duties altogether. They may think it prudent and economical to raise their revenues by direct taxation, without circumventing their foreign trade. We do not propose to do that; but there are a class of men who have taken possession of the Custom-house, and have installed their clerks there, to collect revenue for their own particular benefit, and we intend to remove them out of the Custom-house.

Now, I want to impress on our new friends, these students in Free Trade, to remind them of that which I have frequently dwelt upon, and which cannot be too often repeated, that this system of monopoly is analogous in every respect to that which existed 250 years ago under the Tudors and the Stuarts, when sovereigns granted monopolies to the creatures of their courts for the exclusive sale of wine, leather, salt, and other things, and which system our forefathers, at great labour and heavy sacrifice, utterly extirpated. One by one these monopolies were abolished; and, not content with destroying the existing monopolies, they passed a law, which became, as it were, a fundamental principle in our Constitution, that no sovereign, thenceforth or for ever, should have the power of granting a monopoly to anybody for the exclusive sale of any necessary commodity of life. Now, what I want to impress on our young learners is this, that that which sovereigns cannot do, a band of men united together—the selfish oligarchy of the sugar-hogshead and the flour-sack— [59] have done. They have got together in the House of Commons, and by their own Acts of Parliament have appropriated to their own classes the very privileges, the self-same monopolies, or monopolies as injurious in every respect to the interests of the people, as those monopolies were which our forefathers abolished two centuries and a half ago. There is no difference whatever in the effect of a monopoly in the sale of sugar held by a few men, the owners of those specks of land in the West Indies (for specks they are compared with the South American continent, the East Indies, Siam, China, the Indian Archipelago, and those other countries from which sugar might be supplied); there is no earthly difference in its effect on the community, whether a body of men in London take to themselves a monopoly in the sale of sugar, or whether Queen Victoria granted that monopoly to one of the noblemen of her court. Well, our forefathers abolished this system; at a time, too, mark you, when the sign manual of the sovereign had somewhat of a divine sanction and challenged superstitious reverence in the minds of the people. And shall we, the descendants of those men, be found so degenerate, so unworthy of the blood that flows in our veins, so recreant to the very name

of 'Englishmen,' as not to shake off this incubus, laid on as it is by a body of our fellow-citizens?

I believe some of our visitors here to-night are of what is called 'the agricultural interest.' They are probably curious to know why it is that we, professing to be Free Traders in everything, should restrict the title of our association to that of 'The National Anti-Corn-Law League.' I will explain the reason. We advocate the abolition of the Cornlaw, because we believe that to be the foster-parent of all other monopolies; and if we destroy that—the parent, the monster monopoly—it will save us the trouble of devouring all the rest. We have had now, for more than twenty years, a succession of Cabinets every one of them claiming the merit in the eyes of the people of England of being Free-trade Administrations; from the year 1823, when Mr. Huskisson proposed his extensive changes in our commercial system,—when he became installed, as it were, the very lion of the aristocratic coteries of London, as a Free Trader—a Free Trader in silks and ribbons, French lace, and the like,—from that time to this we have never wanted a Government willing to take the credit to themselves of being Free Traders. If I wanted an argument to convince you that we are right in the title that we have taken, and the direction we have given to our agitation, I would show it in the conduct of Sir Robert Peel two years ago. He then boasted that he had propounded the largest measure of commercial reform of any Minister in this country; he brought in his tariff with an alteration of 500 or 600 articles therein. I looked over it again and again, expecting to find corn there, but was disappointed. The right hon. Baronet was asked why corn was not there? and his reply was, 'It has always been customary in this country to treat corn differently from every other item in the tariff.' In that significant reply of the Prime Minister do we find a justification for the title of our agitation, and the direction in which we carry it. You will have reform enough in colonial asses, caviare, fiddlesticks, and other equally important matters. You will have all those items very diligently attended to. Do you look after corn, and corn will take care of all the rest. Thus have I told our new visitors what 'Free Trade' means, and why we almost exclusively advocate the repeal of the Corn-laws, instead of taking a wider purpose.

Now, what are the objections alleged against the adoption of Free-trade principles? First of all, take the most numerous body—the working class—by far the most important in the consideration of this question: for probably ninety-ninths of all the population of this country are dependent on labour, either the hard work of hands, or the equally hard [60] toil of heads. I say, take their case first. We are told this system of restriction is for the benefit of the labourers. We are informed by the earls, dukes, and the squires, that the price of corn regulates the rate of wages; and that, if we reduce the price of corn by a free trade in that article, we shall only bring down the rate of wages. Now, I see a good many working people in this assembly, and would ask them whether, in any bargain ever made for labour in London, the question of corn or its price was ever made an element in that agreement? Why, look at your hackney-coach and watermen's fares, and at your ticket-porters' charges. Your own Corporation, in their bye-laws and Acts of Parliament regulating the wages of a variety of labourers in this metropolis, have been strangely oblivious of this sliding scale of corn, when they have fixed a permanent rate of wages. I think I have heard lately something about women who

'Stitch—stitch—stitch!  
For three half-pence a shirt.'

I want to know whether the wages of those poor creatures are regulated by the price of corn. I thought I had settled that matter, as far as regards the working man, at the time Sir Robert Peel brought in his Corn Bill two years ago. I then moved an amendment to this effect:—'Resolved, That before we proceed to pass a law having for its object to raise,



artificially, the price of bread, it is expedient and just that we should first of all consider how far it is practicable to raise in proportion the wages of labourers in this country.' I was determined I would stop that gap for the monopolists for ever; and accordingly I brought on my amendment; and was then informed by Sir Robert Peel,—'It is quite impossible we can fix the rate of wages in this country. Parliament has no power to settle the rate of wages; that must be settled by the competition of the world's market.' I forced the monopolists to a division on this matter, determined that it should not be a sham motion; and we accordingly had a division. The right honourable Baronet and all his friends walked out at one door, and I had some twenty or thirty who accompanied me out at the other. We had not been back again in the House five minutes before this body of innocents were busy passing a law to prevent the price of their corn being settled by 'the competition of the world's market.' I shall not be surprised some night, perhaps when my friend Mr. Villiers brings forward his next motion, in going down to St. Stephen's, to see a bit of paper fixed to the door of that place with something of this kind written upon it: 'Corn and cattle-dealers to be found within. No competition allowed with the shop over the water.'

Now, the first and greatest count in my indictment against the Corn-law is, that it is an injustice to the labourers of this and every other country. My next charge is, that it is a fraud against every man of capital engaged in any pursuit, and every person of fixed income not derived from land. I will take the trader. I am a manufacturer of clothing, and I do not know why, in this climate, and in the artificial state of society in which we live, the making of clothes should not be as honourable—because it is pretty near as useful—a pursuit as the manufacture of food. Well, did you ever hear any debates in the House to fix the price of my commodities in the market? Suppose we had a majority of cotton-printers (which happens to be my manufacture) in the House: and if we had a majority I have no doubt we should find Sir Robert Peel quite willing to do our work for us: he is the son of a cotton-printer, and I dare say he would do it for us as well as any one else. Let us suppose that you were reading the newspaper some fine morning, and saw an account of a majority of the House having been engaged the night before in fixing the price at which yard-wide prints should be sold: 'Yardwide prints, of such a quality, 10*d.* a yard; of such a quality, 9*d.*; of such a quality, 8*d.*; of such a quality, 7*d.*,' and [61] so on. Why, you would rub your eyes with astonishment! You would clear your spectacles, if you wore any, and you would doubt your own senses! The very boys in the streets leading to Parliament, and the cabmen and omnibus-drivers, would hoot and hiss us out of the metropolis! Now, did it ever occur to you that there is no earthly difference between a body of men, manufacturers of corn, sitting down in the House, and passing a law enacting that wheat shall be so much, barley so much, beans so much, and oats so much?

Why, then, do you look at this monopoly of corn with such complacency? Simply because you and I and the rest of us have a superstitious reverence for the owners of those sluggish acres, and have a very small respect for ourselves and our own vocation. I say the Corn-law monopolists, who arrogate to themselves power in the House of Commons, are practising an injustice on every other species of capitalists. Take the iron trade, for example—a prodigious interest in this country. Iron of certain qualities has gone down in price, during the last five or six years, from 15*l.* 10*s.* to 5*l.* 10*s.* per ton. Men have seen their fortunes—ay, I have known them—dwindle away from 300,000*l.* till now they could not sit down and write their wills for 100,000*l.* Well, did any man ever hear in the House of Commons an attempt made to raise a cry about these grievances there, or to lodge a complaint against the Government or the country because they could not keep up the price of iron? Has any man come forward there proposing that by some law pig-iron should be so much, and bar-iron of such a price, and other kinds of iron in proportion? No; neither has this been the case with any other interest in the country. But how is it with corn? The very first night I was present in the House this session, I saw the Prime Minister get up, having a paper

before him, and he was careful to tell us what the price of corn had been for the last fifty years, and what it was now. He is employed for little else but as a kind of corn-steward, to see how the prices may be kept up for his masters.

What are the grounds on which this system is maintained? The farmer is put forward—the interests of the farmer and the farm-labourer are put forward—as the pretext for maintaining this monopoly. I have heard the admission made at agricultural meetings by landlords themselves, that there are twenty farmers bidding for every farm, and that they excuse themselves to the farmers at these very meetings that they let their land at the full value, and they cannot help it. It is not their fault because there are these twenty farmers bidding for every farm that is vacant. Now, I would ask you, or the merest tyro in this question, if there be twenty farmers bidding for every farm, and the law can raise the price of the produce of that farm, do you think that one out of those twenty farmers will get the benefit of that rise in price? Will not the other nineteen take care that it is brought down by competition to the ordinary profit of trade in this country? The farmers have been too long deluded by the mere cry of ‘Protection.’ We read of it now in every meeting—‘Protection to the farmers.’ It is destruction to the farmers. The word should be changed from ‘protection’ to ‘destruction,’ and it would then be more expressive of the effect of the Corn-law on the farmers.

With respect to the farm-labourers, our opponents tell us that our object in bringing about the repeal of the Cornlaws is, by reducing the price of corn, to lower the rate of their wages. I can only answer upon this point for the manufacturing districts; but, as far as they are concerned, I state it most emphatically as a truth, that, for the last twenty years, whenever corn has been cheap wages have been high in Lancashire; and, on the other hand, when bread has been dear wages have been greatly reduced. Now, I distinctly put this statement on record, and challenge any one to controvert it. Wages may possibly be affected by the price of food [62] in the agricultural districts, and rise and fall in proportion; but if they do, it is simply for this reason—that they have reached their minimum, or the point at which they verge towards what you might call slave labour, when a man gets in the best of times only as much as will keep him in health. When corn rises, equal food must be given to the labourer to eat, just upon the same principle as farmers or others give an equal quantity of corn to their horses in dear years as they do in periods of cheapness, in order that they may be maintained in health, and be equal to the amount of labour which is wanted of them. But whenever the value of labour rises and falls in the agricultural districts with the price of food, it must be because those wages have previously sunk to that point which is next in degree to the wages which slaves obtain for their labour. Now, let me be fully understood as to what Free Traders really do want. We do not want cheap corn merely in order that we may have low money prices. What we desire is plenty of corn, and we are utterly careless what its price is, provided we obtain it at the natural price. All we ask is this, that corn shall follow the same law which the monopolists in food admit that labour must follow; that ‘it shall find its natural level in the markets of the world.’

And now, what would be the process of this equalisation of prices? I think I can give you the rationale of it. The effect of free trade in corn will be this: It would increase the demand for agricultural produce in Poland, Germany, and America. That increase in the demand for agricultural produce would give rise to an increased demand for labour in those countries, which would tend to raise the wages of the agricultural labourers. The effect of that would be to draw away labourers from manufactures in all those places. To pay for that corn, more manufactures would be required from this country; this would lead to an increased demand for labour in the manufacturing districts, which would necessarily be attended with a rise of wages, in order that the goods might be made for the purpose of exchanging for the corn brought from abroad. Whether prices would be equalised, according to the opinion expressed

by my Lord Spencer, by a rise in the price of bread abroad to the level at which it is here, or whether it would be by a fall in the prices here to the level at which they now exist on the Continent, would not make the least earthly difference to the Free Traders; all they ask is, that they shall be put in the same position with others, and that there should be no bar or hindrance to the admission of food from any quarter into this country. I observe there are narrow-minded men in the agricultural districts, telling us, 'Oh, if you allow Free Trade, and bring in a quarter of corn from abroad, it is quite clear that you will sell one quarter less in England.' Those men, fellow-countrymen, who utter such nonsense as this, are a sample of the philosophers who are now governing this country. What! I would ask, if you can set more people to work at better wages—if you can clear your streets of those spectres which are now haunting your thoroughfares begging their daily bread—if you can depopulate your workhouses, and clear off the two millions of paupers which now exist in the land, and put them to work at productive industry—do you not think that they would consume some of the wheat as well as you; and may not they be, as we are now, consumers of wheaten bread by millions, instead of existing on their present miserable dietary? Mark me: these philosophical men, so profoundly ignorant of what is immediately around them, but who meet us at every turn with prophecies of what is going to happen in future, will tell us, forsooth, that Free Trade will throw their land out of cultivation, and deprive their labourers of employment.

Now, we put against the prophecies of these selfish, ignorant beings the predictions of the most eminent and skil [63] ful, in agriculture in this land. I will take my Lord Ducie, who confessedly stands at the head of the arable farmers of this country, and my Lord Spencer, who is admitted to be the first of the grazing farmers of England; I will take the biggest-headed and shrewdest farmers and tenants in every county; and if the monopolists will give me a Committee of the House of Commons, which I intend to move for, they shall be examined before it; and these practical men will, every one of them, predict what I have also predicted (although I claim to be no authority), that, with free trade in corn, so far from throwing land out of use or injuring the cultivation of the poorer soils, free trade in corn is the very way to increase the production at home, and stimulate the cultivation of the poorer soils by compelling the application of more capital and labour to them. We do not contemplate deriving one quarter less corn from the soil of this country; we do not anticipate having one pound less of butter or cheese, or one head less of cattle or sheep: we expect to have a great increase in production and consumption at home; but all we contend for is this, that when we, the people here, have purchased all that can be raised at home, we shall be allowed to go 3000 miles—to Poland, Russia, or America—for more; and that there shall be no let or hindrance put in the way of our getting this additional quantity.

Now, we are met by the monopolists with this objection:—If you have a free trade in corn, foreigners will send you their wheat here, but they will take nothing in return. The argument employed, in fact, amounts to this, if it amounts to anything—That they will give us their corn for nothing. I know not what can exceed the absurdity of these men, if they be honest, or their shallow and transparent knavery, if they be dishonest, in putting forward such an argument as that. If there be a child here, I will give him a lesson which will make him able to go home and laugh to scorn those who talk about reciprocity, and induce to make fools'-caps and bonfires of the articles in the *Morning Post* or *Herald*. Now, I will illustrate that point. I will take the case of a tailor living in one of your streets, and a provision-dealer living in another, and this busybody of a reciprocity-man living somewhere between the two. He sees this tailor going every Saturday night empty-handed to the provision-dealer, and bringing home upon his shoulder a side of bacon, under one arm a cheese, and under the other a keg of butter. Well, this reciprocity-man, being always a busbody, takes the alarm, and says, 'There is a one-sided trade going on there, I must look after it.' He calls on the tailor, and says, 'This is a strange trade you are doing! You are importing largely from that provision-dealer, but I do not find that you are exporting any cloths, or coats, or waistcoats,

in return?' The tailor answers him, 'If you feel any alarm at this, ask the provision-dealer about it: I am all right, at all events.' Away goes the reciprocity gentleman to the provision shop, and says, 'I see you are doing a very strange business with that tailor; you are exporting largely provisions, but I do not see that you import any clothes from him: how do you get paid?' 'Why, man, how should I?' replies the provision-dealer, 'in gold and silver, to be sure!' Then the reciprocity-man is seized with another crotchet, and forthwith begins to talk about 'the drain of bullion.' Away he flies to the tailor, and says, 'Why, you will be ruined entirely! What a drain of the precious metals is going on from your till! That provision-dealer takes no clothes from you: he will have nothing but gold and silver for his goods.' 'Ay, man,' replies the tailor, 'and where do you think I get the gold and silver from? Why, I sell my clothes to the grocer, the hatter, the bookseller, the cabinet-maker, and one hundred others, and they pay me in gold and silver. And pray, Mr. Busybody, what would you have me to do with it? Do you think my wife and family would [64] grow fat on gold and silver?' Now, if there is any little girl or boy in this assembly, I hope they will go home, and for exercise write out that illustration of reciprocity, and show it to any of their friends who may be seized with this crotchet respecting reciprocity and the drain of gold, and see if they cannot laugh them easily out of their delusions.

Well, now, my friend, Mr. Villiers, has alluded to the subject of revenue. I need not go into that point, for he has completely exhausted it; but it was a most impudent pretence which the monopolists set up, and set up in the face of the income-tax, levied upon us, as it were, to be a scourge of thorns to remind us of our sins of ignorance and our neglect of our interests. To think of their having the impudence to tell this to us, with this fact, not staring in our faces, but visiting us in our pockets; to think that this should ever be advanced again—the that the monopolists keep up the revenue—is to me the most monstrous piece of impudence I ever heard of in my life. Now, we want the farmers to understand precisely what the National Anti-Corn-law League is, and what its objects are. We are not going to allow the landlords to carry off the farmers with the old stale watchword and the threadbare arguments again. Why, they had not anything new to offer them, and, therefore, they have started this about the revenue; their agitators are all the old hacks over again; there has not been even a young aristocrat come forward to show a modicum of talent in support of the system. There they are! the same men and the same arguments, and the whole being summed up in 'Protection.' That word 'protection' reminds me of another word that was used by a character in the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' I mean Mr. Jenkinson, who, if ever he wanted to take in anybody, had some talk to them about the 'cosmogony' of the world; and with that word he took in poor Moses with his green spectacles, and actually imposed upon poor Dr. Primrose himself in the same way. Now, this 'protection' is, to my ear, very much like the 'cosmogony' of good Mr. Jenkinson; and I think the men who use it have just about as honest objects in view as Mr. Jenkinson had.

I do not like to turn these meetings into scolding assemblies, for we are too majestic a body to scold any person; but I do like, if possible, to extract a little amusement out of our opponents in this matter; and certainly, when I look through their speeches and read what they have been saying, I must confess I have enjoyed more laughter about these statements than this question has afforded me ever since we began our agitation five years ago. We are going to prepare a pamphlet—I am not sure whether it will not grow into a volume—of elegant extracts from monopolists' speeches! There shall be separate headings to the several extracts. One head shall be, 'argument;' another, 'wit;' a third, 'humour;' a fourth, 'manners;' and a fifth, 'morals;' and you shall see choice specimens of every one of them. There is one worthy gentleman, who, in speaking of the League, has given such a bouquet of flowers of oratory, that I think we ought to put him as a frontispiece to this volume. This gentleman, in the course of about twenty lines, manages to apply about as many abusive epithets to the League:—We are mere 'Jacobins,' 'Jonathan Wilds,' and 'Jack Sheppards.' We are a 'scratch

pack of hounds;’ and he condescends to explain that that phrase means the odds and ends, or a pack collected from the whole county. The elegant gentleman winds up with the choice appellation of ‘ragamuffins.’ That is the effusion of Sir Charles Knightley; and I think we must have his portrait for a frontispiece to our volume.

I observe one noble Lord has inquired very innocently, in alluding to our agitation, ‘What does all this bobbery mean?’ Now, they have let us into a secret in this agitation of theirs. We did not think—I am sure I did not—that there was so much titled ignorance [65] or coroneted vulgarity in the land as I find there is. I confess I did not expect to find the strongest argument coming from such a source, but had hoped to meet with something like decency of manners! Why, who would belong to such a set? If that is the best language they can put out in public, what sort of talk must be theirs in private?

And then for ‘violence’—why, we were charged with violence at one time; and I really believe we used to be somewhat violent. Five years ago, when we began, we were small and insignificant, and very poor; fighting our way up in the world. We were really almost compelled to make a noise to attract a hearing. All small things, you know, are generally very noisy; it is the order of nature. See how the little dog barks at the stately steed as he goes along your streets; but the horse takes no notice of him. There was some excuse for us; our cause appeared a desperate one. Now, they must have an excuse, too, for their violence, and I suspect it is the very same we had—they feel their cause to be a desperate one. But I want, in this stage of our agitation, to impress on our friends the necessity of taking warning by the spectacles which our opponents now present, and that they should resolve not to imitate such a bad example. We have got up in the world; we can pay our way. We have the nobles and the gentles of the land in our ranks, and we ought to be very decorous. We can afford to be condescending, even. I should not wonder if we soon begin to ballot for members, and not admit people unless they happen to be ‘of the superior kind.’

Our opponents, I presume, intend to spend their money in something like the same way as we have expended ours,—that is, in giving lectures and distributing tracts. How I should like to attend one of their first meetings! Fancy a meeting like this! An orator introduced to deliver a magnificent—magniloquent, I should say—lecture in behalf of starvation! Only think of his exordium and his peroration, with such an inspiring topic! We have heard much boasting of these meetings; we have been told that they are ‘farmers’ meetings;’ but we have not seen the names of any farmers who have made these vulgar speeches of which I have been speaking. Now, as having something like an hereditary right to identify myself with farmers, I do rejoice to say, that, in scanning over all the proceedings of these monopolist gatherings, I have not seen a single instance of vituperation, or anything approaching to vulgarity of language, on the part of the *bonâ fide* tenant-farmers. The monopolists of corn—the landlords—are the monopolists of all the vulgarity of language! There have been one or two individuals paraded, who have been called ‘farmers,’ and who have made long speeches; but I have taken pains to inquire a little of their whereabouts, and I find that they are all auctioneers and land-valuers; and it is a remarkable fact, that I have never met with a protectionist orator at the meetings I have attended in the agricultural districts, but he has always turned out an auctioneer or a land-valuer. The land-valuers are a body of men—I mean the land-valuers and auctioneers—who represent the landlord in his very worst aspect; they are persons that have an interest in this system which causes perpetual change and a constant rise in rent; for the more changes there are, or the more failures there are, the more valuing there is for the valuer, and the more selling there is for the auctioneer: though, if you had a system by which prices were steadied, and leases were granted, the land-valuers and auctioneers would not be known in the land; in fact, they are a tribe hardly to be met with in Scotland at the present time.

Now, we expect our opponents will meet us fairly in this matter. We have avoided, although we have been often pressed to do so, interfering with any of their meetings. I hold it to be unjust in this country, wherever meetings are held avowedly upon one side of the question, and to make a demonstration, [66] that anybody should go and interfere with such a meeting, or attempt to put counter-resolutions. I say I hope they will deal fairly with us, but, judging by their conduct in past times, I do not expect they will. I know that monopolist money has been paid for the hire of men to attend and interrupt our meetings ever since we began our agitation. I am now suffering under a hoarseness from an encounter of this kind in the great Town-hall of Birmingham on Monday last. When I arrived in that town I found huge yellow placards posted all over the walls, the cost of which a printer there told me must have been many pounds, professing to emanate from the O'Connor Chartist agitators, calling upon the working men to 'assemble in all their might, and upset these mill tyrants, and drive them out of the town.' Now it is remarkable that there was no printer's name to these placards, therefore there is every reason to suppose they were imported from a distance. The Town-hall was thrown open. A fair public meeting had not been held in Birmingham for six years previously; and I was glad of an opportunity of making my first experiment upon the good sense of the working people of that district. The magnificent building of which I have spoken was crammed, and four-fifths of the audience were working men; for it was in the morning of holiday Monday. About fifty men, however, of another description, were packed in the centre of that meeting. A most notorious individual was placed in the organ-loft by the side of us, who acted as fogleman to the rest. Their object evidently was to prevent the deputation of the League from being heard. While my friend Colonel Thompson—who is even hoarser than I am myself—was speaking, they kept up a continued clamour. When my turn came, I appealed to the 4000 working people, and asked them whether they would allow themselves to be tyrannised over by a handful of men, who, with liberty on their lips, had despotism at heart? In less than five minutes the most disorderly among them were removed from the hall; and the remainder, when they saw two or three of their number carried out by the working men, showed—what such fellows will always show—that they were as great cowards as they had previously shown they were bullies. They were as peaceable as mice in a church for the rest of the meeting; and, I will venture to say, it is the last appearance of that body in the Town-hall of Birmingham.

I know that monopolist money in former times has been so spent and taken by men who have degraded the name they have borne—that is, men of a political party seeking for liberty. I reverence men who make honest efforts, who seek for freedom in any form; but I say that these persons have degraded the sacred name under which they have pretended to work. They have been for the last three years doing nothing but trying to help the aristocracy in maintaining the Corn-laws. Look, I say, at their organ of the press, and you will perceive the character of its leading articles for the last two years. Has it been advocating the object which it professed to be established to promote? No. The staple of its articles are just the counterpart of what you will find in the *Morning Post*. Look at its leaders—who are they? Men who are ever found trying to thwart us in our honest, single-minded effort to pull down this giant monopoly. Well, then, I say, those men who have been hitherto paid for this work—though I admit that some of them have been fools enough to do the work for nothing—but as they have been paid, I suspect that some of the money that has been raised recently by the monopolists will find its way into the same channel, and that there may be further attempts made of the kind I have alluded to. But I think a body that had the temerity to come into this theatre with such an object would look twice before it made the essay. There may be an attempt made even to interrupt the orderly proceed [67] ings of these most important gatherings; for if these meetings continue, and are carried on with the same numbers, order, and decorum with which they are now, speaking a voice that is felt throughout Europe—yes, I know they are felt throughout Europe, and one of the first things inquired for when intelligent foreigners come here is to have an opportunity of seeing such unparalleled

demonstrations—I say, if these meetings continue, do you think it will be long before their influence will be found in another place whose locality will be nameless, not far from Parliament-street?

Then, I say, fair play. Let every man follow his own bent in this free country—free, at all events, to hold meetings like this. Let every man attend his own meeting, call together his own, and promote whatever legitimate objects he pleases. We will neither intrude into the meetings of others, nor allow intrusion into ours. If a meeting be held to take the sense of a district, it is the duty of every man to attend; and the votes should be taken to see what the sense of the majority of that district may be. Now, I give notice to the monopolists, that in all my meetings in their counties I invite all comers to oppose me; I will consider their doing so no intrusion. Talk of their meetings! Why, I have been in every county in which they have held them, and I have no hesitation in declaring, that for every hundred they have had gathered together I have had a thousand on every occasion. Take their largest number—in Essex, where it is said they had 600 gathered—we had 6000 at Colchester! Ay, and I promise them that, when the weather comes that is favourable for open-air meeting, I will visit their counties again, and take the opinion of their population. I call my meetings in the same place where their own high authorities always convene theirs—in the county towns, such as Winchester and Salisbury. I could gather ten times the number to hear me as at these recent meetings, though perhaps they may have ten Dukes, fifteen Earls, or a dozen Members of Parliament.

But when I have taken the sense of such meetings in favour of Free Trade, what have the monopolists said upon the subject? That we have carried our resolutions merely by ‘the rabble of the towns.’ Now, mark this fact: I have observed in every instance that their own organs of the press declare that I am indebted to ‘the rabble of the town’ for carrying my resolutions. But, now it is this same ‘rabble’ which they pretend to tell us is opposed to the Anti-Corn-law League! They throw it in our teeth that we are not supported by this very rabble, which they formerly said was our whole support at our openair meetings. They go down to Birmingham and hire fifty, certainly of the dirtiest and most unintelligent fellows they can find, and try to get them to break up the meeting, and then boast that ‘the rabble of the town,’ as they condescend to call you, are against us.

I will not disguise from you my opinion, that the time is approaching when it will require every effort on the part of Free Traders to carry out the objects which we have in view. I am not one who would, and I never did, underrate the power or the importance of our opponents. There is much work for us to do, but the work shall and will be done. There are men now brought out by this very agitation in every borough and large town that I have visited—new men—not the old hacks of party, but persons drawn out with a solemn and earnest conviction, with a craving after justice and truth in this matter, who are diligently at work in every part of the kingdom. And if we were to be taken off this scene, in which we have been and are now most prominent, and were unable to continue our effort, the question has gone beyond the stage from which it can recede. It only requires that you should continue to disseminate the knowledge which you have, and increase the interest which is felt in London upon this subject, that this question will ultimately be brought to a triumph [68] ant issue. It cannot be carried *pro* or *con* by such insignificant boroughs as Devizes. Give us the large constituencies—give us, as we will have when another election comes (and you cannot carry this question without a dissolution), every borough in South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, give us Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Hull, Bristol, and all the large constituencies; give us Liverpool—ay, and give us London—and there is no Minister to be found who can maintain office to carry on a system of monopolies upon the strength of a mere numerical majority of the House of Commons, and by the aid of the representatives of such places as Devizes or St. Albans; there is no Minister who would dare to do it, though the

monopolists would be glad to find their tool, if they could, in the face of the united expression of opinion of the great constituencies of this kingdom. But from the moment that you are right in the metropolis—and we are right in all the large towns—that moment the Corn-laws are repealed!

Still, you have work to do in London. I observe that your beaten candidate, who I thought was silenced for ever, at one of his meetings, either by himself or by his chairman, denominated those who voted for Mr. Pattison at the last election as ‘the rabble of the City.’ Now it so happens that I am entitled to register myself as a voter for the City of London, but have neglected so to do; but I intend at the next revision to register, in order that I may have the honour of joining that ‘rabble’ which rejected Mr. Baring. Be diligent therefore in disseminating knowledge on this question. The repeal of the Corn-laws will be carried when men understand it. And when you understand it, if you are honest men, you will feel it; if you feel it, at least as I have, you will not be able to be quiet without doing something to put down this great injustice. I exhort you each in your several circles to spread abroad light on this subject. Knowledge is the power—knowledge alone—by which we shall bring this foul system to the dust.

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**FREE TRADE. IX.**  
**EFFECT OF PROTECTIVE DUTIES.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, MARCH 12, 1844.** ↩

[On March 12, 1844, Mr. Cobden brought forward his motion for a Select Committee to inquire into the effects of Protective Duties on imports on the interest of the tenant-farmers and farm-labourers of the country. The debate is interesting, partly from the fact that the reply to Mr. Cobden on the part of Ministers was entrusted to Mr. Gladstone, partly because a considerable part of the debate was occupied with the question as to the proportion which rent bears to cost. The motion was rejected by 91 (133 to 224). Messrs. Cobden and Bright were the tellers.]

THE motion which I have to make is one of a nature which I believe is not ordinarily refused; it is for a Select Committee to sit upstairs, to take evidence on a question that excites great controversy out of doors, and which I believe is likely to cause considerable discussion in this House. It may be thought that my motion might have been appropriately placed in other hands. I am of that opinion too. I think it might have been more properly brought forward by a Gentleman on the other side of the House, particularly by an honourable Member connected with the counties of Wiltshire or Dorsetshire. But, although not myself a county Member, that does not necessarily preclude me from taking a prominent part in a question affecting the interests of the tenant-farmers and farm-labourers of this country, for whom I feel as strong a sympathy as for any other class of my countrymen; nay, I stand here on this occasion as the advocate of what I conscientiously believe to be the interests of the agriculturists. We have instances of Committees being appointed to take evidence as to the importation of silk, the exportation of machinery, the navigation-laws, and on questions of similar importance. It must also be admitted that such Committees have been appointed without the parties more immediately concerned having in the first instance petitioned the House for their appointment. On the appointment of the Committee relative to the exportation of machinery the motion was granted, not at the instance of manufacturers who had a monopoly of the use of machinery, but by parties whose interests were concerned in the making and exporting of machinery. I do not therefore anticipate that my motion will be resisted on the ground that no petitions have been presented demanding it.

I shall now state what my views will be on entering the Committee. I shall be prepared to bring forward important evidence showing the effects of ‘protection,’ as it is called, on the agriculturists by the examination of farmers themselves. I will, in fact, not bring [70] forward a single witness before that Committee who shall not be a tenant-farmer or a landed proprietor, and they shall be persons eminent for their reputation as practical agriculturists. The opinion that I shall hold on entering the Committee is, that ‘protection,’ as it is called, instead of being beneficial, is delusive and injurious to the tenant-farmers; and that opinion I shall be prepared to sustain by the evidence of tenant-farmers themselves. I wish it to be understood I do not admit that what is called protection to agriculturists has ever been any protection at all to them; on the contrary, I hold that its only effect has been to mislead them. This has been denied both in this House and out of doors. I have recently read over again the evidence taken before the Committees which sat previous to the passing of the Corn-law of 1815, and I leave it to any man to say whether it was not contended at that time that sufficient protection could not be given to the agriculturists unless they got 80s. a quarter for wheat. I wish to remind the hon. Member for Wiltshire (Mr. Bennett) that he gave it as his opinion before the Committee of 1814, that wheat could not be grown in this country unless the farmers got 96s. a quarter, or 12s. a bushel, for it, while now he is supporting a Minister who

only proposes to give the farmers 56*s.* a quarter, and confesses he cannot guarantee even that. It is denied that this House has ever promised to guarantee prices for their produce to the farmers. Now what was the custom of the country from the passing of the Corn-law in 1815? I will bring old men before the Committee who will state that farmers valued their farms from that time by a computation of wheat being at 80*s.* a quarter. I can also prove that agricultural societies which met in 1821, passed resolutions declaring that they were deceived by the Act of 1815, that they had taken farms calculating upon selling wheat at 80*s.*, while, in fact, it had fallen to little more than 50*s.* In the Committee which sat in 1836, witnesses stated that they had been deceived in the price of their corn; and I ask whether at the present moment rents are not fixed rather with reference to certain Acts that were passed than the intrinsic worth of farms? In consequence of the alteration that was made in the Corn-law of 1842. the rent of farms has been assessed on the ground of corn being 56*s.* a quarter. I know an instance where a person occupying his own land was rated at a certain amount, viz. at the valuation of corn being 56*s.* a quarter, while, in fact, it was selling at 47*s.*; and, upon his asking why he had been so rated, he was told that the assessors had taken that mode of valuation in consequence of what the Prime Minister had stated was to be the price of corn. [‘Oh! oh!’] Hon. Gentlemen may cry ‘Oh! oh!’ but I will bring forward that very case, and prove what I have stated concerning it.

What I wish in going into Committee is, to convince the farmers of Great Britain that this House has not the power to regulate or sustain the price of their commodities. The right hon. Baronet opposite (Sir R. Peel) has confessed that he cannot regulate the wages of labour or the profits of trade. Now, the farmers are dependent for their prices upon the wages of the labourer and the profits of the trader and manufacturer; and if the Government cannot regulate these—if it cannot guarantee a certain amount of wages to the one, or a fixed profit to the other—how can it regulate the price of agricultural produce? The first point to which I should wish to make this Committee instrumental is to fix in the minds of the farmers the fact that this House exaggerates its power to sustain or enhance prices by direct acts of legislation. The farmer's interest is that of the whole community, and is not a partial interest, and you cannot touch him more sensitively than when you injure the manufacturers, his customers.

I do not deny that you may regulate prices for awhile—for awhile you have regulated them by forcing an artificial [71] scarcity; but this is a principle which carries with it the seeds of self-destruction, for you are thereby undermining the prosperity of those consumers upon whom your permanent welfare depends. A war against nature must always end in the discomfiture of those who wage it. You may by your restrictive enactments increase pauperism and destroy trade; you may banish capital and check and expatriate your population; but is this, I will ask, a policy which can possibly work consistently with the interests of the farmers? These are the fundamental principles which I wish to bring out, and with this primary view it is that I ask for a Committee at your hands.

With regard to certain other fallacies with which the farmers have been beset, and latterly more so than ever, the farmer has been told that if there was a free trade in corn, wheat would be so cheap that he would not be able to carry on his farm. He is directed only to look at Dantzic, where corn, he is told, was once selling at 15*s.* 11*d.* per quarter, and on this the Essex Protection Society put out their circulars stating that Dantzic wheat is but 15*s.* 11*d.* per quarter, and how would the British farmer contend against this? Now, I maintain that these statements are not very creditable to the parties who propagate such nonsense, nor complimentary to the understandings of the farmers who listen to and believe them. It would be no argument against Free Trade, but quite the contrary, if wheat could be purchased regularly at Dantzic at that price; but the truth is, that in an average of years at that port it has cost much more than double; and the truth, I suppose, is what all men desire to arrive at. The

farmer will be very easily disabused on this and other points if you will grant me the Committee I seek. We know what the price has been in the Channel Islands, where the trade is free. These islands send the corn of their own growth to this country whenever it is profitable to do so, and they receive foreign corn for their own consumption duty free. Sir, without pretending to look into futurity, I know of no better test of what the price of corn in this country would be in a state of free trade, than the prices in the island of Jersey afford, taken not, like the Essex Protection Society, for a single week or month, but for a number of years, comprising a cycle of high and low prices in this country. We know that the fluctuation of prices in this country embraces the fluctuation of the whole of Europe. We have papers on the table showing what the prices of corn were in Jersey in the ten years from 1832 to 1841 inclusive. The average price was in those ten years 48*s.* 4*d.* What do you think was the average price in your own markets in those years? It was 56*s.* 8*d.* Now, I have taken some pains to consult those who best understand this subject, and I find it to be their opinion, that a constant demand from England under a free trade would have raised the level of European prices 2*s.* or 3*s.* a quarter during the above period. If this be a fair estimate, it brings the price up to within 5*s.* or 6*s.* a quarter of our own average. Was this difference in price to throw land out of cultivation, annihilate rent, ruin the farmer, and pauperise the labourers? But in years of high prices the farmers do not receive the highest price for their corn. On the contrary, they sell their corn at the lowest prices, and the speculator sells his at the highest.

A short time ago I met a miller from near Winchester, who told me the prices which he paid every year for the corn which he purchased before the harvest and after the harvest during five years. That statement I beg to read to the House:—

			Load of 5 qrs.			
1839	August	Wheat	..	£ 19	10	0
	November	"	..	16	0	0
1840	August	"	..	18	0	0
	October	"	..	14	5	0
1841	August	"	..	19	0	0
	October	"	..	15	0	0
1842	August	"	..	17	0	0
	September	"	..	12	0	0
1843	July	"	..	15	15	0
	September	"	..	12	10	0

[72]

Thus in these five years there had been a difference of 3*l.* 10*s.* a load, or 15*s.* a quarter, between the prices of wheat in July and August and in October and November in each year, showing, beyond dispute, that the farmer did not sell his corn at the highest, but at the lowest of the markets.

Now, Sir, there is another point upon which as much misrepresentation exists as upon the one I have just stated, namely, the price at which corn could be grown abroad. The price of wheat at Dantzic during those ten years to which I have referred averaged upwards of 40*s.* a quarter; and if you add to it the freight, it will corroborate the statement I have made with regard to the price at which wheat has been sold at Jersey. Another point upon which misrepresentation has gone abroad, relates to the different items of expenditure in bringing wheat to this country. We have had consuls' returns from various ports, of the charges for freight at various periods, but we have not had full accounts of the other items of expenditure. It would be important to elicit as much information as possible upon this subject, and the best means of arriving at it would be to examine practical men from the City before a Select Committee of the House as to the cost of transit. As far as I can obtain

information from the books of merchants, the cost of transit from Dantzic, during an average of ten years, may be put down at 10*s.* 6*d.* a quarter, including in this, freight, landing, loading, insurance, and other items of every kind. This is the natural protection enjoyed by the farmers of this country. I may be answered, that the farmers of this country have the cost of carriage to pay also, as, for instance, from Norfolk to Hull or London. But I beg to remind hon. Gentlemen that a very small portion of home-grown corn is carried coastwise at all. Accurate information upon this point might be got before a Select Committee of this House. From information which I have obtained, I am led to believe that not more than 1,000,000 of quarters are carried coastwise at all, or 5 per cent. of the yearly growth of the country; the rest is carried from the barn-door to the mill. This is an important consideration for those who say that there is no natural protection for the farmer, inasmuch as it gives a farmer here the constant protection of half-a-guinea.

But hon. Gentlemen ought to bear in mind that the corn which is brought from Dantzic is not grown on the quays there, any more than it is grown on the quay of Liverpool. On the contrary, it is brought at great expense from a very long distance in the interior. I have seen a statement made by an hon. Member from Scotland, who said that the rafts on which the corn was brought down the river to Dantzic were broken up and sold to pay the cost of transit. I have not been able to verify that statement in the course of my inquiries. These are points which might all be cleared up by practical men before the Committee; and thus, instead of resorting to prophecy, we should be able to judge from facts and past experience as to the ability of the English farmers to compete with foreigners.

Hon. Gentlemen would do well to consider what happened in the case of wool. Every prediction that is now uttered with regard to corn, was uttered by Gentlemen opposite with regard to wool. If hon. Gentlemen visited the British Museum, and explored that Herculaneum of buried pamphlets which were written in opposition to Mr. Huskisson's plans for reducing the duty on wool twenty years ago, what arguments would they find in the future tense, and what predictions of may, might, could, would, should, ought, and shall! But what was the result? Did they lose all their sheep-walks? Had they no more mutton? Are their shepherds all consigned to the workhouse? Were there no more sheep-dogs? I have an account of the importation of wool and the price of wool, and the lesson I wish [73] to impress on Gentlemen opposite is this, that the price of commodities may spring from two causes—a temporary, fleeting, and retributive high price, produced by scarcity; or a permanent and natural high price, produced by prosperity. In the case of wool, you had a high price springing from the prosperity of the consumers. It so happens, in the case of this article of wool, that the price has been highest when the importation has been most considerable, and lowest in the years when the importation has been comparatively small. I beg to read a statement which illustrates this fact:—

			Imported lbs.
1827	10 <i>d.</i>	per lb.	29,115,341.
1829	7 <i>d.</i>	per lb.	21,516,649.
1836	18 <i>d.</i>	per lb.	64,239,000.
1841	11 <i>d.</i>	per lb.	56,170,000.
1842	10 <i>d.</i>	per lb.	45,833,000.

From this statement it appears, that in every instance where the price has been highest, the English farmer has had the largest competition from foreign growers, and that the price was lowest where the competition was least.

Well, that is the principle which I wish to see applied in viewing this much-dreaded question of corn. You may have a high price of corn, through a prosperous community, and it may continue a high price; you may have a high price through a scarcity, and it is impossible

in the very nature of things that it can be permanent.

Now, put this test of wool in the case of cattle and other things that have been imported since the passing of the Tariff. I want this matter to be cleared up. I do not want Gentlemen to find fault with the Prime Minister for doing what he did not do. I do not think his Tariff caused a reduction of one farthing in the price of articles of consumption. But I must say, with all deference to him, that I think he himself is to blame for having incurred that charge by the arguments which he brought forward in support of the Tariff; for assuredly he took the least comprehensive or statesmanlike view of his measures when he proposed to degrade prices, instead of aiming to sustain them by enlarging the circle of exchanges. It is said that the Tariff has caused distress among the farmers. I don't believe there has been as much increase in the imports of cattle as would make one good breakfast for all the people. Did it never enter the minds of hon. Gentlemen who are interested in the sale of cattle, that their customers in large towns cannot be sinking into abject poverty and distress, without the evil ultimately reaching themselves in the price of their produce? I had occasion, a little time ago, to look at the falling-off in the consumption of cattle in the town of Stockport. I calculated the falling-off in Stockport alone, for three or four years, at more than all the increase in the importation of foreign cattle. It appears, therefore, that the distress of that town alone has done as much to reduce prices as all the importation under the Tariff. It has been estimated that in Manchester, 40 per cent. less of cattle was consumed in 1842 than in 1835; and it has also been estimated that the cotton trade was paying 7,000,000*l.* less in wages per annum in 1842 than in 1836. How could you then expect the same consumption? If you would but look to your own interests as broadly and as wisely as manufacturers look to theirs, you would never fall into the error of supposing that you can ruin your customers, and yet, at the same time, prosper in your pursuits. I remember hearing Lord Kinnaird, whose property is near Dundee, state, that in 1835 and 1836, the dealers from that town used to come and bespeak his cattle three months in advance; but in 1842, when the linen trade shared the prostration of all the manufactures, he had to engage steam-boats three months in advance to bring his cattle to the London market. Hon. Members who live in Sussex and the southern counties, and who are in the habit of sneering at Manchester, should recollect that they are as much dependent upon the prosperity of Lancashire as those who live [74] in its immediate neighbourhood. If graziers, on looking at the *Price Current*, find they can get a better price for their cattle in London than in Manchester and Stockport, will they not send their cattle up to London, to compete with the southern graziers?

The point, therefore, which I wish to make known is, that the Tariff has not caused any reduction in prices. There is nothing which I regret more than that the Corn-law or the Tariff should have been altered by the right hon. Baronet at all. Without this alteration, I feel confident we should have had prices as low at least as they are; our lesson would then have been complete, the landlords and tenants would have been taught how dependent they are on their customers, and they would then have united with the manufacturers in favour of Free Trade. But, if the late alterations in the Corn-law and Tariff are now to be made the bugbear for frightening the farmers from the path of Free Trade—if they are to be told that those measures have reduced their protection 30 per cent.,—then I think those political landlords who were returned to this House as 'farmers' friends,' pledged to defend 'protection' as it stood, and who betrayed their trust, ought to do something more if they are sincere; they ought to reduce their rents in proportion to the amount of protection which they say they have withdrawn from the farmer—they ought to do this, not for one rent-day, but permanently; and they should do it with penitence and in sackcloth and ashes, instead of hallooing on the poor farmers upon a wrong scent, after the Anti-Corn-law League, as the cause of their sufferings.

Now, with regard to the low prices having been caused by the change in the Tariff, I do not know whether a noble Lord happens to be present who illustrated this very aptly, by stating that the farmers in the West of Scotland had been ruined by the reduction in the duty on cheese. There could be nothing more unfortunate than that statement, as there happens, in that respect, to have been no alteration; and yet, I believe, cheese fell in price as much as any other article. It is well known that whilst the price of cheese has fallen in the home market, the importation from abroad has been also considerably diminished. There is another subject upon which I must entreat hon. Members' forbearance, for it is an exceedingly tender point, and one which is always heard with great sensitiveness in this House: I refer to the subject of rent. We have no tenant-farmers in this House. I wish we had, and I venture here to express a hope that the next dissolution will send up a *bonâ fide* tenant-farmer. I know nothing more likely than that to unravel the perplexity of our terminology—nothing more likely to put us all in our right places and to make us speak each for himself on this subject. The landowners—I mean the political landowners, those who dress their labourers and their cattle in blue ribbons, and who treat this question entirely as a political one—they go to the tenant-farmers, and they tell them that it would be quite impossible for them to compete with foreigners, for, if they had their land rent-free, they could not sell their produce at the same price as they did. To bear out their statement, they give a calculation of the cost per acre of growing wheat, which they put down at 61. Now, the fallacy of that has been explained to me by an agriculturist in the Midland Counties, whom I should exceedingly like to see giving his evidence before the Committee for which I am moving. He writes me, in a letter which I have received to-day:—

'You will be met by an assertion, that no alteration in rent can make up the difference to the tenant and labourer of diminished prices. They will quote the expense on a single crop of wheat, and say how small a proportion the rent bears to the whole expense, but that is not the fair way of putting it. Wheat is the farmer's remunerating crop, but he cannot grow wheat more than one year in three. The expense, then, of the management of the whole farm should be compared with the rent, to estimate what portion of the price [75] of corn is received by the landlord. I have, for this purpose, analysed the expense of a farm of 400 acres—230 arable, 170 pasture.

'The expenses are:—

Parish and county rates	£90
Interest of capital	150
Labour	380
Tradesmen's bills	80
Manure and lime	70
Wear of horses	20
	790
Rent	800
	£1,590

So that on this farm, which is very fairly cultivated, the rent is 800*l.*, the other expenses 790*l.* Now, if it requires 55*s.* per quarter in an average year, to enable the tenant to pay the rent and make 150*l.* profit, it is obvious that without any rent he would be enabled to pay his labourers and tradesmen as well, and put the same amount of profit into his pocket, with a price of 30*s.*, supposing other produce to be reduced in the same proportion. But I do not anticipate that wheat will be reduced below 45*s.*, even by free trade, and meat, butter, and cheese will certainly not fall in the same proportion.'

This, then, is a very important statement from a competent authority, and the gentleman who makes it I should be very glad to have examined before the Committee, if the House grant one. I believe that the writer will have no objection to his name being published: he is Mr. Charles Paget, of Ruddington Grange, near Nottingham.

Allow me now to state the method by which I calculate the proportion which rent bears to the other outgoings on a farm. I ascertain first what amount of produce the farmer sells off his farm in the year, and next I inquire how much of the money brought home from market goes to the landlord for rent. I take no account in this money calculation of the seed-corn, stock manure, horse-keep, or other produce of the land used or consumed upon the farm, because these things are never converted into money, and cannot, therefore, be used in payment of rent, taxes, &c. Now I am prepared to prove before a Committee, by a Scotch farmer, that one-half of the disposable produce from a Lothian farm goes to the landlord for rent—that 26*s.* out of every 52*s.* for a quarter of wheat is rent; and that consequently, if they had their land rent free, and sold their wheat at 26*s.* a quarter, they would do as well, pay as good wages, and everybody about the establishment be as well provided for as they are now, when paying rent and getting 52*s.* for their wheat. With such a margin as this, I think we need not be in much fear of throwing land out of cultivation in Scotland!

I believe many hon. Gentlemen opposite have never made a calculation of what proportion of the whole of the saleable produce goes for rent. It must be borne in mind that every acre of a farm pays rent, although probably not more than one acre in three, and in the best farming not more than one in four, is in the same year devoted to the growth of wheat, whilst a part of the farm is generally in permanent pasture. My mode of calculation, then, is this: ascertain the money value of the whole produce of every kind sold in a year, find how many quarters of wheat it is equal to at the price of the year, and next divide the total number of quarters by the number of acres in the farm, and the result will give you the quantity of wheat sold off each acre in the year. I have made the calculation, and in doing so have had the opinions of those who have taken pains upon the subject; and these are the conclusions to which I have come:—I calculate that an arable farm, on an average, does not yield for sale, of every kind of produce, more than equivalent to ten bushels of wheat per acre; so that a farm of 500 acres would not dispose of more than what is equivalent to 5,000 bushels. In many parts I believe that this estimate is too high, and that the farmer does not dispose of more than one quarter per acre. And the result of the inquiry would show that in Scotland (where much of the labour on the farm is paid in kind) one-half of the produce taken to market goes to the landlord as [76] rent, whilst in England it will average more than 20*s.* a quarter upon the present price of wheat. With regard to cheese, I am prepared to bring witnesses to prove that more than half of the produce goes to the landlord, owing to the fact of there being less paid in wages upon dairy farms. For every 5*d.* received for cheese, more than 2½*d.* is paid in rent; and upon grazing farms, also, for every 5*d.* received for a pound of meat, at least 2½*d.* is paid to the landlord. This is, after all, the important point in the consideration of this question, because, it being settled, the public would no longer labour under the apprehension, that if free trade were adopted the farmers would suffer, or that land would be thrown out of cultivation.

This is a point upon which I should not have entered, had not the investigation been challenged by my opponents. It must not be imputed to me that I entertain the opinion that free trade in corn would deprive the landowners of the whole of their rents. I have never said so—I have never even said that land would not have been as valuable as it is now, if no Corn-law had ever existed. But this I do mean to say, that if the landowners prefer to draw their rents from the distresses of the country, caused by their restrictive laws to create high prices through scarcity of food, instead of deriving an honourable income of possibly as great, or even greater amount, through the growing prosperity of the people under a free trade, then

they have no right, in the face of such facts as I have stated, to attempt to cajole the farmer into the belief that rent forms an insignificant item in the cost of his wheat, or to frighten him into the notion that he could not compete with foreigners if he had his land rent free.

I shall now touch upon another and more important branch of this question, I mean the interests of the farm-labourer. We are told that he is benefited by a system of restriction which makes the first element of subsistence scarce. Do you think posterity will believe it? They will look back upon this doctrine, in less than twenty years, with as much amazement as we do now upon the conduct of our forefathers when they burnt old women for witchcraft! To talk of benefiting labourers by making one of the main articles of their consumption scarce! The agricultural labourers live by wages; what is it which regulates the wages of labour in every country? Why, the quantity of the necessaries and comforts of life which form the fund out of which labour is paid, and the proportion which they bear to the whole number of labourers to be maintained. Now, the agricultural labourer spends a larger proportion of his wages in food than any other class. And yet, in the face of this fact, do you go on maintaining a law which makes food scarce in order to benefit the agriculturist. I hold in my hand a volume which has been presented to the House relating to the state of the agricultural population of this country, and which, I think, ought to have been brought under the notice of the House, by some one competent to deal with the subject, long before now.

Last year a Commission was appointed to inquire into the state of women and children employed in agriculture. I beg to make a few observations before proceeding further upon the manner in which this inquiry has been conducted. Some years ago the House will recollect that a Commission was appointed on the condition of the handloom weavers. That Commission sat two years; its inquiries have since been directed to the state of other manufacturing interests, and it is still, I believe, in existence. The inquiry upon the state of the labourers employed in our manufactures, therefore, will have been very fully gone into. But when an application was made to a member of the Cabinet to allow the same Commission to institute a similar inquiry into the state of the labourers employed in husbandry, he refused to do so; but afterwards he agreed that an inquiry should be made by the Assistant Poor-law Commissioners, but that only thirty days could be [77] allowed for such inquiry. The volume which I hold in my hand is, therefore, the work of four gentlemen during only thirty days; one of these gentlemen, Mr. Austin, set forward on his task, and consumed two days in travelling. He had thus only twenty-eight days to inquire into the condition of the agricultural population in four counties in the south of England. We have, however, some facts elicited on that inquiry, which ought to have drawn forth remarks from hon. Gentlemen opposite as to the condition of their own constituents.

Before I allude to the condition of the agricultural labourers, I wish to state that, whatever may have been the animus which influenced others in investigating the condition of the manufacturing districts, I am actuated by no invidious feeling whatever towards the agriculturists; for bear in mind that my conduct has been throughout marked by consistency towards both. Had I ever concealed the wretched state of the manufacturing operatives, or shrunk from the exposure of their sufferings, my motives might have been open to suspicion in now bringing before your notice the still more depressed condition of the agricultural poor. But I was one of that numerous deputation from the North which, in the spring of 1839, knocked in vain at the door of this House for an inquiry at your bar into the state of the manufacturing population. I was one of the deputies who intruded ourselves (sometimes five hundred strong) into the presence of successive Prime Ministers, until our importunities became the subject of remark and complaint in this House. From that time to this we have continued without intermission to make public in every possible way the distress to which the manufacturers were exposed. We did more; we prescribed a remedy for that distress; and I do not hesitate to express my solemn belief that the reason why, in the disturbances which took



place, there was no damage done to property in the manufacturing districts, was, that the people knew and felt that an inquiry was taking place, by active and competent men, into the cause of their distress, and from which they had hoped some efficient remedy would result. Now I would impress upon hon. Members opposite, as the result of my conviction, that if the labouring poor in their districts take a course as diabolical as it is insane—a course which I am sorry to see they have taken in many agricultural localities—of burning property to make known their sufferings—if I might make to those hon. Gentlemen a suggestion, it would be this—that if they had come forward to the House and the country as we, the manufacturers, have done, and made known the sufferings of the labouring population, and prescribed any remedy whatever—if that population had heard a voice proclaiming their distresses, and making known their sufferings—if they had seen the sympathies of the country appealed to—I believe it would have had such a humanising and consoling effect upon the minds of the poor and misguided people, that in the blindness of despair they would never have destroyed that property which it was their interest to protect. I have looked through this volume, which is the result of Mr. Austin's twenty-eight days' travels through the agricultural districts, and I find that during that period he visited Somersetshire, Devonshire, Wiltshire, and Dorsetshire. He has given the testimony of various respectable gentlemen in these several localities, as to the condition of the agricultural labourers. Some of these accounts are highly important. The first that I shall refer to is the evidence of the Rev. J. Guthrie, the vicar of Calne, in Wilts. He says (speaking of the agricultural labourers in that district):—

'I never could make out how they can live with their present earnings.'

Dr. Greenup, M. D., Calne, says:—

'In our union, the cost of each individual in the workhouse, taking the average of men, women, and children, is 1*s.* 6*d.* a [78] week, for food only; and, buying by tender and in large quantity, we buy at least 10 per cent. cheaper than the labouring man can. But, without considering this advantage, apply the scale to the poor, industrious family. A man, his wife, and two children, will require, if properly fed, 6*s.* weekly; their rent (at least 1*s.*) and fuel will very nearly swallow up the remainder; but there are yet things to provide—soap and candles, clothes and shoes; shoes to a poor man are a serious expense, as he must have them strong, costing about 12*s.* a pair, and he will need at least one pair in a year. When I reckon up these things in detail, I am always more and more astonished how the labourers contrive to live at all.'

Thomas King, Esq., surgeon, Calne, Wilts, says:—

'If women and boys who labour in the field suffer in their health at all, it is not from the work they perform, but the want of food. The food they eat is not bad of its kind, but they have not enough of it; and more animal food would be most desirable, but with the present rate of wages it is impossible. Their low diet exposes them to certain kinds of diseases, more particularly to those of the stomach.'

Mr. Robert Bowman, farmer, and vice-chairman of the Board of Guardians, Calne Union, deposes:—

'In the great majority of cases, the labourer has only the man's wages (8*s.* or [illegible digit—Econlib Ed.]*s.* a week) to live on. On that, a man and his wife, and family of four, five, or six children, must live, though it is a mystery to me how they do live.'

This was the evidence of a farmer. Mrs. Britton, wife of a farm-labourer, says:—

'We could eat much more bread, if we could get it.'

Mrs. Wiltshire, wife of a farm-labourer at Cherill, Wilts, in her own pathetic way, says:—

'Our common drink is burnt-crust tea. We also buy about half-a-pound of sugar a week. We never know what it is to get enough to eat. At the end of the meal the children would always eat more. Of bread there is never enough; the children are always asking for more at every meal. I then say, "You don't want your father to go to prison, do you?"'

That is a specimen of the evidence collected in the south of England, in the purely agricultural districts, by Mr. Austin. I have myself had the opportunity of making considerable observations in the agricultural districts, and I have come to this conviction, that the farther you travel from the much-maligned region of tall chimneys and smoke, the less you find the wages of labourers to be; the more I leave behind me Lancashire and the northern parts of England, the worse is the condition of the labourers, and the less is the quantity of food they have. Does not this, I will ask, answer the argument that the agricultural labourer derives protection from the Corn-laws? Now, what I wish to bring before the Committee is not merely that, in the abstract, and as a general principle, the working class can never be benefited by high prices occasioned by scarcity of food, but, that even during your casual high prices, caused by scarcity, the agricultural labourers always suffer. Pauperism increases as the price of food rises; and, in short, the price of the loaf is in a direct ratio proof of the increase of pauperism. An hon. Gentleman says 'No, no.' I hope I shall have him on the Committee, and, if he will only hear me out, I am sure I shall persuade him to vote for the Committee.

With regard to the condition of the agricultural labourer, I have taken some pains to ascertain what has been the relative progress of wages and rents in agricultural districts. I know that this is a very sore point indeed for hon. Members opposite; but I must tell them that in those very districts of Wilts and Dorset the wages of labour, as measured in food, are lower now than they were sixty years ago, while the rent of land has increased from two-and-a-half to threefold. Mind, I do not pretend to decide whether, with a free trade, rents might not have advanced even fivefold, [79] but I do contend that, under those circumstances, the increased value of land could have only followed the increased prosperity of every portion of the industrious community; and so long as you maintain a law for enhancing prices by scarcity, and raising artificial rents for a time, and by the most suicidal process, out of the privations of the consumers, you must not be surprised if you are called upon to show how the system works upon those for whose benefit you profess to uphold the law. I find that the following were the ordinary wages of the common agricultural day-labourers previous to the rise of prices after 1790, taken from the accounts of the respective counties drawn up for the Board of Agriculture; not including hay-time and harvest:—

Average price of wheat	44s. 6d.
Devonshire	6s. to 7s. 6d. per week.
Wiltshire	6s. to 7s. per week.
Somersetshire	7s. to 9s. per week.
Dorset	6s. to 6s. 6d. per week.
(With wheat at 5s. per bushel.)	
Gloucester	7s. to 10s. per week.

Since that period, money wages have hardly increased in those districts; and wages, computed in food, have certainly declined, while rent has progressed from 200 to 250 per cent. I will mention another fact, illustrative of the relative progress of rents and wages. When lately attending a meeting at Gloucester, I heard a gentleman say publicly that he had

recently sold an estate which had belonged to his great-grandfather, and which brought him ten times the price his ancestor had given for it. But what, in the same time, has been the course of wages? It is stated in a work attributed to Justice Hale, published in 1683, upon the condition of the working classes, that the wages of a farm-labourer in Gloucestershire were 10s. a week; and he remarks:—

'Unless the earnings of a family, consisting of the father, mother, and four children, amount to that sum, they must make it up, I suppose, by begging or stealing.'

Wheat was then 36s. a quarter. Now that wheat is 40 per cent. higher, the average wages in Gloucestershire are only 8s. to 9s., and in many cases 7s. and 6s. And Mr. Hunt, a farmer in Gloucestershire, who is also a guardian of the poor, stated publicly at the same meeting, that in his district it was found, when relief was applied for, that in many instances families, who were endeavouring to exist on wages, were, taking the number of the family into account, only obtaining one-half the amount which their maintenance would cost in the workhouse. Mr. Hunt also stated that, directions having been received by the guardians of the union to keep the poor who were inmates of the workhouse upon as low a diet as the able-bodied labourer and his family could obtain out of it, they were, on inquiry, startled at the small quantity of food upon which, from the low rate of wages, the labouring population were forced to subsist; and upon referring the point to the medical officer of the union, he reported that it would not be safe to feed the able-bodied paupers upon the scale of food which they were getting out of the workhouse.

Hitherto I have spoken of the food of the agricultural population; and when we speak of food, it implies lodging, clothing—it implies morality, education, ay, and, I fear, religion, and everything pertaining to the social comforts and morals of the people. I have informed the House in what manner that population is fed; but there is another point in the volume before me which most especially calls for the attention of hon. Gentlemen opposite—I refer to the lodging of the agricultural poor. That is a point that more nearly concerns, if possible, the character of the landowner than, perhaps, the question of food. Mr. Austin, in the report from which I have before quoted, in reference to the four counties I have enumerated, says:—

The want of sufficient accommodation seems universal. At Stourpain, a village near Blandford, Dorset, I measured a bedroom [80] in a cottage. The room was 10 feet square, not reckoning the two small recesses by the side of the chimney, about 18 inches deep. The roof was the thatch, the middle of the chamber being about 7 feet high. Eleven persons slept in three beds in this room. The first bed was occupied by the father and mother, a little boy, Jeremiah, aged one year and a half, and an infant, aged four months; second bed was occupied by the three daughters—the two eldest, Sarah and Elizabeth, twins, aged twenty, and Mary, aged seven; third bed was occupied by the four sons—Silas, aged seventeen, John, aged fifteen, James, aged fourteen, and Elias, aged ten. There was no curtain or any kind of separation between the beds.'

Mr. Phelps, an agent of the Marquis of Lansdowne, says:—

'I was engaged in taking the late census in Bremhill parish; and in one case, in Studley, I found twenty-nine people living under one roof; amongst them were married men and women, and young people of nearly all ages. In Studley it is not at all uncommon for a whole family to sleep in the same room. The number of bastards in that place is very great.'

The Hon. and Rev. S. Godolphin Osborne, rector of Bryanston, Dorset, says:—

'Within this last year I saw in a room about 13 feet square, three beds: on the first lay the mother, a widow, dying of consumption; on the second two unmarried daughters, one eighteen years of age, the other twelve; on the third a young married couple, whom I myself had married two days before. A married woman, of thorough good character, told me a few weeks ago that on her confinement, so crowded with children is her one room they are obliged to put her on the floor in the middle of the room that they may pay her the requisite attention; she spoke of this as to her the most painful part of that, her hour of trial.'

Mr. Thomas Fox, solicitor, Beaminster, Dorset, in his evidence to Mr. Austin, says:—

'I regret that I cannot take you to the parish of Hook (near here), the whole parish belonging to the Duke of Cleveland, occupied by a tenant of the name of Rawlins, where the residences of the labourers are as bad as it is possible you can conceive; many of them without chambers, earth floors, not ceiled or plastered; and the consequence is, that the inhabitants are the poorest—the worst off in the country.'

He is asked:—

'Are you of opinion that such a want of proper accommodation for sleeping must tend very much to demoralize the families of the labouring population?—There can be no doubt of it; and the worst of consequences have arisen from it.'

Mr. Malachi Fisher, of Blandford, Dorset, says:—

'That in Milton Abbas, on the average of the late census, there were thirty-six persons in each house. It is not an uncommon thing for two families, who are near neighbours, to place all the females in one cottage, and the males in another.'

And Mr. Austin, in his report, says:—

'The sleeping of boys and girls, young men and young women, in the same room, in beds almost touching one another, must have the effect of breaking down the great barriers between the sexes; the sense of modesty and decency on the part of women, and respect for the other sex on the part of the men. The consequences of the want of proper accommodation for sleeping in the cottages are seen in the early licentiousness of the rural districts—licentiousness which has not always respected the family relationship.'

I am by no means desirous of using excitable language or harsh terms in anything I may have to address to the House upon this subject; but I should not do justice to my own feelings if I failed to express my strong indignation at the conduct of those owners of land who permit men, bred on the soil, born on their territory, to remain in the condition in which the labouring population of Dorsetshire appear, not occasionally, but habitually to exist. [Lord Ashley: 'Hear!'] I am glad to hear that cheer from the noble Lord; I should have expected as much. You talk to us about the crowding together of the labouring [81] population in the manufacturing towns, and charge that upon the manufacturer and the mill-owner, forgetting that the crowding together in towns cannot come under the cognisance of particular individuals or employers; but in the agricultural districts we find the large proprietors of land, who will not allow any other person to erect a stick or a stone, or to build up a cottage on their estates, nevertheless permitting men, for whose welfare they are responsible, to herd in this beastly state in dwellings worse than the wigwams of the American Indians. When we see these things, I repeat, that the persons by whom they are permitted to continue, deserve to be visited with the most unqualified reprobation of this House. It was well said by the late

Mr. Drummond, 'that property has its duties as well as its rights,' but these duties are grossly neglected when a Commissioner from the Government can find people living in such pigsties — or worse than pigsties — as have been described.

I have alluded to the evidence of the Rev. Godolphin Osborne. I have not the honour to be acquainted with that gentleman, and I have no doubt that in political matters we differ 'wide as the poles,' but I cannot but admire him or any other man who will come forward and express his opinion, and make public the state of a population so degraded. That gentleman, in a letter lately written, says:—

'Our poor live on the borders of destitution...From one year's end to another, there are many labouring families that scarcely touch, in the way of food, anything but bread and potatoes, with now and then some bacon. Bread is in almost every cottage the chief food of the children, and, when I know of what that bread is often made. I am not surprised at the great prevalence amongst the children of the labourers, of diseases known to proceed from an improper or too stinted diet....The wages paid by farmers I do not find exceeding 8*s.*, except, perhaps, in the case of the shepherd or carter. In many parishes only 7*s.* a week are paid... A clergyman in this union states to me, that he had lately had four blankets sent to him to dispose of. In making inquiry for the most proper objects, he found in fifteen families in his parish, consisting of eighty-four individuals, there were only thirty-three beds and thirty-five blankets, being about three persons to one bed, with one blanket. Of the thirty-five blankets, ten were in good condition, having been given them within the last four years, the other twenty-five were mere patched rags.'

Bear in mind that I am describing no sudden crisis of distress, such as occasionally takes place in the manufacturing districts, but the ordinary condition of the people. The strikes and tumults of which you hear so much in those districts, are the struggles of the operatives against being reduced from their comparatively comfortable earnings to the deplorable condition in which the agricultural population have sunk unconsciously, and, I am afraid to think, contentedly. Speaking of the union of Tarrant Hinton, the same rev. gentleman says:—

'In Tarrant Hinton parish, a father, mother, married daughter and her husband, an infant, a blind boy of sixteen, and two girls, occupying one bedroom; next door, a father, mother, and six children, the eldest boy sixteen years of age, in one bedroom; two doors below, a mother, a daughter with two bastards, another daughter, her husband and two children, another daughter and her husband, one bedroom and a sort of landing, the house in a most dilapidated state! It is not one property or one parish alone, on or in which such cases exist; the crowded state of the cottages generally is a thing known to every one who has occasion to go amongst the poor. In one or two cases whole villages might be gone through, and every other house at least would tell the same tale; and I know this to be true out of this union as well as in it; and in some of these worst localities, a rent of from 3*l.* to 5*l.* yearly is charged for a house with only one room below and one above. It may serve to corroborate what I have stated of the crowding of the villages to add, that I have now a list before me of forty families belonging to other parishes in the union, who are now actually residing in the town of Blandford.'

[82] Now, mark! the progress of the evil is this. The landowner refuses to build up new cottages, and permits the old cottages to fall down; and I speak advisedly when I say, that this is the course adopted systematically in Dorsetshire, and the people are driven to Blandford and other towns. And what a population they are thus sending to the manufacturing districts ! And what are these villages but normal schools of prostitution and vice? Oh, do not then blame the manufacturers for the state of the population in their towns, while you rear such a people in the country, and drive them there for shelter, when the hovels in which they have dwelt fall down about them.

I wish to be understood, that in speaking of the condition of the agricultural labourer, and of the wages he receives, I do not intend to cast imputations upon any individual. I attack not individuals, but the system. Although I hold the proprietor to be responsible for the state of lodging on his own land, I do not hold him responsible for the rate of wages in his district. I never held the farmers responsible for the want of employment or the price of labour, although it has been foolishly said of me that I did so. I challenge the Argus-eyed opponent I have to deal with to show that I have ever done so. But, so far from that being the case, I have, in every agricultural district which I have visited, told the labourers, 'that the farmers cannot give what wages they please—wages are not to be looked upon as charity—the farmers are in no way responsible for low wages—it is the system.' I have thus spoken of the food and lodging of the agricultural labourers, and shall content myself with one extract from Mr. Austin's description of their clothing:—

'A change of clothes seems to be out of the question, although necessary not only for cleanliness, but saving of time. It not unfrequently happens, that a woman on returning home from work is obliged to go to bed for an hour or two, to allow her clothes to be dried. It is also by no means uncommon for her, if she should not do this, to put them on again next morning nearly as wet as when she took them off.'

Now, what kind of home customers do hon. Gentlemen opposite think these people are to the manufacturers? This is the population, who, according to those hon. Gentlemen, are our best customers. I should be glad for a moment to call the attention of the right hon. the Home Secretary to the present working of the New Poor Law in Wilts. I have observed in a Wiltshire paper a statement which I will read to the House:—

'In Potterne, an extensive parish on the south-west side of Devizes, in which reside two country gentlemen, who are magistrates, considerable landowners, and staunch advocates of the Corn-laws, besides other gentlemen of station and of wealth, this plan of billeting the labourers has been adopted; and the following are the prices which are put on those poor fellows who cannot get work at the average rate of 7s. a week, and of whom, we understand, there are, or lately were, about forty:—Able-bodied single men, 2s. 6d. a week; ditto married men, 4s.; ditto with two or three children, 5s.; ditto with large families, 6s. a week. At these rates then—fixed with reference to the number of mouths to be fed, and not according to the ability of the parties as workmen, the object clearly being to reduce the poor's rate—may any person in the parish, or out of it either, we presume, command the services of any of these forty unfortunates. We say command, for these independent labourers, "bold peasantry, their country's pride," have no voice in the matter; they have not even the option of going into the Union-house while any one can be found willing to use up their sinews and their bones at this starvation price.'

I have seen this in the Independent Wiltshire newspaper, and have taken it down, and had the names of the parties sent to me corroborating it. And is not this, I will ask, quite inconsistent with what is the understood principle of the Poor Law? Here is a sliding tariff of wages beginning at 2s. 6d., and ending at 6s., the men who are the victims of [83] the system having no more voice in the matter than the negro slaves of Louisiana!

Now, I put it to you who are the supporters of the Corn-law—Can you, in the face of facts like these, persist in upholding such a system? I would not, were I in your position, be a party to such a course—no, nothing on earth should bribe me to it—with such evidence at your doors of the mischiefs you are inflicting. I have alluded to the condition of the people in four of the southern counties of England—in Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Somersetshire, and Devonshire; and what I have stated in regard to those places would apply, I fear, to all the purely rural counties in the kingdom, unless you go northward, where the demand for labour

in the manufacturing districts raises the rate of wages on the land in the neighbourhood.

The hon. and gallant Member for Lincoln says 'No;' and I will concede to the hon. and gallant Member, for I have no wish to excite his temper by contradicting him, that it is not so in Lincolnshire; I admit there is an exception to the general rule in regard to that county—there, I believe, both the labourers and farmers are in a much better condition than in the south. But I am referring to the condition of the agricultural population generally; and when we look at the orderly conduct of that population, at the patience exhibited by them under their own sufferings and privations—fortified, as it were, by endurance so much, that we scarcely hear a complaint from them, I am sure such a population will meet with the sympathies of this House, and that the noble Lord, the Member for Dorset (Lord Ashley), whom I see opposite, and whose humane interference on behalf of the factory labourers is the theme of admiration, will extend to the agricultural population that sympathy which has been so beneficial in ameliorating the condition of a large portion of the labouring people. But where are the Scotch county Members, that they have nothing to say? In that country there is an agricultural population, that, as far as their conduct is concerned, would do honour to any country. Yet I find the following description of the diet of these labourers in a Scotch paper:

—

'In East Lothian, the bread used by hinds and other agricultural labourers is a mixture of barley, peas, and beans, ground into meal; and you will understand its appearance when we inform you that it is very like the rape and oil cakes used for feeding cattle and manuring the fields; and it is very indigestible, coarse food.'

And I have received from a trustworthy person a letter, giving me the subjoined account of the peasantry of the county of Forfar:—

'In this county (Forfarshire), the mode of engaging farm-servants is from Whitsunday to Whitsunday; in some cases the period of engagement is only for half a year. The present average rate of wages is 11*l.* per annum, or a fraction more than 4*s.* per week, with the addition of two pecks or 16*lbs.* of oatmeal, and seven Scotch pints of milk weekly. The amount of wages may be stated thus:—

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Money	4	0
Oatmeal, two pecks at 10 <i>d.</i>	1	8
Seven pints of milk at 2 <i>d.</i>	1	2
Total weekly wages	6	10

That is the current weekly wages of an able-bodied agricultural labourer. An old man—that is, a man a little beyond the prime of life—if employed at all, his wages are considerably lower. The universal food of the agricultural labourers in Forfarshire is what is locally called "brose," which is merely a mixture of oatmeal and boiling water; the meal is not boiled, only the boiling water poured on it. There is no variation in this mode of living; butcher's meat, wheaten bread, sugar, tea, or coffee, they never taste. The outhouses they live in are called "bothies," and more wretched hovels than these bothies are not to be found among the wigwams of the uncivilised Africans.'

It really would appear, from the slight notice taken here of the state of suffering in the rural districts, that the County [84] Members were sent up to this House to conceal rather than to disclose the condition of the people they left behind them. Then there is the case of Wales. There can be no excuse for ignorance as to the state of the Welsh people, for during the time of the recent disturbances we had the accounts given by the *Times*' reporter, corroborated by persons living in the locality, showing clearly what was the condition of both

the farmer and the labourer in that country. In one of those accounts it was stated:—

'The main cause, however, of the disturbances, is beyond question the abject poverty of the people. The small farmer here breakfasts on oatmeal and water boiled, called "duffrey" or "flummery," or on a few mashed potatoes left from the previous night's supper. He dines on potatoes and buttermilk, with sometimes a little white Welsh cheese and barley bread, and, as an occasional treat, has a salt herring. Fresh meat is never seen on the farmer's table. He sups on mashed potatoes. His butter he never tastes; he sells it to pay his rent. The pigs he feeds are sold to pay his rent. As for beef or mutton, they are quite out of the question—they never form the farmer's food.'

Then as to the labourer:—

'The condition of the labourers, from inability in the farmers to give them constant employment, is deplorable. They live entirely on potatoes, and have seldom enough of them, having only one meal a-day! Being half starved, they are constantly upon the parish. They live in mud huts, with only one room for sleeping, cooking, and living—different ages and sexes herding together. Their cottages have no windows, but a hole through the mud wall to admit the air and light, into which a bundle of rags or turf is thrust at night to stop it up. The thinly-thatched roofs are seldom drop-dry, and the mud floor becomes consequently damp and wet, and dirty almost as the road; and, to complete the wretched picture, huddled in a corner are the rags and straw of which their beds are composed.'

I have now glanced at the condition of the agricultural population in England, Scotland, and Wales. You have too recently heard the tales of its suffering to require that I should go across the Channel to the sister island with its two millions and a half of paupers; yet bear in mind (for we are apt to forget it), in that country there is a duty this day of 18s. a quarter upon the import of foreign wheat. Will it be believed in future ages, that in a country periodically on the point of actual famine—at a time when its inhabitants subsisted on the lowest food, the very roots of the earth—there was a law in existence which virtually prohibited the importation of bread! I have given you some idea of the ordinary condition of the agricultural labourers when at home: I have alluded to their forced migration from the agricultural districts to the towns; and I will now quote from the report of the London Fever Hospital, a description of the state in which they reach the metropolis:—

'Dr. Southwood Smith has just given his annual report upon the state of the London Fever Hospital during the past year, from which it appears that the admissions during the period were 1,462, being an excess of 418 above that of any preceding year. A large portion of the inmates were agricultural labourers, or provincial mechanics, who had come to London in search of employment, and who were seized with the malady either on the road or soon after their arrival, evincing the close connexion between fever and destitution. These poor creatures ascribed their illness, some of them to the sleeping by the sides of hedges, and others to a want of clothing, many of them being without stockings, shirts, shoes, or any apparel capable of defending them from the inclemency of the weather; while the larger number attributed it to want of food, being driven by hunger to eat raw vegetables, turnips, and rotten apples. Their disease was attended with such extreme prostration as generally to require the administration of an unusually large proportion of wine, brandy, ammonia, and other stimulants. The gross mortality was 15½ per cent. An unprecedented number of nurses and other servants of the hospital were attacked with fever, namely, twenty-nine, of whom six died.'

I have another account from the Marl [85] borough-street police report, bearing upon the same point, which is as follows:—



'Marlborough Street.—The Mendicity Society constables and the police have brought a considerable number of beggars to this court recently. The majority of these persons are country labourers, and their excuse for vagrancy has been of the same character—inability to get work from the farmers, and impossibility of supporting themselves and families on the wages offered them when employment is to be had. It is impossible to describe the wretched appearance of these men, most of whom are able-bodied labourers, capable of performing a hard day's work, and, according to their own statements, willing to do so, provided they could get anything to do. A great many of these vagrant agricultural labourers have neither stockings nor shoes on their feet, and their ragged and famished appearance exceeds in wretchedness that of the Irish peasantry who find their way to this metropolis. The magistrates, in almost every instance, found themselves obliged to send these destitute persons to prison for a short period, as the only means of temporarily rescuing them from starvation. Several individuals belonging to this class of beggars were yesterday committed.'

You have here the condition of the agricultural labourers when they fly to the towns. You have already heard what was their condition in the country, and now I appeal to honourable Members opposite, whether theirs is a case with which to come before the country to justify the maintenance of the Corn-laws? You are nonsuited, and put out of court; you have not a word to say. If you could show in the agricultural labourers a blooming and healthy population, well clothed and well fed, and living in houses fit for men to live in—if this could be shown as the effects of the Corn-laws, there might be some ground for appealing to the feelings of the House to permit an injustice to continue while they knew that they were benefiting a large portion of their fellow-countrymen. But when we know, and can prove from the facts before us, that the greatest scarcity of food is to be found in the midst of the agricultural population, and that protection does not, as its advocates allege, benefit the farmer or the labourer, you have not a solitary pretext remaining, and I recommend you at once to give up the system, which you can no longer stand before the country and maintain.

The facts I have stated are capable of corroboration. Before a Select Committee we can obtain as much evidence as we want to show the state of the agricultural population. We may get that evidence in less time and more satisfactorily before a Select Committee than through a Commission. Though I by no means wish to undervalue inquiries conducted by Commissions, which in many cases are very useful, I am of opinion that an inquiry such as I propose would be carried on with more satisfaction and with less loss of time by a Select Committee than by a Commission. There is no tribunal so fair as a Select Committee; Members of both sides are upon it, witnesses are examined and cross-examined, doubts and difficulties are removed, and the real facts are arrived at. Besides the facts I have stated, if you appoint a Committee, the landlords may obtain evidence which will go far to help them out of their own difficulty—viz. the means of giving employment to the people. The great want is employment, and if it is not found, where do you suppose will present evils end, when you consider the rapid way in which the population is increasing? You may in a Committee receive valuable suggestions from practical agriculturists—suggestions which may assist you in devising means for providing employment. There may be men examined more capable of giving an opinion, and more competent to help you out of this dilemma, than any you could have had some years ago. You may now have the evidence of men who have given their attention as to what can be done with the soil. Drain-tiles are beginning to show themselves on the surface of the land in many counties. Why should they not always be placed under the surface, and why [86] should not such improvements give employment to labourers?

You do not want Acts of Parliament to protect the farmer—you want improvements, outlays, bargains, leases, fresh terms. A farmer before my Committee will tell you that you may employ more labourers by breaking up land which has lain for hundreds of years in

grass, or rather in moss, to please some eccentric landowner, who prefers a piece of green turf to seeing the plough turning up its furrows. This coxcomby of some landlords would disappear before the good sense of the Earl of Ducie. You may derive advantage from examining men who look upon land as we manufacturers do upon the raw material of the fabrics which we make—who will not look upon it with that superstitious veneration and that abhorrence of change with which landlords have been taught to regard their acres, but as something on which to give employment to the people, and which, by the application to it of increased intelligence, energy, and capital, may produce increased returns of wealth.

But we shall have another advantage from my Committee. Recollect that hitherto you have never heard the two sides of the question in the Committees which have sat to inquire into agricultural subjects; and I impress this fact on the notice of the right hon. Baronet opposite as a strong appeal to him. I have looked back upon the evidence taken before these Committees, and I find that in none of them were both sides of the question fairly stated. All the witnesses examined were protectionists—all the members of all the Committees were protectionists. We have never yet heard an enlightened agriculturist plead the opposite side of the question. It is upon these grounds that I press this motion upon hon. Gentlemen opposite. I want to have further evidence. I do not want a man to be examined who is not a farmer or landowner. I would respectfully ask the Earl of Ducie and Earl Spencer to be examined first; and then hon. Gentlemen could send for the Dukes of Buckingham and Richmond. I should like nothing better than that—nothing better than to submit these four noblemen to a cross-examination. I would take your two witnesses and you would take mine, and the country should decide between us. Nothing would so much tend to diffuse sound views as such an examination. But you have even Members on your own side who will help me to make out my case. There is the hon. Member for Berkshire (Mr. Pusey); he knows of what land is capable—he knows what land wants, and he knows well that in the districts where the most unskilful farming prevails, there does pauperism exist to the greatest extent. What does he say to you? He advises that—

'More drains may be cut; more chalk be laid on the downs, the wolds, and the clays; marl on the sand, clay on the fens and heaths, lime on the moors—many of which should be broken up. That old ploughs be cast away, the number of horses reduced, good breeds of cattle extended, stock fattened where it has hitherto been starved, root-crops drilled and better dunged; new kinds of those crops cultivated, and artificial manures of ascertained usefulness purchased.'

It almost appears from the testimony of your own side, that you are doing nothing right. There is nothing about your agriculture that does not want improving. Suppose that you could show that we are wrong in all our manufacturing processes—suppose the theorist could come to my business, which is manufacturing garments, and which, I take it, is almost as necessary, and why not as honourable, in a civilised country and with a climate like ours, as manufacturing food; suppose, I say, a theoretical chemist, book in hand, should come to me, and say, 'You must bring indigo from India, madder from France, gum from Africa, and cotton from America, and you must compound and work them scientifically, so as to make your gown-pieces to be sold for 3*s.* each garment.' My answer would be, 'We do it already.' We require no theorist [87] to tell us how to perform our labour. If we could not do this, how could we carry on the competition which we do with other nations? But you are condemned by your own witnesses; you have the materials for the amelioration of your soils at your own doors: you have the chalk and clay, and marl and sand, which ought to be intermingled, and yet you must have people writing books to tell you how to do it.

We may make a great advance if we get this Committee. You may have the majority of its Members protectionists, if you will; I am quite willing that such should be the arrangement. I know it is understood—at least, there is a sort of etiquette—that the mover for a Committee

should, in the event of its being granted, preside over it as chairman. I waive all pretensions of the sort—I give up all claims—I only ask to be present as an individual Member.

What objections there can be to the Committee I cannot understand. Are you afraid that to grant it will increase agitation? I ask the hon. Baronet the Member for Essex (Sir J. Tyrell), whether he thinks the agitation is going down in his part of the country? I rather think there is a good deal of agitation going on there now. Do you really think that the appointment of a dozen Gentlemen, to sit in a quiet room up-stairs and hear evidence, will add to the excitement out of doors? Why, by granting my Committee you will be withdrawing me from the agitation for one. But I tell you that you will raise excitement still higher than it is, if you allow me to go down to your constituents—your vote against the Committee in my hand—and allow me to say to them, ‘I only asked for inquiry; I offered the landlords a majority of their own party; I offered them to go into Committee, not as a Chairman, but as an individual Member; I offered them all possible advantages, and yet they would not—they dared not grant a Committee of inquiry into your condition.’ I repeat to you, I desire no advantages. Let us have the Committee. Let us set to work, attempting to elicit sound information, and to benefit our common country. I believe that much good may be done by adopting the course which I propose.

I tell you that your boasted system is not protection but destruction to agriculture. Let us see if we cannot counteract some of the foolishness—I will not call it by a harsher name—of the doings of those who, under the pretence of protecting native industry, are inviting the farmer not to depend upon his own energy and skill and capital, but to come here and look for the protection of an Act of Parliament. Let us have a Committee, and see if we cannot elicit facts which may counteract the folly of those who are persuading the farmer to prefer Acts of Parliament to draining and subsoiling, and to be looking to the laws of this House when he should be studying the laws of nature.

I cannot imagine anything more demoralising—yes, that is the word—more demoralising, than for you to tell the farmers that they cannot compete with foreigners. You bring long rows of figures, of delusive accounts, showing that the cultivation of an acre of wheat costs 6*l.* or 8*l.* per year. You put every impediment in the way of the farmers trying to do what they ought to do. And can you think that this is the way to make people succeed? How should we manufacturers get on, if, when we got a pattern as a specimen of the productions of the rival manufacturer, we brought all our people together and said, ‘It is quite clear that we cannot compete with this foreigner; it is quite useless our attempting to compete with Germany or America; why, we cannot produce goods at the price at which they do.’ But how do we act in reality? We call our men together, and say, ‘So-and-so is producing goods at such a price; but we are Englishmen, and what America or Germany can do, we can do also.’ I repeat, that the opposite system, which you go upon, is demoralising the farmers. Nor have you any right to call out, with the noble Lord the Member for North Lancashire—you have no right to [88] go down occasionally to your constituencies and tell the farmers, ‘You must not plod on as your grandfathers did before you; you must not put your hands behind your backs, and drag one foot after the other, in the old-fashioned style of going to work.’ I say you have no right to hold such language to the farmer. Who makes them plod on like their grandfathers? Who makes them put their hands behind their backs? Why, the men who go to Lancashire and talk of the danger of pouring in of foreign corn from a certain province in Russia, which shall be nameless—the men who tell the farmers to look to this House for protective Acts, instead of their own energies—instead of to those capabilities which, were they properly brought out, would make the English farmer equal to—perhaps superior to—any in the world.

Because I believe that the existing system is worse for the farmer than for the manufacturer—because I believe that great good to both would result from an inquiry—because I believe that the present system robs the earth of its fertility and the labourer of his hire, deprives the people of subsistence, and the farmers of feelings of honest independence—I hope, Sir, that the House will accede to my motion for—

'A Select Committee to inquire into the effects of protective duties on imports upon the interests of the tenant-farmers and farm-labourers of this country.'

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**FREE TRADE. X.**  
**LONDON, MAY 8, 1844.** ↩

FORTUNATELY for me, the phrenologists, who have examined my head, tell me that I have neither the organ of self-esteem nor that of love of approbation: if I had, I am sure you would spoil me. At this late hour of the meeting I should not have intruded myself at all upon you were it not for a consciousness of the duty we owe to our visitor to-night—the noble Lord (Kinnaird) who has so kindly consented to fill the chair upon the present occasion, who, possessing great nobility and courage of nature, is the second individual who has come forth from his Order to preside at our meeting, who has furnished us with so many additional arguments, and who is thereby able to cheer us on in the pursuit of our great cause. Had it not been for the duty we owe to his lordship and to the gentleman (Mr. Somers) who has just sat down, who is an occupier of land, and who, I may tell you, holds the situation of acting chairman of the board of guardians of the Bridgwater Union—if it had not been, I say, for the purpose of paying a tribute to this noble Lord and the Somersetshire farmer, I am sure I should not have trespassed upon your time at this late hour of the evening.

We have here again another answer to his Grace of Richmond, who stated in the House of Peers that the farmers to a man are with the monopolists. I tell the noble Duke, ‘Well, you have not yet answered the speeches of Messrs. Hunt and Lattimore, and now are you willing to reply to that of Mr. Somers?’ We will call upon his Grace to notice these men, and to say whether, in the counties of Gloucester, Hertford, and Somerset, from whence these three farmers severally came, there can be found more unexceptionable witnesses, in point of talent, character, morality, and fitness in every respect; whether there could have been better witnesses brought from the counties I have named than those gentlemen. These are not the description of men the Protectionists put forward at their meetings as ‘farmers;’ their farmers generally consist of lawyers, land-valuers, and auctioneers—mere toadies and creatures of the landlords. They are men who stand towards the real farmers in a far worse relation than the landlord himself; for they do the dirty work on the tenant which the landlord personally would scorn to do. I will tell you what kind of people these land-valuers and auctioneers are. I was once travelling in Scotland upon the banks of a loch, between Taymouth and Killeen. A Highlander rode with me in the car who was a firm believer in witches and ghosts. He said his father had seen many of these ghosts, and he himself had seen some; that they were exceedingly mischievous, for they actually put stumbling-blocks in the way of people going home on a dark night, and often bewitched the cattle; ‘in fact,’ said he, reasoning the matter [90] out, ‘I believe they are worse than the Evil One that sends them. Just, you see, as the factor over there,’ pointing in the direction of the marquis's factor or land-agent's mansion, ‘just as the factor there is waur than the laird.’ Now, we do not bring forward these land-valuers and auctioneers. Mind you, the talking men in the farming districts generally are these auctioneers and land-agents. We have not too wide a choice among farmers who are Free Traders, and who can speak at public meetings like this; but this I can tell you from my own experience: wherever you find in any county of the kingdom a man of original thought and independent mind, and who has wherewithal to make him independent, and enable him to stand erect in the world, that man is almost invariably in favour of Free Trade.

But, upon the general argument of Free Trade, what am I to say to you, since you are all agreed on the subject? I can only congratulate you, that during this present week we have not been without evidence of a progress in high quarters on our question. We have had a budget—I cannot say it is a Free-trade one, because, when we Leaguers get into power, we will bring forward a much better budget than that. But still there were some little things done in

the budget on Monday night, and everything that was done was in the direction of Free Trade. What have the Duke of Richmond and the Protection Society been about? Why, I thought they had organised themselves, and assembled in his Grace's parlour, and had declared that their Prime Minister had gone so far that he should now go no farther. But it is quite clear to me that the Prime Minister does not dread those carpetknights much who sit in the drawingroom of his Grace; he is not very much alarmed at that chivalry. I think he has a great deal more reliance upon us than dread of them. There is one thing done by the present Government which has been well done, because it was totally and immediately done—I mean their abolition of the protection upon wool. Twenty-five years ago there was an uprising of all the Knatchbulls, Buckinghams, and Richmonds of that day, who said, we insist on having a *6d.* duty laid on foreign wool, to protect our own growth. They obtained what they asked Five years afterwards, Mr. Huskisson said he had been informed by the Leeds manufacturers, that if that duty was not greatly altered, and almost taken off, all the woollen manufactures would be lost, and then the English farmers would have no market for their wool at all. By dint of great management and eloquence on his part, Mr. Huskisson was enabled to take off at that time *5d.* of the *6d.* which had been laid on. And during the past week we have got rid of the other *1d.* When it was proposed to take off this duty, the agriculturists—I mean the Knatchbulls and Buckinghams of the day—declared (I have often quoted from their pamphlets upon that subject before), that if the duty was repealed, there would be no more shepherds employed, but that they would all go to the workhouse; that there would be no mutton in the land, and that all the shepherds' dogs might be hanged. If you had heard them talk in those days, you would have thought the poor sheep, instead of carrying merely its own wardrobe on its back, bore the entire wealth and prosperity of the whole nation. Now they are going to carry on the trade of sheep-rearing and woollselling without any protection.

Why should they not conduct the business of raising and selling corn upon the same principle? If it is unreasonable to 'totally and immediately' abolish the duty on corn, why has their own Prime Minister and Government 'totally and immediately' abolished the protection on wool? We find encouragement and good argument in favour of our principles by every step that is taken, even by our professed opponents. Take the article of coffee; a reform in that is not entirely, but it is half done. The duties on coffee formerly were—indeed, at this moment, are—*4d.* per lb [91] duty on colonial, and *8d.* per lb. on foreign. That meant just *4d.* per lb. monopoly to the colonial growers, because they were thereby enabled to sell their coffee at just *4d.* more than they otherwise would have done. Sir Robert Peel has reduced the duty on foreign coffee, but not on colonial, leaving the latter with *2d.* per lb. less protection than it formerly had. I cannot say that is rightly done, but it is half done, and we will have the other half by-and-by. Now, the next matter is sugar. Ladies, you cannot make your coffee without you have sugar; at least, with all your most honeyed smiles, you cannot make it sweet. Now, we are in a little difficulty about this sugar; for there are scruples of conscience which have come over the Government of this country. They cannot take foreign sugar, because it is tainted with slavery. Now observe, I am going to let out a secret. There is a secret correspondence going on between the Government of this country and that of Brazil to this effect. You know that statesmen sometimes write private letters and instructions to their agents, which are not published till about one hundred years after they are written, when they become curiosities. I will just give you one that will be published one hundred years hence respecting our Government and the Brazils. The present Ministry turned out the late Administration on the question of sugar. Lord Sandon, when he moved an amendment to the Whig proposition to allow foreign sugar, rested his argument on the ground that it was very impious to consume slave-grown sugar. But he said nothing about coffee; the rest I will explain in the words of the supposed secret letter from our Government to their ambassador in Brazil:—

'Inform the Brazilian Government that we stand pledged to the country, as regards this article of sugar, and, when we bring in our budget, we shall be obliged to tell the people of England, who are very gullible, and who will believe anything we tell them from our places in the House of Commons, that it will be very improper to encourage slavery and the slave trade by taking Brazilian sugar; but, to convince the Brazilian Government that we do not mean to do them any harm in this matter, we will preface our remarks about sugar by a declaration that we will admit their coffee at *2d.* per lb. reduction on the former duty; and as four out of five of the slaves who are employed in Brazil are engaged in the coffee plantations, and as three-fifths of all the exports from the Brazils are coffee, and as sugar forms comparatively an insignificant item in their production and exports (of all which the people of England are profoundly ignorant), this will convince them that we do not mean any injury to the Brazilian planters, and that we are not in earnest when we propose to stop the slave trade; we are simply bound to exclude the sugar by the exigencies of our party and our peculiar position. But tell them, at the same time, how cleverly we have tripped up the heels of the Whigs by the manœuvre.'

That is the description of despatch which will be published one hundred years hence, as having been sent by our present Government to their envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary at Brazil.

No doubt there are people who have been taken in by this cant about slave produce: honest, well-meaning philanthropists, if I must call them so, although I find it difficult to treat men as philanthropists who merely revel in the enjoyment of an unreasoning conscience, because true philanthropists have always a real ground of reason by which to guide their benevolence. There is a class of individuals who have come into considerable notoriety of late in this country, who wish to subject us, not to the dictates of an enlightened benevolence, but to the control of mere fanaticism. They are men who, under the plea of being anti-slavery advocates, petition the Government that they should not allow the people of this country to consume sugar, unless they can prove [92] that it had not 'the taint of slavery,' as they call it, upon it. Is there anything in morals which answers to the principle in material nature that there should be one thing which is a conductor of immorality, and another a non-conductor? that coffee is a non-conductor of the immorality of slavery, but that sugar is a conductor, and therefore you must not take it? I have personally met with some of these unreasoning philanthropists, and have been called upon by them to meet their objections relative to slave-grown sugar. I remember in particular one very benevolent gentleman in a white muslin cravat, with whom I discussed this question. I met him this way:—'Before you say another word to me on the subject, strip that slave-grown cotton from your neck.' He replied, that it was not practicable to do so. I rejoined, 'I demand it; it is practicable; for I know one gentleman who has dispensed with wearing cotton stockings in the summer, and will not allow his garments to be put together with cotton thread if he knows it.' It is, I assure you, a fact, that I know one philanthropist who has made that sacrifice. 'But,' said I, 'if it is impracticable for you, who stand up before me now with slave-grown cotton round your neck, to abstain from slave-grown commodities, is it possible for the people of England to do it? Is it practicable for us as a nation to do so? You can, if you please, pass a law prohibiting the importation of slave-grown sugar into England, but will that accomplish your object at all? You receive free-grown sugar in England; that leaves a vacuum in Holland and elsewhere, which is filled up with slave-grown sugar.' Before men have a right to preach such doctrines as these, and call upon the Government and the nation at large to support them, they ought to give evidence of their sincerity by the self-denying practice of abstaining from those articles which are already consumed in this country.

What right have a people who are the largest consumers and distributors of cotton goods to go over to the Brazils with their ships full of cotton, then turn up the whites of their eyes, shed crocodile tears over the slaves, and say, 'Here we are with a cargo of cotton goods, but

we have qualms of conscience, religious scruples, and cannot take your slave-grown sugar in return for our slave-grown cotton'? In the first place the thing is inconsistent, and in the next it is hypocritical. Mark me, clever knaves are using fanatics in order to impose upon the people of England a heavy burden. That is just what it amounts to. Cunning and selfish men are tampering with the credulity of what used to be the reasoning benevolence of the people of England. We must put down this sort of dictatorship, which has no rational judgment to guide it. Will they venture to assert that I am an advocate for the continuance of slavery because I maintain the principle of Free Trade? No; I assert here, as everywhere, that one good, sound, and just principle never can be at war with another of a similar character. If you can show me that Free Trade is promotive of slavery, and that it is calculated to extend or perpetuate it, then I should doubt, pause, and hesitate whether freedom of trade and personal freedom are equally consistent and just in their principles; and, as I say, *primâ facie*, there can be no question but that the possession of human beings as goods and chattels is contrary to the first Christian precept, therefore I say at once that slavery is unjust; and, if you can show me that Free Trade would promote that diabolical system, then I should be prepared to abandon Free Trade itself.

But I have always been of the same opinion with the most distinguished writers who have ever treated upon this subject—such men as Adam Smith, Burke, Franklin, Hume, and others, the greatest thinkers of any age—that slave labour is more costly than free labour—that if the two were brought into fair competition, free labour would supersede slave labour. I find this view so strongly put and clearly borne out by a body of men whom I should think [93] ought to be considered as authorities on this matter—I mean the anti-slavery body themselves—that I will venture to read just three or four lines out of this volume, which is a record of the proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention, called by the committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and held in London in 1840. It was denominated the 'World's Convention of Anti-Slavery Delegates,' for its members assembled from all parts of the globe. They appointed a most intelligent committee to make a report as to the relative value of free and slave labour, and here is their declaration, unanimously agreed to by the conference, with Thomas Clarkson at their head. They say,—

'Resolved—That, upon the evidence of facts to which the attention of this Convention has been directed, it is satisfactorily established as a general axiom that free labour is more profitable to the employer, and consequently cheaper, than slave labour.'

They go on to say,—

'That of all kinds of slave labour, that of imported slaves has been demonstrated to be the most costly and the least productive.'

And they wind up thus:—

'That the advantages of free-labour cultivation cannot be fairly attested or fully realised under a system of husbandry and general management which has grown up under the existence of slavery, and which is attested by a waste of human labour, that, but for monopoly prices, must have absorbed all the profit of cultivation. That the unrestricted competition of free labour in the cultivation of sugar would necessarily introduce a new system, by which the cost of production would be further diminished, and the fall of prices that must ensue would leave no profit upon slave-grown sugar.'

I will only quote one other passage of three lines from this report. There was a long debate upon the subject; many intelligent witnesses from all parts of the world bore testimony to that principle, and the committee passed those resolutions unanimously. I will



only read from the report of the discussions a few words of the speech of Mr. Scoble, who was speaking of the difference in the price of sugars which were then in the market. In alluding to the fact that the price of slave-sugar was 23s. per cwt., while that of free-grown sugar was 47s., he says:—

'Now, what is it that makes the difference in price between these two classes of colonial produce but what is usually termed the West Indian monopoly? Let the monopoly be got rid of, and I will venture to say that free-labour will compete with slave-labour sugar of any kind.'

That is the testimony of Mr. Scoble, who, I believe, is the accredited agent of the present London anti-slavery body.

Now, I ask these gentlemen to do that which we Free-traders do—to have faith in their own principles; to trust a great truth, convinced that it will carry them safely, whatever there may be of apparent difficulty in their way. We, as Free-traders, do not ask for the free admission of slave-grown sugar because we wish to consume the produce of slaves rather than of freemen, but because we object to the infliction of a monopoly upon the people of England under the pretence of putting an end to slavery. We deny that that is an effectual or a just mode of extinguishing slavery. On the contrary, it is subjecting the British public to a species of oppression and spoliation second in injustice only to slavery itself. We maintain, with Mr. Scoble and the Anti-Slavery Convention, that free labour, if placed in competition with slave labour, will be found cheaper and more productive, and that it will, in the end, put down slavery and the slave trade, by rendering it unprofitable to hold our fellow-creatures in bondage. Why, would it not be a monstrous thing if we found that in the moral government of this world it was so contrived that a man should have a premium offered him for doing injustice to his [94] fellow-man? Plenty and cheapness have been the reward promised from the beginning of time to those who do well; but if the greater cheapness and plenty should be the reward of him who seizes on his fellow-man and compels him to work with the whip, rather than for the man who offers a fair recompense for the willing labourer, I say, if that were found to be true, it would be at war with all we hold most just, and which we believe to be true of the moral government of the universe. If, then, free competition be wanted to overturn slavery, I ask this anti-slavery body how they can consistently present petitions to the House of Commons praying that this free competition shall not be allowed, and therefore that the very means they recommend for abolishing slavery shall not be carried into effect in this country? I am willing to believe many of these individuals to be honest; they have proved themselves to be disinterested by the labours they have gone through; but I warn them against being made the unconscious instruments of subtle, designing, and thoroughly selfish men, who have an interest in upholding this monopoly of sugar, which is slavery in another form, for the consumers of sugar here; and who, to carry their base object, will tamper with the feelings of the people of this country, and make use of the old British anti-slavery feeling, in order to carry out their selfish and iniquitous objects.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, before I sit down, I wish to say a word to you on a truly practical part of the question. Some allusion was made by my friend, Mr. Ricardo, to the probability of an election, and the necessity of being prepared for it. I am desirous, particularly in this place, where what we say goes out to the whole world—our own organ, the *League*, conveys every syllable of our speeches to 20,000 persons in all the parishes in the kingdom—I say, I want to dwell especially here upon what I conceive it is necessary that the people of this country should do to carry out the principles of Free Trade. They must simply adopt the plan which Sir Robert Peel recommended to his party—'Register, register, register!' Without a single public meeting or demonstration of any kind at all comparable with this, that party went to work, and in the course of four or five years placed their chief, who had given that good advice, in a majority in the House of Commons. Now, we have

infinitely more scope for work than ever he or his supporters had. Are you aware of the number of people who are voluntarily disfranchised in this country at this moment? You will be astonished when I tell you that in the metropolitan boroughs alone there are from 40,000 to 50,000 people who might register and vote for Members of Parliament, if they chose, but who neglect to do so. In every one of the large boroughs, such as Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds, there are thousands of people entitled to vote for Members of Parliament, but who yet do not make the necessary claim for that purpose. Why, within the walls of the city of London, I will venture to say that there is not one house which is paying a lower rent than 10*l.* Every man with a roof over his head there, can, and ought to, be a voter. How will you carry your Free-trade ticket at the next city of London election, unless you all register yourselves, for we do not then intend to go for one, but for all the four Members together?

I will in a few words state to you, and all our friends in the country, exactly how we stand at this particular moment. In about ten weeks the time will have elapsed which will give the people an opportunity of claiming to vote for the next year. Then, observe, that in order to have a vote you must have occupied a 10*l.* house for twelve months previous to the 31st of July, and have paid all rates and taxes due up to the 6th of April, upon or before the 20th of July. Having done this, you will be entitled to register your names as voters, and be in a position to exercise the elective franchise the next year, [95] should there be a dissolution of Parliament, and a contest for Free Trade. Mark me! By a late decision in the Court of Common Pleas, every man who rents a room in a house, if the apartment be a separate tenement—that is, if the lodger has the key of it, and has ingress and egress at the outer door when he likes—if that room be rented at 10*l.* a year or upwards, he will be entitled to a vote; and, if his landlord pays the rates, it is a sufficient rating, provided his own name be put down along with his landlord's on the books of the overseers. Now, that decision alone has given the franchise to perhaps 1,500 or 2,000 people in the City of London, and an immense number throughout the whole metropolitan boroughs. But lodgers who are boarded and lodged in a house, and who have not a separate room, as is the ordinary way with young persons, are not entitled to a vote. I wish they were, for I have no doubt we should get most of them. How is it that there are 40,000 or 50,000 people in the metropolis, and many thousands in all large towns, that are not on the electoral lists? I will tell you why. In the first place, I am sorry to say that a vast number of people in this country, who would be shocked and offended if we called them 'slaves,' or did not compliment them under the title of 'free-born Englishmen,' will not take the trouble to walk across the street in order to obtain for themselves votes, even where there is no expense attending it. In very many cases the difficulty is this, that in a great number of the smaller class of houses the landlords owning them compound for the rates, and pay them in a lump, whether the houses be empty or not, and by so doing pay a somewhat less amount than they would do if they paid for each house individually. If a tenant under such circumstances tells the overseers he wishes to be put down in the rate-book to get a vote, the overseers are required by law to put their names upon the rate-books with that of their landlords'. That is the condition in which thousands, nay, tens of thousands, of people in this country are situated who might have votes for Members of Parliament, if they adopted the proper means. I do hope that all who hear me, and those who will read what I am saying, will feel that now the time is come when each individual in his locality will be called on to make an effort to enrol his own and his neighbours' names on the register, against a future electoral combat.

Come when it may, our victory will depend on the force we can bring on paper before we come into the field. It is of no use going to a contest if we have not previously been to the registration court. I would counsel our friends, the non-electors in any borough, and point out to them how much they can do by looking after their neighbours; and, when they see a man just balancing and doubting whether he will or will not claim to vote, to urge upon him the duty which he owes to the cause we advocate of having his name placed on the register. If

they do not do so, the time will come when they will bitterly regret it. It was only the other day that our friend, General Briggs, at Exeter, where he nobly did the work for us, found that he could not walk the streets of that city without being followed by crowds of non-electors, saying, 'I will show you, sir, where there is a man who will give you a vote.' Another would say, 'I have been looking after three votes for you.' A third would exclaim, 'I wish I had a hundred votes, you should have them all.' One honest man who kept a turnpike-gate—and we are often told that turnpike-keepers are misanthropes—positively would not receive toll from the General, stating that as he had not a vote to register for him, he would give him what he could. Persons of this description, if they will take my advice, instead of reserving all their enthusiasm until the time of contest, will during the next ten weeks do their utmost to influence every one of their neighbours whom they can to be enrolled. It is by these means, and not by talking, that the victory will be won. I have over [96] and over again told you that I have no faith in talking; it is not by words, but by deeds, by pursuing a course such as I have been describing, that when the day of battle comes we shall be prepared with a majority on the electoral lists to meet our opponents in that constitutional fight in which the question must be decided; and if we are true to our principles, and show but ordinary zeal in their behalf, we shall not have another general election without finding a triumphant majority in favour of Free-trade principles.

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**FREE TRADE. XI.**  
**LONDON, JULY 3, 1844.** ↩

AFTER the narrative which our friend Mr. Villiers has given of the past proceedings of himself and others in the House of Commons, in connection with that great question, the Repeal of the Corn-laws, I am sure it will be as acceptable to you as it will be pleasant to my own feelings to express my gratitude, as I am sure you will allow me to do yours, towards that gentleman especially, who, fortunately for us and the country, took possession six years ago of this question in the Legislature, and who has so nobly and manfully supported it in spite of all sinister influences, in defiance of all those associations which he himself, as a member of the aristocracy, must have had brought to bear upon him. I thank him in your name and in behalf of the country for the consistent course he has followed in advocating this question. He has told us that the progress which he has marked in the House of Commons has been measured by the progress of our agitation out of doors.

Really, when I look back and remember what the Anti-Corn-law League was six years ago, and when I consider the progress which the movement has made since that time, I cannot help thinking it affords a still greater hope and far more encouragement to us to proceed than even those more obvious gains which the figures he has given you respecting the divisions in the House of Commons are able to demonstrate. I remember quite well, that six years ago we could have mustered all the members of the Anti-Corn-law League in one of those stage boxes, and even then I am afraid that at most of our meetings we should have had a great deal of vacant space. Our funds were small, collections of 5s., and even at that low sum there were not very numerous contributors. Year after year I have seen the progress of this movement, not merely in Manchester, but in every provincial town, until I find we are at length landed here in the midst of this mighty metropolis, and have been during the last six months holding weekly assemblies in this vast theatre, filled on every occasion, and to-night as crowded as on any previous meeting. If this unabated interest of London and the Londoners, in the midst of so many distracting engagements, such numerous and inviting temptations—if this attention to our cause is not proof of the hold which Free-trade principles have on the public mind, I know not where to go to find evidence which can possibly prove the fact. Our friend has told you some of the arguments that are used in the Houses of Parliament, in opposition to our cause. Now, I am not so jealous of any of their assertions or arguments as I am of one which I see was used in the House of Lords last night by his Grace of Richmond. I find he is now continually stating in that august assembly, that the tenantry of this country arose as one man to oppose the League. I have myself heard the same assertions [98] from the squirearchy in the House of Commons, and I have heard it asserted so often, that I confess the repetition itself, if I had known nothing else upon the subject, would have made me rather suspect its authenticity; for it very much reminds me of the schoolboy, whistling his way through the churchyard to keep his courage up. Why the necessity for these assertions? Wherefore do the landlords and the dukes now state so continually that the farmers are with them? This must, I suspect, have arisen from some doubts which pervade their minds as to whether the farmers really are to be beguiled and hoodwinked by their professions of protection. But when they tell us that the tenant-farmers rose spontaneously and formed the Anti-League Association, I tell them here, in the most public place in the world, that what they say is not true.

I do not wish to be offensive, and therefore I will use the words ‘it is not true, in a logical sense. I say it is untrue’ and I will prove my assertion by facts. I will take, for example, the meeting which his Grace of Richmond attended at Steyning, in Sussex, and I will mention

facts which cannot be controverted. I know that that meeting was got up by the aristocracy and squire-archy of Sussex, and that if they themselves did not personally go round, and canvass and entreat the farmers to attend, that their land-agents, and land-stewards, and law-stewards did so; that the tenant-farmers were canvassed and pressed to come up to that meeting with just the same earnestness with which they are canvassed for a general election. Nay, more; the carriages and horses,—the vehicles of the landlords, down even to the deer-cart,—were put at the disposal of the farmers, to carry them up to the Steyning meeting. What I say of the Sussex meeting, of my own knowledge, is, I am well assured, a fact as regards almost every assemblage which has been held, purporting to be a spontaneous meeting of the farmers to oppose the League. In some instances dinners were provided for the tenantry at the expense of the landlord. The tenant-farmers were moved by the landlords; they were canvassed by the law-agents and land-agents in every part of the kingdom, often not knowing the business they were going upon, and in much more frequent cases not caring for the object for which they were summoned together. And what I am telling you now is patent to the whole community; there is not an individual here from any county in England where those meetings have been got up, who will not immediately respond to the truth of what I have stated. [A voice: 'I can bear you out.'] The land-agent—mark the tribe—is the finger of the landlord. He has but to point, and the farmer acts according to his direction, knowing that it is the bidding of his landlord at secondhand. And who are the men who have attacked the League at these meetings? Can you show me one specimen of a *bonâ fide* intelligent, substantial farmer, like my friend Mr. Lattimore, whom I see sitting behind me; or like Mr. Josiah Hunt, who addressed us here a short time back; or those two worthy men who came from Somersetshire for the same purpose? Can you show me in all the instances of their meeting, *bonâ fide* respectable, intelligent men, known to be good farmers in their own locality, men of capital in the world, who have taken a lead in the movement? You cannot show me a man of that stamp who has attended a meeting, and taken the leading part in their proceedings. But if you ask who the men are that have been placed in the chair, or put forward to speak upon such occasions, you will find that a hundred to one they are either agents, auctioneers, or land-stewards. Who is Mr. Baker, of Writtle, in Essex? He is the man who has been put forward as the great leader of the protectionists in that county; it was he who originated the first meeting, who has written pamphlets and made speeches upon the subject of protection; and yet, who is this Mr. Baker, of Writtle? I will undertake to say that he makes more money by agency and auctioneering than by farming. You [99] may have seen his name advertised in newspapers, in one column as the author of a pamphlet or the writer of a letter for the protection societies in favour of the Corn-law, and in another column advertised as the auctioneer who is going to sell up some unfortunate farmer who has been ruined by the Corn-law.

Does his Grace of Richmond or the squirearchy in the House of Commons, after the enlightenment and education which our great peripatetic political university—the League—has diffused through the country, think for a moment that the public will be so gulled by these unfounded assertions in either House of Legislature, as to really believe that the tenant-farmers spontaneously and voluntarily rose up to form anti-league associations, when the facts which I have mentioned are generally known in every county in the kingdom? Why, how can they get up and talk so foolishly! It appears to me that they must be about as cunning as the ostrich, which hides its head in the sand, and thinks that no one can see its unfortunate body because it cannot see it itself. I am jealous of this practice of taking the tenant-farmers' name in vain. They tell us that we have been abusing the farmers, and therefore they have turned against us; but, if there has been one individual in the country who has more constantly stood up for farmers' interests and rights than another, I am the man. I have a right to do so. All my early associations—which we do not easily get rid of—lead me irresistibly to sympathise with the farmers. I was bred in a farm-house myself, and up to the time of my going to school I lived amongst farmers and farm-labourers, and witnessed none

other than farming pursuits. I should be utterly unworthy of the class from which I have sprung if I voluntarily entered upon a crusade against one of the most industrious, painstaking, and worst-used classes in the community. I have said scores of times, in all parts of the country, that I believe the tenant-farmers have been more deeply injured by the Corn-laws than any other class of the community. The history of the tenant-farmers—oh, that we could have the history of that class in this country for the last thirty years! Would we could procure a report to be presented to the House of Commons of the number of tenants in this country who have been sold up and ruined during the last thirty years under the blessed protection of the Corn-laws! It would form a dark calendar of suffering, not to be equalled by the history of any other class of men in any other pursuit in this world. An enemy to farmers! If I am an enemy to the farmers, at all events I have not feared to trust myself amongst them. The monopolists did not come to meet me when I went into the farming districts, and they will not come to meet me if I go there again: that is the reason why I have not been lately; and I have often put this question to the protectionists in the lobby of the House of Commons: ‘Will you meet me in your own locality? Will you let your high-sheriff call a county meeting in any part of the country; I care not where it is; you shall choose your own county? Will you meet me in a public meeting in any county in the kingdom, and there take a vote for or against the Corn-laws?’ No; they will not meet me, because they know they would be out-voted if they did. The Corn-laws protect farmers! Why, the farmers pay their rent according to the price of the produce of their land; and after that well-known fact you need not say another word upon the subject. If Corn-laws keep up the price of food, they maintain the amount of rents also. The Corn-law is a rent law, and it is nothing else. But I am jealous of these noble dukes and squires attempting to make it appear that we are enemies to the farmer. In fact, I feel it is paying no great compliment to our own knowledge and intelligence if they suppose that we should have gone on lumping the landlords along with farmers altogether in the way in which they lump them. No, no; I began my career in the House of Commons by a definition of this kind:—You landlords have called yourselves [100] ‘agriculturists;’ mind, I do not denominate you such: you are no more ‘agriculturists’ because you own land than a shipowner is a sailor because he owns ships. When the noble Duke of Richmond gets up in the House of Peers and says, ‘Oh, the Anti-Corn-law League by their abuse of the agriculturists have set the farmers against them,’ he does not know the language of his own country, and requires to study an English grammar, if he is not aware that an agriculturist means a cultivator of the land. That term may be applied to the tenant-farmer and the farm-labourer; but his Grace of Richmond must change his pursuits, and become a more useful member of society, before he will be entitled to be called an agriculturist.

Now, it is not only in the way you have heard pointed out that the Corn-law injures the farmer—it is not merely that the Corn-law has tempted him to make bad bargains by expecting high Act-of-Parliament prices, and then deceived and disappointed him in those prices—that is not the only way in which the Corn-law has worked mischief to the farmer. It has injured him by distracting his attention from other grievances which lie nearer home—which are really of importance—keeping his attention constantly engaged with an *ignis fatuus*, which perpetually escapes his grasp, and which would not benefit him even if he could clutch it. What are the grievances which the farmer feels? He requires a fair adjustment of his rent; he wants a safe tenure for his land; he requires a lease; he must get rid of the game which are nourished in those wide hedge-rows which rob him of the surface of the land, whilst the game devours the produce of his industry and his capital. The farmer wants improvement in his homestead; he requires draining, and a variety of concessions from his landlord: and how is he met when he endeavours to obtain them? He cannot approach the landlord, agent, and steward, and ask for a settlement of any of those grievances; those parties are all in a plot together, and they forth-with tell him, ‘This is not the matter you should trouble yourself with: go and oppose the Anti-Corn-law League, or else they will ruin you.’ Is there any other class of men who are dealt with in a manner like this? They cannot

come to a *bonâ fide* settlement upon any existing grievance, because there is an Act of Parliament pointed to which they are told they must maintain, or else they will all be ruined.

I have often illustrated the folly of this practice to farmers; I do not know whether I have ever done so to you; but if you will allow me, at all events, I will hazard the chance of its being a repetition; for I have found the illustration come home forcibly to the apprehensions of the farmers in the country. I have pointed out the folly of this system in the following manner:—You, as a farmer, deal with your landlord in a manner different from the way in which I transact business with my customers, and they with me. I am a manufacturer, having extensive transactions with linen-drapers throughout the country. I dispose of a bale of goods to a trades-man; I invoice it to him, stating it to be of a certain quality and price, and representing it as an article which he may fairly expect to sell for a certain sum. At the end of half-a-year, my traveller—who is my ‘agent,’ similar to that of the landlord—goes round to the draper and says, ‘I have called for this account;’ presenting the invoice. The linen-draper replies, ‘Mr. Cobden sold me these goods, promising they were all sound, and they have turned out to be all tender: he stated they were fast colours, and they have every one proved to be fugitive. From what Mr. Cobden stated, I expected to get such-and-such a price, and I have only obtained so-and-so; and, consequently, have incurred a great loss by the sale of the article.’ Suppose my traveller—who, as I said before, is my ‘agent’—replied to the linendraper, ‘Yes, all which you have said is perfectly true; it has been a very bad bargain, and you have lost a great deal of money; but Mr. Cobden is a [101] real linendraper’s friend, and he will get a Committee of the House of Commons to inquire into the matter.’ Then, still following up the simile of the land-agent, if the commercial-traveller were to present his account, and say, ‘In the mean time, pay Mr. Cobden every farthing of that account, for if not, he has got another Act of Parliament, called the law of distress, by which he is enabled to come upon your stock, and clear off every farthing in payment of himself, although no other of your creditors should get a farthing; but, notwithstanding, Mr. Cobden is a real linendraper’s friend, and he will get a Committee of the House to inquire into the subject.’ That is precisely the mode in which farmers deal with their landlords. Do you think that linen-drapers would ever prosper if they dealt with manufacturers in that way? They would very soon find themselves where the farmers are, in fact, too often found—in the hands of an auctioneer, agent, or valuer. Linendrapers are too sagacious to manage their business in such a manner as that. I never will despair that the farmers—the real *bonâ fide* tenant-farmers—of this country will not find out—I say they shall find it out, for we will repeat the fact so often that they shall know it—how they have been bamboozled and kept from the real grievances, the real bargains, and actual transactions by which they should govern their intercourse with landlords by this hocus-pocus of an Act of Parliament which professes to benefit them.

What is it that these political landlords tell the farmers at the present time to do? Is it to petition Parliament to give them anything different from what they now possess? They are in distress. Their labourers, numbers of them in every parish, are standing idle in the market-place, wanting work and getting none. They find themselves threatened with being devoured with poor-rates, and they cannot meet their half-year’s rent. What is it which the political landlords tell the farmers to do in order to remedy all these grievances? Present petitions to Parliament, praying them to keep things exactly as they are! That is really what the speeches at the protection meetings amount to. This attempt at deluding the farmers is a masterpiece of audacity compared with any previous pretext of the landlords; for in former times, when farmers were recommended to go to Parliament with a petition for a Committee to inquire into their condition, it was invariably with a view of discovering a remedy for their evils; but now all which these political impostors profess to do, is to persuade the farmers to keep themselves in the same downward course and hopeless state in which they at present find themselves. No, no; I do not despair that the farmers will yet find out this miserable delusion which has been practised upon them. The landlords tell me that at the meetings I have held in

the counties I have not had the voice of the farmers with me. I am perfectly well aware that, in holding a meeting in a county town, even in the most purely rural district—such as Wiltshire and Dorsetshire—you cannot prevent the townspeople from assembling along with the farmers. I am quite ready to admit that many farmers may have attended those meetings without holding up their hands one way or the other. They came, however, and heard our statements, and that was all I wanted. But mark the inconsistency of these landlords: one day they come and tell me that the whole population of the agricultural districts,—the shopkeepers, mechanics, artisans,—that every man in a county town like Salisbury, for instance, depends upon the Corn-laws, and benefits by this protection; and then when, I say, I go down to such a place and take the voice of the community, including the tradesmen of the town as well as farmers and farmlabourers, they immediately separate that class of the community which consists of shopkeepers and residents in towns, and state, ‘We will not take their voices and votes as decisive in this matter,’ though they live in their own [102] county; but they say, ‘It is the farmers and farm-labourers who alone must be judges between us.’

There is one other argument which has also been employed, and which I did not expect to hear, even from a duke. I see that a noble duke tells the House of Lords that the Anti-Corn-law League wish to repeal the Corn-laws in order that they may reduce the wages of their workmen. He asserts that the price of corn governs the rate of wages in this country; that when bread is high wages are raised, and when it is low wages are depressed. I say, I did not expect ever to have heard this allegation made again, even in the House of Lords. Such, however, was the statement made in that assembly last night, but which was promptly met by our noble and patriotic friend Lord Radnor, who is always at his post. It requires a great amount of moral courage, in an atmosphere like that in which he was then sitting, in an assembly possessing very little sympathy for men holding patriotic views and taking an independent course, to take such a course as he has always taken; and yet that nobleman is always to be found in the right place; his courage never fails him; and I must say that he meets the noble dukes with their fallacies in a most clear and concise way, and puts his extinguisher upon them in a most admirable manner. Lord Radnor gave the noble duke an axiom which should always be borne in mind by you,—that if the labourer is already sunk so low in wages that he cannot subsist upon a less sum, that then the price of labour must rise and fall with the value of corn, because otherwise your labourers would starve and die off; that, in fact, where labour has reached its minimum, the labourer is treated upon precisely the same principle as a horse or beast of burden: the same quantity of bread is given to him in dear years as in cheap seasons; just in like manner as you would give as much oats to a horse when they were dear as you would when they were cheap, because it is necessary to do so in order to keep him in working condition, otherwise you would not obtain his labour. Now, what does this fact prove, except that the man is reduced to the condition of a slave, where the wages are not the result of a free bargain between the employer and the labourer, but where, like the negro in Cuba and Brazil, he has his rations served out to him—his red herring and rice—no more and no less, whatever its price may be.

But will they venture to tell us that this is the condition of the working classes in the manufacturing districts or in the metropolis? [A person in the pit: ‘Yes.’] I ask that man who answered ‘Yes,’ whether he ever knew an instance in London in which the price of labour followed the price of bread? [The person in the pit: ‘Yes, in the manufacturing districts.’] I said ‘in London.’ I will come to the manufacturing districts presently; but let us begin with the metropolis, for I see there are some persons here who require instruction upon this point. In 1839 and 1840 bread was nearly double in price that it was in 1835 and 1836; did the shoemakers, painters, tailors, masons, joiners, or any other operatives in London get an advance of wages in the dear years? Did the porters of London, even, obtain any increase of remuneration? You have in London 100,000 men employed in the capacity of porters in



shops and warehouses, in the streets, or upon the river: did any of these 100,000 men ever hear in their lives, or their fathers before them, of wages rising along with the price of bread? What is the mode of proceeding in your Corporation? They fix the wages of many people, such as ticket-porters and watermen, and the rate of hackney-coach fares is also determined either by their orders or by Act of Parliament. Did you ever know of their being altered because there had been a change in the price of corn? Who ever heard of a man stepping into a boat and requesting to be rowed from Westminster to Blackfriars-bridge, and upon arriving at the latter place asking the waterman what his fare [103] was, and being told in reply, 'Why, Sir, it is a dear year; the quatern loaf is up two-pence, and therefore we charge more than we did when bread was cheaper?'

As regards the manufacturing districts, I will tell you what the rule is there. You know that every word of what I am saying is taken down; and I am not speaking here to you only, but for publication, and, if untrue, refutation, in the north of England. If they can contradict my statement, there are plenty of good friends who would rejoice to do so; we have, perhaps, one of them now here—I do not think there are more—who would be glad, if he could, to pick a hole in my argument. I repeat here what was recently stated by Mr. Robert Gardner in Lancashire. That gentleman, be it remembered, is a Conservative; the treasurer of a fund for building ten churches in Manchester, and himself a subscriber of 1000*l.* to that object; but who, on the Free-trade principle, nobly threw aside party, and at the last county election himself proposed Mr. Brown as a candidate for South Lancashire. What did Mr. Robert Gardner say? Bear in mind he is one of our largest and oldest manufacturers in Lancashire. He stated on the hustings there, in the midst of men of his own order, but of different political views, and who, therefore, would have denied his statement if they could have done so,—

I have been engaged extensively in this district for thirty years past, and I here state as the result of my experience, that, so far from the wages in this part of Lancashire rising and falling with the price of bread, that there never has been an instance during my experience when the bread has become dear and scarce, that wages and employment have not gone down; but whenever bread has become plentiful and provisions cheap, wages have as constantly risen, and employment has become more abundant.'

I quote that upon Mr. Gardner's authority; but I pledge my reputation as a public man and private citizen of this country to the truth of what that gentle man has stated.

That these scandalous misstatements should have ever again been repeated, even in the House of Lords—that any one should have dared to venture upon such a worn-out, miserable fallacy—surpasses my comprehension. I say here, deliberately, that instead of the price of corn governing the rate of wages in the way our opponents state, so far as the north of England is concerned, the effect is the very opposite; and, therefore, to say that the Anti-Corn-law League wants a reduction in the price of food in order to reduce wages, and acts upon the supposition that wages can be reduced when food is cheap in the manufacturing districts, is to charge it with going contrary to all experience. I do not content myself with arguing upon possibilities. I am not a duke, you know, and therefore I cannot content myself, like a duke, with arguing always in the future tense, and saying what will happen, and then take it for granted that common plebeians must take my assertions for prophecy or argument; but I mention facts and experience, the only ground upon which fallible men can form a judgment of anything; and therefore I say, if the members of the Anti-Corn-law League who are manufacturers—although now a very small minority of that body are manufacturers, I am happy to say—but if those who are manufacturers want a repeal of the Corn-laws with the idea that to cheapen food would enable them to reduce wages, they are the most blind, and apparently the most besotted class of men that ever existed; for, if one may trust all experience, the effect of a free trade in corn must inevitably be to raise the money rate of

wages in the north of England, at the same time that it will give to the working class their enjoyments, comforts, and the necessaries of life at a cheaper rate than they have hitherto had them.

You remember our first appearance in London in 1839 and 1840. You did not take much notice of us then: we were assembled in Brown's Hotel in Palace [104] Yard, in a comparatively small room. The reception you then gave us was a very cold one. If you had then known as much about the Corn-laws as you do now, or rather if you had felt as keenly—for I believe that at that time you knew quite as much as your fellow-countrymen—if you had felt as you do now, I believe that by this time we should have had a repeal of the Corn-laws. What was the state of the north of England when we first came up to London? Bread was dear enough to please even his Grace of Richmond. Good wheat, such as Christians ought to consume, was selling at about 80s. a quarter. What was then the condition of our manufacturing districts? Did we come up to London because we wanted labour cheapened, that we might get men out of the agricultural districts, and pull down their wages? Why, a large portion of our own population were in the workhouse or the streets wanting employment, and offering their labour at any rate. One-half the manufactories in Stockport were shut up; and men who were bred to skilful pursuits, worked upon the road at stonebreaking for 7s. or 8s. a week. Such was the state of things in the manufacturing districts when we first came to London. What was our object in coming here, and what remedy did we propose for that distress? By a free trade in corn to cheapen its price, to lower it materially from the price at which it then was—20s. per quarter higher than it now is. Our object then was by this means to enable us to employ our people at good wages. If we had wanted to lower the price of labour, we should have come up to Parliament and asked your noble dukes and squires to keep on the Corn-law; for that was the most effectual way of doing it. No; in London and the manufacturing districts, in all your cities, large towns, and villages, mechanics and operatives, blacksmiths, carpenters, and every class of people, are above that state at which they have rations served out to them like the negroes in Brazil or Cuba: they are superior to that low condition when wages rise and fall with the price of food. If the Duke of Richmond tells me that agricultural labourers are in that state, then I say that this class has reached the lowest point of degradation which men, nominally free but really enslaved by circumstances, ever reached in any Christian country.

For myself, I repudiate the motives falsely attributed to us, of seeking by the repeal of the Corn-laws to reduce wages. I do not urge motive as argument, or as a ground for your confidence. We know nothing of men's motives: they may often be the very worst when we suppose them to be the very best. I say, from the facts I have told you, that the effect of the repeal of the Corn-laws, if it cheapen the price of food, will be to lighten distress, and to give a demand for labour by extending our foreign trade. If it reduce the price of bread, looking to all past experience, the effect in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and all the manufacturing districts, must be to raise the money rate of wages; in London and the large towns of agricultural districts leaving the wages at least where they are now, seeing that wages do not follow the price of food; and it will give all the people the necessaries of life as cheap as by nature they were intended to enjoy them.

There was another duke, his Grace of Cleveland, who applauded a pamphlet written by Mr. Cayley, in which the writer has taken great liberties with Adam Smith—as Lord Kinnaird, I think, recently pointed out to you from this place. Mr. Cayley and his party have taken Adam Smith and tried to make him a protectionist, and they have done it in this manner: they took a passage, and with the scissors snipped and cut away at it, until by paring off the ends of sentences, and leaving out all the rest of the passage, they managed to make Adam Smith appear in some sense as a monopolist. When we referred to the volume itself, we found out their tricks, and exposed them. I tell you what their argument reminds me of.

An anecdote is told of an atheist who once asserted that there was no God, [105] and said he would prove it from Scripture. He selected that passage from the Psalms which says, 'The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.' He then cut out the whole of the passage, except the words 'there is no God,' and brought it forward as proof of his statement. As the Dukes of Richmond and Cleveland have found out that there is such a work as that of Adam Smith, I wish they would just read the eighth chapter of his First Book, where he speaks of wages of labour. I will read an extract from it to you:—

'The wages of labour do not, in Great Britain, fluctuate with the price of provisions. Wages vary everywhere from year to year, frequently from month to month. But in many places the money price of labour remains uniformly the same, sometimes for half a century together. If in these places, therefore, the labouring poor can maintain their families in dear years they must be at their ease in times of moderate plenty, and in affluence in those of extraordinary cheapness.'

But I will not confine myself to Adam Smith: I will neither take him nor any other writer, but will be guided by experience and facts within our own knowledge, and then we cannot go wrong. I do not think we need argue this matter here to-night; we have come together upon this occasion almost as for a leavetaking. We have had so many delightful meetings in this place, that I cannot help feeling regret that I should have heard our chairman whisper that our weekly meetings are drawing to a close. Depend upon it, we have given an impetus to this question, not merely in England; for in Europe, in America, and every part of the civilised globe, our meeting have excited the greatest attention.

I should not like that we should separate without a distinct enunciation of what our intention is, and, if opponents wish it, what our motives are. In the first place, we want free trade in corn, because we think it just; we ask for the abolition of all restriction upon that article, exclusively, simply because we believe that, if we obtain that, we shall get rid of all other monopolies without any trouble. We do not seek free trade in corn primarily for the purpose of purchasing it at a cheaper money-rate; we require it at the natural price of the world's market, whether it becomes dearer with a free trade—as wool seems to be getting up now, after the abolition of the *1d.* a pound—or whether it is cheaper, it matters not to us, provided the people of this country have it at its natural price, and every source of supply is freely opened, as nature and nature. God intended it to be;—then, and then only, shall we be satisfied. If they come to motives, we state that we do not believe that free trade in corn will injure the farmer; we are convinced that it will benefit the tenant-farmer as much as any trader or manufacturer in the community. Neither do we believe it will injure the farm-labourer; we think it will enlarge the market for his labour, and give him an opportunity of finding employment, not only on the soil by the improvements which agriculturists must adopt, but that there will also be a general rise in wages from the increased demand for employment in the neighbouring towns, which will give young peasants an opportunity of choosing between the labour of the field and that of the towns. We do not expect that it will injure the land-owner, provided he looks merely to his pecuniary interest in the matter; we have no doubt it will interfere with his political despotism—that political union which now exists in the House of Commons, and to a certain extent also, though terribly shattered, in the counties of this country. We believe it might interfere with that; and that with free trade in corn men must look for political power rather by honest means—to the intelligence and love of their fellow-countrymen—than by the aid of this monopoly, which binds some men together by depressing and injuring their fellow-citizens. We are satisfied that those landowners who choose to adopt the improvement of their estates, and surrender mere political power by granting long leases to the farmers—who [106] are content to eschew some of their feudal privileges connected with vert and venison—I mean the feudal privileges of the chase—if they will increase the productiveness of their estates—if they

choose to attend to their own business—then, I say, free trade in corn does not necessarily involve pecuniary injury to the landlords themselves.

If there be a class in the community who may be said to have a beneficial interest in the Corn-laws—to whom there would be no compensation from their repeal, if the price of corn were a little reduced—that class is the clergy of this country, and they alone. The Tithe Commutation Act has fixed their incomes at a certain number of quarters of corn per annum. Suppose a clergyman gets 200 quarters of corn for his tithe, if that corn fetch in the market 40s. a quarter, it yields him as his annual stipend 400*l.* as the produce of his tithe; but if the price of wheat be 50s. a quarter, then the clergyman obtains 500*l.* per annum, instead of 400*l.* as formerly. I am willing to admit, that if the result of Free Trade causes a reduction in the price of corn to the amount of 10s. per quarter—though I by no means use it as an argument—that it will be productive to him, upon such a supposition, of an uncompensated diminution of his income as a tithe-owner. He does not spend so much of his stipend in bread as to obtain from the decrease of its price compensation for the diminution of his income arising from the same source. But, I would ask, is this a right position for the clergy of this country to be placed in? Is it reasonable that they who pray for ‘cheapness and plenty’ should have an interest in maintaining scarcity and dearness? I will put it to the clergy of this country whether, with this one fact apparent to the world, they can, consistently with the retention of their character of respectability, be found in future assisting Anti-League meetings in upholding the Corn-laws? Why they would not be fit to sit upon a jury for the trial of the question; you might challenge them as interested parties, and they would, upon the commonest principles of justice, be excluded the box upon that ground. I appeal to them, as they love their own reputation, and for the sake of decency, at least to stand neutral upon the question: that is all I require of them.

We believe that Free Trade will increase the demand for labour of every kind, not merely of the mechanical classes and those engaged in laborious bodily occupations, but for clerks, shopmen and warehousemen, giving employment to all those youths whom you are so desirous of setting out in the world. O, how anxiously do fathers and mothers consult together upon this point! What letters do they write soliciting advice and assistance! I have frequently had such epistles addressed to me: ‘There is our boy, John, just come from school; he is now fifteen years of age; we do not know where to put him, every trade is so full, we’re quite at a loss what to do with him; we can get nothing from Government, for they give everything they have to bestow to the aristocracy.’

Finally, we believe that Free Trade will not diminish, but, on the contrary, increase the Queen's revenue.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is our faith; these our objects; and this the ground upon which we stand. We believe that we are right: our opponents have acknowledged that we are so; they have confessed that our principles are true; and we will, therefore, stand by the justice of our system. Do not let us be disheartened by the apparent difficulty of our position: I never felt less discouragement in our cause than I do at this moment. Our labours for the next few months may not be quite so noisy as they have been; probably we have had too much talking; but if they are not so loud, be assured they shall be quite as efficient as any labours in which we have hitherto engaged upon this question. The registration throughout the country shall be well and systematically worked. In every locality where you may happen to mix, press upon your fellow-citizens the importance of watch [107] ing the registration, that your own and your neighbours' names may be placed upon the register, and that you may strike off those irreclaimable monopolists who are not to be brought to the authority of reason upon this question. Let us attend diligently to this duty, and, if they will give us another registration or even another after that, I have no doubt we shall give a very different account of matters in the House of Commons.

One word more and I have done. In order to keep our question in its true position, do not let us be used, however we may be abused, by any of the existing political parties. I have no objection at all to an alliance, offensive and defensive, with anybody who adopts our principles; but if some men are engaged in the pursuit of one object, and we of another, do not let us think of shutting our eyes, and entering into an arrangement which promises to be a partnership, in which the very first step we take will find us diverging, the one going one way and the other another.

Political parties are breaking up in this country: I mean the old factions. There never was a period in the history of England when an attempt was made to carry on an opposition with a more intangible line of demarcation than that which separates Whig and Tory at the present moment. I venture to say, looking back upon the history of this country for two hundred years—to the time of Charles I., when party spirit ran so high that men drew their broadswords to decide political questions,—from that time down to the present there never has been a period when there was such an attempt to keep up an opposition against a party in power, without, apparently, one atom of principle or any one great public question on which to support an opposition. There are many other subjects which the politicians of this country take an interest in besides Free Trade; but for none of those questions has the Opposition, as led on now by one nominal chief, the support of the people out of doors. If we give up the ground we have taken upon the Free-trade principles, or surrender one iota of our principles, I know the temper and character of those who have nursed this agitation from its commencement, and by whom it is at this moment carried on, too well to doubt that, if there be the slightest evidence of anything which amounted to a compromise of our principles with any political party, that moment the right arm of every true friend of the League will be paralysed. I ask you, upon this occasion, whatever may happen in party papers, or be spoken in public against us, as Free Traders—and in no other capacity do I prefer the request—that you who have watched over this organisation, who have helped—as you have so continually done by your numbers—to sustain it with your sympathies,—I ask you, whatever you may see, notwithstanding anything which may be put out by a party press—the pens of whose writers are often guided by the intriguers of political faction—to apply but one test to us, namely, are we true as a League to the principles we advocate? If we are, depend upon it, whatever obstacles there may be, if we cling to that truth, we have only to persevere as men have ever done in all great and good objects, and it will be found, that being true to our principles, we shall go on to an ultimate and not very distant triumph.

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**FREE TRADE. XII.**  
**MANCHESTER, OCTOBER 24, 1844.**↩

I WAS thinking, as I sat here, that probably there never have been so many persons assembled under a roof in England, or in Europe, as we have at this great League meeting. And the occasion and the circumstances under which we meet afford the most encouraging symptoms—encouraging, inasmuch as they prove that it is from no transient motive that you have joined together in this great cause—that it is not from the pressure of distress, temporary distress, that you have banded yourselves together—that the cause of Free Trade is, in your minds, something more than a remedy for present evils—that you look at it, under all circumstances, as a great and absorbing truth—and that your minds crave for it with an intellectual and moral craving, which has made it almost a part of the religion of your souls.

I venture to say that this meeting, held under these circumstances, with no pressure or excitement to call you together, will have more weight, more effect upon public opinion, than a score of those assemblies we used to hold, when we were driven together, as it were, under the pressure of local and temporary distress. And quiet as have been those statistical tables that you have heard from our chairman, I venture to say that they will strike more terror into the ranks of the monopolists than the loudest demonstrations or the most brilliant declamation with which we have ever tried to interest you. Upon the subject of this registration there is one thought that occurred to me as our chairman was giving you an account of the proceedings in the county revision. It is this, that the counties are more vulnerable than the small pocket boroughs, if we can rouse the Free Traders of the country into a systematic effort such as we have exercised in the case of South Lancashire. In many of the small boroughs there is no increase in the numbers; there is no extension of houses; the whole property belongs to a neighbouring noble, and you can no more touch the votes which he holds through the property than you can touch the balance in his banker's hands. But the county constituency may be increased indefinitely. It requires a qualification of forty shillings a-year in a freehold property to give a man a vote for a county. I think our landlords made a great mistake when they retained the forty-shilling freehold qualification; and, mark my words, it is a rod in pickle for them. I should not be surprised if it does for us what it did for Catholic emancipation, and what it did for the Reform Bill—give us the means of carrying Free Trade; and if it should, the landlords will very likely try to serve us as they did the forty-shilling freeholders in Ireland, when we have done the work.

The forty-shilling franchise for the county was established nearly five cen [109] turies ago. At that time a man, in the constitutional phraseology of the time, was deemed to be a 'yeoman,' and entitled to political rights, provided he had forty shillings a-year clear to spend. That was at that time a subsistence for a man; probably it was equal to the rental of one hundred acres of land. What is it now? With the vast diffusion of wealth among the middle classes, which then did not exist, and among a large portion, I am happy to say, in this district of the superior class of operatives too, that forty-shilling franchise is become merely nominal, and is within the reach of every man who has the spirit to acquire it. I say, then, every county where there is a large town population, as in Lancashire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, South Staffordshire, North Cheshire, Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, and many other counties I could name—in fact, every other county bordering upon the sea-coast, or having manufactures in it—may be won, and easily won, if the people can be roused to a systematic effort to qualify themselves for the vote in the way in which the South Lancashire people have reached to the qualification. We find that counties can be won by that means, and no other. It is the custom with many to put their savings into the savings' banks. I believe there

are fourteen or fifteen millions or more so deposited. I would not say a word to lessen your confidence in that security, but I say there is no investment so secure as the freehold of the earth, and besides it is the only investment that gives a vote along with the property. We come, then, to this—it costs a man nothing to have a vote for the county. He buys his property; sixty pounds for a cottage is given—thirty or forty pounds in many of the neighbouring towns will do it; he has then the interest of his money, he has the property to sell when he wants it, and he has his vote in the bargain. Sometimes a parent, wishing to teach a son to be economical and saving, gives him a set of nest-eggs in a savings' bank: I say to such a parent, 'Make your son, at twenty-one, a freeholder; it is an act of duty, for you make him thereby an independent freeman, and put it in his power to defend himself and his children from political oppression—and you make that man with 60*l.* an equal in the polling-booth to Mr. Scarisbrick, with his eleven miles in extent of territory, or to Mr. Egerton. This must be done. In order to be on the next year's register, it requires only that you should be in possession of a freehold before the 31st of next January.'

We shall probably be told that 'this is very indiscreet—what is the use of coming out in public and announcing such a plan as this, when your enemies can take advantage of it as well as you?' My first answer to that is, that our opponents, the monopolists, cannot take advantage of it as well as we. In the first place, very few men are, from connection or prejudice. monopolists, unless their capacity for inquiry or their sympathies have been blunted by already possessing an undue share of wealth. In the next place, if they wish to urge upon others of a rank below them to qualify for a vote, they cannot trust them with the use of the vote when they have got it. But, apart from that, I would answer those people who cavil at this public appeal, and say, 'You will not put salt upon your enemy's tail—it is much too wise a bird.' They have been at this work long ago, and they have the worst of it now. What has been the conduct of the landlords of the country? Why, they have been long engaged in multiplying voters upon their estates, making the farmers take their sons, brothers, nephews, to the register; making them qualify as many as the rent of the land will cover: they have been making their land a kind of political capital ever since the passing of the Reform Bill. You have, then, a new ground opened to you which has never yet been entered upon, and from which I expect—in the course of not more than three years from this time—that every county (if we persevere as we [110] have in South Lancashire) possessing a large town population may carry Free Traders as their representatives to Parliament.

Now, gentlemen, with just these preliminary remarks, I was going to notice a common objection made to us during the last two or three months—that the League has been very quiet of late—that we have been doing nothing. Many people have said to me, 'When are you going out into the agricultural districts again? I think they will be quite ripe for you now, for most of your predictions have fallen true, and the farmers will come and listen.' My answer has been, 'We are better employed at present at home, and the landlords are doing our work very well for us at their agricultural meetings.' What have been the features of the agricultural meetings we had heard of in the last two months? Here is one very striking circumstance, that, from the Duke of Buckingham downwards, every president of an agricultural association has always begun the proceedings of the day by saying, 'We must not introduce political topics in the discussions of this association.' That means, 'It is not convenient to us, the political landlords, to talk about the Corn-laws just now to the farmers'—and so they talk of everything else but the Corn-laws, and a very pretty business they make of their discussions. We hear, in every case in which I have read their reports, of the deplorable state of the agricultural labourers. Now, I beg to premise, from my own personal observation, and much inquiry, that the agricultural labourers, as a class, are better off now than they were when corn was 70*s.* the quarter in 1839 and 1840. I watched the Poor-law returns during those years, when we had such deep distress in this district, and I found that able-bodied pauperism was increasing faster in the corn-growing counties of

Sussex and Kent than it was in these manufacturing districts.

When we called together the conference of ministers from all parts of the country, the accounts they brought from the rural villages were as heartrending as anything we had ever known in these manufacturing districts. You did not hear the clamours from the agricultural districts then, because they were drowned in the concentrated cry from these populous regions; but they were suffering as much as you were suffering. And now, when in this district employment and comparative prosperity have returned upon us, we hear of the state of the agricultural labourers, which has been always bad, always at the lowest level of wretchedness, only because you have ceased to occupy the public mind with your complaints and your distresses. But, if what they tell us is true, that the agricultural labourers are so distressed, what becomes of their plea in the House of Commons, that the Corn-law was passed and is kept up for the benefit of the agricultural labourers? After what I have heard from these gentlemen, the squirearchy in the House of Commons, I should have expected that they ought to have been the last, upon the institution of agricultural associations, to complain of distress and of the dangers impending over them in the future—to have said, ‘I have a nostrum in my pocket that will quite prevent distress among agricultural labourers: have we not got the Corn-law; did we not pass it upon the pretence of remedying the distress of the agricultural labourers? Here it is—we have our sliding-scale, and depend upon it our agricultural labourers have nothing to fear.’ But, instead of that, in no instance do they ever allude to the Corn-law as either a cause of employment or as a means of remedying the evil. They never allude to any Act of Parliament of the kind at all; and they seek, wide and far, for some other remedy for these distresses.

What are their remedies? One of the latest declared is the allotment of land. To hear the outcry that we hear from the landlords of the country, who, glorifying themselves for having the idea of giving a patch of land to the labourer, [111] you would have thought they had resolved all at once to make a present of a little slice of their estates to the labourers around them; but what does it amount to? It is proposed that each cottage should have a garden attached to it! The general advice is, I see, that it should be not more than half an acre, and some are recommending but a quarter of an acre in extent! It amounts to this, that the landlords, benevolent souls, are going to allow the peasantry that live upon their land to have a garden to their cottages! Why, there was a law passed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth ordering that no cottage should be built in this country without a garden being attached to it. I do not believe that that law has ever been repealed to this day; and the landlords, after violating the law, are now taking credit to themselves, and glorifying each other, that they are going to allow their labourers to have a garden to their cottages!

Now, what is the mode in which these gentlemen go to work to benefit the agricultural labourers? They call them together for a ploughing match, then they bring them into the room and give them a glass of wine, and they give a reward of thirty shillings to one man who has ploughed best! Then they inquire who has served twenty-five years in the same place, and, perhaps, they condescend to give him thirty shillings as a reward for good conduct. Then the farmers—the farmers who sit at the table—have their names read over, and prizes are awarded: to one for successfully cultivating turnips, to another for having produced a good fat ox, and to another for having accumulated the greatest quantity of lard upon a pig. And this is the way in which agriculture is to be improved! What should you think if a similar plan was adopted to assist you in your business? Let us suppose that a number of monopolists came down once a year—once a year, mind you, for the lesson is only given once a year, and then it is only about two hours and a half long—that they held a meeting, in which they would have a spinning match or a weaving match. And after they had been into some prize mill to see this spinning and weaving match, they sat down to dinner; and Job Hargreaves or Frank Smith is brought in, stroking his head down all the while as he comes before the



squirearchy, and making his very best bow, to receive from the chairman thirty shillings as a reward for having been the best spinner and the best weaver! And, this being disposed of, imagine such a manufacturer getting a prize of five pounds for the best piece of fustian! And another 'ditto, ditto,' for the best yard-wide calico! Then imagine a shopkeeper rising from his seat to the table while the chairman puts on a grave face, and, addressing him in complimentary terms, presents him with five pounds for having kept during the past year his shop-floor and his counters in the cleanest state! Then they call up a manufacturer, and he has an award of five pounds, because the inspectors had found his mill to be in the best working condition. Then the merchant rises up, and gets his reward of five pounds for having been found by the inspectors to have kept his books in the best order by double entry.

You laugh at all this, and well you may; you cannot help it. Where is the difference between the absurdity, the mockery of bringing up men in round frocks to a dinner-table and giving them thirty shillings, because they had ploughed well, or hoed well, or harrowed well—bringing up farmers to give them prizes for having the cleanest field of Swedish turnips, or for having managed their farm in the best way? Where is the difference, I ask, between offering these rewards and the giving out here of such rewards as I have just now alluded to? Let us suppose, if you can keep your countenances, that such a state of things existed here. Now what must be the concomitant order of things? It would argue, in the first place, that the prizemen who were so treated were an abject and a servile class. It would [112] argue that the trader who could condescend to be treated so would himself be little better than a slave. And if you needed such stimulants as these to make you carry on your business as you ought to do, where do you think you would be found in the race of industry as compared with other classes? Where would you be if you were so childish as to be fondled and dandled by a body of Members of Parliament? Why, there would not be a country on the face of the world that you could compete with—that is evident. You would, like them, be going to these same parliamentary men, begging them to be your dry nurses, in order that they might pass an Act of Parliament to protect you in your trade.

The landlords do not give themselves prizes, but they hold up their conduct as something deserving of the reward of public admiration, because they can come forward and tell us that they make the most of their land, forsooth! I was reading just now in this morning's paper a report of Lord Stanley's speech at the Agricultural Society's meeting on Tuesday, which, by the magic power of steam, has been carried to London and brought back to us here in Manchester in two days; and Lord Stanley tells us what must be done with land. He says:—

'And I repeat what I have already said on a former occasion in this room, that there is no investment in the world in which a landlord can so safely, so usefully, or so profitably invest his capital as in the improvement of his own farm, by money sunk in draining on security of the land which belongs to himself.'

Well, what does this amount to? That it is the interest of the landlord to make the most of his land. And he goes on to say—and he takes some little credit to himself and to his father for what had been done with his land here in Lancashire. He says:—

'In this last year we have laid down in deep draining somewhere about 300 miles of drains, at an expense of between 5000*l.* and 6000*l.*, and, I think, employed about a million and a half of draining-tiles.'

I believe my friend Mr. Bright here, who has been building a mill, has during the same time been laying down about a million and a half of bricks in erecting it; but you would be astonished, would you not, and I am sure the squirearchy would be rather puzzled, if Mr. Bright were to get up here and talk of that as something for which he might glorify himself, having first of all asserted it to be the most profitable investment any man could make. By the

way, I wish my friend here would calculate how much duty his million and a half of bricks pay to the Government, from which duty my Lord Stanley and his fellow-landlords have managed to exempt draining-tiles.

Now, gentlemen, I do not want to say anything rude or uncivil, and I will not apply my remarks personally to Lord Stanley; but I will say this, that the whole course of the conduct of these gentlemen in their exhibitions—the land-lords—when they parade to the world what they condescend to do with their land, is just a gratuitous piece of impertinence to the rest of the community. What do we care what they do with their land? Whether they put down draining-tiles or not, all we say is this, ‘If you do not make the most of your land, it is no reason why we should be starving that you may grow rushes.’ It is a gross humbug, to use no milder term, on the part of those who come forward at the agricultural meetings, to glorify themselves about the mode in which they choose to dispose of their private property. There is an absurd delusion lurking under it. It is intended to make us believe that we are indebted to them, and must wait until they choose to supply us with our food; that it is something like a condescension, or at least an act of favour, on their part, that they give us their food in exchange for our manufactures. Now, what is the reason that the land has not been improved before? Lord Stanley tells us here when these great improvements began, and mark what he says:—

‘Even within the last few years—within [113] a much shorter time than that which I have named, within the last four or five years—I see strides which, small as they may be compared with what might be done, are gigantic when compared with what was done before.’

What was ‘done before’? What has there been done ‘within the last four or five years’? Lord Stanley gives the credit to the agricultural associations. Why, what have they been doing? Up to within the last year, when did they condescend to talk about the Corn-law? From one end of the kingdom to the other they were nothing but political clubs, created for the purpose of drawing the poor tenant-farmers together, in order that they might be drilled by the land-agent to be made subservient at a future voting day; and the whole talk of these agricultural associations was, not about improving the land, but maintaining protection to British agriculture.

And now, what can these agricultural associations do for agriculture? They meet once a year; they generally have a man in the chair who begins, as Lord Stanley does, by admitting his practical ignorance of the question upon which he is going to dilate; and the chairman is generally the man who occupies three-fourths of the time of the meeting by his speeches. I have watched the proceedings of these associations, and I have observed they have had all sorts of people except farmers in the chair: upon one occasion, in a part of Middlesex, I observed that the late Attorney-General, the present Chief Baron Pollock, was in the chair as president; and I must do him the justice to say (for he is a most candid and excellent man) that he began his opening address by declaring he did not know anything concerning what they had met about. What have these associations done for agriculture? They assemble men together once a year; they bring prize cattle to be exhibited; they bring agricultural implements to be examined. Are improvements only to be sought for once a year in agriculture? Would that do for manufactures? Only think of a commercial meeting once a year to see what our neighbours are doing, where there was any new machinery invented, or which of the hands had discovered some new process in calico printing! Could not farmers see what superior farming was to be seen by riding out any day in the week to look over their neighbours' hedges? Could they not learn where the best breeds of cattle were to be had from the advertisements of those who had them to sell? and could they not get the best agricultural implements by writing for them any day by the penny post, whether they were to be found in Manchester, London, or Ipswich? The thing is a farce; and when my Lord Stanley takes

credit to these agricultural associations for having improved agriculture during the last five years, I say it is not due to those agricultural associations, but to the Anti-Corn-law League. It is owing to that that the agriculturists and the land-owners have been roused from their lethargic sleep. They are buckling on their armour to meet the coming competition, which competition will do for them what nothing else will do, and what it has done for manufactures—it will make the agriculturists of this country capable of competing with the farmers of any part of the world. They give up the whole case when they talk in this way.

When they tell us what the land might do—and what it ought to do they admit it has not done—they plead guilty to all we have ever alleged against them and their system of Corn-law. I ask them this: can they bring a Member of Parliament, a theorist, into Manchester, with his books in hand, and can he suggest a single improvement in any of our processes of manufacture, whether they are connected with mechanical or chemical science? No. I went the other day into several establishments with one of the most eminent French chemists—a man renowned in Europe: he had nothing to say in visiting the dye-works or the print-works of this neighbourhood, but to express his unqualified admiration of the perfection to which they [114] had brought these arts among us. Can they come here and say, as they say of themselves, in connection with their industry, ‘You ought to produce three times as much as you do produce from your machinery, for it is already done in other places which we can name to you?’ No. But what do they say of their own land. I have heard Mr. Ogilvy, who was engaged by Mr. Brooke, of Mere, and other landlords of this and the neighbouring county as superintendent of their estates, declare—and he is willing to go before a Committee of the House of Commons to prove it—that Cheshire, if properly cultivated, is capable of producing three times as much as it now produces from its surface; and he is willing the statement should be made public upon his authority—and there is not higher authority in the kingdom.

I say, whatever improvement has been made in this respect it is to the Anti-Corn-law League we are indebted for it; and more—the most bigoted of our opponents have made the admission. Whilst they abhor the League and detest its principles, they have made the admission—‘At all events,’ they say, ‘you have done good, and are doing good’ to agriculture. I passed last year about this time over to Knutsford, where I held a public meeting close to the gates of Mr. Egerton, of Tatton. As I went from the railway station across to Knutsford, I rode, at least for five or six miles, through the estate of that large proprietor, and I saw the land was in the same state as I believe it was at the time of the Conquest, growing just about as plentiful a supply of rushes as of grass. It so happened that, upon the day I was addressing the meeting upon the racecourse at Knutsford, Mr. Egerton, of Tatton, was paying a visit to Manchester, to preside at the Manchester Agricultural Association, and I took the opportunity of saying, in the course of my remarks, that I thought a gentleman who had such an extent of territory as he had might be better employed in exterminating his rushes, and setting a better example to his neighbours at home, than in travelling to Manchester to preach up improvements in agriculture. The other day I met a gentleman who happened lately to be at Knutsford, and he told me that while sitting at the inn there came in a number of the neighbouring farmers, whose conversation turned upon agriculture. In the course of their conversation one of them remarked, ‘What a deal of draining has been going on here since Cobden was here blackguarding him about the rushes!’ We have indeed given them a fillip; we have stirred them up a little; but, gentlemen, if the mere alarm of the approach of Free Trade has done so much for agriculture, what will free trade in corn itself do for it? ‘Why,’ they say, ‘we should be an exporting country if we only grew as much as we may grow.’ I have no objection to it; if, beside feeding the whole of the people as they ought to be fed—no short commons—if, besides feeding them well, they should send four or five millions of quarters of corn abroad, and bring us back tea and sugar, and such like matters in addition, we shall have no reason to complain of the British agriculturist. But we do complain, that whilst they stop our supplies from other countries, under pretence of benefiting agriculture,

they at the same time come before us at these meetings of their own, and plead guilty to our charge, that under this system of protection they are not making the most of their land.

I speak my unfeigned conviction—and we have the very best agriculturists with us in that conviction; men like Lord Ducie and others, who are agriculturists by profession—when I say I believe there is no interest in this country that would receive so much benefit from the repeal of the Corn-laws as the farmertenant interest in this country. And I believe, when the future historian comes to write the history of agriculture, he will have to state:—'In such a year there was a stringent Corn-law passed for the protection of agriculture. From [115] that time agriculture slumbered in England, and it was not until by the aid of the Anti-Corn-law League the Corn-law was utterly abolished, that agriculture sprang up to the full vigour of existence in England, to become what it now is, like her manufactures, unrivalled in the world.' It is a gloomy and most discouraging thought that, whilst this system of Corn-laws alternately starves the people in the manufacturing districts and then ruins the farmers, it really in the end confers no permanent benefit upon any class. I told you in the beginning I did not believe the agricultural labourer was now so badly off as he was when corn was 70s. a quarter; but I will tell you where distress in the agricultural districts is now. It is among the tenant-farmers themselves. They are paying rents with wheat at 45s. a quarter, which they have bargained for at a calculation of wheat being 56s., and, in many cases, 60s. a quarter. It is owing to this discrepancy in the prices that the tenant-farmers are now paying rent out of capital; they are discharging their labourers, unable to employ them—and theirs is the real distress now existing in the agricultural districts.

This state of things will not continue, either here or in the agricultural districts. What is the language that drops from the landlords at some of their meetings? It is, 'We shall not very likely have higher prices for corn this year; we must wait for better times; we will give you back ten per cent. this year.' No permanent reduction; and why? Because they know that, by the certain operation of this system, in less than five years from this time, this wheel of fortune, or rather misfortune, will go round again; you will be at the bottom and the farmers at the top, and you will have wheat again at 70s. or 80s. a quarter, causing thus a pretended prosperity among the farmers. As sure as you have had this revolution before, so sure will you have it again. There is nothing in Sir Robert Peel's Corn-law to prevent the recurrence of similar disasters. The law is as complete a bar to legitimate trade in corn as the old law was. I speak in the presence of merchants shipping to every quarter of the globe—men who bring back the produce of every quarter of the globe—and I put it to them whether, with this slidingscale, they dare to order from a foreign country a single cargo of wheat in exchange for the manufactures which they sell? This being the case—and it is the whole case—you are not stimulating other countries to provide for your future wants, you are laying up no store here or stores abroad, and there will again be a recurrence of the disasters we have so often passed through before.

**FREE TRADE. XIII.**  
**LONDON, DECEMBER 11, 1844.** ↩

I COULD not help thinking, as I sat here surveying this vast assemblage, how I wished that all our friends who are scattered over the length and the breadth of this land could be present to-night, to feel their pulses beat in unison with yours, to look you face to face, and join in that triumphant shout, which augurs prosperity to our good cause. We meet here to-night for business. I am almost sorry for it; for we have to give many statistics, which probably are not the most captivating to five thousand people assembled together on this occasion; and, besides, at this time I happen to know that we have a large number of visitors, whom I am especially anxious to see. I am aware that there are many farmers in this assembly, who have come to see the Smithfield Cattle Show, and have been tempted to smuggle themselves into this assembly. I am sorry I cannot give them a farmer's view of our question to-night; but I ask them to look round on this assembly, and then let them, on the day after to-morrow, Friday—it is an ominous day—wend their way to Bond-street, and attend the meeting of the Duke of Richmond's Protection Society; let them remember the scene here—count the odd duke or so, the brace or two of earls, and the half-dozen Members of Parliament, and the score of land-agents and land-valuers—and then, with a vivid recollection of this scene, let them ask themselves which cause is likely ultimately to triumph? I beg of them to compare these two scenes, and to remember that these meetings of such a different character are but types of the comparative merits of our two causes. Then let the tenant-farmer go home and attend to his own business, and not look to dukes or Acts of Parliament to help him. Let him talk about corn-rents, such as the sagacity of the Scotch farmers has secured for nearly twenty years, so soon as it found out the operation of this sliding-scale of corn duties. Let the English farmer put himself on the secure basis of a rent of that description—I mean rent calculated on a certain fixed quantity of corn per annum, fluctuating in price as the value of corn varies in the averages, and then he may bid defiance to all Acts of Parliament. It makes no difference to him, then, what the price may be. He may talk to his landlord about a few other things, such as game and so on, and he will be better employed than in listening to speakers at protection societies, or going to dukes or Members of Parliament.

I believe we have another visitor here to-night. I have had put into my hands a little tract, published by the enemy, and very carefully circulated. On the title-page of this tract—which is addressed to the working classes—there is a quotation from the republican authority, Henry Clay. I am glad they have put his name on the frontispiece, and quoted his sayings; for let the English operatives remember, as my friend Mr. Villiers has [117] already told you, that, since that tract was published, Mr. Henry Clay has been rejected as an aspirant for the Presidency of America. He stood as candidate for that high honour at the hands of three millions of free citizens, on the ground of his being the author and father of the protective system in America. I have watched the progress of that contest with the greatest anxiety, and received their newspapers by every packet. There have I seen accounts of their speeches and processions. The speeches of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster might have done credit to the Dukes of Buckingham and Richmond themselves. All the banners at their processions were inscribed with such mottoes as,—'Protection to native industry.' 'Protection against the pauper labour of Europe.' 'Stand by native manufactures.' 'Stand by the American system.' 'Henry Clay and protection to native industry.' Yes, all this was said to the American democracy, just as your protection societies are saying it to you in this pamphlet. And what said three millions of the American people voting in the ballot-box? Why, they rejected Henry Clay, and sent him back to his retirement. I think this protection society, if they have got a large stock of this tract on hand, will be offering it cheap; it might do for lighting cigars,

probably.

Well, what have you new in London? You have heard something of what we have been about down in the north; what is going on among you? I think I have seen some signs, not of opposition, but of something very like what I call a diversion. You have had some great meetings here, professing vast objects, to benefit large classes of people in London. Mr. Villiers has slightly alluded to that subject; but I have a word or two additional to say about it. I call it a 'diversion,' but it is something more; it is rather an attack by monopolists upon the victims of their own injustice. When the people in Turkey are suffering under the tyranny of a Grand Vizier, and are threatening to rise and revenge themselves upon him, and take his head, it is an old trick for that functionary to send emissaries among the populace, who are to point to the bakers' shops, and say, 'The bakers are selling too high.' The people are then told to go and nail the bakers' ears against the door-posts. Now, our monopolists have taken a leaf out of the Turkish Vizier's book. When we were in great distress and trouble in Manchester and its neighbourhood, and the people were starving in the streets, then it was stated that the manufacturing capitalists were 'grinding the faces of the poor,' and depriving them of bread. Now, when the distress is in the agricultural districts, the landed squires meet the farmers at their agricultural societies' tables, and tell them to go and employ the labourer by laying out more capital upon their farms. It is said that they must drain their land; they do not say a word about the farmer having had his pockets thoroughly drained.

Again, when some distress has fallen upon a large portion of the most defenceless part of your community, I find that a large, a useful, a respectable class of that community, the shopkeepers and dealers in ready-made linen and articles of clothing, are selected by the monopolists as the objects of attack for 'grinding the faces of the poor needle-women.' Now, I stand here to vindicate the character of those traders, and to turn back the charge upon those who assail them. I stand here to vindicate Moses and Son themselves against these attacks. Yes, I say Moses and Son themselves are Christianlike in their character compared with the men who are now assailing them whilst they support this system of the Corn-laws. For there is this difference between Moses and Son and those who vote for Corn-laws, and then affect to pity the poor needle-women: if the former buy cheap, they also sell cheap, and have not by unfair means obtained an Act of Parliament to give them a monopoly. But what shall we say of your landlords of Dorsetshire, who, whilst they are paying 7s. a-week for their labour, have passed an Act of [118] Parliament, by which they are enabled to sell even the very bread that these poor wretches consume at an artificially enhanced and unnatural price? And yet here is a great scheme of charity, forsooth, to atone for this mischief; and you are to have fifty thousand people kept, I suppose, in employment by a society, not of 'middle-women,' but of middlemen, ay, very middling men indeed!

Now, I venture on a prediction: that bubble will burst before the meeting of Parliament, and they will try and invent some other. They will not fail to charge us—or any portion of the unprivileged class of the community—with being the authors of their own misdoings. They have set up themselves as being more benevolent than the rest of the community. My friend Mr. Villiers was talking of their being charitable, of their settling everything by alms. But even if they were charitable, and more so than other people, I agree with him, objecting to one large portion of the community being dependent upon alms at the hands of another portion. But I deny that they are such philanthropists. I roll back the charge they make against us, and say that the Free-traders—the much-maligned political economists—are the most truly benevolent people in the country. We had a meeting two or three months ago in Suffolk, had we not? There was a great gathering of landowners, noblemen, squires, and clergymen, met together in a great county assembly in order to—what? To provide for the distresses of the peasantry of that county by a philanthropic plan. They proposed to raise a subscription; I believe they entered into something like one on the ground; they separated

then, and what has been done since? How much has been effected for charity? I will venture here to say, that there is one Leaguer in Manchester who has given more money for the parks and pleasure-grounds connected with that town than all the landowners and gentry of the county of Suffolk have subscribed for the benefit of the peasantry.

You will not misunderstand me: we do not come here to boast, but merely to hurl back these charges which are made against the great body of the more intelligent portion of the middle classes of this country, who happen to take scientific and enlightened views upon what ought to be the conduct of the Government of this land. They call us ‘political economists’ and ‘hard-hearted utilitarians:’ I say the political economists are the most charitable people in this country; the Free-traders are the most liberal to the poor of this land. I call upon them, if they will have it that the people are to live on charity, at all events, to give us a guarantee that they shall not starve, by really conferring that charity which they propose to bestow upon them. Ay, it is a very convenient thing for them to try and give a bad name to a sort of police who are looking after their proceedings. We avow ourselves to be political economists; and we are so on this ground, that we will not trust our fellow-creatures to the eleemosynary support of any class of the community, because we believe that if we do, we shall leave them in a very hopeless condition indeed. We say, let the Government of the country be conducted on such a principle, that men shall be enabled, by the labour of their own hands, to find an independent subsistence by their wages.

These gentlemen have had another meeting to-day: they are ready in all directions upon every sort of subject except the right one. A gathering took place this morning at Exeter Hall, at which all sorts of men assembled;—what think you for? To devise means, and to raise a society, to look after ‘the health of towns.’ They will give you ventilation—air—water—drainage—open courts and alleys—anything in the world but bread. Now, so far as the Lancashire districts go, nothing is clearer—for we have it upon the authority of the Registrar-General’s report of deaths in that district—than this: that the mortality of that locality rises and falls, year [119] by year. with the price of food; that this connection may be as clearly traced, as though you had the evidence taken before a coroner’s inquest. Upwards of three thousand people more per annum were swept off during the dear years than have died since corn has come down to a more natural price, even in a very limited district of Lancashire. And yet these identical gentlemen, who meet together and form their benevolent societies, will talk to you of air and water, and everything in the world but bread, which is the staff and support of life. I have no objection to charity—I advocate it strongly; but I say with my friend, Mr. Villiers, do justice first, and then let charity follow in its wake. I have no doubt these individuals may be actuated by very benevolent motives—I will not charge them here with hypocrisy; but this I do say, that we shall expect them to meet this question, and not to shirk it. I am complaining of one section in particular of the landed aristocracy, who are setting up claims to a superior benevolence, who are conscience-stricken, I am sure, from what I know, on this question of the Corn-law, who yet vote in its support, and who refuse to discuss it, or record their opinions on the subject. I allude in particular to one nobleman who acted in this manner in the last session on Mr. Villiers’s motion, notwithstanding he is one who professes great sympathy for the poor of this country. He did not attend on that debate, or take a part in the discussion, but came in at the last moment, at the time of the division, and voted against that motion. I will mention his name: I refer to Lord Ashley. Now, I say, let us, at all events, whilst we admit their good intentions, stipulate that this question shall be discussed by them in the same way as those relating to washing and fresh air. Do not let them blink this matter. What course do they pursue as regards ventilation? They call in scientific men to help them; they go straightway to Dr. Southwood Smith and others, and say, ‘What is your plan for remedying this admitted social evil?’ and they take the opinion of scientific men, who have given great attention to the subject. We ask them, on this question of supplying the people with food and employment, to call to their councils scientific men, who

have devoted their lives to the investigation of this question, and who have left on record their opinions in a permanent form—opinions which have been recognised as sound and indisputable philosophy all over the world. We ask them to take Adam Smith, as they have on other questions taken Southwood Smith; and either prove that he is wrong in his principle for providing food and employment for the people. or vote in accordance with his opinions. It will not be sufficient to wring their hands or wipe their eyes, and fancy that in this intelligent and intellectual age sentimentality will do in the senate; it may do very well in the boarding-school.

Now, what should we say of these same noblemen and gentlemen, who lament over the distress of the people, if they were to refuse to take science, knowledge, experience to their councils, in remedying another class of evils—if they went into a hospital, and found the patients writhing under their bandages after they had just gone through the ordeal of surgical aid from accidents, and these philanthropists were to drive out the surgeons and apothecaries, denouncing them as ‘cold-blooded and scientific utilitarians,’ and then, after wringing their hands, and turning up the whites of their eyes, set to work and treat these patients after their own fashion? I like these Covent Garden meetings, and I will tell you why; we have a sort of intellectual police here. Byron said this was a canting age, and there is nothing so difficult to meet and grapple with as cant: but I think, if anything has produced a sound, wholesome, and intellectual tone in this metropolis, it has been our great gatherings and discussions within these walls.

There is another meeting to be held to-night, to present a testimonial to Sir Henry Pottinger; I wish to say one [120] word to you about that. First of all, what has Sir Henry Pottinger been doing for these monopolists—I mean the great monopolist merchants and millionaires, including the house of Baring and Co., who have subscribed 50*l.* in Liverpool towards the testimonial there, and I suppose have contributed here also? I ask, what has that baronet done to induce this determination on the part of the great merchant-princes in the City? I will tell you: he has been to China, and extorted from the Government of that country (for the benefit of the Chinese people, I admit) a tariff. But of what description is it? It is founded on three principles. The first is, that there shall be no duties whatever laid upon corn, or provisions of any kind, imported into the Celestial Empire; nay, even if a ship comes in loaded with provisions, not only is there no duty upon the cargo, but the ship itself is exempted from port charges; and it is the only exemption of the kind in the world. The second principle is, there shall be no duties for protection. The third is, there shall be moderate duties for revenue. Why, that is the very tariff that we, the Anti-Corn-law League, have been contending for these five years. The difference between us and Sir Henry Pottinger is this, that whilst he has succeeded by force of arms in conferring upon the Chinese people that beneficial tariff, we have failed hitherto by force of argument to extort a similar boon for the advantage of the English people from our aristocracy. A further difference is this: that while these monopolist merchants are ready to offer a demonstration to Sir Henry Pottinger for his success in China, they have heaped obloquy, abuse, and opposition on us, for trying unsuccessfully to do the same thing here. And why have we not succeeded? Because we have been opposed and resisted by these very inconsistent men, who are now shouting and toasting Free Trade for China. I would ask one question or two upon this point. Do these gentlemen believe that this tariff, which Sir Henry Pottinger has obtained for the Chinese people, will be beneficial to them or not? Judging by all they have said to us on former occasions, they cannot really believe it. They have said that low-priced provisions and free trade in corn would injure the working classes, and lower their wages. Do they positively imagine that the tariff will be beneficial to the Chinese? If they do, where is their consistency in refusing to grant the same advantages to their own fellow-countrymen? But if not, if they suppose that tariff to be what they have here asserted a similar tariff would be for Englishmen, then they are no Christians, because they do not do to the Chinese as they would



be done by. I will leave them on the horns of that dilemma, and let them take the choice which they will have. There is some little delusion and fraud practised in the way in which they talk of this Chinese tariff as a commercial treaty; it is not a commercial treaty. Sir Henry Pottinger imposed that tariff on the Chinese Government, not as applicable to us, but to the whole world. What do these monopolists tell us? 'We have no objection to Free Trade, if you will give us reciprocity from other countries.' And here they are, 'Hip, hip, hip, hurrahing!' down at the Merchant Taylors' Hall, at this very moment, shouting and glorifying Sir Henry Pottinger because he has given to the Chinese a tariff without reciprocity with any country on the face of the earth.

Will Mr. Thomas Baring stand again for the city of London, think you? He said you were a very low set last year, after he had lost his election. If he should come again, let me give you one word of advice: go and ask him if he will give you as good a tariff as Sir Henry Pottinger gave to the Chinese. If not, let him tell you why he subscribed to this piece of plate to Sir Henry Pottinger, if he does not think such a measure would be a good thing for the English too, as well as for the Chinese. In Manchester we have a good many of the same kind of monopolists, who have [121] joined in this testimonial; they always do things on a large scale in that town, and while you have raised a thousand pounds or so here, pretty nearly three thousand pounds have been subscribed there, a large portion of it by our monopolist manufacturers, who are not the most intelligent, numerous, or wealthy class among us, although they say sometimes they are. They have joined in this demonstration to Sir Henry Pottinger. A friend of mine called to ask me to subscribe towards it. I said, 'I believe Sir Henry Pottinger to be a most worthy man, a great deal better in every respect than many of those who are joining here in subscriptions for his testimonial; I have no doubt that he has done excellent service to the Chinese people; and if they will send over a Sir Henry Pottinger to England, and if that Chinese Pottinger can succeed by such force of argument (for we want no recourse to arms here)—by the power of logic, if there be any such in China—as will prevail to extract from the stony hearts of our landlord monopolists the same tariff for England as that which our General has given to the Chinese, I will join with all my heart in subscribing for a piece of plate for him.'

By the way, gentlemen, we must come to business, notwithstanding. Our worthy chairman has told you something of our late proceedings. Some of our cavilling friends—and there are a good many of this class: men who seem to be a little bilious at times, and are always disposed to criticise; individuals who do not move on themselves, and, not being gregarious animals, are incapable of helping other people to move on, and, therefore, who have nothing to do but to sit by and quarrel with others—these men say, 'This is a new move of the League, attacking the landlords in their counties; it is a change in their tactics.' But we are altering nothing, and we have not changed a single thing. I believe every step we have taken has been necessary, in order to arrive at the present stage of our movement. We began by lecturing and distributing tracts, in order to create an enlightened public opinion; we did that for two or three years necessarily. We then commenced operations in the boroughs; and never at any time was there so much systematic attention, labour, and expense devoted to the boroughs of this country in the way of registration as at the present time. As regards our lectures, we continue them still; only that instead of having small rooms up three pair of stairs back, as we used to have, we have magnificent assemblies, as that now before me. We distribute our tracts, but in another form; we have our own organ, the *League* paper, twenty thousand copies of which have gone out every week for the last twelve months. I have no doubt that that journal penetrates into every parish in the United Kingdom, and goes the round of the district.

Now, in addition to what we proposed before, we think we have had a new light; we rather expect that we can disturb the monopolists in their own counties. The first objection that is made to that plan is, that it is a game which two can play at; that the monopolists can adopt the move as well as we can. I have answered that objection before, by saying that we are in the very fortunate predicament of sitting down to play a game at a table where our opponents have possession of all the stakes, and we have nothing to lose. They have played at it for a long time, and won all the counties; my friend Mr. Villiers had not a single county voter the last time he brought forward his motion. There are 152 English and Welsh county members, and I really think it would baffle the arithmetic of my friend, the Member for Wolverhampton, to make out clearly that he could carry a majority of the House without having some of them. We are going to try if we cannot get him a few. We have obtained him one already—the largest county in the kingdom; we have secured South Lancashire, and that is the most populous district in the whole kingdom. Lord Francis Egerton sat for that county; he [122] is very powerful, a man of vast property and possessions, and personally respected by all parties. But people are very unfortunate who attack the League. There seems to me something like a fatality hanging over everybody who makes an onslaught upon it.

I am going to mention an anecdote for the benefit of ‘Grandmamma,’ of the *Morning Herald*; she is wearing to a rather shadowy and attenuated form, and yet she still cackles in a ghost-like tone at us. About two years ago, in the House of Commons, on Mr. Villiers's motion, Lord Francis Egerton rose and spoke, and after saying some pretty little nothings, such as go down in the House of Commons from a lord, but would not be tolerated from anybody else, he wound up his speech by offering very kindly and gratuitously his advice to the gentlemen of the Anti-Corn-law League; and it was to this effect: that they would be good enough to dissolve; that they could do nothing; and, therefore, had better disband themselves; and concluding by saying, that he offered that advice in all kindness to them. Let an election again come for South Lancashire, and Lord Francis Egerton will see who will dissolve first. Somebody has alluded to the Member for Knaresborough (Mr. Ferrand); he was let loose upon us a long time back. When I first went into the House of Commons, in 1841, it appeared to me that he had been sent there on purpose that he might bait me. What has been the fate of that worthy gentleman? Why, that same House of Commons—a large majority of whom hounded him upon me in 1841—last session voted unanimously that his assertions were ‘unfounded and calumnious.’ That means, in plain Knaresborough language, that he was a slanderer and a—; I will not give you the other word. There is one other case, which I mention also as a warning and an example to the *Morning Herald*. At the close of the last session, Sir Robert Peel, in speaking upon Mr. Villiers's motion, felt very anxious indeed to retrieve his lost position with the monopolists behind the Treasury benches; and I think he would have stood upon his head, or performed any other feat, to accomplish it. He thought he would have a fling at the League, and therefore he warned us, in his solemn and pompous tones, that we were retarding the progress of Free Trade, and setting the farmers of the country against us by the way in which we had attacked them. Now, mark what I say: it will not be the League that will fall at the hand of the farmers; but I predict it will be Sir Robert Peel, ‘the farmers’ friend,’ whom they will sacrifice.

I have said that we have one county to present to Mr. Villiers; I should be glad to know if he would like to represent it himself. I have heard but one opinion in Lancashire,—that, as it is the first county we have to present him, he ought to have the refusal of it. The monopolists have long played this game in the counties, and they have worked it out. They began immediately the Reform Bill was passed; and they have lynx-like eyes in finding flaws, or discovering the means of carrying out their own ends. They saw in this Reform Act the Chandos clause, and they set to work to qualify their tenant-farmers for the poll, by making brothers, sons, nephews, uncles—ay, down to the third generation, if they happened to live upon the farm—all qualify for the same holding, and swear, if need be, that they were

partners in the farm, though they were no more partners than you are. This they did, and successfully, and by that means gained the counties. But there was another clause in the Reform Act, which we of the middle classes—the unprivileged, industrious men, who live by our capital and labour—never found out, namely, the 40*s.* freehold clause. I will set that against the Chandos clause, and we will beat them in the counties with it. You have heard how dispro-portionately large the number of votes in the rural districts is to that in the towns. We will rectify the balance by bidding our friends qualify themselves for the counties. They do not know how [123] easy a thing it is to do. I see numbers of people here who have no borough vote at all—men in fustian jackets—young men living in lodgings. I will tell them how they may get a county vote, and far cheaper than a borough vote. It is not so easy for men in all positions to take a 10*l.* house, occupy it, furnish it, and live up to it, with the taxes and expenses that accrue; but to qualify for the county you have only to invest 50*l.* or 60*l.* (and I have known it done for 35*l.*) in a freehold which will produce you 40*s.* a year, and you will have a vote for the county. It costs you nothing to keep, and nothing to buy; for you get interest for your money, and you may sell your property whenever you are sick of your vote.

Our opponents have been fond of telling us that this is a middle-class agitation. I do not like classes, and therefore have said that we are the best of all classes; but this I believe, that we have enough of the middle class, and the propertied portion of the middle class, to beat the landlords at their own game in all the populous counties in England. Mr. Wilson told you I had been into Yorkshire. Before the 31st of January there will be 2,000 new votes qualified for the West Riding of that county. I have a guarantee which I can rely upon, that this will be done. Now, I want you to win Middlesex in like manner. I will tell you where you may gain as many votes in that county as by qualifying new votes. You have a thousand or two of good Free-trade votes that are not on the register; I will be bound to say you have 2,000. Look at the case of South Lancashire; you have heard that we have won that county, but we have obtained it without putting in force that 40*s.* freehold clause. We actually won on the register by the votes that were already in existence, and that were drawn out by that intense contest in May, between Mr. Brown and Mr. Entwisle. The revising barrister came round in October and November, and a majority of 1,700 was gained by the men who were already entitled to be on the register, but had neglected to put their names on the list. We are going to work now in Lancashire, to induce our friends to qualify there as 40*s.* freeholders. Our opponents in that district tell us that, although they admit we have won upon the present register, we shall not do so for the future; now I will bet my cause to theirs—and it is the longest odds I know of—that we will make them a thousand worse in the next revision.

I will tell you how you can qualify a thousand or two voters in Middlesex. You have a most important district—Hammersmith, Kensington, Chelsea, and all the surrounding suburbs, which are not in the parliamentary boroughs; Marylebone and Westminster do not extend beyond Pimlico. In all that district every house paying 50*l.* of rent—mind, not 50*l.* of rate, for a house rated upon an average at 40*l.* will pay 50*l.* rent—every one of the tenants of those houses is entitled to be put on the county list as a voter; for the 50*l.* tenant-at-will clause does not confine itself to farmers, but extends to every dwelling-house within the county; and I have no doubt in the world that there are 500 or 600 Free-trade votes in that district that might be on the register, and ought, and may be, next year. But, then, people must qualify who have not already done so. There are young men, clerks, who complain that they have not got the suffrage, and lodgers have been agitating for votes; I heard them once talk of forming a 'Lodgers' League,' in order to obtain the franchise. Here is a more reasonable way of getting the suffrage; the cheapest both to obtain and keep. There is a large class of mechanics who save their 40*l.* or 50*l.*; they have been accustomed, perhaps, to put it in the savings' bank. I will not say a word to undervalue that institution; but cottage property will pay twice as much interest as the savings' bank. Then, what a privilege it is for a working man to put his hands in his pockets and walk up and down opposite his own freehold, and say

—'This is my own; I worked for it, and I have won it.' There are many [124] fathers who have sons just ripening into maturity, and I know that parents are very apt to keep their property and the state of their affairs from their children. My doctrine is, that you cannot give your son your confidence, or teach him to be intrusted safely with property, too early. When you have a son just coming to twenty-one years of age, the best thing you can do, if you have it in your power, is to give him a qualification for the county; it accustoms him to the use of property, and to the exercise of a vote, whilst you are living, and can have some little judicious control over it, if necessary.

I know some fathers say, 'I could give my son a qualification, but I do not like the expense of the conveyance.' Well, go to a Free-trade lawyer; you must employ none but professional men of that description in this business. We have drawn out a good many legal patriots already; they have heard the rustling of parchment, and have been caught with the sound. I say, employ no monopolist lawyers; for if you do, they may leave some flaw, by which you will lose your vote, and make it so that it will not be a real *bonâ fide* qualification. They will secure your title to the estate, but it may not be one which will give you a vote; and they will not tell you, but go and inform the opponent's lawyers in the revision court, who will come and object to you. I tell the fathers of these deserving sons to go to a Free-trade lawyer, and employ him to make the conveyance. Now, I will give a bit of advice to the sons. Do you offer to your father to pay the expense of the conveyance yourself. If you will not, and your father will come to me and make me the offer, I will.

Gentlemen, these are the classes that want the qualification; and, by these means, Middlesex may be made perfectly safe against all comers before the next election. For, recollect, besides qualifying, you must take care that your opponents have no bad votes on the list. I have heard of some very wise men who have said that this is an odious plan, very like the Carlton Club proceedings, to disfranchise the people by striking them off the register. If our opponents will not play the game of leaving bad votes on, and will allow no extension of the suffrage in this way on either side, we have no objection; but if they are to take the law into their hands, and strike off our bad votes, and we are not to do the same by theirs, I wonder when we shall win!

Now, when you go home, and begin talking over this with some of your neighbours, who affect to be wiser than other people, they will tell you, 'Notwithstanding all that Cobden has said, the landlords will beat you at this movement.' They will say, 'See how they can split up their property, and let people have life-rent charges upon it.' As Mr. Villiers has stated, the estates are not theirs in a great many instances; I believe four-fifths of the parchments are not at home; and if they were, whom would they trust with a *bonâ fide* life-rent charge? Their tenant-farmers have got the vote already. Will they give it to the agricultural labourers, think you? The labourer would like those allotments very much. The only difficulty I can foresee is this. Judging from the accounts I read of their condition in Dorsetshire and Wiltshire, I should think it is very likely, when the revising barristers came round, these voters would be disfranchised, one half of them being in the union workhouse, and the other half in gaol for poaching. No; the landowners have done their worst. They want money, men, and zeal in their cause. I believe we have struck the right nail on the head. We have never yet proposed anything that has met with so unanimous a response from all parts of the kingdom upon this subject. It has taken two hours a day, in Manchester, to read the letters that have come from all parts of the country, unanimously applauding this plan. I may tell you, that we have sent out circulars from Manchester to everybody who has ever subscribed to the League Fund all over the kingdom; and I need not tell you how many thousands they amount to. Everywhere, in all parts of the country, has [125] this question been taken up with the same enthusiastic spirit. We have received a letter from Ipswich; we never thought, never dreamt of touching Suffolk; but we had a letter, saying, that it is perfectly easy for the towns of Suffolk to carry

the two divisions of the county on this plan. We look to the more popular districts first; we say it will not be necessary to gain the whole of them; if we obtain North and South Lancashire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, and Middlesex, the landed monopolists will give up corn in order to save a great deal more.

There is one other point. Many people may say, 'This is something not quite legitimate; you cannot go on manufacturing these votes.' We reply, The law and the constitution prescribe it, and we have no alternative. It may be a very bad system, that men should be required to have 40*l.* or 50*l.* laid out on the surface of the earth, in order that they should be represented; but the law prescribes that plan, and there is no help for it. And we say, do not violate the law; conform to it in spirit and in fact; and do so by thousands and tens of thousands, if you can. There is nothing savouring of trick or finesse of any kind in it; you must have a *bonâ fide* qualification. It will not do now, as it did under the old system, to create fictitious votes; there is now a register, there was none formerly. That is where we will stop them; we will put them through a fine sieve at the registration. No, no; under the old system, when the Lowthers contested Westmoreland against Brougham—the Henry Brougham that was, you know—the contest lasted for fourteen days, and they went on manufacturing collusive and fictitious votes during the whole period, making them as fast as they could poll. The voters went up with their papers, and the day after the polling put them into the fire, or treated them as waste paper. But things are altered now; you must be twelve months on the register, and your name must be hung up at the church doors for a certain period, before you can vote. Therefore we do not intend to win by tricks, for we are quite sure the enemy can beat us at that.

There is one other objection: they will say, you should not tell this; it is very bad tactics. I say, you have nothing to gain by secrecy. There are tens and hundreds of thousands in this country, whose hearts will beat when they see the report of this meeting, and who will read every word of it. Those are our friends. Our opponents will turn their heads away, and will not read what we say. We speak to the sympathising multitude, whose feelings and hearts are with us; and we make an appeal to them; not only to you in Middlesex, but to those who are unqualified throughout the length and breadth of the land. Scotland expects it of you; they say in that country—'Oh! that we had the 40*s.* franchise here; we could then clear them out of twelve counties in twelve months.' Ireland looks to you, with her 10*l.* franchise the same as Scotland. England, wealthy England, with nothing but her nominal franchise of 40*s.* a year, with such a weapon as this in her hand, and not to be able to beat down this miserable, unintelligent, incapable oligarchy, that is misgoverning her! No, I will not believe it. We will cry aloud, not here only, but on every pedestal on which we can be placed throughout the country, though there is no pinnacle like this to speak from; we will raise our voice everywhere,—'Qualify, qualify, qualify.' Do it, not only for the sake of the toiling millions, and the good of the industrious middle classes, but for the benefit of the aristocracy themselves. Yes, do it especially for their sake, and for that of their dependent, miserable serfs—the agricultural labourers. Do it, I say, especially for the welfare of the landed interest, who, if left to their own thoughtless and misguided ignorance, will bring this country down to what Spain or Sicily is now; and with it will reduce themselves to the same beggary that the Spanish grandes have been brought to. To avert this calamity from them, the ignorant and besotted few, I say again—'Qualify, qualify, qualify!'

**FREE TRADE. XIV.**  
**LONDON, JANUARY 15, 1845** ↩

REALLY I, who have almost lived in public meetings for the last three years, feel well nigh daunted at this astonishing spectacle. Is there any friend or acquaintance of the Duke of Richmond here? If there be, I hope he will describe to his Grace this scene in Covent Garden Theatre to-night. I do not know how he may be impressed, but I am quite sure that if the Duke of Richmond could call such a meeting as this—ay, even one—in the metropolis, I should abandon in despair all hope of repealing the Corn-laws. But this is only one of many; and when we look back at the numerous gatherings we have had of a similar kind, and when we remember that not one discordant opinion, violation of order, or even breach of etiquette, has occurred at any of our meetings,—why, there is an amount of moral force about these great assemblages which I think it is impossible for any unjust law long to resist.

I appear before you to-night as a kind of connecting link—and a very short one—between two gentlemen who have not so recently presented themselves here as I have: the one (Mr. Milner Gibson) a most able and efficient fellow-labourer in the House of Commons, whose speech you have just heard; and the other (Mr. W. J. Fox) one of the most distinguished and accomplished orators of the age, who will follow me; and I promise you, that, on this occasion, I shall endeavour, in deference to your feelings and in justice to myself, to be very brief in my remarks. Indeed I scarcely know that I should have had any pretence for appearing before you at all, had it not been that we are now preparing for our Parliamentary campaign, and probably, unless I took this occasion, it would be some time before I should have a similar opportunity. And, as we are preparing for our Parliamentary labours, it may be as well, if we can possibly dive into futurity, to try to speculate, at least, upon what the course of proceeding may be, in connection with our question.

Now, I think I can venture, without any great risk of failure, to tell you what will be the course which the Prime Minister will pursue on this question. He will attempt his old arts of mystification. He has acquired somehow, we are told, a great character as a ‘financier.’ Well, that is a distinction which, amongst men of business, does not place a person always on the very highest grade of respectability. ‘A clever financier!’ ‘He has put the revenue of the country in a satisfactory state!’ Yes, he has done so; and how? Why—I hope, to your satisfaction, through the medium of the income-tax. We, as Free-traders, have nothing to do with fiscal regulations here, nor with systems of taxation for revenue; but as I foresee that it will be the policy of the Government, and the Prime Minister in particular, to raise a dust, shuffle the cards, and mix up revenue, taxation, and Free Trade together, I think we cannot do better than begin this year 1845, even at the risk of repetition, by letting the country know what we, the Anti-Corn-law League, really want, and that we are not to be made parties to this or that system of taxation, inasmuch as we ask for nothing which involves any change of taxation of any kind.

I have said again and again—and I reiterate the statement—that Free Trade means the removal of all protective duties, which are monopoly taxes, paid to individuals, and not to the Government; and that, in order to carry out our principle of Free Trade, to realise all the League wants, and to dissolve our association to-morrow, it does not require that one shilling of taxation should be removed, which goes solely to the Queen's exchequer; but that it will increase the national revenue in proportion as you take away those taxes which we now pay to classes and to individuals. We are told that there is a surplus of revenue; and there is a great boast made of it. The income-tax has been productive. Those men with sharp noses, and

ink-bottles at their buttons,—who have gone prying about your houses and at your back-doors, to learn how many dinner-parties you give in a year, and to examine and cross-examine your cooks and foot-boys as to what your style of living may be,—these men have managed to make a very respectable surplus revenue. Now, there seems to be a great contest among different parties who is to have this surplus revenue; that is, what are the taxes which are to be removed? The parties dealing in cotton goods say, ‘We must have the tax taken off cotton-wool?’ another class says, ‘We want the tax off malt;’ and a third party steps in and says, ‘Let us have half the duty taken off tea.’ But, although there may be many parties wanting a reduction of taxes, you do not find any class of the community organising themselves against taking off any one tax. Then, how is it that we, who simply desire to remove the tax on bread, meet with such a mighty opposition in the land? Why, because, as I have just said, the tax that we pay on bread is a tax that goes to the tithe and the landowner, and not to Queen Victoria. Do you think it will do us any more harm to take off a tax that is paid to the squires, than to take off one which goes to her Majesty's exchequer? It seems to be a principle universally admitted, that when you come to reduce a tax paid to the Queen, it will be a benefit to the community at large—the only question being which party shall get the most; but when you propose to reduce the duty on bread, a thousand imaginary dangers are immediately raised.

Talk to a gentleman about the bread-tax, and he says, ‘That is a very complicated question.’ Speak about that other ingredient of the tea-table—tea—and there is not a gentleman, or gentlewoman, who will not say immediately, ‘I think it would be a very good thing indeed to reduce the tax on tea.’ Propose the removal of the tax on bread, and visions of innumerable dangers rise up directly. ‘Why,’ it is said, ‘you want to lower the wages of the working man, and to make us dependent for food on foreigners’ Take the case of sugar: we, as Free-traders, do not desire to diminish the Queen's revenue on that article; we simply want to bring the tax down to a level with the colonial impost on sugar, that we may have the same duty paid on all, and that the whole proceeds shall go to the Queen, and none of it to the owners of estates in the West Indies. Nobody opposes the reduction of duty on sugar, so far as the Queen gets it; but if we propose to take away the tax for the protection of the colonial interest, as it is called, we have a powerful body arrayed against us, and all the same dangers apprehended which we find alleged in the case of bread. Gentlemen, this may serve to illustrate very clearly, to those who are not in the habit of reasoning upon these matters very closely, what our object really is. We propose to reduce the [128] taxes paid to monopolists; and I put it to any person whether it can be less injurious to the country to pay taxes to individuals who make no return in the shape of services to the State—who neither provide army nor navy, nor support police, church, or any other establishment—to pay taxes to these irresponsible individuals, than to the Queen's Government, which makes some return for them? What I wish to guard ourselves against is this—that Sir Robert Peel shall not mix up our question of Free Trade with his dexterity in finance. If he likes to shift the cards, and make an interchange between tea, cotton, tobacco, malt, and the income-tax, and ply one interest against the other, it is all very well; let him do so; it may suit his purpose as a feat in the jngglery of statesmanship. But let it be understood that we have nothing to do with all this mystification and shuffling. Ours is a very simple and plain proposition. We say to the right hon. Baronet, ‘Abolish the monopolies which go to enrich that majority which placed you in power and keeps you there.’ We know he will not attempt it; but we are quite certain that he will make great professions of being a Free-trader notwithstanding.

Oh! I am more afraid of our friends being taken in by plausibilities and mystifications than anything else. I wish we had the Duke of Richmond or his Grace of Buckingham in power for twelve months, that they might be compelled to avow what they really want, and let us have a perfect understanding upon the matter. We should not then be long before we achieved the object of our organisation. Sir Robert Peel will meet Parliament under

circumstances which may perhaps call for congratulation in the Queen's speech. Manufactures and commerce are thriving, and the revenue is flourishing. Was that ever known when corn was at an immoderately high price? The present state of our finances and manufactures is an illustration of the truth of the Free-trade doctrines. As the chairman has told you, I have been, during the last two months, paying a visit to nearly all the principal towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and have seen much prosperity prevailing in those places, where, four years ago, the people were plunged in the greatest distress; and I am glad to tell you that I have everywhere met larger and more enthusiastic meetings than I did in the time of the greatest crisis of distress. We have passed through that trying ordeal which I had always dreaded as the real and difficult test of this agitation; I mean the period when the manufactures of this country regained a temporary prosperity. We are proof against that trial; we have had larger, more enthusiastic, and more influential meetings than ever we had before; and I am happy to tell you, that, so far as the north of England goes, the present state of prosperity in business is merely having the effect of recruiting the funds of the Anti-Corn law League.

There is not a working man in the manufacturing districts who has not his eyes opened to the enormous falsehoods which have been told by the monopolists during the last four or five years. You know that the operatives do not deal learnedly in books: they are not all of them great theorists, or philosophers; but they have, nevertheless, a lively faith in what passes under their own noses. These men have seen the prices of provisions high, and they have then found pauperism and starvation in their streets; they have seen them low, and have found the demand for labour immediately increase, and wages rising in every district of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and a state of things prevailing the very opposite of that which was told them by the monopolists. In fact, in some businesses the men now have their employers so completely at their mercy, that they can dictate their own terms to them. We have heard of one gentleman in the north—not one of the Leaguers, but a large employer of labour—who remarked, 'My hands will only work four days a-week now; if we have free trade in corn, and business is as prosperous as you say it would then [129] be, I should not be able to manage them at all.'

I was at Oldham the other day, and, during our proceedings at a public meeting in the Town-hall, a working man rose in the body of the assembly, and begged to say a few words upon the subject for which we were convened; and his statement put the whole question as to the effect of high and low prices on the wages of the operative into so clear a form, that I begged it might be taken down; and I will now give it you verbatim as he delivered it. I think it is the whole secret given in the compass of a nutshell:—

'Joseph Shaw, a working man, in the body of the meeting, said:—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I rise for the purpose of making a few remarks on the subject of the Corn-laws. I have but once before spoken before a Member of Parliament, viz. Mr. Hindley, at a public meeting at Lees. I have spoken once at Ashton and Saddleworth, but never before in Oldham. I have thought on the subject of the Corn-laws for the last twenty years and more, and I have ever seen great reason to condemn them. As there is no probability that I shall ever see Sir Robert Peel, as he never comes down into this neighbourhood, and I being not able to bear the expense of going to London, I wish you (addressing Mr. Cobden) to be so kind as to tell him what you have heard a working man say on the subject of the Corn-laws in a large and respectable public meeting in the town of Oldham. I am now and have been long of opinion that the Corn-laws are very injurious to the working classes, and I will tell you how I prove it. I have been in the habit of observing that when the prices of food have been high, wages have been low, which sufficiently accounts for the dreadful state of Stockport and the other manufacturing towns and districts two or three years since. At that time, when wheat was up to about 70s. a quarter, the working man would have 25s. per quarter to pay for it more than now when it is down to 45s., and consequently would have 25s. less to lay out for clothing and other



necessaries for his comfort during the time he was consuming a quarter of wheat. I have further to state that, since the prices of eatables have come down, I have seen a deal more new fustian jackets in our village of Lees than I have seen for four or five years during the time of high prices; and I will also tell you how I account for that. When provisions are high, the people have so much to pay for them that they have little or nothing left to buy clothes with; and when they have little to buy clothes with, there are few clothes sold; and when there are few clothes sold, there are too many to sell; and when there are too many to sell, they are very cheap; and when they are very cheap, there cannot be much paid for making them: and that, consequently, the manufacturing working man's wages are reduced, the mills are shut up, business is ruined, and general distress is spread through the country. But when, as now, the working man has the said 25s. left in his pocket, he buys more clothing with it (ay, and other articles of comfort too), and that increases the demand for them, and the greater the demand, you know, makes them rise in price, and the rising in price enables the working man to get higher wages and the masters better profits. This, therefore, is the way I prove that high provisions make lower wages, and cheap provisions make higher wages. (Cheers.)

Now, it is not possible that there can be one intelligent man like this, rising up in a public meeting, and giving so clear a view of the workings of this system, without there being a tolerable share of intelligence among his fellowworkmen in that neighbourhood. One by one these fallacies of our opponents have been by the course of experience cut from under the feet of the monopolists. Now, I do not see that we can do better, at the beginning of the year, than reiterate the grounds on which we advocate our principles, and state again what our profession of faith is. The gentlemen below me, with their pens in their hands, may drop them for the present, for I have stated them over and over again. We do not want free trade in corn to reduce wages; if we, the manufacturers (I speak now of them 3s a class, but the observation applies to all), wanted to reduce wages, we should keep up the Corn-law, because the price [130] of labour is the lowest when the corn is highest. We do not want it to enable us to compete with foreigners; we do that already. You do not suppose that the Chinese give the manufacturer or merchant who comes from England a higher price for his goods than they will to any other people. Suppose one of the manufacturers who votes for the Corn-law here, sent out his goods to China, and said—'You will give us a little higher price for our longcloths than you give to these Germans or Americans, for we have a Corn-law in England, and I always vote for that side which keeps up the bread-tax; and I hope, therefore, you will give me a higher price.' What would the man with a pigtail say? He would reply, 'If you are such blockheads as to submit to have your bread taxed in your own land, we are not such fools as to give you a higher price for your longcloths than we can get them at from the Germans and Americans.' You compete with foreigners now; and all we say is, that you will be able to do so better if you have your bread at the same price as your competitors have. Then the object of free trade in corn is simply this—to have more trade; and the Oldham operative has shown you how more trade will raise wages. We want increased trade, and that in the articles which will minister most to the comfort of the working man. Every cargo of corn which comes in from abroad in exchange for manufactured goods, or anything else—for you cannot get it unless you pay for it with the produce of labour—will serve the working man in two ways. In the first place, he will eat the corn which is thus imported; inasmuch as we of the middle, and those of the upper classes, already get as much as we require, and the poor must eat it, or it will not be consumed at all. But it must be paid for as well as eaten; and therefore every cargo of corn that comes to England will benefit the working men in two ways. They and their families must eat it all; and it can only be paid for by an increased demand for their labour, and that will raise their wages, whilst it moderates the price of their provisions. Doubtless it will also be of advantage to other portions of the community, but it can only benefit them through the working class—that is, through those who now do not get enough to eat.

Then we have the farmer's objection to meet, and he says: 'If you bring in foreign corn, for every quarter of corn that you so import, we shall have a market for one quarter less in England.' That statement proceeds upon the old assumption, that the people of this country are now sufficiently fed. The middle classes, I admit, have enough; and a great many of the upper classes get much more than is good for them; but the working men of this land,—and in that term I include the Irish, Welsh, Scotch, and the agricultural poor of England,—I maintain that all these are not half fed: I mean to say they are not half as well fed as the class to which I belong, nor as the working classes are in the United States of America. I have seen them on both sides of the Atlantic, and I will vouch for the fact We have all heard of the anecdote of the Irishman in Kentucky: the poor fellow had gone out to America; he did not know how to write, and he asked his master to write a letter for him. He began it thus:—'Dear Murphy, I am very happy and comfortable, and I have meat once a-day.' His master said—'What do you mean? Why, you can have meat three times a-day, and more if you like.' 'Ah, sure! your honour, that's true; but they will not believe it at all, at all.' Now, why should not the working people of this country be allowed to have as much meat and bread, if they can get it by the produce of their industry, as the people of America enjoy? It is a hard penalty to be obliged to send 3,000 miles for food; but it is an atrocity—ay, a fearful violation of Nature's law—if, in addition to that natural penalty which the Creator himself has imposed upon us, of sending across the Atlantic for a suffi [131] cient supply of food, men—the owners of the soil in this country—step in, place obstacles in the way, and prevent the poorest people in the land from having that food which their fellow-creatures 3,000 miles off are willing to send them. Then let the people be sufficiently fed, and the introduction of more corn, cattle, butter, and cheese, will not hurt the farmer in this country. We of the middle classes, who now eat his good provisions, and those who are now sufficiently fed, will continue to be his customers; and all we say is, let those who now do not obtain enough, get it from abroad in exchange for the produce of their own honest labour.

The reduction of duty on wool is an illustration of the truth of what I am now saying. During the last year there have been about twenty million pounds weight more of foreign and colonial wool brought into this country than there was the year before; the penny duty was abolished totally and immediately, and here is this vast influx of that article from abroad: and yet the farmers of this country have been getting from twenty to thirty per cent. more for their home-grown wool than they did previously. Now, why is this? Simply because the extension and prosperity of our manufactures have gone on even in a greater ratio than this largely-increased importation of wool. So I maintain that, if you will give freedom to the commerce of this country, and let loose the energies of the people, their ability to consume corn and provisions brought from abroad will increase faster than the quantity imported, whatever it may be. I really feel almost ashamed to reiterate these truisms to you; but that they are necessary, the present position of our question proves. Gentlemen, my firm conviction is, that this measure cannot be carried in-doors within the House of Commons; that the next session of Parliament will see no progress made by that body. We, Free-traders, there, may expose their utter futility in argument—make them ridiculous, cover them with disgrace, in debate; they may talk such stuff that children would be ashamed of out of the House of Commons; but they will, notwithstanding, vote for the Corn-law. Yes, it will be like drawing the kid out of the maw of the wolf, to extort the repeal of that law from the landowners of this country.

I remember quite well, five years ago, when we first came up to Parliament to petition the Legislature, a certain noble earl, who had distinguished himself previously by advocating a repeal of the Corn-laws, called upon us at Brown's Hotel. The committee of the deputation had a private interview with him, during which he asked us what we came to petition for? We replied, for the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws. His answer was, 'My belief is, that the present Parliament would not pass even a 12s. fixed duty; I am quite sure they would not pass a 10s.; but as for the total repeal of the Corn-law, you may as well try to overturn the

monarchy as to accomplish that object.' I do not think any one would go so far as to tell us that now; I do not suppose that, if you were to go to Tattersall's, 'Lord George' would offer you very long odds that this law will last five years longer. We have done something to shake the old edifice, but it will require a great deal of battering yet to bring it down about the ears of its supporters. It will not be done in the House; it must be done out of it. Neither will it be effected with the present constituency; you must enlarge it first. I have done something towards that end since I last saw you. I have assisted in bringing four or five thousand new 'good men and true' into the electoral list—four or five thousand that we know of in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cheshire; and I believe there are five or ten times as many more throughout the country, who have taken the hint we gave them of getting possession of the electoral franchise for the counties. Some people tell you that it is very dangerous and unconstitutional to invite people to enfranchise themselves by buying a freehold qualification. I say, without being revolutionary or boasting of being more democratic than others, that the sooner the power in this country is transferred from the landed oligarchy, which has so misused it, and is placed absolutely—mind, I say 'absolutely'—in the hands of the intelligent middle and industrious classes, the better for the condition and destinies of this country.

I hope that every man who has the ability to possess himself of the franchise for a county, will regard it as his solemn and sacred duty to do so before the 31st of this month. Recollect what it is we ask you to do: to take into your own hands the power of doing justice to twenty-seven millions of people! When Watt presented himself before George III., the old monarch asked him what article he made; and the immortal inventor of the steam-engine replied, 'Your Majesty, I make that which kings are fond of—power.' Now, we seek to create a higher power in England, by inducing our fellow-countrymen to place themselves upon the electoral list in the counties. We must have not merely the boroughs belonging to the people; but give the counties to the towns, which are their right; and not the towns to the counties, as they have been heretofore. There is not a father of a family, who has it at all in his power, but ought to place at the disposal of his son the franchise for a county; no, not one. It should be the parent's first gift to his son, upon his attaining the age of twenty. There are many ladies, I am happy to say, present; now, it is a very anomalous and singular fact, that they cannot vote themselves, and yet that they have a power of conferring votes upon other people. I wish they had the franchise, for they would often make a much better use of it than their husbands. The day before yesterday, when I was in Manchester (for we are brought up now to interchange visits with each other by the miracle of steam in eight hours and a half), a lady presented herself to make inquiries how she could convey a freehold qualification to her son, previous to the 31st of this month; and she received due instructions for the purpose. Now, ladies who feel strongly on this question—who have the spirit to resent the injustice that is practised on their fellow-beings—cannot do better than make a donation of a county vote to their sons, nephews, grandsons, brothers, or any one upon whom they can beneficially confer that privilege. The time is short; between this and the 31st of the month, we must induce as many people to buy new qualifications as will secure the representation of Lancashire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, and Middlesex. I will guarantee the West Riding of Yorkshire and Lancashire; will you do the same by Middlesex?

I am quite sure you will do what you can, each in his own private circle. This is a work which requires no gift of oratory, or powerful public appeals; it is a labour in which men can be useful privately and without ostentation. If there be any in this land who have seen others enduring probably more labour than their share, and feel anxious to contribute what they can to this good cause, let them take up this movement of qualifying for the counties; and in their several private walks do their best to aid us in carrying out this object. We have begun a new year, and it will not finish our work; but whether we win this year, the next, or the year after, in the mean time we are not without our consolations. When I think of this most odious,

wicked, and oppressive system, and reflect that this nation—so renowned for its energy, independence, and spirit—is submitting to have its bread taxed, its industry crippled, its people—the poorest in the land—deprived of the first necessities of life, I blush that such a country should submit to so vile a degradation. It is, however, consolation to me, and I hope it will be to all of you, that we do not submit to it without doing our best to put an end to the iniquity.

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**FREE TRADE. XV.  
AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS.  
HOUSE OF COMMONS, MARCH 13, 1845.** [↩](#)

[On March 13, 1845, Mr. Cobden moved for a Select Committee to inquire into the causes and extent of the alleged agricultural distress, and into the effects of legislative protection upon the interests of landowners, tenant-farmers, and farm-labourers. This motion was opposed on the part of the Government by Mr. Sidney Herbert, on the ground that several such Committees had sat, and had never led to any useful result. The motion was lost by a majority of 92 (121 to 213).]

I AM relieved on this occasion from any necessity to apologise to the other side of the House for this motion having emanated from myself; for I expressed a hope, when I gave my notice, that the subject would be taken up by some one of the hon. Members opposite. I hope, therefore, that in any reply which may be offered to the observations I am about to submit to the consideration of the House, I shall not hear, as I did in the last year, that this motion comes from a suspicious quarter. I will also add, that I have so arranged its terms as to include in it the objects embraced in both the amendments of which notice has been given (Mr. Woodhouse's. and Mr. S. O'Brien's), and therefore I conclude that the hon. Members who have given those notices will not think it necessary to press them, but rather will concur in this motion. Its object is the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the condition of the agricultural interests, with a view to ascertain how far the law affecting the importation of agricultural produce has affected those interests.

Now, that there is distress among the farmers I presume cannot be established upon higher authority than that of those who profess to be 'the farmers' friends.' I learn from those hon. Gentlemen who have been paying their respects to the Prime Minister, that the agriculturists are in a state of great embarrassment and distress. I find one gentleman from Norfolk, Mr. Hudson, stating that the farmers in Norfolk are paying rents out of capital; while Mr. Turner from Devonshire assured the right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) that one half of the smaller farmers in that county are insolvent, that the other half is rapidly hastening to the same condition, and that, unless some remedial measures are adopted by the House, they will be plunged into irretrievable poverty. These accounts from those counties agree with what I hear from other sources, and I will put it to hon. Members opposite whether the condition of the farmers in Suffolk, Wiltshire, and Hampshire is any better. I will put it to county Members whether, looking to the whole of the south of England, from [134] the confines of Nottinghamshire to the Land's End, the farmers are not in a state of embarrassment—whether, as a rule, that is not their condition. Then, according to every precedent in the House, this is a fit and proper time to bring forward this motion; and I will venture to say, that if the Duke of Buckingham had a seat in this House, he would do what he, as Lord Chandos, did—move such a resolution.

The distress of the farmer being admitted, the next question that arises is, What is the cause of this distress? Now, I feel the greater necessity for a committee of inquiry, because I find a great discrepancy of opinion as to the cause. One right hon. Gentleman has said that the distress is local, and moreover that it does not arise from legislation; while the hon. Member for Dorsetshire (Mr. Bankes) declared that it is general, and that it does arise from legislation. I am at a loss, indeed, to understand what this protection to agriculture means, because I find such contradictory accounts given in this House by the promoters of it. For instance, nine months ago the hon. Member for Wolverhampton (Mr. Villiers) brought

forward his motion for the repeal of the Corn-laws; and the right hon. Gentleman then at the head of the Board of Trade (Mr. Gladstone) stated in reply to him, that the last Corn-law had been most successful in its operation, and he took great credit to the Government for the steadiness of price obtained under it. As these things were so often disputed, it is as well to give the quotation. The right hon. Gentleman said,—

'Was there any man who had supported the law in the year 1842, who could honestly say that he had been disappointed in its working? Could any one point out a promise or a prediction hazarded in the course of the protracted debates upon the measure, which promise or prediction had been subsequently falsified?'

Now, let the House recollect that the right hon. Gentleman was speaking when wheat was 56*s.* 8*d.*; but wheat is at present 45*s.* The right hon. Baronet at the head of the Government said that his legislation on the subject had nothing to do with wheat being 45*s.*; but how is the difficulty to be got over, that the head of the Board of Trade, nine months ago, claimed merit to the Government for having kept up wheat to that price? These discrepancies in the Government itself, and between the Government and its supporters, render it more necessary that this 'protection' should be inquired into.

I must ask, What does it mean? We have prices now at 45*s.* I have been speaking within the last week to the highest authority in England—one often quoted in this House—and I learned from him that, with another favourable harvest, it was quite likely that wheat would be at 35*s.* What does this legislation mean, if we are to have prices fluctuating from 56*s.* to 35*s.*? Can this be prevented by legislation? That is the question. There is a rank delusion spread abroad among the farmers; and it is the duty of the House to dispel that delusion, and to institute an inquiry into the matter.

But there is a difference of opinion on my own side of the House, and some Members, representing great and powerful interests, think the farmers are suffering because they have this legislative protection. This difference of opinion makes the subject a fit and proper one for inquiry in a Committee; and I am prepared to bring evidence before it, to show that farmers are labouring under great evils—evils that I can connect with the Corn-laws, though they appear to be altogether differently caused.

The first great evil they labour under is a want of capital. No one can deny it; it is notorious. I do not say it disparagingly of the farmers. The farmers of this country are just of the same race as the rest of Englishmen, and, if placed in the same situation, would be as successful men of business and traders and manufacturers as their countrymen; but it is notorious, as a rule, that they are deficient in capital. Hon. Gentlemen acquainted with farming will probably [135] admit that 10*l.* an acre, on arable land, is a competent capital for carrying on the business of farming successfully; but I have made many inquiries in all parts of the kingdom, and I give it as my decided conviction, that at the present moment the farmers' capital does not average 5*l.* an acre, taking the whole of England south of the Trent, and including all Wales. Though, of course, there are exceptions in every county—men of large capital—men farming their own land—I am convinced that this is true, as a rule, and I am prepared to back my opinion by witnesses before a Committee. Here, then, is a tract of country comprehending probably 20,000,000 of cultivable acres, and 100,000,000*l.* more capital is wanted for its cultivation.

What is the meaning of 'farming capital'? It means more manuring, more labour, more cattle, larger crops. But let us fancy a country in which there is a deficiency of all those things which ought to be there, and then guess what must be the condition of the labourers wanting employment and food. It may be said that capital would be there, if it were a profitable investment. I admit it; and thus the question comes to be,—How is it, that in a

country overflowing with capital—where there is a plethora in every other business—where every other pursuit is abounding with money—when money is going to France for railroads, and to Pennsylvania for bonds—when it is connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific by canals, and diving to the bottom of Mexican mines for investment—it yet finds no employment in the most attractive of all spots, the soil of this country itself?

Admitting the evil, with all its train of fearful consequences, what is the cause of it? There can be no doubt whatever,—it is admitted by the highest authorities, that the cause is this,—there was not security for capital on the land. Capital shrinks instinctively from insecurity of tenure, and we have not in England that security which will warrant men of capital investing their money in the soil. Is it not a matter worthy of consideration, how far this insecurity of tenure is bound up with the ‘protection’ system of which hon. Members opposite are so enamoured? Suppose it could be shown that they are in a vicious circle; that they have made politics of Corn-laws; that they wanted voters, to retain Corn-laws; that they think the Corn-laws a great mine of wealth, and therefore will have dependent tenants, that they may have votes at elections, and so retain those laws. If they will have dependent voters, they cannot have men of spirit and of capital. Then their policy reacts upon them; if they have not men of skill and capital, they cannot have protection and employment for the labourer; and then comes round the vicious termination—pauperism, poor-rates, county-rates, and all the evils from which they are asking the Prime Minister to relieve them.

But here I have to quote authorities, and I shall quote some of the highest consideration with the opposite side of the House. I will just state the opinion of the hon. Member for Berkshire (Mr. Pusey), delivered at the meeting of the Suffolk Agricultural Society. That hon. Gentleman said:—

‘He knew this country well, and he knew there was not a place from Plymouth to Berwick in which the landlords might not make improvements; but when the tenant was short of money, the landlord generally would be short of money too. But he would tell them how to find funds. There were many districts where there was a great superfluity not only of useless but of mischievous timber; and if they would cut that down which excluded the sun and air, and fed on the soil, and sell it, they would benefit the farmer by cutting it down, and they would benefit the farmer and labourer too by laying out the proceeds in under-draining the soil. There was another mode in which they might find money. He knew that on some properties a large sum was spent in the preservation of game. It was not at all unusual for the game to cost 500*l.* or 600*l.* a-year; and if this were given up, the money would employ a hundred able-bodied labourers in improving the [136] property. This was another fund for the landlords of England to benefit the labourers, and the farmers at the same time.’

Again, at the Colchester agricultural meeting—

‘Mr. Fisher Hobbes was aware that a spirit of improvement was abroad. Much was said about the tenant-farmers doing more. He agreed they might do more: the soil of the country was capable of greater production; if he said one-fourth more, he should be within compass. But that could not be done by the tenant-farmer alone; they must have confidence; it must be done by leases—by draining—by extending the length of fields—by knocking down hedge-rows, and clearing away trees which now shielded the corn.’

But there was still higher authority. At the late meeting at Liverpool, Lord Stanley declared—

‘I say, and as one connected with the land I feel myself bound to say it, that a landlord has no right to expect any great and permanent improvement of his land by the tenant, unless that tenant be secured the repayment of his outlay, not by

the personal character or honour of his landlord, but by a security which no casualties can interfere with—the security granted him by the terms of a lease for years.'

Not only does the want of security prevent capital from flowing to the soil, but it actually hinders the improvement of the land by those who already occupy it. There are many tenants who could improve their land if they were made secure; they either have capital themselves, or their friends can advance it; but with the want of leases, with the want of security, they are deterred from laying out their money. Everything was kept 'from year to year.' It is impossible to farm properly unless money is invested in land for more than a year. A man ought to begin farming with a prospect of waiting eight years before he can see a return for what he must do in the first year or two. Tenants, therefore, are prevented by their landlords from carrying on cultivation properly. They are made servile and dependent, disinclined to improvement, afraid to let the landlord see that they could improve their farms, lest he should pounce on them for an increase of rent. The hon. Member for Lincolnshire (Mr. Christopher) is offended at these expressions; what said that hon. Member on the motion of the hon. Member for Manchester (Mr. Gibson) last year on agricultural statistics?—

'It was most desirable for the farmer to know the actual quantity of corn grown in this country, as such knowledge would insure steadiness of prices, which was infinitely more valuable to the agriculturist than fluctuating prices. But to ascertain this there was extreme difficulty. They could not leave it to the farmer to make a return of the quantity which he produced, for it was not for his interest to do so. If in any one or two years he produced four quarters per acre on land which had previously grown but three, he might fear lest his landlord would say, "Your land is more productive than I imagined, and I must therefore raise your rent." The interest of the farmers, therefore, would be to underrate, and to furnish low returns.'

Here is a little evidence of the same kind that is to be gathered from the meeting of the South Devon Agricultural Association, where the Rev. C. Johnson said,—

'He knew it had been thought that landlords were ready to avail themselves of such associations, on account of the opportunity it afforded them of diving into their tenants' affairs and opening their eyes. An instance of this occurred to him at a recent ploughing match, where he met a respectable agriculturist whom he well knew, and asked him if he was going to it. He said, "No." "Why?" Because he did not approve of such things. This "why" produced another "why," and the man gave a reason why: Suppose he sent a plough and man, with two superior horses; the landlord at once would say, "This man is doing too well on my estate," and increase the rent.'

I will ask the landed gentry of England what state of things is this, that the farmer dares not appear to have a good pair of horses, or to derive four quarters where the land had formerly produced only three. Hon. Members cheer, but [137] I ask, is it not so? I must say, that the condition of things indicated by those two quotations brings the farmer very near down in point of servility to the ryot of the East. The one takes the utmost care to conceal the amount of his produce; the other suffers the bastinado, rather than tell how much corn is grown. The tenant, indeed, is not afraid of the bastinado, but he is kept in fear of a distress for rent.

This is the state of tenant-farming without a lease, and in England a lease is the exception and not the rule. But even sometimes, when there is a lease or agreement, the case is still worse, for the clauses and covenants are of such an obsolete and preposterous character, that I will defy any man to carry on the business of farming properly under them. I will just read a passage from a Cheshire lease—an actual lease—to show in what sort of way the tenant-



farmer is bound down:—

To pay the landlord 20*l.* for every statute acre of ground, and so in proportion for a less quantity, that shall be converted into tillage, or used contrary to the appointment before made; and 5*l.* for every hundredweight of hay, thrave of straw, load of potatoes, or cartload of manure, that shall be sold or taken from the premises during the term; and 10*l.* for every tree fallen, cut down, or destroyed, cropped, lopped, or topped, or willingly suffered so to be; and 20*l.* for every servant or other person so hired or admitted as to gain a settlement in the township; and 10*l.* per statute acre, and so in proportion for a less quantity of the said land, which the tenant shall lot off or underlet, such sums to be paid on demand after every breach, and in default of payment to be considered as reserved rent, and levied by distress and sale, as rent in arrear may be levied and raised; and to do six days' boon team work whenever called upon; and to keep for the landlord one dog, and one cock or hen; and to make no marlpit without the landlord's consent first obtained in writing, after which the same is to be properly filled in; nor to allow any inmate to remain on the premises after six days' notice; nor to keep nor feed any sheep, except such as are used for the consumption of the family.

What is such an instrument as this? I will tell the House what it is. It is a trap for un wary men—a barrier against capital and intelligence, and a fetter to any free man. No one can farm under such a lease. The hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir C. Burrell) cheered; but if hon. Members would look into their own leases, though there may not be the 'cocks and hens, and dogs,' and probably not the 'team-work,' they will find almost as great absurdities. These documents are generally taken from old dusty, antediluvian remains, that some lawyer's clerk drew from a pigeon-hole, and copied out for every in-coming tenant; something that had been in existence perhaps for five hundred years. You give men no credit for being able to discover any improvements; in fact, you tie them down from improving; you go upon the assumption that there will be no improvement, and do your best to prevent it. I do not know why we should not have leases of land upon terms similar to those in leases of manufactories, and places of business; nor do I think farming can be carried on as it ought to be until then. A man may take a manufactory, and pay 1,000*l.* a year for it. An hon. Member near me pays more than 4,000*l.* a-year rent for his manufactory and machinery. Does he covenant as to the manner in which that machinery is to be worked, and as to the revolutions of his spindles? No; his landlord lets to him the bricks and mortar and machinery. The machinery was scheduled to him, and, when his lease is over, he must leave the machinery in the same state as when he found it, and be paid for the improvements. The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Goulburn) cheers that. I want to ask his opinion on a similar lease for a farm.

I am rather disposed to think that the Anti-Corn-law League will very likely form a joint-stock association, having none but Free-traders in that body, to purchase a joint-stock estate, and have a model farm, taking care to have it in one of the rural counties where they all [138] think there is the greatest need of improvement—perhaps Buckinghamshire; and there establish a model farm, and a model homestead, and model cottages (and I will tell the noble lord, the Member for Newark [Lord J. Manners] that we shall have model gardens, without any outcry about it); but the great object shall be to have a model lease. We shall have as a farmer a man of intelligence, and a man of capital. I am not so unreasonable as to say that you ought to let your land to a man without capital, and to one who is not intelligent; but select such a man, with intelligence and capital, and you cannot give him too wide a scope. You will find such a man, and let him have a farm, and such a lease as my hon. friend took his factory with. He shall do what he likes with the old pasture; if he can make more of it with ploughing it up, he shall do so. If he can grow white crops every year, he shall do so. I know persons who are doing that in more places than one in this country. If he can make any improvement he shall make it. We will let him the land with a schedule of the state of tillage on the farm, and will bind him to leave the land as good as he found it. It shall be valued; and

if in an inferior state when he leaves it, he shall compensate us for it: if it be in a superior state, he shall be compensated accordingly by the association. You will think this something very difficult, but the association will give him possession of the farm, with everything on the soil, whether wild or tame. We will give him absolute control; there shall be no gamekeeper prowling about, and no sporting over his farm. Where is the difficulty? You may take as stringent means as you please to compel the punctual payment of rent; you may take the right of re-entry if the rent be not paid; but take the payment of rent as the sole test of the well-doing of the tenant, and so long as he pays that uniformly, it is the only test you need have; and if he be an intelligent man and a man of capital, you will have the strongest security that he will not waste your property.

I have sometimes heard hon. Gentlemen opposite say, 'It is all very well to propose such leases, but we know many farmers who will not take them.' An hon. Member cheers that. What does that argue? That by a process which the hon. Member for Lincolnshire (Sir John Trollope) has described—that degrading process which renders these tenants servile, hopeless, and dejected—they are satisfied to remain as they are, and do not want to be independent. Hear what Professor Low says on this subject:—

'The argument has again and again been used against the extension of leases, that the tenants themselves set no value on them; but to how different a conclusion ought the existence of such a feeling amongst the tenantry of a country to conduct us! The fact itself shows that the absence of leases may render a tenantry ignorant of the means of employing their own capital with advantage, indisposed to the exertions which improvements demand, and better contented with an easy rent and dependent condition, than with the prospect of an independence to be earned by increased exertion.'

But whilst you have a tenantry in the state described and pictured by the hon. Member for Lincolnshire, what must be the state of our population? The labourers can never be prosperous where the tenantry is degraded. You may go through the length and breadth of the land, and you will find that, where capital is most abundant, and where there is the most intelligence, there you will find the labouring classes the most happy and comfortable. On the other hand, show me an impoverished tenantry, and there I will show you a peasantry in the most hopeless and degraded condition; as in the north of Devonshire, for instance. I have proved that the want of capital is the greatest want among the farmers, and that the want of leases is the cause of the want of capital. You may say, 'You have not connected this with the Corn-laws and the protective [139] system.' I will read to you the opinion of an hon. Gentleman who sits on that (the Opposition) side of the House; it is in a published letter of Mr. Hayter. He said:—

'The more I see of and practise agriculture, the more firmly am I convinced that the whole unemployed labour of the country could, under a better system of husbandry, be advantageously put into operation; and, moreover, that the Corn-laws have been one of the principal causes of the present system of bad farming and consequent pauperism. Nothing short of their entire removal will ever induce the average farmer to rely upon anything else than the Legislature for the payment of his rent, his belief being that all rent is paid by corn, and nothing else than corn; and that the Legislature can, by enacting Corn-laws, create a price which will make his rent easy. The day of their (the Corn-laws) entire abolition ought to be a day of jubilee and rejoicing to every man interested in land.'

I do not stay to collect the causes affecting this matter, and to inquire whether the Corn-law and our protective system have caused the want of leases, or have caused the want of capital. I do not stop to prove this, for this reason:—we have adopted a system of legislation by which we propose to make farming prosperous. I have shown you, after thirty years' trial, what is the condition of the farmers and labourers, and you will not deny any of my

statements. It is, then, enough for me, after thirty years' trial, to ask you to go into Committee, and to inquire if something better cannot be devised. I am going, independently of protection, and independently of the Corn-law, to contend that a free trade in corn will be more advantageous to the farmers, and with the farmers I include the labourers; and I beg the attention of the hon. Member for Gloucestershire (Mr. Charteris) and the landowners. I am going to contend that free trade in corn will be more beneficial to these classes than to any other classes. I should have contended so before the tariff, but now I am prepared to do so with ten times more force.

The right hon. Gentleman opposite (Sir R. Peel) has passed a law to enable fat cattle to be imported, and there have been some foreign fat cattle selling in Smithfield Market at 15*l.* or 16*l.* and 1*l.* duty; but he has not taken off the duty on the raw material. He did not do so with regard to manufactures. Mr. Huskisson had not done so: but, on the contrary, he began by taking off the duty on the raw material, without taking off the duty on foreign manufactures. You (the Ministers) have begun, on this question, at the opposite end. I would admit grain free, which should go to make the fat cattle.

I contend that by this protective system the farmers throughout the country are more injured than any other class of the community. I will begin with clover. The hon. Member for North North-amptonshire (Mr. Stafford O'Brien) put a question to the right hon. Baronet the other night, and looked so alarmed whilst doing so that I wondered what was the matter. He asked the right hon. Baronet 'if he was going to admit clover-seed free?' That is to be excluded; and for whose benefit? I ask that hon. Member or his constituents, are they in the majority of cases sellers of clover-seed? I will undertake to say they are not. How many counties are protected by the sale of clover-seed being secured to them? I will take Scotland; that country imports it from England; it does not grow it. I will undertake to say that not ten counties in the United Kingdom are interested in exporting clover-seed out of their own borders. There is none in Ireland.

Take the article of Egyptian beans. I see the hon. Member for Essex (Sir J. Tyrell) in his seat: in that county they can grow beans and wheat and wheat and beans alternately, and send them to Mark-lane; but how is it with the poor lands of Surrey, and with the poor lands of Wiltshire? Take the country through, and how many counties are exporters of beans to market? You are taxing [140] the whole of the farmers who cannot export beans for the benefit of those few counties that can grow them. And mark, where you can grow beans. It is where the soils are better; it is not in one case in ten that a farmer can grow more than for his own use, or be able to send any to market; and when that is the case, the farmer can have no interest in keeping up the price to prevent importation.

Take oats. How many farmers have oats on the credit side of their books, as an item to rely on for paying their rent? They grow oats for feeding their horses; but it is an exception where they depend on their crop of oats for the payment of rent. Ireland has just been mulcted by the tax on clover-seed. Is it a benefit to the farmers who do not sell oats to place a tax on their import, they having no interest in keeping up the money price of oats?

Take the article hops. We have a protective duty on hops for the protection of particular districts, as Kent, Suffolk, and Surrey; but they in return have to pay for the protection on other articles which they do not produce.

Take cheese. There is not a farmer but makes his own cheese for the consumption of his servants; but how many send it to market? The counties of Chester, Gloucester, Wilts, and part of Derbyshire and Leicester, manufacture this article for sale. Here are four or five counties having an interest in protecting cheese. But you must recollect that those counties are heavily taxed in the articles of oats and beans and corn; for these are the districts where

they most want artificial food for their cattle.

Take the whole of the hilly districts. I hope the hon. Member for Nottinghamshire (Mr. Knight) is present. He lives in Derbyshire, and employs himself in rearing good cattle on the hills; but he is taxed by protection for his oats, or Indian corn, or beans. That hon. Member told me the other day that he would like nothing better than to give up the protection on cattle, if he could only go into the market and purchase his thousand quarters of black oats free from protective duty. Take the hilly districts of Wales, or take the Cheviot hills, or the Grampian hills; they are not benefited by their protection on these articles; they want provender for their cattle in the cheapest way they can get it. The only way in which these parts of the country can improve the breed of their stock, and bring their farms into a decent state of fertility, is to have food cheap.

But I will go further, and say that the farmers on the thin soils—I mean the stock farmers in parts of Hertfordshire—farmers of large capital, arable farmers—are deeply interested in having a free importation of food for their cattle, because they have poor land which does not contain or produce the means for its own fertility; and it is only by bringing in artificial food that they can bring their land into a state to grow good crops. I have been favoured with an estimate made by a very experienced and clever farmer in Wiltshire: it is from Mr. Nathaniel Atherton, of Rington. I will read this to the House; and I think that the statements of such men—men of intelligence and experience—ought to be attended to. Mr. Nathaniel Atherton, Rington, Wilts, estimates,—

'That upon 400 acres of land he could increase his profits to the amount of 280*l.*, paying the same rent as at present, provided there was a free importation of foreign grains of all kinds. He would buy 500 quarters of oats at 15*s.*, or the same amount in beans or peas at 14*s.* or 15*s.* a sack, to be fed on the land or in the yard; by which he would grow additional 160 quarters of wheat and 230 quarters of barley, and gain an increased profit of 300*l.* on his sheep and cattle. His plan embraces the employment of an additional capital of 1000*l.*, and he would pay 150*l.* a-year more for labour.'

I had an opportunity, the other day, of speaking to an intelligent farmer in Hertfordshire—Mr. Lattimore, of Wheathampstead; he stands as high in the Hertfordshire markets as any farmer, as a man of skill, of abundant capital, and of unquestionable intelligence. He told me that he had paid during the last year 230*l.* in enhanced price on the beans and other provender which he had bought for his cattle, in consequence of the restrictions on food of foreign growth, and that this sum amounted to 14*s.* a quarter on all the wheat which he had sold off his farm. With regard to Mr. Atherton and Mr. Lattimore, they are as decided advocates of free trade in grain as I am.

I have before told hon. Gentlemen that I have as wide and extensive an acquaintance with farmers as any Member in this House. In almost every county I can give them the names of first-rate farmers who are as much Free-traders as I am. I told the Secretary of the much-dreaded Anti-Corn-law League to make me out a list of the names of subscribers to the League amongst the farmers. There are upwards of a hundred in England and Scotland, and they comprise the most intelligent men that are to be found in the kingdom. I have been into the Lothians myself—into Haddingtonshire. I went and spent two or three days amongst the farmers there, and I never met with a more intelligent or liberal-minded body of men in the kingdom. They do not want restrictions on corn; they say, 'Let us have a free importation of linseed-cake and corn, and we can bear competition with any corn-growers in the world. But to exclude provender for cattle, and to admit fat cattle duty free, was one of the greatest absurdities in legislation that ever was.' We have heard of absurdities in commerce—of sending coffee from Cuba to the Cape of Good Hope, to bring it back to this country under the law; but in ten years' time people will look back with more amazement at our policy,—

that whilst we are sending ships to Ichaboe for manure, we are excluding oats, and beans, and Indian corn for fattening our cattle, which would give us a thousand times more fertilising manure than this which we now send for.

On the last occasion on which I spoke on this subject in this House I was answered by the right hon. Gentleman the President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Gladstone), and that gentleman talked of the Free-traders throwing poor land out of cultivation, and throwing other land out of tillage into pasture. I hope that the Anti-Corn-law League will not be reproached again with any such designs. My belief is, that the upholders of protection are pursuing the very course to throw land out of cultivation and to make poor land unproductive. Do not let the Free-traders be told again that they desire to draw the labourers from the land that they may reduce the labourers' wages in factories. If you had abundance of capital employed on your farms, and cultivated the soil with the same skill that the manufacturers conduct their business, you would not have population enough to cultivate the land. I had yesterday a letter from Lord Ducie, and he has given the same opinion, that if the land were properly cultivated there would not be sufficient labourers to till it. And yet, whilst that is the fact, you are chasing your population from village to village, and passing a law to compel the support of paupers. You are smuggling the people away and sending them to the antipodes, whereas if your lands were properly cultivated you would be trying to lure them back, as the most valuable part of your possessions. It is by this means only that you can avert very serious disasters in the agricultural districts.

On the last occasion of my addressing this House, a great deal was said about disturbing great interests. It was said that this inquiry could not be gone into, because it would disturb a great interest. I have no desire to undervalue the agricultural interest. I have heard it said that the agricultural classes are the greatest consumers of our goods, and that we had better look after our home trade. Now what sort of consumers of manufactures do you think the agricultural labourers could be with the wages they get? Understand me, I am arguing for a principle which I solemnly believe will raise the wages of the people. I believe there would be no men starving on 7s. a week if there were abundance of capital and skill employed in cultivating the soil. But, I ask, what is this home consumption of manufactures? I have taken some pains to ascertain the amount laid out by agricultural labourers and their families for clothing. It may probably startle hon. Members when I tell them that we have exported more goods to Brazil in one year than has been consumed in a year by the agricultural peasantry and their families. You know, by the last census, that there are 960,000 agricultural labourers in England and Wales, and I can undertake to say, from inquiries I have made, that each of these men does not spend 30s. a year in manufactures for his whole family, if the article of shoes be excepted. I say that, with the exception only of shoes, the agricultural labourers of England and Wales do not spend 1,500,000*l.* per annum in the purchase of manufactured goods, clothing, and bedding. Then, I would ask, what can they pay, on 8s. a week, to the revenue? I am satisfied, and hon. Members may satisfy themselves, from the statistical returns on the table, that agricultural labourers do not pay per head 15s. a year to the revenue; the whole of their contributions to the revenue do not amount to 700,000*l.* a year; and, I ask, when hon. Members opposite have by their present system brought agriculture to its present pass, can they have anything to fear from risking a change, or, at any rate, from risking an inquiry?

On the last occasion that I addressed the House on this subject, I laboured to prove that we have no reason to fear foreign competition if restrictions were removed, and I stated facts to show that. On the present occasion I shall not dwell on that topic; but still, as many people are possessed with the idea, that if the ports were opened corn will be to be had for nothing—and that is one of the favourite fallacies—I may be allowed to offer a few remarks upon the subject. People continue to hold this doctrine, and they argue, 'Now that prices are low, corn

is coming in; but if you had not a duty of 20s. a quarter, is it possible to say what would be the quantity that would come in?' This is said; but I hope it is not dishonestly said; I hope the argument is founded on a confusion between the nominal and the real price of corn. The price of wheat at Dantzic is now a nominal price. In January, 1838, wheat at Dantzic was at a nominal price, there being no one to purchase from England; but in July and August of that year, when a failure of the harvest here was apprehended, the price at Dantzic rose, and by the end of December in the same year the price at Dantzic was double what it had been in January, and wheat there averaged 40s. a quarter for the three years 1839, 1840, 1841. Now, I mention this for the purpose of asking the attention of hon. Members opposite to it, and I entreat them, with this fact before them, not to go down and alarm their tenantry about the danger of foreign competition. They ought to take an opposite course—the course which would enable them to compete with foreigners. Their present course is the worst they could take, if they wish to compete with foreigners.

I was about to allude to a case which referred to the hon. Baronet the Member for Shoreham (Sir C. Burrell), who has lately let in a new light upon agricultural gentlemen. The country was now told that its salvation is to arise from the cultivation of flax. This was stated by the Flax Agricultural Improvement Association, Lord Rendlesham president, of which I have in my hand a report, wherein, after stating that Her Majesty's Ministers were holding out no hopes of legislative assistance to the agricultural body, they then called upon the nation to support them, on the ground that they were going to remedy the grievances under which the agricultural interest laboured. I observe that Mr. Warner, the great founder of this association, was visiting Sussex lately, and at a dinner at which the hon. Baronet (Sir C. Burrell) presided, after the usual loyal toasts, 'Mr. Warner and the cultivation of flax [143] was proposed. Now, when the hon. Baronet did this, probably he was not aware that he was furnishing the most deadly weapon to the lecturers of the Anti-Corn-law League. The country is told that unless they have a high protective duty the farmers cannot get a remunerative price for the wheat they grow. They have a protective duty of 20s. a quarter on wheat, and one quarter of wheat was just worth a hundredweight of flax; yet, although against Polish wheat they have a protection of 20s., the protective duty on a hundredweight of flax is just 1*d.* Now, I did not hear a murmur when the right hon. Baronet proposed to take off that tax of 1*d.* But we are told that the English agriculturist cannot compete with the foreigner, on account of the abundance of labour he has the command of, especially in the case of the serf labour which is employed somewhere up the Baltic. Now, flax comes from up the Baltic, and yet they have no protection upon it. Then it is insisted that we cannot contend against foreign wheat, because it takes so much labour to raise wheat in this country; yet it takes as much labour to raise flax. How, then, are we to contend against foreign flax? Nevertheless, the hon. Baronet undertook to restore prosperity to the country by means of his flax, which was in this helpless state for want of protection.

The hon. Baronet will forgive me—I am sure he will, because he looks as if he will—while I allude again to the subject of leases. The hon. Baronet, on the occasion I have alluded to, complained that it was a great pity the farmers did not grow more flax; but it is curious that I should have since seen it stated in a Brighton paper—the hon. Baronet's county paper—I do not know how truly—that the hon. Baronet's own tenants have leases which forbid them to grow flax. However, it is quite probable the hon. Baronet does not know what covenants there are in his leases; but, be that as it may, at any rate it is very common, I know, to insert in leases a prohibition to cultivate flax. This just shows the manner in which the landlords carry on the agriculture of the country. The original notion of the injury done by flax to the land was derived, I believe, from Virgil, who stated something to the effect that flax was very scourging to the land. I have no doubt it was from this source that some learned lawyer has derived the usual covenant on this subject in leases.

I have alluded to the condition of the agricultural labourers at the present time; but I feel bound to say, that whilst the farmers are in a worse position than they have been for the last ten years, I believe the agricultural labourers have passed the winter, though it was a five-months' winter, and severe, with less suffering from distress than the previous winters. I mention this because it is a remarkable proof of the degree in which a low price of food is beneficial to the labouring classes. I can demonstrate that in the manufacturing districts, whenever food is dear, wages are low; and that whenever food is low, wages rise. That the manufacturers can prove. Then I stated it as my own opinion, that the agricultural labourers are in a better state than they were in previous winters. But does not that show that the agricultural labourers, having only just so much wages as will find them in subsistence, derive benefit from the plenty of the first necessities of life? Their wages do not rise in the same proportion as the price of food rises, but then neither do their wages fall in the same proportion as the price of food falls. Therefore in all cases the agricultural labourers are in a better state when food is low than when it is high.

Now, I am bound to state, that whatever is the condition of the agricultural labourer, I believe the farmer is not responsible for that condition while he is placed as at present. I have heard many exhortations to the farmer that he must employ more labour. I believe the farmer is very unjustly required to do this. The farmer stands between the landlord and the suffering peasantry. It [144] is rather hard in the landlord to point the farmer out as the cause of the want of employment for labour—as the man to be marked. Lord Hardwicke has lately made an address to the labourers of Haddenham, in which he said,—

'Conciliate your employers, and, if they do not perform their duty to you and themselves, address yourselves to the landlords; and I assure you that you will find us ready to urge our own tenants to the proper cultivation of their farms, and, consequently, to the just employment of the labourer.'

That is the whole question. I think the duty rests with the landlords, and that it is the landlords, and not the employers, who are in fault. The landlords have absolute power in the country. There is no doubt about it—they can legislate for the benefit of the labourers or of themselves, as they please. If the results of their legislation have failed to secure due advantages to the labourer, they have no right to call on the farmers to do their duty, and furnish the labourers with the means of support. I lately saw a labourer's certificate at Stowupland, in Suffolk, placed over the chimneypiece in a labourer's cottage. It was this:—

'West Suffolk Agricultural Association, established 1833, for the advancement of agriculture, and the encouragement of industry and skill, and good conduct among labourers and servants in husbandry. President, the Duke of Grafton, Lord Lieutenant of the county.—This is to certify, that a prize of 2*l.* was awarded to William Birch, aged 82, labourer, of the parish of Stowupland, in West Suffolk, September 25, 1840, for having brought up nine children without relief, except when flour was very dear, and for having worked on the same farm twenty-eight years. (Signed) Robert Rushbrooke, Chairman.'

After a severe winter, with little employment to be had, I congratulate the country that we have fewer agricultural labourers in the workhouses, and fewer pining in our streets from want, than in former years; but a bad case at the best is the condition of the agricultural labourer, and you will have to look out, before it is too late, how you are to employ him. The last census shows that you cannot employ your own labourers in the agricultural districts. How, then, are you to employ them? You say, there are too many of them. That is an evil which will press on you more and more every year: what, then, are you to do? Are you, gentry of England, to sit with your arms folded, and propose nothing? I am only here tonight because you have proposed nothing. We all know that the allotment system has been taken up; it is a plaything; it is a failure, and it is well for some of you that you have wiser heads to

lead you than your own, or you would shortly be in precisely the same situation as they are in Ireland; but with this increase to the difficulty of that situation, that they do contrive to maintain the rights of property there with the aid of the English Exchequer and 20,000 bayonets; but bring your own country into the same condition, and where will be your rents?

What, then, do you propose to do? Nothing this year to benefit the great mass of the agricultural population! You admit the farmer's capital is diminished—that he is in a worse state than he was. How to increase the confidence of capitalists in the farmers' power of retrieving themselves? How this is to be done is the question. I cannot believe you are going to make this a political game. It was well said that the last election was an agricultural election; and there are two hundred members sitting behind the right hon. Baronet; that is the proof of it. Don't quarrel with me because I have imperfectly stated my case; I have done my best; I ask what have you done? I tell you this 'protection,' as it is called, has been a failure. It failed when wheat was 80s. a-quarter, and you know what was the condition of the farmer in 1817. It failed when wheat was 60s., and you know what was the condition of the farmer in 1835. And now it has failed again with the last amendments you have made in the law, for you have confessed [145] to what is the condition of the agricultural tenantry. What, then, is the plan you propose? I hope that this question was not made a pretence—a political game—at the last election; that you have not all come up as mere politicians. There are politicians in this House who look with ambition—and probably in their case it is a justifiable ambition—to the high offices of the State; there may be men here who by thirty years' devotion to politics have been pressed into a groove in which it is difficult for them to avoid going forward, and are, may be, maintaining the same course against their convictions. I make allowance for them; but the great body of you came up not as politicians, but as friends of the agricultural interest; and to you I now say, what are you going to do? You lately heard the right hon. Baronet at the head of the Government say, that if he could restore protection, it would not benefit the agricultural interest. Is that your belief? or are you acting on your convictions, or performing your duty in this House, by following the right hon. Baronet into the lobby when he refuses an inquiry and investigation into the condition of the very men who send you up here? With mere politicians, I have no right to hope to succeed; but give me a committee, and I will explode the delusion of agricultural protection; I will produce such a mass of evidence, and call authorities so convincing, that when the blue-book shall be sent out, I am convinced that protection will not live two years.

Protection is a very convenient vehicle for politicians; the cry of 'protection' won the last election; and politicians looked to secure honours, emoluments, places by it; but you, the gentry of England, are not sent up for such objects. Is, then, that old, tattered and torn flag to be kept up for the politicians, or will you come forward and declare that you are ready to inquire into the state of the agricultural interests? I cannot think that the gentlemen of England can be content to be made mere drum-heads, to be sounded by the Prime Minister of England—to be made to emit notes, but to have no articulate sounds of their own. You, gentlemen of England, the high aristocracy of England, your forefathers led my forefathers; you may lead us again if you choose; but though—longer than any other aristocracy—you have kept your power, while the battle-field and the hunting-field were the tests of manly vigour, you have not done as the noblesse of France or the hidalgos of Madrid have done; you have been Englishmen, not wanting in courage on any call. But this is a new age; the age of social advancement, not of feudal sports; you belong to a mercantile age; you cannot have the advantage of commercial rents and retain your feudal privileges too. If you identify yourselves with the spirit of the age, you may yet do well; for I tell you that the people of this country look to their aristocracy with a deep-rooted prejudice—an hereditary prejudice, I may call it—in their favour; but your power was never got, and you will not keep it, by obstructing the spirit of the age in which you live. If you are found obstructing that progressive spirit which is calculated to knit nations more closely together by commercial



intercourse; if you give nothing but opposition to schemes which almost give life and breath to inanimate nature, and which it has been decreed shall go on, then you are no longer a national body.

There is a widely-spread suspicion that you have been tampering with the feelings of your tenantry—you may read it in the organ of your party—this is the time to show the people that such a suspicion is groundless. I ask you to go into this committee—I will give you a majority of county members—you shall have a majority of members of the Central Agricultural Protection Association in the committee; and on these terms I ask you to inquire into the causes of the distress of our agricultural population. I trust that neither of those gentlemen who have given notice of amendments will attempt to interfere with me, for I have embraced the substance of their [146] amendments in my motion. I am ready to give those hon. Gentlemen the widest range they please for their inquiries. I only ask that this subject may be fairly investigated. Whether I establish my principle, or you establish yours, good must result from the inquiry; and I do beg and entreat of the honourable, independent country gentlemen in this House, that they will not refuse, on this occasion, to sanction a fair, full, and impartial inquiry.

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**FREE TRADE. XVI.**  
**LONDON, JUNE 18, 1845.** ↩

I COULD not help thinking, as my friend the chairman (Mr. G. Wilson) was giving you those interesting and somewhat novel statistics, that I am following him at some disadvantage, inasmuch as I fear there is little chance of my being able to communicate anything so new, or even so agreeable, to you as he has done. He has just returned from the north, where he has been making up his accounts; I have just come from a Railway Committee, where I have been on the tread-wheel for the last three weeks—as much a prisoner as though I were in Newgate, and with the disadvantage of being conscious that I am in a place where there is more time wasted than even in that distinguished gaol. Yet even under the roof of St. Stephen's there has been something of late passing of rather a cheering character, and I think I may say, I do bring good news from the House of Commons. It is not such a bad place, after all, especially for agitation. Last year we made a little mistake at the beginning of the session; we laid our heads together, and came to the conclusion that we could employ ourselves better out of doors in visiting some of the counties and rural districts, and agitating a little in the country; this year we have changed our tactics, and we thought that Parliament, after all, was the best place for agitating. You speak with a loud voice when talking on the floor of that House; you are heard all over the world, and, if you have anything to say that hits hard, it is a very long whip, and reaches all over the kingdom.

We determined to confine ourselves during this session to Parliament, and I think the result has shown that it is the best field for our labours. We brought forward a succession of motions. We began with one, in which we challenged our opponents to meet us in Committee and examine the farmers and landowners, to show what benefit the Corn-laws had done them; they refused our proposal,—and I have no doubt the country put the right interpretation upon their motives. Then my friend Mr. Bright, who is an active-minded man, looked about, and thought that, amongst all these burdens upon land, he did not think there was one greater than the game that was eating up its produce. He felt anxious, if possible, to point out to the landowners where they could find a margin in their account-books to turn a penny, and compensate themselves for repealing the Corn-laws by abolishing the Game-laws. And, therefore, he moved for his Committee, and was more lucky than I have been, for he has got it; and I have no doubt that in due time, when the secrets of that prison-house come out at the end of the session, he will be able to show you, from the mouths of the most intelligent farmers in the country, that there is one burden which they consider heavier than all their local taxes, county-rates, highway-rates, and even their poor-rates—and that is the burden of these excessive [148] game preserves. Then we had our friend Mr. Ward's motion, by way of sweeping the ground clear for Mr. Villiers to pass over with his great annual motion. Mr. Ward proposed that they should give a Committee to inquire what was the amount of these special burdens of which we had heard so much, in order that we might compensate them, pay them off, and have done with them. They said they would not have any inquiry made into it.

Now, you who are Londoners know an old trick, called a 'dodge,' which is sometimes practised on the credulous and the philanthropic in your streets. A mendicant is sometimes seen walking about with his arm bandaged up; he has a special burden; it is a grievance, and he makes money by it. But sometimes, if one of the Mendicity Society's officers come and ask him to let him undo the bandage to see what this special damage is, you find these artful dodgers very loth to comply. Now that is the case with our landlords—I mean the protectionist landlords—only the protectionists; they have been going about exciting the

benevolent feelings of the community upon the plea that they are labouring under some serious disadvantage, or great and heavy burden; and when Mr. Ward comes forward and offers to undo the burden to let them go free, and take the bandage away, they are like the impostors in your streets—they take to their heels and run away.

Those were our motions in the House of Commons; that was our place of agitation: but I must admit that we have not done so much for our cause as has been done by our opponents. I must say that I think their motions, resolutions, and amendments have been of much more importance to us than anything we could have done. They had the great and immortal grease debate; and they brought forward their motion for the relief of farmers by repealing their local burdens;—and what do you think one of them was? I heard it with my own ears, or I would not have believed it—that in the maritime counties, where shipwrecks and accidents occur, dead bodies are washed on shore, and they have to hold inquests on them, and the expense is charged to the county-rate. Well, that is an argument of the great landed interest. Then came the annual debate, brought forward by Mr. Villiers with his accustomed talent and earnestness. Now, we heard a rumour in the House,—for these things are always known, because they are concocted at clubs—we always know what the dodge is in the House,—we heard a rumour, before the debate began, that they did not intend to have any discussion on the other side: it was determined they would not talk; and I believe, if my friend Mr. Villiers had not dexterously alluded in the course of his speech—pointedly alluded—to three of their county members in such a way that they were forced to stand up and speak,—I really believe not one of them would have opened his mouth. But, however, there were three or four of them that spoke. The most significant part of what they said was, as an Irishman would say, what they did not say. They did not say a word about the farmers upon this occasion; not a syllable about the farmers being interested in the Corn-laws. But what a change! Three or four years ago, to my knowledge, they talked of nothing else but the farmers; how they would stand by them, and how they came there to protect the interest of the tenant-farmers. I do not know whether it was our challenge to discuss that point in Committee, or whether it was from the fact that we happen to have some of the best and most extensive farmers with us,—for I find myself just now seated between Mr. Houghton on one side and Mr Lattimore on the other,—I do not know whether we may take credit to ourselves, or whether we ought to give the honour to our excellent agricultural friends who have come amongst us; but so it is, that nothing is now said in the House of Commons about the farmers having an interest in the Corn-laws; nothing is said about special burdens, for fear we should ask them to undo the bandage.

[149]

But the most significant part of that discussion was in the declarations of opinion by the leading men on both sides of the House—by Sir Robert Peel and Sir James Graham on one side, and Lord John Russell on the other. I was very curious to know what Sir James Graham would say upon the occasion. He had spoken a few nights before on Lord John Russell's motion, and he then brought out in a most gratuitous manner,—I feel deeply indebted to him for it, though I did not see that it was quite relevant to the occasion,—but he then brought out voluntarily, from official sources, some of the most startling proofs that I have ever met with in my experience, showing the extensive evils, physically and morally, that arise from scarcity of food, and the great blessings that overspread the country when food is abundant and cheap. He showed, by the statistics of pauperism, crime, disease, and mortality, that all the best interests of our nature are identified with an abundance of the first necessities of life. My friend Mr. Villiers followed him, and with that promptitude for which he excels, and in which he has no rival, I would venture to say, in the House, he turned to account every fact that the Home Secretary had dropped, and applied them instantly and with immense force as proof of the truth of the doctrine which he had so long been arguing. And when my friend

brought forward his motion a few nights afterwards, he again pinned the Home Secretary to the inference which naturally followed from the speech of the previous evening. I was curious to hear what Sir James Graham would say: I listened with great anxiety to what he would say to the public when he spoke upon the subject. I thought he must draw back a little, to please those who sat with blank faces behind him; but no: he got up and reiterated all he had said before. He stated that he did not withdraw one word of what he had uttered; that he did not recant one syllable of what he had said; that those were his principles, and he would abide by them.

Sir Robert Peel followed; and though he has been going at rather a quick pace lately—I hear somebody calling out ‘*Punch*,’ well, he is an admirable authority to quote—an excellent commentator, an admirable critic, is *Punch*—he is never wrong, he is infallibly right: *Punch* represented Sir R. Peel as going fast ahead of Lord John Russell on this occasion;—but I must say that, fast as he had been travelling before, he seemed now to have quickened his pace. What a contrast did the speech of Sir Robert Peel present to that which he delivered last year on the same occasion! Then everything was said for the purpose of conciliating the men behind and below him on the same benches; and everything that could be uttered was said to insult the Free-traders: but he had not then had the grease debate, nor had he found out the quality of the men then. He has had a twelvemonths' experience: they have set up for themselves; they have found out their weakness, and, what is more, they have let Sir Robert Peel find it out also; and now he can afford to treat them as he likes. The right hon. Baronet tells them that he intends to carry out the principles of Free Trade gradually and cautiously; but still that they must be carried out.

We had Lord John Russell, and he voted with us. I wish he had done so without any qualification; but, however, as we have got him amongst us, I hope we shall amend him. Lord John Russell proposes a very little fixed duty; but in the same speech in which he propounds this, he tells us he does not approve of a tax on corn: he thinks it is one of the most objectionable taxes that could be raised. Then why does he propose it? He does not intend to keep it; he merely proposes it just to put those people in the wrong who refuse even to put a little tax on corn. I have no doubt next year he will give up that inconsistency, and will be in favour of total repeal.

Well, we came to our vote; and though we had the verdict in our favour, as far as words could convey it, the [150] votes were against us. But that cannot last long. In this country you must be governed by one of two methods; you must be ruled either by moral or physical force. Moral force means governing according to right principles, when those principles are acknowledged to be true. They may govern by a species of moral force when they can manage to persuade men that, while they are governing wrong, they are governing right; but you never can rule by moral force when you yourselves avow that you are carrying on principles which you believe to be unjust and untrue.

I think we ought to feel deeply indebted to such meetings as this, which have stood by this question; which have cheered on public men in its advocacy; which have aided in disseminating the knowledge that has gone forth from this vast building, in which we have brought the public mind on both sides so far to defer to the expression of public opinion as to show that they are bound to acknowledge the justice of our principles.

Now, there is but one universal opinion—that it is a question of time. Three or four years ago everybody used to tell me that it was a species of insanity to think of carrying this principle of total repeal. Now everybody says, ‘There is no doubt you will effect the total repeal; the only question is as to the time.’ We have narrowed the controversy; we have reduced it down to one little word. The whole question hinges upon one monosyllable—‘when?’ I think the *Times* newspaper put out a very fair challenge to the League of the day

before yesterday, in a very beautiful article, in which it said we were called upon to argue this question upon that ground; to show the justice, expediency, and policy of our doctrine of 'immediate repeal.' I have no objection to answer that appeal; and in doing so, if I am matter-of-fact and dull, you must bear with me, and that patiently, because I shall be followed by those who can treat the subject with greater interest. Mark me, it is quite right, if I am to lay the basis of a matter-of-fact argument, that I should come first. I will be the heavy foundation-stone; and here behind me are the Corinthian capital and the gorgeous pedestal—the architectural beauties that are to grow upon this foundation. It is right, too, that we should have this kind of variety; because one of the boasts of the League is this, that we can find audiences such as could only be assembled in ancient Rome to witness the brutal conflicts of men, or that can now be found in Spain to witness the brutish conflicts of animals;—we can assemble multitudes as great to listen to the dry disquisitions of political economy.

That is our boast. Now to our argument. As Sir Robert Peel would say, 'there are three ways of dealing with this question.' Firstly, you may acknowledge the justice of the principles of total repeal, and you may defer it until it suits your party, or until circumstances compel you to abolish the Corn-laws totally and immediately. Secondly, you may abolish it gradually by a vanishing duty, putting an 8s. tax, and sliding off 1s. a year till it comes to nothing; that may be done by an Act of Parliament, and would involve the principle of a total repeal. Or, thirdly, you may adopt our principle of total and immediate repeal. Now, firstly of the first. The policy of our present Government appears to be this:—'We will acknowledge the principle; that will stave off debate. We could not meet them in debate if we did not acknowledge the principle; if we took the same ground as the Members for Essex, Somerset, and Sussex, we should be rolled over and over in the mud in debate by these Leaguers, and be hooted and hissed at the corners of the streets, when we walked out of the House.' Well, they give up the principle of protection. But they say, 'We will not apply our principle of Free Trade; we will tell them, this is not the time; and more, we will not tell them (we will take care of that) what is the time; that shall be as it suits our party.' What would be found in the innermost hearts of these men? or, if you could get to their private conferences when they are behind the [151] scenes, what are they thinking about as to the repeal of the Corn-law? I know it as well as though I were in their hearts. It is this: they are all agreed that this Corn-law cannot be maintained—no, not a rag of it—during a period of scarcity prices, of a famine season, such as we had in 1839, 1840, and 1841. They know it. They are prepared, when such a time comes, to abolish the Corn-laws, and they have made up their minds to it. There is no doubt in the world of it. Is that statesmanlike, think you?

First, for the farmers. They have told them, with all the high authority that belongs to their life and station, that the Corn-laws will be abolished; they tell their tools, the papers, like Grandmamma, to deal out in their diurnal twaddle, the argument that if the Corn-laws are abolished the farmers would be ruined even if they paid no rent. That is the language of Grandmamma of to-day. That is the sort of slip-slop in answer to the admirable article in yesterday's *Times*. How does this work? In the first place, the farmers are told by Sir James Graham and Sir Robert Peel that the Corn-laws must be abolished and Free Trade be established; but it must be done gradually and cautiously. Now, I appeal to my friends Mr. Lattimore and Mr. Houghton, both experienced and able men, whether they could put the farmers in a more disadvantageous position than that in which they are now, under the pretence of benefiting them? They hang them up on the tenter-hooks of suspense. These party newspapers are alarming them with all sorts of raw-head-and-bloody-bone stories of what Free Trade is going to inflict on them; and the Prime Minister is telling them that, notwithstanding all that, he is prepared to carry out Free Trade. Nothing could be worse for the interests of the agriculturists, whether farmers or labourers—for the welfare of any class of capitalists, especially for one having such a vast amount of capital and so large an interest at stake as the farmers—to place them in the position which these pretended friends of theirs

do by their present policy. Now, what is that policy morally? They will not deal with this question now, when they can do it calmly and deliberately: they wait for a period of excitement and clamour. They are calculating on repealing these Corn-laws some day when Palace-yard is crowded with famishing thousands. What is the effect morally of such a proceeding as that? It is to induce the belief among the people of this country, that moral influence has no effect whatever on their legislation. May they not, after such an example as that, appeal to their countrymen upon any future occasion, when a body of men shall be found willing to exert themselves through a period of years, as the League has done, to effect a great and benign change in our laws,—may they not appeal to such an example as that, and say, ‘What is the use of your agitation? or what is the use of your printing, passing resolutions, and sending petitions to Parliament? The League tried that for years; they persevered for seven, eight, or nine years; but when 10,000 people met in the street, called aloud in the voice of menace, and threatened with danger the persons of their legislators, then they yielded, but never dreamt of doing so till then.’

Now, the second plan of doing this work is the passing a fixed duty of 8*s.*, and diminishing it 1*s.* every year. What is the effect of such a change as that on the farmers? They begin with a fixed duty of 8*s.*, or any sum you please. The farmer is told by the land-agent or by the landlord himself, ‘Well, we have passed a duty of 8*s.*, but you know you have only been getting an average protection of 6*s.* or 7*s.* for the last ten years for corn imported; we must try and see what the effect of this will be. We need not talk anything about game-laws, under-draining, sub-soil ploughing, clearing away these hedge-rows, or adjusting rents: wait and see how this law operates.’ The consequence is, nothing is done, but all must wait. The farmer goes on; next rent-day comes; the landlord or his agent says, ‘Well, Farmer Hobbins, I don’t think much harm is done by this change [152] in the Corn-laws: it does not seem to have been of so much good to us, after all. We will wait a year or two; I don’t think there will be much harm.’ And so nothing is done: the farmer goes on, in the mean time, exerting himself to meet the coming danger which is apprehended when duty is low. What is going on abroad in the mean time? Why, the foreigner is told, as soon as that 8*s.* duty comes down to 2*s.* to 3*s.*, then there will be a wide door opened for grain in England. The foreigner is induced to increase the production every year more and more, expecting to find a market, and when the low duty does come, he is prepared to pour into this country corn, swamping the farmer at the end of this seven or eight years, just as he is now swamped in the month of May or June by an inundation of corn under this sliding scale.

Then we come to our principle of total and immediate repeal. In answer to the word ‘when,’ we say ‘now. The landlord says it will create a panic, and, in order that that argument may not wear out, they set their newspaper organs to frighten the farmers and keep the argument alive. Well, but what is there to be feared from this total and immediate repeal? We are told there are vast quantities of corn lying somewhere abroad ready to be poured into this market when we repeal the Corn-laws. I think this argument was dealt with so admirably by the *Times* newspaper, that I will just read an extract from its columns of the day before yesterday:—

‘Count up every quarter of corn in every one of earth’s richest granaries; track all her winding shores, penetrate every creek and every stream; measure every diluvial delta and every sheltered valley, the natural fertility of the plains and the artificial productiveness of the hills; take the sum of all the warehouses, all the heaps, and all the standing crops; and we entertain no doubt whatever that reasonable and candid men will be astonished above measure at the “universal nakedness of the land.” The Baltic and the Euxine, the Gulf of Genoa, the St. Lawrence, the Mississippi, and even the rivers that flow under our feet, are names of terror to some minds, as if they flowed with corn. But rivers of corn are as pure and impossible a fiction as rivers of gold. Once you begin to investigate, to measure, and to count, you find the most formidable accumulations dwindle

into a few months' or a few weeks' sustenance for such living and growing multitudes as London, Manchester, or Glasgow. There is not too much corn on earth, nor will there ever be till the saddest and awfulest words that ever were spoken are finally unsaid, which they never will be in this mortal world.'

Now, there is the profoundest philosophy presented in all the charms of poetic language. But I like to go to experience: I never like to deal in the future, or to argue on what will happen; but let us take the lights of experience to guide us in our paths for the future. We have had occasions in this country, when we have had as sudden a demand for corn all over the world for this country as though we had a total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws. In 1839, 1840, and 1841, during all those three years, the average price of corn in this country was 67*s*. We ransacked the world for corn during those three years; our merchants sent everywhere for it; we swept over the face of the earth, bribing every nation to send their corn to this rich market, and gain this high price for their produce. I will give you a list of places from which we received corn in one year during that period: from Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Prussia, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain, Gibraltar, Italy, Malta, Ionian Islands, Turkey, Egypt, Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, Morocco, Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, East India Company's territory, Australia, Canada, United States, Chili, and Peru. Every region on the face of the globe—Europe, Asia, America, Africa, and even Australia—were ransacked for corn. How much do you think we got in the course of that year,—bribing the nations of the earth with the high price of 67*s*. a quarter? In 1839 we received in wheat and flour together equivalent to 2,875,605 quarters, [153] about one-eighth of the annual consumption of the wheat of this country. In 1840, when we had given them a year's stimulus, the imports were 2,432,765 quarters of corn. In 1841, 2,783,602 quarters. During those three years we imported 8,091,972 quarters, being an average each year of 2,700,000 quarters. Now, mark me, that corn was sent out for by our merchants with a knowledge that the price in this country for corn was nearly 70*s*. a quarter, and was brought here with the belief and under the conviction that every quarter of it would be admitted into this country under a 1*s*. duty. There was, therefore, during those three years virtually a total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws; and you see the result in the supply for this market.

Now, we say, pass an Act for the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws, and you do not put us in the same position that we were in during those years in stimulating other countries to send us corn; for now our corn is 46*s*. a quarter instead of 67*s*., as it was then; and, therefore, if you were not inundated with corn in those dear seasons, where is the corn to come from that is to inundate you now? No; there is no such thing as a store of corn abroad in the world; there is no provision made by people for a contingency that they do not expect to arise. There is no cultivator on the face of the earth that has ever put a plough into the ground, or a yoke upon his horse, with the idea of producing one bushel of wheat in order to meet the demands of this country consequent on the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws. There is no stock abroad, therefore no supply, except that which has been provided for a known and expected market; and if we repealed our Corn-law to-morrow, there is literally not a quarter of wheat provided in order to meet the demands in consequence of such an abolition of our Corn-laws.

But it is our opponents who want to introduce an unnatural and artificial inundation of corn in this market: they, by withholding the time, by promising that it shall come, by telling foreigners abroad that when it does come they can compete with our farmers, though they do not pay a shilling of rent,—or, who say to the foreigners, 'Wait until Sir Robert Peel is pressed on by the cry of distress to repeal the Corn-laws, and then you may supply all England with corn, for our farmers cannot compete with you,'—those are the men who are inviting this inundation of corn; who, not content with circulating fallacies at home, are trying to spread delusion through the Ukraine and in the valley of the Mississippi, over all the face of the habitable globe, and wherever their false and delusive fallacies can reach.

I have argued this question as though there were only farmers concerned in it; I have dealt with it with a view to the interests of the parties supposed to be likely to be injured by it: but are there no other parties to this question? Why do we advocate the removal of this bad law?—because it is destructive to the interests of the great body of the people. This movement has not taken place—this agitation has not had its origin or been sustained by the vast proportion of the intelligent and humane population of this country, because it is an error in political economy—it is opposed because the Corn-law is intended to restrict the supply of the food of this country and to put the nation on short commons. That is why we oppose this Corn-law; and we do so in the name, not merely of farmers and landowners, but of the great body of the people.

If we can show that the law is unjust as respects the interests of the great majority of the people, then, though its total and immediate repeal did involve injury to that class for whose benefit it has been unjustly maintained, it is not an argument that would weigh one instant with me in opposing its total repeal. Who ever said this law was passed for the great body of the people of this country? We have never heard any attempt to show that. We have heard it urged that it was good for the landlords, to compensate them for the peculiar bur [154] dens that I have described just now; but you know we have found out that that was an imposture: we sent the Mendicity Society officer after them. We have heard it maintained that it was for the benefit of the farmer; but farmers are only 250,000 people out of the 27,000,000 inhabitants of these islands; that is their proportion in Great Britain; but who ever heard them argue that it was for the benefit of the great body of the people? They have given up that case, when they say the law ought to be abolished at some time; for I maintain that if this law, which has been in existence for the last thirty years, is not a law for the benefit of the people, they never ought to have passed it; and it is a shame to themselves, and they ought to hide their faces for ever, for having maintained it, if it is not for the benefit of the great body of the people.

I say, if it is not for their benefit—and it never was—why on earth should they come forward and say that it should ever be repealed? And if it is to be repealed at all, I say, let it be repealed immediately, as it is an unjust law. They may set up other interests. I believe Sir R. Peel is frequently talking of a due consideration to the great and important interests that have grown up under this law. I plead for the vastly greater and more important interests that have been crushed to the earth under this law. If they want any proof of this, I bring their own Home Secretary, with his Prison Report and the statistical tables, into the witness-box, to prove what the law has done. Now, then, for the sake of that class—the most numerous of all—for the sake of all the unprivileged classes of this country—I plead for the total and immediate repeal of this Corn-law. I do it upon the ground of expediency, as being better at this moment than any other time in which you could repeal the law. I do it on the ground of justice, because I say, if it is not a good law you have not a right to retain it one instant.

What will be the effect on the great body of the people when the time comes at which we believe Government contemplate the repeal of the Corn-law? They are going to repeal it, as I told you—mark my words—at a season of distress. That distress may come; ay, three weeks of showery weather when the wheat is in bloom or ripening would repeal these Corn-laws. But how? We had a taste of it in 1839, 1840, and 1841. Are the people of this country to be subjected to another ordeal before this Corn-law is repealed? What provision is made against that calamity? For here is probably the most important consideration for us at the present moment. Divine Providence has repealed the Corn-laws for this year by an abundance at home. He has in a great degree repealed the Corn-laws; but He has not given us the benefit we should have if we had an unlimited range over all which He designed for the good of His creatures over this earth's fair surface; but still we have a mitigation by His bounty of the rigours of the landowners' Corn-law.



Suppose another such reverse to take place as we have witnessed in this country within the last six years—such a revolution as the youngest man amongst us has beheld during the period of his life—or supposing it to come this year, what provision is made against such a calamity? I have told you how much corn could be got here in 1839 after our failing harvest of 1838; but there is no such supply available now, as those nations are increasing in numbers along the whole of the maritime districts of Europe. They are wanting more and more of the corn of the interior. The Atlantic States of America are increasing, and consuming more and more of the corn of their interior; and we offer them no inducement to spread themselves out from the cities—to abandon their premature manufactures—in order to delve, dig, and plough for us; and they are more and more in a condition to consume all that they produce.

I heard in the House of Commons, from Mr. Mitchell, a gentleman himself practically acquainted with the subject, who in an admirable speech that riveted [155] the attention—as all practical speeches in that place do, where men will content themselves with speaking only upon what they do understand—I say, in an address which riveted the attention of every one in that House, Mr. Mitchell exposed the bankrupt condition of this country, so far as its future provision of food goes, looking to the whole world as our resource. We have now 300,000 quarters of foreign corn in this country. Where is the supply to come from? Ought we to be called upon to answer that question? No! but it ought to be answered by our Government. That is a question which ought to be thrust upon them. I do not believe they have nerve enough to bear the responsibility that will be cast upon their shoulders, if that argument is pressed upon them.

Then look at the position in which our unprivileged middle classes and capitalists will be placed, as well as the poor, who first suffer from famine, for want of bread. They are not allowed to starve in this country: they have a right to claim relief, and justly so, from those above them; and, if you have a scarcity, it is the middle classes who will have to support the lower and working classes, and at the same time maintain themselves, with a very inferior business to do it with. Look at our capitalists spreading out their wings. Go down to the House of Commons; look into the lobbies; go into one of those groups where I have the misfortune to be at present. There they are contemplating railways all over the length and breadth of the land. What would be the effect of a bad harvest upon those men who have subscribed their thousands and tens of thousands to some new railway scheme, and have signed the parliamentary contract? It is all very fine and plain sailing now when everything is at a premium, everything is up; get shares to-day, sell them to-morrow, pay for them the next day, and get 20 per cent. But these shares will be held by somebody; and if we have a failing harvest, whenever it comes, then the day of reckoning for the holders of these shares and scrips will arrive. I would advise every speculator in railway shares to keep a sharp eye on the barometer. He should take in two papers—a railway paper, and the *Mark-lane Express*; and when he has seen the price of shares, then let him go and observe the price of wheat in Mark-lane. But if a bad harvest comes, and a rise in prices takes place, they are a class that will suffer; and not merely they and their families, but it will entail misery and disasters on every section of the community. Now, these are the points that I want to see urged upon the Government at the present moment. Throw on the Government—as a Government, do not let us be misunderstood—throw on them the whole of the responsibility of this state of things.

That is about the completion of my case at present in favour of the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws. As the lawyers say,—'Gentlemen, that is my case.' But I want to know, if there is nothing to be said in answer to this, why we should not carry the repeal of the Corn-laws, and carry it now? It is merely partisanship. These men cannot make up their minds to admit that they may have been wrong at some former time. What I want to do is this,—to open a door as wide as possible for the conversion—the avowed conversion—of our opponents. I wish we could burn *Hansard*, and all the debates that have ever taken place, in

order to let these statesmen be at liberty to adopt a new course of policy, dictated by their present convictions. But they are afraid of being taunted with having said something different before from what they are ready to say now. We have all said something different before from what we have said now. Have we not all grown wiser? Have we not all learned something by the discussions for seven years? I want to see these men get up in the House of Commons and avow that they have learned something by our discussions in that assembly. I set myself up to teach people years ago; I have been learning more than anybody else every [156] day since; and why should not they make that frank and free admission? If they would make an admission and make a clean breast, and confess that they did not know so much formerly as they do now, they would never be taunted afterwards.

I have only one word to say, before I sit down, upon another subject. I want to see the people of this country feel alive to the ensuing registration. This next registration will, in all probability, decide the fate of the Corn-laws. Most likely we shall have a dissolution next year. I want every man to make that his business as much as he makes his ledger or his counter his business—every man who is convinced that the Corn-law ought to be abolished to feel it his paramount duty to look after his votes and the votes of his neighbours before the next registration. The work begins on the 20th of this month for the counties. This is the time for men to look after their own votes, and to find everybody else they can that have got votes and will support Free Trade. There is another duty: there are a great number of bad votes on the list for counties. Some say we want to disfranchise the people. I do not want to disfranchise any one; but this I do say, that if we are to fight fairly we must fight on equal terms. If we put on false votes, our opponents strike them off: we cannot fight them with our legal votes against their illegal votes, and, therefore, we must strike them off.

I have no hesitation in telling you that there are counties where there are many bad votes. I will be bound to say that in Buckinghamshire, for instance, you will find at the very least 1,000. I have heard competent people give a surmise that there are 2,000 spurious votes on the register in that county. There they are; nobody looks after them; nobody ever thinks of going and objecting to them. Everybody is afraid, because they hear there is some man they call the Duke of Buckingham. Why, if they would only consider these things a little more rationally, they would see that the Duke of Buckingham, as I assure you, is not a more formidable man in the registration court than any of you here. You, who are Leaguers, consider yourselves as united with a body that can protect you morally, legally, and pecuniarily, against 150 dozen Dukes of Buckingham.

Now, there is East Surrey; what a scandal it will be if that county should return two monopolists at its next election! There is not one man in 100 in Southwark and Lambeth that is upon county lists, and yet, if you go down into the agricultural districts, you will find one in 30 or 40. It is one in 30 in the agricultural parts of East Surrey, but only one in 100 in the metropolitan districts. I say it is the duty of every man to get himself on the list, and his neighbours likewise. There are thousands, I believe, qualified to be there who have not thought of it: it will be a scandal to the people on that side of the river if they do not see to this. We will take care of Middlesex; we have it in hand, and will look after it. There are a few more counties which we will give you a good account of in due time. I do not consider any county hopeless.

I will tell you that we have something else in view besides registration: we will apply our organisation to contesting counties as well as registration. Why should not the principle of co-operation that we have exercised so long and so usefully be carried out in the work of contesting counties where there is a chance of winning them? Why not have in each parish in every populous county an earnest man who will devote himself, as far as he can, to bringing persons to vote, and appealing to their patriotism and good feeling to vote, without putting the candidate to one shilling expense? I say we can contest counties, ay, at one per cent. of

the expense of that which it costs our opponents, if we adopt our organisation. How can monopolists contest a county without expense? What motives can they appeal to? Where is their organ [157] isation? It is gone. They are all backbiting each other in their counties. One of their Members is accused of voting with Sir Robert Peel, and another voting against him. When they meet in Committee they are all pulling each other to pieces just like so many village gossips.

Bear in mind that the League has a plan in store, by which we intend to prepare the counties and to contest them; and I entreat from this place every man interested in this question, that he will make it his paramount duty, from this time, for the next two months, to give his attention to the subject of registration. If we do this, we shall totally repeal the Corn-laws yet, before a famine comes. In doing so, you will set a glorious example to all future times of the way in which such questions ought to be carried. I really hardly regret, though it has been attended with very heavy sacrifice, that the agitation has lasted so long. If we had carried the repeal of the Corn-laws by a multitudinous shout in 1839, 1840, and 1841, it would have been something like yielding to brute force and clamour; but now, besides the advantage of repealing the Corn-laws—our agitation will have been attended with many other advantages. We have been teaching the people of this country something more, I hope, than the repeal of the Corn-laws.

We have taught the farmers, I trust, to begin to think for themselves; we have made landlords and farmers think of improving their lands; we have taught the middle classes, I hope, that they have a moral power, if they choose to exercise it, and a power of applying it as great as the monopolists, if they will avail themselves of it; but I hope, in addition, that we shall set an example of truth to the working classes, showing them that these questions can be carried by moral means, and that, if they will accomplish anything for their benefit, then they will adopt precisely the same organisation which we have before done to accomplish our object.

**FREE TRADE. XVII.**  
**MANCHESTER, OCTOBER 28, 1845.** ↩

MANY as have been the meetings which I have had the honour of addressing in Manchester, yet I think I can truly say that none will lay claim to surpass the present in numbers and intelligence; and, if I look around me on the platform, I am led to the conclusion that for weight, influence, and moral power, this constitutes altogether about one of the strongest meetings I have ever known held in this country. As I came along the street just now, I saw such a rushing and struggling to gain access to this meeting, that I could not help asking myself what it was that we were called together for. You have nothing particular to learn, we have nothing particular to communicate in reference to this cause, and yet there seems to be something in our question which naturally and instinctively draws us together.

I think there is some danger of a misapprehension on the part of some as to the particular object which again draws us together to-night in this building. Our business here to-night is to state the position in which our cause stands at the present moment, to draw some consolation from the particular posture in which we are now placed, and to make some allusion to the dilemma in which our opponents, as many suppose, are now placed. We are not met here to-night to exult in the fallen and menacing condition of our unhappy sister island, Ireland, whose inhabitants, in consequence of the failure of the potato crop, and the deficiency of the wheat harvest, seem to have starvation staring them in the face, and famine impending over them. But, ladies and gentlemen, let it be perfectly understood that we do not meet here to exult over the calamity in which a large portion of our countrymen are likely to be placed, or over the scarcity and famine which impend over our unhappy sister island. The objects for which we have laboured for seven years have been abundance and cheapness. 'Plenty' is our motto—'Plenty always and everywhere!' And if there be drought, or scarcity, or famine, here or elsewhere, we, at all events, of all our fellow-countrymen, may fairly claim to stand guiltless of the cause of that famine and distress. We are told that in a country where the great bulk of the population are always upon the verge of famine, where that gaunt spectre now threatens to stalk through the land—that misery, starvation, and even death, may be the portion of millions of our fellow-countrymen in Ireland.

Now, what is the remedy for this? We do not come to talk about the principle which is applicable to all times and seasons; but what, I ask, is the natural and obvious remedy, under existing circumstances, against the gaunt famine that threatens a country like Ireland? You would say, 'Open wide the ports, and admit the bread of the whole world [159] to feed the people.' That is the obvious and natural remedy—that is the remedy which an enlightened despot would at once fly to. Witness Russia, witness Turkey, or witness Germany, Holland, and Belgium; these Governments have not waited, but when their people have been threatened with want, they have at once thrown open their ports, and in some cases stopped exportation, in order to supply their people with abundance of the first necessaries of life. Why has not our Government taken a similar course? Why have they waited to learn Christianity from the Turk, or humanity from the Russian? Is it because our Government is less merciful than that of the Mahometan Sultan? Is it that our boasted constitutional power is less humane than that of the despot of Russia? Or is it that our Prime Minister, who holds the responsible position of Sultan in this country—is it because he is afraid that if he takes the step—the obvious and natural and necessary step—he will not have the support of the country in throwing open the ports of this kingdom to foreign corn? If that be his doubt, we meet here to give him all the support which we can give him. I hesitate not to say, that whatever may be the attempts of the aristocracy to thwart the Minister in taking such a

course, there is popular power enough in the country to support him in that act of humanity. We support him here in this magnificent meeting! What we say, South Lancashire will say whenever he appeals to it. We speak the voice of the West Riding of Yorkshire whenever he chooses; and Middlesex will endorse what we say in this hall.

You have animated the hearts and hopes of this empire; and a Minister having the support of the vast multitude in this country—having their intelligence at his back, which he may have whenever he chooses to draw upon it—I say he is a criminal and a poltroon if he hesitates a whit. He has the power. There is no man, whether he be the Grand Turk, or whether he be a Russian despot—there is no man in the world that has more power than Sir Robert Peel has in this country. His party cannot do without him. Let anybody sit in the House of Commons as we do, opposite to Sir Robert Peel, and watch the proceedings of his party. He comes down to the House night after night. With the exception of his colleague, Sir James Graham, the whole of the side of the House upon which they sit may be called a dreary waste, as far as statesmanship is concerned. Sir James Graham, although I admit he has manifested great administrative talents, has not exactly arrived at that state of personal popularity in this country that he can take Sir Robert Peel's place. Sir Robert Peel is therefore absolute with his party; and, with the power he possesses, he must be content to take the responsibility which attaches to power. I need not tell you that that word 'responsibility' has an ugly and a sinister sound in the ears of the Prime Minister; but let us be understood. By responsibility, we mean moral responsibility:—he is responsible to his country, he will be responsible to history, if he fails, upon this occasion, in taking that step which he is bound to take to save a large portion of the people of this country from famine.

Many people now say, 'Admitting that Sir Robert Peel opens our ports, and foreign corn comes in, that will not settle the question;' and this is a point that I wish particularly to draw the attention of this meeting to, for I see a disposition upon the part of many of my friends to throw up their caps and consider this question as settled. I do not exactly see my way to the settlement of this question yet. I wish I did. I do not think the opening of the ports will settle this question. We had the ports opened in 1826; but they passed the sliding scale in 1828, with all its horrible iniquities. It is not because Ireland wants feeding that we shall necessarily have a repeal of the Corn-laws. Ireland has been in a state of semi-famine for the last thirty years; and in 1822 you had subscriptions in England—every church [160] was thrown open—you had 250,000*l.* raised in England, and sent to Ireland, to save the two provinces of Connaught and Munster from a state of actual famine; but nobody said a word about repealing the Corn-laws then; not the slightest syllable was said about relieving the people of Ireland by admitting foreign corn; and what I wish to impress upon you now is this, that it is not the opening of the ports alone we want, but we want to set our backs against them to prevent them from ever being shut again. Do you not think we may find some arguments nearer home in favour of this principle? (Cries of 'Yes.') I believe many of you are brought here because you have an idea that things are not looking quite so promising as they have been in Lancashire. You are not arrived exactly at that state they are in in Ireland, where they have commissioners sent over just now, learned doctors, to see how much the patient will bear, to see how much it can endure. They have got it upon the rack, and there are learned doctors round it feeling the pulse, to see if the patient will live a little longer, or to see whether it should be taken off the rack. Then the *Standard* newspaper tells us, that even if the patient is taken off the rack, it shall be put on again as soon as it will bear it. Now you are not exactly arrived at that state yet; but what is the price of oatmeal? I believe that what used to be a guinea is now 35*s.*; and I believe, too, that flour has advanced fifty per cent.; that the dozen pounds of flour which used to cost 1*s.* 8*d.* are now selling at 2*s.* 6*d.* Am I right? (Loud cries of 'Yes, yes.') Then you have bread still dearer, because flour makes more than its own weight in bread; and every man who is now spending half-a-crown in bread is just getting one-third less for it than he did this time twelvemonths. Every man will then have one-third

less to spend upon the other things which he uses. We thus come to the old story again—if he has so much more to spend in what he eats, he will have less to spend in what he wears; and if there is more goes to the baker, and through him to the miller, there will be less to go to the draper and to the wholesale dealer. You will then have less work, while you will have more to pay for your food. Then the masters will cry out at their short profits; then there will be no more strikes for higher wages. It is the old thing coming round again, and I believe many of you here have felt it, and that you are come here to see whether you are likely to get rid of the cause. It will not be got rid of, however, by throwing up your caps, because a lord has written a very ambiguous sort of a letter, or because certain honourable gentlemen make speeches, the meaning of which you cannot tell, and indeed they do not appear to comprehend it very clearly themselves. You must not throw up your caps, and fancy you are going to have the Corn-law abolished by any such adventitious aid as that. It will have to be done by your own right arm, if it is done at all.

We have a new class in this country that I think are more deeply interested in this question than they have been yet considered to be. I wonder if we have any people here that have got any interest in railways? (Loud laughter and cheers.) I should think, judging by that response, that almost every lady and gentleman here has a little sympathy in that direction. Now the railway people have got—a king! Kings sometimes make speeches, though we never expect much from kings' speeches. Cobbett once wrote a grammar for the purpose of teaching statesmen how to write better kings' speeches; but I do not think that your railway-king has studied that grammar. You have a 'king,' and he has lately been railing at the League at Sunderland. He is given to *railing*, and he calls the League a 'selfish' body; he denounces us. I think railway kings and their subjects are more deeply interested just now in the success of the League than any other class of the community. Did you ever take a look at the trains starting from the Leeds or Sheffield station, or out by [161] Ashton? You who have got shares in railways, just go and take stock of your business: see who your customers are: inquire from the secretary or one of the directors how much they receive for first-class passengers, how much for second-class, and how much for third-class, and then you will be able to understand how much you are indebted to the working classes for the prosperity of your lines. Learn where the cheap trains go, how much they carry, and how much they pay; and then just make a little calculation. Here is John Tomkins, his wife, and seven children; they earn together a guinea a-week: his wife comes and says, 'John, I'm paying 3s. 2d. more for flour than I did three months ago.' 'Then,' says John, 'we must give up the trip to Alderley—we shall not be able to take that.' Go and tell your 'king' this. They sometimes call him the railway Bonaparte. Recollect that a man may be a Napoleon among navigators, and only a navigator among statesmen! I am not happy at nick-names, but I will give him a title. He shall be one of those pasteboard potentates that shuffle and cut, and win tricks—call him 'the King of Spades!'

I do not know how it is, but there is nobody who attacks the League, but you may be almost certain, whatever fame or reputation he had before—you may take it for granted, I say, that that man is at the end of his tether, he is just at the brink of the precipice, and that all his public fame and character goes overboard. We were attacked by an exchancellor once, and what a figure he has been cutting in *Punch* ever since! Then we have had Ministers attacking us, Prime Ministers too, who said we should be mad if we persevered for Free Trade. What is become of them? And, mark my words, the railway 'king' will turn out only a 'pretender.' Depend upon it people will soon avoid running their heads against that stone wall called the Anti-Corn-law League. I wonder if there is any man who has laid out his money upon railways that has not bought a county qualification. I cannot imagine a man showing less calculation or sound foresight than the man who lays out his 50*l.* or 100*l.* in buying a couple of shares in a railway, rather than upon a freehold qualification. It is the 40*s.* qualification that can make railways profitable, by giving us Free Trade. I like these railways

too, and I will tell you why. They are carrying common sense, that is, when the railway-king does not travel upon them, into the agricultural districts. The great proprietor and squire in the west and south of England have all been anxious to have railways. For many years they have wanted railways to their own houses, and they found out that, if they are to have them, they must come to Lancashire or Yorkshire, for there was nobody else that had either the money or the wit to make them. That makes them sympathise with the prosperity of Lancashire and Yorkshire; they come into contact with business men, and they understand men of business. They are beginning to feel that railways are the barometer of the state of trade, as you all will find it out by-and-bye. I like railways; they are drawing us more together; they are teaching the landowner to feel for the manufacturer, and placing the manufacturer upon better terms with the landowner. I wish them to go on; but they cannot prosper unless you have something to carry upon them. The more trade you have—the more Free Trade—the more profits will your railways bring. Nobody objects to railways now; but how was it twelve years ago with the landlords in this respect? Twelve years ago, the Marquis of Chandos then, but Duke of Buckingham now, presided at a public meeting at Salthill, near Windsor, at which the fellows of Eton College and other great and distinguished men of the county assembled, to celebrate the first defeat of the Great Western Railway bill. What do these gentlemen say now? Why, even the Pope himself is now in advance on these subjects, and they are only some ten years in advance of the Pope. Is it not just as possible that they may [162] be as much mistaken about their true interests in the matter of Free Trade as they were in the case of railroads? This is encouraging. Indeed, we are only now about three or four years in advance of the monopolists with our arguments.

About three or four years ago we put out placards, stating that the population of this country was increasing at the rate of a thousand a day. I was passing by when I heard a man with a shovel in his hand reading it upon the wall. 'That's a lie, anyhow!' he said. But that incredible fact at that time has been so well established, that now even Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham admit it is true, and are compelled to acknowledge that it is necessary to make provision for the large and increasing population. This also is encouraging; it shows that the principle we contend for is good, and that we need only continue the efforts hitherto used to set ourselves free. It begins to be seen now on all hands, that the present Corn-law cannot stand; but it seems to be very doubtful, at present, what we shall get instead of it. Are we to have another Corn-law? Are we to have a sliding-scale or a fixed duty? Only think of the number of Corn-laws we have had during the last few years! The present has been in operation three years, and now we are talking of getting rid of it. Why is it so? Because just now there is a probability of scarcity; we want food, and this law, which Sir John Tyrell tells us is to give us 'plenty, and security for plenty,' stands in the way of our obtaining it. It is a law at once unnatural, impolitic, and inexpedient, and meant only to suit the pockets of those who believe themselves interested in its continuance. There will be attempts made to cheat us out of the demand we make, and there is every probability that those attempts will succeed, unless we, as Free-traders, stand fast to the principle we have espoused, by showing to our opponents that we are neither to be used nor abused by the acceptance of either a sliding scale or a fixed duty. I think we have made out a sufficient case, and by that we must stand, without any attempt at compromise.

We do not ask to be benefited at the expense of any other portion of the community; I have all along repudiated that idea; but I think we have fully demonstrated that monopoly is the bane of agriculture; and Peel says ditto to it. And we shall continue to labour and to urge this cause, whether the ports be immediately opened or not, until not the slightest ground is left to the monopolists, or until every rag and vestige of the protective system is done away with. We have told them in the House of Commons that the farmers are robbing one another, and that position was not controverted, but must be acquiesced in, by all who are in any way acquainted with the subject. But since the close of Parliament I have had an opportunity of

consulting with many of this class of men, and have obtained a variety of statistics and details on the subject, which go to show that the farmer, instead of being a gainer, is a most material loser by this so-called system of protection. It has been proved to me, that the better off the farmer is, the more he suffers by protection. The large stock farmers, as they are called, are more seriously injured than any other part of the community. They are consumers of Indian corn, oats, beans, cheese, butter, beer, and of all other taxed articles, and they are made to pay artificial prices for all these articles for protection. We have now had thirty years of protection, and during the whole of this time the farmer has been the dupe of every blockhead who gave the cry of 'protection!' But it is not enough that we demonstrate the iniquity and impolicy of these laws, and the injury they inflict upon all classes of the community. We may make this clear and unanswerable by the most direct and logical of processes. There shall not be found a man in the House of Commons, with any pretension to intellect, who shall dare to controvert it.

Yet you cannot carry the abolition of [163] this system unless you are active and energetic in putting yourselves in a position to have the power of carrying out your principles. Talking will not do it. I admit we can show our enemies are wrong; but still you cannot make men do right unless you have the power to compel men to it. I believe that power is in your hands. We have done something already by resorting to the constitutional weapons of war which have been already referred to, the 40s. freeholders. We called upon the West Riding Free-traders this time twelve months, and we asked them to qualify 2,000 voters, to rescue that county from the grasp of monopoly; they have nobly responded to that call. They have put 2,300 upon the register. They have converted the majority that formerly existed in favour of monopoly of 1,100, into a majority of 1,600 for Free Trade. Now I ask them not to rest satisfied there. I ask them to go on again, and by the same process qualify 2,000 more by the 31st of next January; for if they do that, they will save themselves much trouble and expense at the next election. An election must come in twelve months, or a little more. A contest for the West Riding of Yorkshire will cost each party 10,000*l.*, and by the expenditure of 1,000*l.* between now and the 31st of January, our friends may induce as many more to buy freeholds as will render a contest hopeless, and thus save themselves the expense. I ask them to put themselves in the same position as South Lancashire. We have a majority of 3,000 in South Lancashire. Mark the extraordinary change that we have witnessed. In 1841, at the dissolution of the Liberal Government, the Whig committee of that time took the registration books in hand, and looked at them with the view of contesting the county. They found, if they had contested it, they would have been in a minority of 2,000. Four years have elapsed; the League took the registrations in hand. South Lancashire was wholly abandoned by the so-called Whig party. The League took the registration in hand, and in four years the minority of 2,000 has been converted into a majority of 3,000. You will have no contest in South Lancashire. Nobody will be such a fool upon the side of the monopolists as to incur the expense of a contest in South Lancashire. We have a majority in the Manchester polling district alone large enough to cover the monopolist majority in all the districts where they have one. We made an appeal to North Cheshire. We asked them to qualify, to put themselves into a majority; and they have done so. You will hear the particulars when the time comes. But I ask them now not to rest satisfied where they are. I am jealous of North Cheshire. I want to see the county (for a borough in which I have the honour to sit), so safe in three months' time, that Mr Egerton will not think of coming to contest it. This is easily done. North Lancashire—ay, we shall make an example of the monopolists in North Lancashire. There is some pluck in North Cheshire; but they are a poor, beaten, coward, craven set in North Lancashire. They have no heads. Make light work of them in North Lancashire. Why, they have turned Lord Stanley and family to the right-about, and set up their own little champion; but I think they will have to go and seek the Derby family to come and help them out of the scrape, for they seem sadly in want of a leader. Middlesex we have won; South Lancashire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, North Cheshire, South



Staffordshire, North Lancashire. This is nothing but a basis. This is only the basis of our operations to begin with. Having done what we can down here, we must now appeal to the country at large to follow our example.

Wherever there is a man above the rank of an unskilled labourer, whether a shopkeeper, a man of the middle class, or of the skilled working class, that has not got a county vote, or is not striving to accumulate enough to get one, let us point the finger of scorn at him; he is not fit to be a freeman. It is an avenue by which we may reach the recesses of power, and possess ourselves of any constitutional [164] rights which we are entitled to possess. They cry shame upon us for inviting the people to qualify. Why, the revising barristers everywhere have not only passed the qualifications that have been made, and have not only admitted them to be strictly legal and right, but they have gone out of their way, and said that they considered it honourable for men to purchase property with the view of acquiring the franchise. For myself and friends, I may say that we consider it our duty to enlist as many of the counties as possible in the cause of Free Trade; we have a list of twenty, and we intend to visit every one of them. We will have them organised on the plan that has been so successful in South Lancashire, under the superintendence of our excellent chairman. I mention this to account to our friends for the neglect of many visits we may have been expected to pay in various quarters. They must allow us to proceed with this registration business; for assuredly it is of the utmost importance. There is nothing that will so much alarm the monopolists as to be told that the League has got hold of the counties. What are their pocket boroughs in comparison with South Lancashire, Middlesex, and the West Riding of Yorkshire? With these constituencies to back them, the principles of Free Trade would be found more powerful than all the boroughmongers.

Don't let any friend of the cause, however, entertain the vain hope that a letter from any noble lord will secure the full triumph of the Free Trade cause. This principle for which we have been so long contending will prove successful when the Free-traders are prepared to work out their own redemption, and not before. We have everything to encourage us, however; and I for one believe that the day of our redemption draweth nigh. But we must not relax in our labours; on the contrary, we must be more zealous, more energetic, more laborious than we have ever yet been. When the enemy is wavering, then is the time to press upon him. I call, then, upon all who have any sympathy in our cause, who have any promptings of humanity, or who feel any interest in the well-being of their fellowmen, all who have apprehensions of scarcity or starvation, to come forward with their efforts to avert this horrible destiny, this dreadful and impending visitation.

**FREE TRADE. XVIII.**  
**BIRMINGHAM, NOVEMBER 13, 1845.**

[The first indications of the potato disease of 1845, were noticed in the month of August. On Oct. 13, Sir Robert Peel, in a letter to Sir James Graham, said that there was no effectual remedy to impending scarcity, except the removal of 'impediments to import.' On the 31st, a meeting in Dublin, presided over by the Duke of Leinster, memorialised the Lord Lieutenant, to the effect that the Government should, without hesitation or delay, take the most prompt measures for the relief of the Irish people. On Nov. 1, Sir Robert Peel declared that it was impossible 'to maintain the existing restrictions on the free importation of grain.' The majority of the Cabinet were opposed to this step. In consequence, Sir Robert Peel resigned office on Dec. 5, and Lord John Russell was instructed to form a Government. On Dec. 20, Lord John Russell announced that he was unable to form a Government, and Sir Robert Peel resumed office. Lord Stanley (the late Lord Derby) declined to take part in this new Government, the basis of which, though not yet declared, was the gradual abolition of the Corn-laws. Parliament opened on Jan. 22, and on Jan. 27, Sir Robert Peel proposed his plan of a total repeal at the end of three years.]

I FEEL deeply indebted to you for the kind manner in which you have received the announcement of my name, and I may add that I am truly encouraged and gratified by the aspect of the meeting, and the numbers which have assembled here this evening. The greatest gratification next to that which I received from the manner in which the electors of Wolverhampton returned my friend, Mr. Villiers, to Parliament, is that such a tribute has been paid to him by the men of Birmingham on this occasion, because it will put into his hands additional weapons in the House of Commons, which I am sure he will use right manfully for the common benefit of us all. I did not come here for the purpose of making an argumentative speech on the subject of commercial freedom, for all now are made aware, from experience of the results, how injuriously the restriction of commercial freedom acts, and the poorest and least informed can see that those consequences which were predicted from the existing system are approaching. We are now near a state of famine, and this, as my friend, Mr. Villiers, has already stated, is one of the results which were frequently predicted as to be expected from the law which prevented the importation of corn. It was a prediction which had been made by every enlightened speaker and writer on the subject, from the time of Lord Grenville's protest in the House of Lords, in 1815, down to the last pamphlet which had been written in relation to the question. We have to expect, from time to time, amidst occasional gleams of happiness and prosperity, such seasons of gloom as that which we now witness in consequence of the operations of the Corn-law, for that is its necessary result. A consequence, which has been well described [166] by my friend, Col. Thompson that veteran champion of Free Trade, in one of those graphic comparisons for which he is so remarkable, when he said the country, under the influence of the law, was like a bird fastened with a spiral spring—it might wing its way aloft for a short time, but only to be again inevitably drawn back to where it ascended from.

What, then, is to be done? It seems that we have been deluding ourselves, when we thought that the Government was going to do something. We, it seems, have not a Government such as several continental nations enjoy. Are you not exceedingly gratified that you are not deemed worthy of as good treatment at the hands of your Government as the Russians, Turks, and Dutch receive from theirs? When these Governments find that there is likely to be a scarcity, they do that which common sense would dictate to any one; which any community out of Bedlam would do at once, if left to their own unbiassed judgment. Seeing

that there was a prospect of an insufficient supply of food at home, they opened wide their ports to admit the needed supply from any part of the world from which it might come. This was precisely what we expected from our rational Government. What have thirteen noblemen and gentlemen been lately meeting in Cabinet Council to discuss? I wish I had the names of the thirteen notables, for they would be historic curiosities to be handed down to posterity. What have they been deliberating upon? Was it whether they, from their own rents and revenues, should make a large purchase of grain or potatoes abroad, in order to supply the wants of the people at home? Was it whether they should vote a subsidy out of the public taxes, with which to buy food for a starving people? It was none of these. The difficulty upon which they solemnly deliberated was this—whether they should allow the people of this country to feed themselves?—and it seems they have decided that they shall not. Rumours reach you—we cannot tell you how well founded—that there is in the Cabinet a division on this matter. You are told that Sir Robert Peel and Sir James Graham have ranged themselves on the one side, and the Duke of Wellington and Lord Stanley on the other—that they are thus at variance with one another on this question, and that the Duke and his party have decided that you, the people of England, shall not be allowed to feed yourselves. Now this is the question on which we are at issue with these mighty personages. If I mistake not, you have tried the metal of the noble warrior before in Birmingham. He is a man whom we all like to honour, as possessing those qualities which entitle men to our esteem wherever possessed—high courage, firmness of resolve, and indomitable perseverance. But let me remind the noble Duke, that, notwithstanding his victories on the field, he never yet entered into a contest with Englishmen in which he was not beaten. I say we *shall* feed ourselves. And, now that this battle must and shall be fought, I hope the veteran Duke will live long enough to test the quality of his countrymen again.

But, after all, it is not the Duke who is the Government—it is Sir Robert Peel. We hear in the House of Commons, in the palmy days of prosperity, when Peel brings forward his measures, and dictates to his servile colleagues what his policy shall be, the little word ‘I,’ repeated over and over again, reminding us that ‘I, as Premier, act upon my own responsibility’—that ‘I’ do this, and ‘I’ do that. If he is the Prime Minister, we hold him responsible for his acts. Now, I see many attempts made to shirk that responsibility, and sometimes in a very shabby manner, by trying to make it appear that we who cry out against this responsibility mean to do him some personal violence. Was ever such a schoolboy trick as that resorted to by a man in his situation? He is fairly ashamed of it now, as are all who sit behind him, and who faithfully supported him in it. But we find the news [167] papers still dealing with this hypocritical and absurd argument. Why, for my own part, I would not touch a hair of his head, were he ever so much in my power. But what is the meaning of this responsibility on the part of a Minister? The Queen, with us, is not responsible. If we were governed by a Czar, or by a Grand Turk, we would then hold the sovereign responsible. In a system of constitutional government like ours, however, it is the Minister alone who is responsible. None but the Queen can issue an Order in Council for the opening of the ports, and the Queen would have done this long ago, but that she has to wait until Sir Robert Peel chooses to inform her that the Cabinet have consented to her doing so. We, then, as loyal subjects, are only pursuing a constitutional course when we bring him to the bar of public opinion, and declare him responsible for the acts of the Government.

We are told, to be sure, by those who still put forth their daily nonsense in defence of monopoly, that to admit foreign corn is not to hit the right way, by which the present difficulties can be surmounted. Instead of enlarging the supply of food, we are told that certain great public works are to be undertaken. Railroads are to be constructed and lands to be drained in Ireland, and the fisheries are to be promoted, and all these devices are to be carried through by the instrumentality of the public purse. Anything will be done but the right thing. That reminds me of the old story of the man who had a horse, which was in the last

stage of decline, for want of sufficient nourishment, and who told his friend that the horse would not thrive, although he had given him old shoes, chips, and even oyster-shells. His friend replied to him, 'Suppose you try corn.' Now we say to those gentlemen who want to feed the people with pickaxes, shovels, fishing-nets, and draining-tiles, 'Suppose you try a little corn.' You, who do not sit in the House of Commons, would be astonished how reluctantly we bring our opponents' noses to the corn-crib. Now, mark me. Be prepared in the present emergency, and constantly on your guard. There will be an effort made to extract some enormous jobbery out of the anticipated famine. The landlords in Ireland have not cultivated their lands, their bogs, and wastes, as they should have done; and now they will get the Government to do it for them out of the public taxes of all which, of course, they will reap the benefit. Now, be on your guard. I have no objection, after everything else which should first be resorted to has been done—after the ports have been thrown open, without let or hindrance—if charity is to be administered to the Irish people, that it should rather be bestowed in the shape of payment of wages than as eleemosynary grants.

I read in the papers of to-day the speech of the King of Belgium to the Chambers in that country, in which he congratulated them that they have opened the ports for the admission of foreign corn, and that being done, they are enabled, by a vote of public money, to execute certain public works, to make up for the deficiency in employment, and thereby supply the people with food. In Belgium, you see, they do not expect to feed their people with mere pickaxes and shovels. They first let in the needed supply of foreign corn, and then, by supplying funds for the execution of public works, provide the people with the means of feeding themselves without resorting to charity. Was ever a people so insulted as are the English people by the arguments of the monopolists? What is our present dilemma? It is neither more nor less than the want of food. Now what do people work for? Not for work itself, certainly, but for the food which they are enabled to procure by it. The monopolist writers think, or so pretend, that it is work that is wanted at present. Now work is never wanted but as a means of getting something out of it. We have the highest authority—that of sacred writ itself—for considering work a curse, but a [168] curse which is mercifully sweetened by the rewards of labour. But where are the rewards to come from if there is an insufficient supply of food to meet the wants of the people? The Irish are about to suffer from a famine. It will not confine its effects to those who can work upon railroads, but will also, in all probability, affect every man, woman, and child scattered over the face of that country, and, with the exception of the wealthy portion of the population, the mass of the inhabitants of towns. Those able to work, and those not able, will equally suffer. Are these the people into whose hands, with your supply of food manifestly deficient, you can put pickaxes and shovels, and expect them to work, without holding out to them the prospect of receiving the ample and legitimate reward of labour?

What happened in the spring of 1822, I am afraid, is very likely to happen again. Mark my words, and I speak them in sorrow, that next spring will develop the calamitous result of our present suicidal policy. It was only in the spring after the harvest of 1821 that the evil to which I have just alluded was felt. In the spring of 1822, when the country people had eaten up the potatoes which were left them, they flocked in crowds to the towns for subsistence; for it is in towns that you find ample supplies of food generally accumulated, and in the towns the starving masses had to be fed from the charity of their fellow-countrymen. Depend upon it you will have to feed large masses of the people of Ireland in a like manner out of a public fund before midsummer. But where is the subsistence to come from which you are to administer to them? It is not in this country, and must be procured elsewhere. But does it not behove the Minister of the Crown to see, in the present emergency, that not a moment is lost in accumulating in this country such a stock of food as may not be procurable next spring, when famine presses heavily upon us, for less than double the price which some time ago we would have been called upon to pay for it? Mark how our present rulers are tampering with

the existing alarming condition of the country. You behold the organs of the Government giving vent to statements, the object of which is to induce us to believe that the evil does not exist to the extent which has been assigned to it. Is there, then, a deep-laid conspiracy on the part of any one to lead us falsely into the anticipation of evils which there is no real ground to apprehend? That cannot be. Have we not seen that solemn masses have been offered up in Roman Catholic chapels, beseeching the Disposer of all Events that He would graciously avert the impending calamity? Did we not see in yesterday's paper that the primate and bishops of Ireland had ordered prayers to be offered up, to arrest, if possible, the progress of the threatened evil? Have we not had boards of guardians, on more occasions than one, memorialising Government to do what they could to moderate the severity of the apprehended famine? If all this be so, can it, then, be possible that any person or persons have entered into a wide and diabolical conspiracy, for the purpose of trifling with the most sacred feelings of humanity, or is the statement of the evil a lamentable and incontrovertible fact? That statement is unfortunately but too melancholy a truth, and yet the Government is tampering with this most critical juncture of our national welfare, and leads us to infer that it is prepared to do nothing.

Well, then, as Mr. Villiers and Earl Ducie have well advised you, it is high time for the people to speak out. There have been scarcely any demonstrations as yet in the country in favour of the immediate opening of the ports. And why? Because every one expected that every successive mail from London would carry to him the welcome decision of the Cabinet that the ports had been already opened. People did not choose to waste their strength and their energies in preparing for a demonstration, which was to take place at the end [169] of a week's time, in favour of an object which they thought would be accomplished every twenty-four hours. It now behoves the people of every town to meet, as the people of Manchester are going to meet, and throw upon the Government the whole responsibility of the present state of things, and call upon them immediately to open the ports; and, when once opened, they will never be shut again. That is the true reason why the ports have not already been opened. If there had been no Anti-Corn-law League, they would have been opened a month ago. It is because they know well in the Cabinet, and because the landlords also well know, that the question of total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws is at stake, that they will risk, like desperate gamblers, all that may befall us during the next six months, rather than part with that law.

Well, if they won't open the ports, somebody must make them. You will be the laughing-stock of all Christendom if you do not make them: only think of the Dutchman—think of Mynheer whilst smoking his pipe, and seeing the ships coming in from America laden with corn for him. How he will laugh at your stupidity when he sees Englishmen starving, while Dutchmen are well fed! We are not sunk quite so low as that yet. But for Sir Robert Peel, what a critical moment in his fortune has now past! I say past, for let him do the act at the end of this month, which he ought to have done ten days ago, still he will not be the same man that he would have been had he done it then. There is not even a child in statesmanship that could not have then told Sir Robert Peel, 'Now is the critical period of your political fortune—this is the tide of your political life; if you take it at its flood, you go on to such a fortune as no statesman ever attained in this country before; but if you miss it—if you allow the flood to pass by you—you will prove to the world that you have been all your life a pretender, and a mere hoax on the credulity of your countrymen.'

We have all been thinking for some time past that Peel was the man—not the coming man—but the come man. Everybody began to say, 'Peel is the man for a practical statesman, to govern a practical people;' and I have no hesitation in saying, that if Sir Robert Peel had taken the course I have suggested, of boldly bearding the Iron Duke, and at once dismissing him and his tail from the Cabinet, I have no hesitation in saying, so far as Lancashire and

Yorkshire are concerned, he would have rallied around him the whole of the mighty population of those counties as one man in his support. We should have buried Whig or Tory from the moment we found Sir Robert Peel had abolished the Corn-laws. There would have been a union of all men and all classes in those districts in support of the man who had the courage and the honesty to put an end to this atrocious and long-continued injustice. But he has not done it, and I venture to prophesy that he won't do it. Somebody else will have to do it, and we are not yet so badly off in England but that we may find somebody willing and able to do the will of the country whenever it is unmistakably expressed. We are told that it would be useless to pass a law to admit foreign corn, for there is none to come in. Then what has the Cabinet been deliberating about so long? If there was no corn to come in, why did the Government hold four or five Cabinet Councils to decide whether it should come in or not? Some of the protectionists tell us, that even if our supply is deficient, the remedy is not to look to foreign countries, but to our native produce. But that is not the rule they follow in anything else but corn. I heard not long ago Mr. Gladstone expound most eloquently the great importance of permitting the free admission of foreign lard, flax, hides, and many other things, as being necessary as the raw materials for our manufactures. Though flax is grown in England, though we produce hides, and make lard, these are admitted from [170] abroad; but with regard to corn, the argument is, that we are not to look to foreign countries for an increased or supplementary supply of that article. And so it is. It is the corn question upon which the mighty struggle will be, after all. And I will whisper in your ear the reason why;—corn is the article upon which rents are fixed, and by which tithes are regulated. Do not deceive yourselves, and suppose you will get a free admission of foreign corn—that is, wheat—except after a considerable struggle. They do not mind so much about Indian corn. Lord Sandon the other day wrote from Liverpool, that he has no objection to Indian corn coming in. And why? It does not regulate tithes, or operate on fixed rents in this country.

My noble friend, Lord Ducie, was quite right when he said that the land-owner might do as well without Corn-laws as with them, and the farmer and farm-labourer much better. But, unfortunately, everybody in the same position is not up to the light of my noble friend. The squire and land-owner in general think differently from my noble friend, and they actually hiss him at their agricultural meetings. I tell this as a specimen of their intelligence. But they only act according to their own convictions and their own ignorant prejudice. And here let me remind you, that this country is governed by the ignorance of the country. And I do not say this without proof; for amongst those Members of the majority of the House of Commons who uphold the Corn-law protective principle, there is not a man of anything like average intellect who dares to speak in their favour. You cannot appeal to a single statesman that deserves a moment's regard as such, who has uttered anything like an authoritative dictum in their favour. There is no single writer of eminence who has not repudiated the doctrines of the monopolists. They are condemned alike by all the intelligence of this and of past ages, and yet they rule this country at this time with more tyranny than even the Grand Turk himself governs with. These people, though possessing no intelligence themselves, yet find people to do their work for them. They will find Sir Robert Peel to do it, and that against his own conscientious convictions; for there can be no doubt that Sir R. Peel is at heart as good a Free-trader as I am myself. He has told us so in the House of Commons again and again; nor do I doubt that Sir R. Peel has in his inmost heart the desire to be the man who shall carry out the principles of Free Trade in this country. But he has been tampering with the question in order to adapt his policy to the ignorance of his party, and we see the state into which the country has been brought the while.

We have, however, one consolation—we have run the fox to earth at last, and know he cannot double on us again. The question cannot be dealt with in another session, as it has been when the country has been blessed with her abundant crops, and when trade was good, and the people all employed. If you had seen the jaunty airs Sir Robert Peel gave himself

when we talked of Free Trade in past sessions, you would have been amused, if not astonished. But that is all at an end now, and next session we shall have him fairly pinned, and he knows it too. And I can tell you, that if there is one man who will go up to Parliament next session with a heavier heart than another, that man is Sir Robert Peel. It is my belief, that if in the mean time he does not take the step of throwing open the ports, he will not dare to face us at all next session. Of this I am quite sure, that if the leading Members of the Opposition, in another session, take the position they ought to take—in the van of the people; and, having the people at their back, stand boldly forth as the advocates of those sound principles we are met here to support, and will show themselves ready and determined to apply them as fairly, as effectually, and as permanently as my honourable friend, Mr. Villiers, would, and Sir Robert Peel takes his [171] place in Parliament without first opening the ports, I undertake to say that they will shake him out of office in a week.

But I do not like altogether the idea of giving Peel up. He is a Lancashire man—and in my part of the country we are proud of Lancashire men. We used to think that Sir Robert cast a sheep's eye on the tall chimneys, and that he had something of a lingering kindness for Lancashire; and I can tell him it would have been a proud day for the Lancashire men, when they saw a Lancashire man, and the son of a Lancashire manufacturer, stand forward to rescue the commerce of the country from the shackles of that feudal and senseless oppression it has so long laboured under. I must not forget that I am charged with a message from Lancashire to you. You have already heard what we have done by our twelve months' labour at the registration. We have secured that county for the Free-traders; and you have also heard what we have done in the neighbouring northern counties with their constituencies of 70,000 or 80,000—constituencies greater than those of all the counties south of Middlesex put together. We sent Mr. Hickin to Staffordshire to attend the last revision—he followed the barrister to every court; and the result is, we have gained between 1,000 and 2,000 votes. The expense of this proceeding has been paid by the League out of its funds, and when we asked you to contribute your money to the League, it was with the view of spending it in the same way for your benefit. I believe South Staffordshire is safe at the next election for two Free-traders. But we must not rest there—we must do the same in other counties. In South Lancashire we have put such a majority of Free-traders on the registry, that, unless I am much mistaken, our opponents will not dare to contest another election with us. I say every man in Birmingham who can afford it must buy a 40*s.* freehold, and so qualify himself to vote for South Staffordshire. In Manchester, we say to every man who has a good coat on his back, 'You must buy a freehold, and qualify for the county.' But you have a county nearer here—you are partly in North Warwickshire as well as Coventry; and if you qualify, what is to prevent your returning two Free-traders for that place at the next election? Shame on you if you doubt it! Think of the beauty of the 40*s.* freehold! Why, it is the best part of the Reform Bill—it is an inheritance handed down to us from our ancestors five hundred years ago. A man for 50*l.* can buy one of these freeholds, and place himself, as regards the county franchise, upon an equality with the squire who has an estate of 5,000*l.* a-year.

The landowners have multiplied their 50*l.* tenants-at-will, and, do what they will, they cannot stretch out their land like India-rubber; but you can make every cobbler's stall, every butcher's shamble, every stable, the means of conferring the franchise, and placing its owner on an equality with the man who holds an estate of 50,000*l.* a-year. I say, too, if you choose, you can ensure the return of two Free-traders for Worcestershire. Worcester must also be won. There was a desultory effort made to gain North Warwickshire the other day, which ended disgracefully, and which showed the necessity of some local organisation. 'Tis votes, not meetings, that persuade Sir Robert Peel. In Staffordshire, the revising barrister acknowledged that the League had purged the registry of an immense number of fictitious votes. The finger of scorn should be pointed at any of the middle classes in the northern towns who did not become co-electors. The man is not fit to be a freeman who, when he

could afford it, refuses to pay 50*l.* for the franchise. Having qualified every man you can, you must proceed to a systematic purging of the registers. Many silly persons object to this as disfranchising the people; but if our opponents strike off our votes, are theirs to remain untouched? ('No, no.') We should be in such a position as to be able to tell the Government, [172] 'You must give up the Corn-laws, or give up a good deal more.'

The aristocracy of this country have the army, the navy, the colonies, and a large amount of expenditure, at their disposal. 'Tis a perfect paradise for the aristocracy in this country, if they knew only how to behave themselves—not as angels, but as decent, honest, rational men. Whom have they to govern? Practical, industrious, intelligent men, whose thoughts centred in their business, and who would gladly leave to those above them the toil of government, if those were willing to allow commerce and industry fair play. What a people for an aristocracy to govern! And yet they risk all for the sake of a miserable tax on bread, which is of no earthly benefit even to themselves. Be prepared for a crisis as to this law, which may come on even before the next dissolution. You will see by the swaying of parties, and the general agitation of the public mind in the next session, that some great change is approaching; and when you discover these symptoms, don't mind who goes out or in, but keep your eyes steadily fixed on this corn question; and when the crisis does come, let the multitudinous numbers of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Staffordshire be prepared to act with united strength against the vile fabric of monopoly, over which, when levelled with the earth, will be driven the ploughshare of peace, that prosperity may arise out of its ruins.

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**FREE TRADE. XIX.**  
**LONDON, DECEMBER 17, 1845.**↵

I THINK some of the protection societies would be glad to have our overflow to-night. If this agitation continues, we shall have to build an edifice as large as St. Paul's to hold the Leaguers. I believe to-day we have had application for 30,000 tickets of admission; we have now many hundreds round this building more than can be accommodated; and we have a great many more inside than can be comfortable. But I feel confidence in the disposition of all good Leaguers to accommodate each other; and I must say that I have seen in front of me every disposition to be quiet; but it is the same to-night as I have observed generally in my great experience at public meetings, that if there is any disturbance it is always amongst the aristocracy upon the platform.

I think this meeting is a sufficient proof of the exciting circumstances under which we meet to-night. I need not say a word. [Mr. Cobden was here interrupted by a slight disturbance arising from the extremely crowded state of the stage.] Some gentlemen at the back of the stage wish to have my assurance that there is no room in front; I can assure them that there is not vacant space for a mouse. I think the aspect of the meeting is a sufficient illustration of the present crisis of our great movement. The manner in which we are gathered together; the excited feeling which animates all present—all indicate that there is something peculiar in the present phase of our movement. I do not know how it is, but if I see other people inclined to throw up their caps and become exceedingly excited, it always makes me feel and look grave; for I always think there is the most danger when people are the least on their guard in this wicked world. Doubtless we have brought our cause to a new position—we have got it into the hands of politicians. The 'ins' and the 'outs' are quarrelling over it. But I am very anxious to impress upon you and our friends throughout the kingdom—for what we say here is read by hundreds and thousands elsewhere—that it is not our business to form Cabinets—to choose individuals who shall carry out our principles; we are not to trust to others to do our work; we are not to feel confident that the work will be done till it is done; and I will tell you when and when only I shall consider it done—when I see the sheet of the Act of Parliament wet from the printer's containing the total abolition of the Corn-laws.

I have always expected in the course of our agitation that we should knock a Government or two on the head before we succeeded. The Government of 1841 can hardly be said to have been killed by the Corn-law; it took the Corn-law as a last desperate dose in order to cure it of a long and lingering disease—but it proved fatal to it. I think we may say, too, that the recent Government has died of the Corn-law; and our business must be, gentlemen, to try and make the fate of the last Government a [174] warning to the next. We do not certainly exactly know yet why Sir Robert Peel ran away from his own law; we have had no explanation. I have been in town for three or four days. I thought when I came from the country I might probably get a little behind the scenes, and learn something about it; but I am as much in the dark now as when I came from Lancashire. I cannot learn why it was that Sir Robert Peel bolted. From what did he run? It was his own law, passed in 1842; it was deliberated upon about six months in 1841. It was not passed at the pressing solicitation of the people for any such law. I know that almost the whole of the people petitioned against it. It was his own handiwork, done in defiance of the people; and now, in 1845, with still the same Parliament, with a majority of 90 to back him, the very men who passed the law being still at his back, he suddenly runs away and leaves his sliding-scale as a legacy to his successors. Gentlemen, if he had carried his own law with him—if he had only carried off his sliding-scale to Tamworth—I do not think we should have made many inquiries about him. But he has left

his law, and we do not know how he is going to deal with it in future.

I suppose, when we meet in Parliament, which may be early next month—at all events, the sooner the better—the first thing I shall look to with some degree of interest will be an answer to the question, What is the reason of this sudden dissolution of the Cabinet? I shall await Sir Robert Peel's explanation with very great interest. He will doubtless be able to tell us whether the facts collected by his commissioners in Ireland as well as in England were of such a nature as to impress him with the idea that we are verging on a probable famine in one country, if not in both. If that be the case, I suppose he will also tell us that, so far as he was concerned, he was the advocate in his Cabinet for the suspension of his own handiwork—the sliding-scale. Well, that being the case, I presume, when Parliament meets, he will assist us to do that which he could not accomplish himself with his refractory Cabinet. I expect—I do not know whether I may be rash in expecting it—from Sir Robert Peel straightforward conduct.

There are people who tell us that this Corn-law must not be suspended suddenly, that it must not be dealt with rashly and precipitately, and that, if we are to have the repeal of the Corn-law, it must be done gradually, step by step. Well, gentlemen, that might have been in the eyes of some a very statesmanlike way of doing it six or seven years ago. Some people would have thought last year, when wheat was at 47*s.* a quarter, that if a law had been passed then providing for the extinction of the Corn-law in two or three years, that that would have been no very bad measure to have been obtained; but who will propose now to pass a law imposing a fixed duty on corn next spring, to go off 3*s.* or 4*s.* the spring after, and 3*s.* or 4*s.* the spring after that, till it comes to nothing? That would not suit the exigencies of the present movement. Our wise Legislature, our wise Conservative statesmen, would not deal with this question when they might have dealt with it with some advantage to their own policy. We were pressing on the Government to deal with the Corn-laws last year and the year before, when wheat was at 47*s.* a quarter, but we were told then we were rash men; that the Corn-law had not had a fair trial; that ours was not the way to deal with it; that we must wait to see how it worked.

Well, now they are seeing how it has worked. But there is no time for temporising now. Nature has stepped in; Providence has interfered, and has inflicted a famine upon the land, and set at nought all the contrivance, delay, and modifications of statesmen. They have but one way of dealing with this question. It is of no use asking us for a feather-bed to drop our aristocracy upon; they might have had a feather-bed, if there had been one to offer them; but there is no feather-bed for them now. They must have the total and immediate [175] repeal of the Corn-laws; not because the League has demanded it; not out of any deference to the Shibboleth of clubs like ours. No, we do not ask them to bow to any such dictation as that; we will not inflict any unnecessary humiliation upon our landowners; but they have put off this good work so long, until Nature has stepped in, and now they must bow to the law of Nature without any delay.

Gentlemen, we meet Parliament next session—I take it for granted—with but one proposition before us,—that is, the immediate and total abolition of the Corn-laws. No Minister can take office without proposing that measure, whether Sir Robert Peel or Lord John Russell. I defy them to take office and come before Parliament without the Queen's Speech proposing that measure. No; we will not exult over them; it is not our doing, after all; we have prepared the public in some degree to take advantage of a natural calamity, but we are not so well prepared as we should have been if they had given us a year or two more; the potato rot has tripped up the heels of Sir Robert Peel, but it has also stopped our registration agents a little. We should like to have had another year of qualification for counties. If we had had another year or two, we could have shown the monopolist landowners that we can transfer power in this country from the hands of a class totally into the hands of the middle and industrial classes of this country. We shall go on with that movement, and I hope it will

never stop; but we shall have to deal with the crisis of the Corn-law question next session.

The Queen's Speech, within a month of this time, must recommend the abolition of the Corn-laws. I want to get into the House of Commons again to have some talk about that question. Oh! it is very heavy work, I assure you; it is heavier work every day to come into these enthusiastic meetings, and talk of this question, for we meet no opponents. I do not know how it is, but I have that quality of combativeness, as phrenologists call it, and unless I meet with some opposition I am as dull as ditch-water. Well, there is no man to be found at large out of the House of Commons who can be got in public to say a word in defence of the Corn-laws; that is, you cannot hear any attempted defence out of their own protection societies, and you know they are privileged people.

I am anxious to meet them in the House of Commons upon this subject; but it will be an odd scene when we assemble next session, for we shall not know where to sit. There will be such greetings in the lobbies, one asking the other, 'On which side are you going to sit?' And then, the greatest curiosity of all, the greatest subject of interest, will be to see where Sir R. Peel is to sit. I should not wonder if we shall have to find him a chair, and put him in the middle of the floor.

Now, I shall be somewhat interested in witnessing the arguments that will be used by the protectionists in defence of this Corn-law. Recollect, the debate will come on with reference to the exigency of the moment. The Corn-law must be suspended instantly, if Lord John Russell takes office. He will be a bold man if he does. But if he does, I suppose he will either suspend the law the next day by an Order in Council, or he will call us together; and he will throw down his proposition, 'Either you must suspend that Corn-law at once, or I will not hold office a week.' Then the debate will turn as to the necessity of suspending this Corn-law; and we shall have gentlemen getting up from Dorsetshire and Essex, protesting that there is a great abundance of everything in the country, that there is no scarcity at all, no potato rot, and that there is a full average quantity and quality of wheat. [Cheers, and cries of 'Plenty of curry!']

Then I should not wonder, gentlemen, if we were to hear some moral receipts for feeding the people. You know Dr. Buckland has lately been publishing a paper read at Oxford to the [176] Ashmolean Society, I believe, and he has shown that people can live very well on peas, can get on tolerably well upon beans, and, if there is nothing else to be had, they can live pretty well upon mangold-wurzel; and he gives an instance of one good lady who lived, I do not know how many days, by sucking the starch out of her white pocket-handkerchief. Now, mangold-wurzel, starch, and beans, mixed with a little curry-powder, would do very well.

Well, gentlemen, we shall have a division as well as a debate. I should like to see the names of those good men in the House of Commons who will vote against opening the ports—that is, the men who will decree that we shall not be treated as well as the Prussians, the Turks, the Poles, and the Dutchmen; if they outvote us upon that proposition, we shall have a general election. I should like to see some of those curry-powder candidates go down to their constituents. I would advise you to get doses of the curry-powder water ready; a little hot water, and a pinch of curry-powder stirred up, makes a man very comfortable to go to bed with, they say. Try it upon some of the protectionist candidates.

Gentlemen, this is no laughing subject, after all. As my friend, Mr. Villiers, says, it is a question very much between Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell now. I have no reason, and I think you will all admit it, to feel any very great respect for Sir Robert Peel; he is the only man in the House of Commons that I can never speak a word to in private without forfeiting my own respect, and the respect of all those men who sit around me. But though I say that, and though I am justified in saying it, yet this I will say, that so deeply have I this

question of the Corn-laws at heart, that if Sir Robert Peel will take the same manly, straightforward part that Lord John Russell has taken—if he will avow an intelligible course of action—that is what I want, no mystification—if he will do that, I will as heartily co-operate with him as with any man in the House of Commons.

I should think now the time was come when every statesman, of whatever party, who has a particle of intelligence and conscience, must be anxious to remove this question of supplying the food of the people out of the category of party politics; for see what a fearful state it places the Ministry in. They maintain a law for the purpose of regulating the supply of food to the people; if the food falls short, the people assail the Government as the cause of their scarcity of food: this is a responsibility that no Government or human power ought to assume to itself. It is a responsibility that we should never invest a Government with, if that Government did not assume to itself the functions of the Deity.

Gentlemen, why should we tax the Government with being the cause of our suffering when we are visited with a defective harvest? Why should a Government fly away? Why should a Prime Minister retire from office because there is a failure and rot in the potatoes? Suppose we had a devastating flood that swept away half our houses in a day, we should never think of charging the Executive Government with being the cause of our calamities. The Government does not undertake to build houses, or to keep houses for us. Suppose half of our mercantile marine was swept away with a hurricane, and if the whole of it was submerged in the flood, we should never think of flying at the Government, and making them responsible for such a calamity. On the contrary, if we had such a dire event by flood or fire happening to the country, we should instinctively rally round the Government, one helping the other in order to mitigate the horrors of such a calamity. And why should it be otherwise with supplying the food of the people? Why, because the Government of this country—Ministers and Parliament in this land—have arrogated to themselves functions which belong not to man, but to nature—not to laws of Parliament, but to the laws of Providence—not to regulations of statesmen, but to regulations of the merchants of the world; it is because they [177] have taken upon themselves superhuman functions that we make them responsible for divine inflictions.

Then, gentlemen, I hope that every intelligent statesman in this country will be anxious to get rid of this question of protection to agriculture. But there is another reason why our intelligent statesmen ought to wish to bury it so deep that even its ghost cannot haunt us again—this ragged and tattered banner of protection—and it is this, that if you leave a rag of it behind, these protectionist squires will hoist that ragged standard again. And my firm conviction is, that they will find farmers enough to rally round that old rag—they will have the same organisation, the same union in the counties between the protectionist squires and their dupes the protectionist farmers—that would prove a hindrance to everything like an enlightened and rational government on the part of any Administration. I say, then, whether it be Sir Robert Peel, or whether it be Lord John Russell, put an end to this protective principle; destroy it altogether; leave no part of it behind. And the only way you can do that is by proposing honestly, totally to abolish the Corn-laws, and the rest of the system will abolish itself very soon afterwards.

There are terms talked about; they talk of some terms; they talk of re-adjusting taxation. I am told Sir Robert Peel has got a scheme as long as my arm for mixing up a hundred other things with this Corn-law. I say we will have no such mystification of our plain rights. We have had too much of his mystification before. In the north of England, where we are practical people, we have a prejudice in favour of doing one thing at a time. Now, we will abolish the Corn and Provision Laws if you please; that shall be one thing we will do; and anything else they propose to do we will take it upon its merits, as we take the Corn-law upon its demerits. They propose a modification of taxation; and I am told that Sir Robert Peel

has some such sop in view to compensate the landowners. He has not been a very safe guide hitherto to the landowners of this country; he has led them into a quagmire with his leadership. I predict that if Sir Robert Peel provokes a discussion upon the subject of taxation in this country, that he will prove as great an enemy to the landowners as he is likely to prove, according to their views of the question, in his advocacy of protection for them.

I warn Ministers, and I warn landowners, and the aristocracy of this country, against forcing upon the attention of the middle and industrious classes the subject of taxation. For, great as I consider the grievance of the protective system, mighty as I consider the fraud and injustice of the Corn-laws, I verily believe, if you were to bring forward the history of taxation in this country for the last 150 years, you will find as black a record against the landowners as even in the Corn-law itself. I warn them against ripping up the subject of taxation. If they want another League, at the death of this one—if they want another organisation, and a motive—for you cannot have these organisations without a motive and principle—then let them force the middle and industrious classes of England to understand how they have been cheated, robbed, and bamboozled upon the subject of taxation; and the end will be—(now I predict it for the consolation of Sir Robert Peel and his friends)—if they force a discussion of this question of taxation; if they make it understood by the people of this country how the landowners here, 150 years ago, deprived the sovereign of his feudal rights over them; how the aristocracy retained their feudal rights over the minor copyholders; how they made a bargain with the king to give him 4s. in the pound upon their landed rentals, as a quit charge for having dispensed with these rights of feudal service from them; if the country understand as well as I think I understand, how afterwards this landed aristocracy passed a law to make the valuation of their rental final, the bargain originally being that they should [178] pay 4s. in the pound of the yearly rateable value of their rental, as it was worth to let for, and then stopped the progress of the rent by a law, making the valuation final,—that the land has gone on increasing tenfold in many parts of Scotland, and fivefold in many parts of England, while the land-tax has remained the same as it was 150 years ago—if they force us to understand how they have managed to exempt themselves from the probate and legacy duty on real property—how they have managed, sweet innocents that taxed themselves so heavily, to transmit their estates from sire to son without taxes or duties, while the tradesman who has accumulated by thrifty means his small modicum of fortune is subject at his death to taxes and stamps before his children can inherit his property; if they force us to understand how they have exempted their tenants' houses from taxes, their tenants' horses from taxes, their dogs from taxes, their draining-tiles from taxes—if they force these things to be understood, they will be making as rueful a bargain as they have already made by resisting the abolition of the Corn-law.

Do not let them tell me I am talking in a wild, chimerical strain; they told me so, seven years ago, about this Corn-law. I remember right well, when we came to London six years ago, in the spring of 1839, there were three of us in a small room at Brown's Hotel, in Palace Yard, we were visited by a nobleman, one who had taken an active part in the advocacy of a modification of the Corn-laws, but not the total repeal; he asked us, 'What is it that has brought you to town, and what do you come to seek?' We said, 'We come to seek the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws.' The nobleman said, with a most emphatic shake of the head, 'You will overturn the monarchy as soon as you will accomplish that.' Now, the very same energy, starting from our present vantage-ground, having our opponents down as we have them now—the same energy—ay, half the energy, working for seven years—would enable a sufficient number of the middle and working classes of this country to qualify for the counties, and might transfer the power utterly and for ever from the landowners of this country to the middle and working classes, and they might tax the land, and tax the large proprietors and rich men of every kind, as they do in all the countries of Europe but England.

Again and again I warn Sir Robert Peel—I warn the aristocracy of this country—that, on the settlement of this question, they do not force us into a discussion upon the peculiar burthens upon land.

Well, they cannot meet us now with any modification of the law, because—however it might have suited past years to have let them down on a feather-bed, as they call it, to have given a salve to their wounds—the crisis of the potato rot will not wait for it now; they dare not open the question of taxation. What will they attempt to do, then? What can they do? Why, I would advise them, as friends, to do justice speedily and promptly; and if we take the repeal of the Corn-laws, and ask no further questions—if we let bygones be bygones—they ought to be abundantly satisfied with the bargain. I am disposed, gentlemen, to ask no questions, to let by-gones be bygones. I want no triumph; I want no exaltation. I think no one will accuse us of having crowed over converts, or exulted over repentant sinners. We exist as an association, solely for the object of converting people. It would be a very bad piece of tactics if we ever offered the slightest impediment to an honest conversion to our ranks. We began in a minority of the intelligent people of England. I am willing to admit it, we had to inform the country and to arouse it; we live only to convert; and I am very glad indeed to congratulate you upon having converted some very important allies lately.

I feel very great pleasure in noticing a statement which appears in to-day's paper in the news from Ireland. It is a report of a speech of Mr. O'Connell. [179] We of the Anti-Corn-law League have every reason to feel indebted to Mr. O'Connell for the uniform and consistent course which he has taken in reference to the Corn-laws. From the beginning he has acted and co-operated with us both in our great meetings and in the House of Commons; but I have never considered him as acting here upon English ground. I have always regarded him as promoting a measure for the benefit of his own countrymen in Ireland, when he has co-operated with us for the repeal of the Corn-laws; because we have had the best possible proof, in the continued misery and semi-starvation of the Irish people, that whatever good the Corn-law may have done to the landowner in England, it is quite certain that it has never been of any benefit to the people of Ireland, a large majority of whom never taste anything better than lumper potatoes. Then, both upon Irish and English grounds, I am glad we have an opportunity of co-operating with Mr. O'Connell. I rejoice that upon this question, at all events, there cannot be a line of demarcation drawn between the two countries. Our interests are theirs, and theirs are ours. They want more bread, God knows, in Ireland; and if we can help Mr. O'Connell to give it them they shall have it.

I am not going to talk argumentatively to-night; and I have but to add, that the times that are coming are just those that will most require our vigilance and activity. Demonstrations now are comparatively valueless; we shall want you all next spring. There is a great struggle for that period. The Duke of Richmond has told us he shall trust to the hereditary legislators of the country. Well, I might say,—

'Hereditary bondsmen, know ye not?

I will back the 'hereditary bondsmen' against the hereditary legislators upon this question. But, no; we have not all the hereditary legislators opposed to us I am glad of it; we have the best of them in our ranks; we always had the best of them with us. If they have not all joined our club we do not care about it, so long as they adopt our principles.

I have never been for making this a class question. I have preached from the first that we would have the cooperation of the best and most intelligent of all ranks in life—working, middle, and upper classes. No, no; we will have no war of classes in this country. It is bad enough that in free and constitutional States you must, have your parties; we cannot, in our state of enlightenment, manage our institutions without them; but it shall never be our fault if

this question of the Corn-laws becomes a class question, between the middle and working classes on the one side, and the hereditary legislators on the other. No, no; we will save the Duke of Richmond's order from the Duke of Richmond. We have got Lord Morpeth, and we have also Lords Radnor, Ducie, and Kinnaird, and a good many more; and among the rest Earl Grey, our earliest and most tried champion of the aristocracy. This is one proof that ours is not a class question, and that we are not at war with the whole landed aristocracy; but if the Duke of Richmond sets up the Noodles and Doodles of the aristocracy, why, before we have done with them, they shall be as insignificant and more contemptible than the round-frocked peasantry upon his Grace's estate.

This is a question that, during the next three months, will allow of no sleeping: we must be all watching. I have confidence in Lord J. Russell; I think, if you have his word you have his bond. I do not know at this moment whether he will take office or not; but if he does, and has Lord Morpeth and Lord Grey associated with him, you are as safe with them as you are with Lord John Russell himself. I do not know who besides he may have. [A Voice: 'Yourself.')] Yes, I will be the watchman, so long as bad characters are abroad.

But Lord John may have some difficulty, perhaps, in making up a Cabinet [180] as willing to stick to the principles of Free Trade as himself; and he may not find them quite so willing to coerce those refractory legislators as he may wish. We must back him; we must show him the power we can give him to carry this question. They talk of Lord John Russell having made a mistake in putting out that letter to the citizens of London. I have heard some mean and shabby people say, if he had not put out that letter, how much freer he would have been now. Why, Lord John Russell would have been nothing now without that letter. The Queen would not have sent for him without that letter. Lord John Russell would no more have commanded the people's confidence, or excited their hopes or enthusiasm, without that letter, any more than Sir Robert Peel himself would have done. It is a proof not only of the vitality of the principle, that, without joining the League, he did not join us by the mere enunciation of a principle which the people quite understand and feel. Lord John Russell, as if by change of a magic lantern, became from the most obscure the most popular and prominent man of his day.

Ours is the only party that is now solid, growing, and consolidated in this country; all that is good of the Whig party has joined the Free-traders—the Whig party is nothing without the Free-trade party. The Tory or Conservative party, call them what you will, are broken to atoms by the disruption in the ranks of their leaders. The League stands erect and aloft, amidst the ruins of all factions. Let us hold on to the principle which has made us as strong as we now find ourselves; let us hold on to it, not turning to the right or to the left. No man, or body of men, Ministers or ex-Ministers, have a right to expect it, nor shall they have it; we will not turn a hair's breadth to keep men in office, or put them out of office; and if we maintain this ground—ay, for another six months—then we shall be near that time which I so long for, when this League shall be dissolved into its primitive elements by the triumph of its principles.

**FREE TRADE. XX.**  
**MANCHESTER, JANUARY 15, 1846.** ↩

I SHALL begin the few remarks which I have to offer to this meeting by proposing, contrary to my usual custom, a resolution; and it is, 'That the merchants, manufacturers, and other members of the National Anti-Corn-law League claim no protection whatever for the manufactured products of this country, and desire to see obliterated for ever the few nominally protective duties against foreign manufactures, which still remain upon our statute books.' Gentlemen, if any of you have taken the pains to wade through the reports of the protectionist meetings, as they are called, which have been held lately, you would see that our opponents, at the end of seven years of our agitation, have found out their mistake, and are abandoning the Corn-laws; and now, like unskilful blunderers as they are, they want to take up a new position, just as we are going to achieve the victory. Then they have been telling something very like fibs, when they claimed the Corn-laws as compensation for peculiar burdens. They say now that they want merely protection in common with all other interests, and they now call themselves the advocates of protection to native industry in all its branches; and, by way of making the appeal to the less-informed portion of the community, they say that the Anti-Corn-law League are merely the advocates of free trade in corn, but that we want to preserve a monopoly in manufactures.

Now, the resolution which I have to submit to you, and which we will put to this meeting to-night—the largest by far that I ever saw in this room, and comprising men of every class and of every calling in this district—let that resolution decide, once and for ever, whether our opponents can with truth lay that to our charge henceforth. There is nothing new in this proposition, for at the very beginning of this agitation—at the meeting of the Chamber of Commerce—when that faint voice was raised in that small room in King-street in December, 1838, for the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws—when that ball was set in motion which has been accumulating in strength and velocity ever since, why, the petition stated fairly that this community wanted no protection for its own industry. I will read the conclusion of that admirable petition; it is as follows:—

'Holding one of the principles of eternal justice to be the inalienable right of every man freely to exchange the result of his labour for the productions of other people, and maintaining the practice of protecting one part of the community at the expense of all other classes to be unsound and unjustifiable, your petitioners earnestly implore your honourable House to repeal all laws relating to the importation of foreign corn and other foreign articles of subsistence; and to carry out to the fullest extent, both as affects agriculture and manufactures, the true and peaceful principles of Free Trade, by removing all [182] existing obstacles to the unrestricted employment of industry and capital.'

We have passed similar resolutions at all our great aggregate meetings of delegates in London ever since that was issued.

I don't put this resolution as an argument or as an appeal to meet the appeals made in the protection societies' meetings. I believe that the men who now, in this seventh year of our discussion, can come forth before their country, and talk as those men have done—I believe that you might as well preach to the deaf adder. You cannot convince them. I doubt whether they have not been living in their shells, like oysters; I doubt whether they know that such a thing is in existence as a railroad, or a penny postage, or even as an heir to the throne. They are in profound ignorance of everything, and incapable of being taught. We don't appeal to



them, but to a very large portion of this community, who don't take a very prominent part in this discussion—who may be considered as important lookers-on. Many have been misled by the reiterated assertions of our opponents; and it is at this eleventh hour to convince these men, and to give them an opportunity of joining our ranks, as they will do, that I offer this proof of disinterestedness and the fairness of our proposals. I don't intend to go into an argument to convince any man here that protection to all must be protection to none. If it takes from one man's pocket, and allows him to compensate himself by taking an equivalent from another man's pocket, and if that goes on in a circle through the whole community, it is only a clumsy process of robbing all to enrich none; and simply has this effect, that it ties up the hands of industry in all directions. I need not offer one word to convince you of that. The only motive that I have to say a word is, that what I say here may convince others elsewhere—the men who meet in protection societies. But the arguments I should adduce to an intelligent audience like this, would be spoken in vain to the Members of Parliament who are now the advocates of protection. I shall meet them in less than a week in London, and there I will teach the A B C of this protection. It is of no use trying to teach children words of five syllables, when they have not got out of the alphabet.

Well, what exhibitions these protectionists have been making of themselves! Judging from the length of their speeches, as you see them reported, you might fancy the whole community was in motion. Unfortunately for us, and for the reputation of our countrymen, the men who can utter the drivelling nonsense which we have had exhibited to the world lately, and the men who can listen to it, are very few in number. I doubt exceedingly whether all the men who have attended all the protection meetings, during the last month, might not very comfortably be put into this hall. But these protection societies have not only changed their principles, but it seems they have resolved to change their tactics. They have now, at the eleventh hour, again resolved that they will make their body political, and look after the registration. What simpletons they must have been to have thought that they could do any good without that! So they have resolved that their societies shall spend their money in precisely the same way that the League have been expending theirs. They have hitherto been telling us, in all their meetings and in all their newspapers, that the League is an unconstitutional body; that it is an infernal club which aims at corrupting, at vitiating, and at swamping the registrations: and now, forsooth, when no good can possibly come of it—when they most certainly should have wisely abstained from imitating it, since they cannot do any good, and have kept up the strain they formerly had, of calling the League an unconstitutional body, they resolve to rescind their resolution, and to follow his Grace the Duke of Richmond's advice, and fight us with our own weapons. Now, I presume, we are a constitutional body. It is a fortunate thing that we have not got [183] great Dukes to lead us. But, now, of what force is this resolution? Like everything they do, it is farcical—it is unreal. The protection societies, from the beginning, have been nothing but phantoms. They are not realities; and what is their resolution—what does it amount to? They resolve that they will look after the registration. We all know that they have done their worst in that way already. We all know that these landlords may really make their acres a kind of electioneering property. We know right well that their land agents are their electioneering agents. We know that their rent-rolls have been made their muster-rolls for fighting the battle of protection. These poor drivelling people say that we buy qualifications, and present them to our friends; that we bind them down to vote as we please. We have never bought a vote, and we never intend to buy a vote or to give one. Should we not be blockheads to buy votes and give them, when we have ten thousand persons ready to buy them at our request?

But I suspect that our protectionist friends have a notion that there is some plan—some secret, sinister plan—by which they can put fictitious votes on the register. Now I beg to tell them that the League is not more powerful to create votes than it is to detect the flaws in the bad votes of our opponents; and they may depend on it, if they attempt to put fictitious voters

on the register, that we have our ferrets in every county, and that they will find out the flaws; and when the registration time comes, we'll have an objection registered against every one of their fictitious qualifications, and make them produce their title-deeds, and show that they have paid for them. Well, we have our protectionist opponents; but how we may congratulate ourselves on the position which they have given to this question by the discussion that has been raised everywhere during the last few months! We cannot enter a steamboat or a railway carriage—nay, we cannot even go into an omnibus, but the first thing that any man does, almost before he has deposited his umbrella, is to ask, 'Well, what is the last news about the Corn-laws?' Now, we, who remember how difficult it was, at the beginning of our agitation, to bring men's minds to the discussion of this question, when we think that every newspaper is now full of it—the same broad sheet containing, perhaps, a report of this meeting, and of the miserable drivelling of some hole-and-corner agricultural gathering—and when we think that the whole community is engaged in reading the discussion and pondering on the several arguments, we can desire no more. The League might close its doors to-morrow, and its work might be considered as done, the moment it compels or induces people to discuss the question.

But the feeling I have alluded to is spreading beyond our own country. I am glad to hear that in Ireland the question is attracting attention. You have probably heard that my friend Mr. Bright and I have received a requisition, signed by merchants and manufacturers of every grade and party in Belfast, soliciting us to go there and address them; and I deeply regret that we cannot put our feet on Irish ground to advocate this question. To-day I have received a copy of a requisition to the mayor of Drogheda, calling a meeting for next Monday, to petition for the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws, and I am glad to notice at the head of that requisition the name of the Catholic Primate, Dr. Croly, a man eminent for learning, piety, and moderation; and that it is also headed by the rest of the Catholic clergy of that borough. I hope that these examples will not be without their due effect in another quarter. We have, I believe, the majority of every religious denomination with us—I mean the dissenting denominations; we have them almost *en masse*, both ministers and laymen; and I believe the only body, the only religious body, which we may not say we have with us as a body, are the members of the Church of England.

[184]

On this point I will just offer this remark: The clergy of the Church of England have been placed in a most invidious, and, I think, an unfortunate position, by the mode in which their tithe commutation charge was fixed some years ago. My friend Colonel Thompson will recollect it, for he was in Parliament at the time, and protested against the way in which the tithe commutation rent-charge was fixed. He said, with the great foresight he had always shown in the struggle for the repeal of the Corn-laws, that it would make the clergy of the Church of England parties to the present Corn-law by fixing their tithe at a fixed quantity of corn, fluctuating according to the price of the last seven years. Let it be borne in mind, that every other class of the community may be directly compensated for the repeal of the Corn-laws—I mean every class connected with agriculture—except the clergy. The landlords may be compensated, if prices fall, by an increased quantity of produce, so also may the farmer and the labourer; but the clergy of the Church of England receive a given number of quarters of wheat for their tithe, whatever the price may be. I think, however, we may draw a favourable conclusion, under all the circumstances, from the fact that I believe there has not been one clergyman of the Church of England at all eminent for rank, piety, or learning, who has come out, notwithstanding the strong temptation of personal interest, to advocate the existing Corn-law. I think that we may take this as a proof of the very strong appeal to justice which this question makes, and perhaps augur also that there is a very strong feeling amongst the great body of the members of the Church of England in favour of free trade in corn.

Well, there is one other quarter in which we have seen the progress of sound principles—I allude to America. We have received the American President's Message; we have had also the report of the Secretary of the Treasury, and both President Polk and Mr. Secretary Walker have been taking my friend Colonel Thompson's task out of his hands, and lecturing the people of America on the subject of Free Trade. I have never read a better digest of the arguments in favour of Free Trade than that put forth by Mr. Secretary Walker, and addressed to the Congress of that country. I augur from all these things that our question is making rapid progress throughout the world, and that we are coming to the consummation of our labours. We are verging now towards the session of Parliament, and I predict that the question will either receive its quietus, or that it will lead to the dissolution of this Parliament; and then the next will certainly relieve us from our burden.

Now, many people are found to speculate on what Sir Robert Peel may do in the approaching session of Parliament. It is a very hazardous thing, considering that in one week only you will be as wise as I shall, to venture to make a prediction on this subject. [A cry of 'We are very anxious.'] You are very anxious, no doubt. Well, let us see if we can speculate a little on futurity, and relieve our anxiety. There are three courses open to Sir Robert Peel. He may keep the law as it is; he may totally repeal it; or he may do something between the two by tinkering his scale again, or giving us a fixed duty. Now, I predict that Sir R. Peel will either keep the law as it is, or he will propose totally to abolish it. And I ground my prediction on this, because these are the only two things that anybody in the country wants him to do. There are some who want to keep protection as it is; others want to get rid of it; but nobody wants anything between the two. He has his choice to make, and I have this opinion of his sagacity, that, if he changes at all, he will change for total repeal. But the question is, 'Will he propose total and immediate repeal?' Now, there, if you please, I will forbear to offer a prediction. But I will venture to give you a reason or two why I think he ought to [185] take total and immediate repeal. I don't think that any class is so much interested in having the Corn-laws totally and immediately repealed as the farming class. I believe that it is of more importance to the farmers to have the repeal instantaneous, instead of gradual, than to any other class of the community. In fact, I observe, in the report of a recent Oxfordshire protection meeting, given in to-day's paper, that when Lord Norreys was alluding to the probability of Sir Robert Peel abolishing the Corn-laws gradually, a farmer of the name of Gillatt cried out, 'We had better be drowned outright than ducked to death.' Gentlemen, I used to employ another simile—a very humble one, I admit. I used to say that an old farmer had told me, that if he was going to cut off his sheep-dog's tail, it would be far more humane to cut it off all at once than a piece every day in the week. But now I think that the farmer's simile in Oxford is the newest and the best that we can use. Nothing could be more easy than to demonstrate that it is the true interest of the farmers, if the Corn-law is to be abolished, to have it abolished instantly. If the Corn-law were abolished to-morrow, my firm belief is, that instead of wheat falling, it would have a tendency to rise. That is my firm belief, because speculation has already anticipated Sir Robert Peel, and wheat has fallen in consequence of that apprehension. I believe that, owing to the scarcity everywhere—I mean in all parts of Europe—you could not, if you prayed for it, if you had your own wishing-cap on, and could make your own time and circumstances—I believe, I say, that you could never find such an opportunity for abolishing the Corn-laws totally and immediately as if it were done next week; for it so happens that the very countries from which, in ordinary times, we have been supplied, have been afflicted, like ourselves, with scarcity—that the countries of Europe are competing with us for the very small surplus existing in America. They have, in fact, anticipated us in that market, and they have left the world's markets so bare of corn, that, whatever your necessities may be, I defy you to have other than high prices of corn during the next twelve months, though the Corn-law was abolished to-morrow.

European countries are suffering as we are from the same evil. They are suffering from scarcity now, owing to their absurd legislation respecting the article of corn Europe altogether has been corrupted by the vicious example of England in her commercial legislation. There they are, throughout the continent of Europe, with a population increasing at the rate of four or five millions a year, yet they make it their business, like ourselves, to put barriers in the way of a sufficiency of food to meet the demand of an increasing population.

I believe that if you abolish the Corn-law honestly, and adopt Free Trade in its simplicity, there will not be a tariff in Europe that will not be changed in less than five years to follow your example. Well, gentlemen, suppose the Corn-law be not abolished immediately, but that Sir Robert Peel brings in a measure giving you a duty of 5*s.*, 6*s.*, or 7*s.*, and going down 1*s.* a-year for four or five years, till the whole duty is abolished, what would be the effect of that on foreign countries? They will then exaggerate the importance of this market when the duty is wholly off. They will go on raising supplies, calculating that, when the duty is wholly off, they will have a market for their produce, and high prices to remunerate them; and if, as is very likely and consistent with our experience, we should have a return to abundant seasons, these vast importations would be poured upon our markets, probably just at the time when our prices are low; and they would come here, because they would have no other market, to swamp our markets, and deprive the farmer of the sale of his produce at a remunerating price. But, on the contrary, let the Corn-law be abolished instantly; let foreigners see what the English market [186] is in its natural state, and then they will be able to judge from year to year and from season to season what will be the future demand from this country for foreign corn. There will be no extravagant estimate of what we want—no contingency of bad harvests to speculate upon. The supply will be regulated by the demand, and will reach that state which will be the best security against both gluts and famine. Therefore, for the farmers' sakes, I plead for the immediate abolition of this law. A farmer never can have a fair and equitable understanding or adjustment with his landlord, whether as respects rent, tenure, or game, until this law is wholly removed out of his way. Let the repeal be gradual, and the landlord will say to the farmer, through the land-agent, 'Oh, the duty will be 7*s.* next year; you have not had more than twelve months' experience of the working of the system yet;' and the farmer goes away without any settlement having been come to. Another year passes over, and when the farmer presents himself, he is told, 'Oh, the duty will be 5*s.* this year; I cannot yet tell what the effect will be; you must stop awhile.' The next year the same thing is repeated, and the end is, that there is no adjustment of any kind between the landlord and tenant. But put it at once on a natural footing, abolish all restrictions, and the landlord and tenant will be brought to a prompt settlement; they will be placed precisely on the same footing as you are in your manufactures.

Well, I have now spoken on what may be done. I have told you, too, what I should advocate; but I must say, that whatever is proposed by Sir Robert Peel, we, as Free-traders, have but one course to pursue. If he proposes a total and immediate and unconditional repeal, we shall throw up our caps for Sir Robert Peel. If he proposes anything else, then Mr. Villiers will be ready, as he has been on former occasions—to move his amendment for a total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws. We are not responsible for what Ministers may do; we are but responsible for the performance of our duty. We don't offer to do impossibilities; but we will do our utmost to carry out our principles. But, gentlemen, I tell you honestly, I think less of what this Parliament may do; I care less for their opinions, less for the intentions of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, than what may be the opinion of a meeting like this and of the people out of doors. This question will not be carried by Ministers or by the present Parliament; it will be carried, when it is carried, by the will of the nation. We will do nothing that can remove us a hair's breadth from that rock which we have stood upon with so much safety for the last seven years. All other parties have been on a quicksand, and floated about by every wave, by every tide, and by every wind—some floating to us, others, like fragments

scattered over the ocean, without rudder or compass; whilst we are upon solid ground, and no temptation, whether of parties or of Ministers, shall ever make us swerve a hair's breadth. I am anxious to hear now, at the last meeting before we go to Parliament—before we enter that arena to which all men's minds will be turned during the next week—I am anxious, not merely that we should all of us understand each other on this question, but that we should be considered as occupying as independent and isolated a position as we did at the first moment of the formation of this League. We have nothing to do with Whigs or Tories; we are stronger than either of them; and if we stick to our principles, we can, if necessary, beat both. And I hope we perfectly understand now, that we have not, in the advocacy of this great question, a single object in view but that which we have honestly avowed from the beginning. Our opponents may charge us with designs to do other things. No, gentlemen, I have never encouraged that. Some of my friends have said, 'When this work is done, you will have some influence in the country; you must do so and so.' I said then, as I say [187] now, 'Every new political principle must have its special advocates, just as every new faith has its martyrs.' It is a mistake to suppose that this organisation can be turned to other purposes. It is a mistake to suppose that men, prominent in the advocacy of the principle of Free Trade, can with the same force and effect identify themselves with any other principle hereafter. It will be enough if the League accomplishes the triumph of the principle we have before us. I have never taken a limited view of the object or scope of this great principle. I have never advocated this question very much as a trader.

But I have been accused of looking too much to material interests. Nevertheless I can say that I have taken as large and great a view of the effects of this mighty principle as ever did any man who dreamt over it in his own study. I believe that the physical gain will be the smallest gain to humanity from the success of this principle. I look farther; I see in the Free-trade principle that which shall act on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe,—drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace. I have looked even farther. I have speculated, and probably dreamt, in the dim future—ay, a thousand years hence—I have speculated on what the effect of the triumph of this principle may be. I believe that the effect will be to change the face of the world, so as to introduce a system of government entirely distinct from that which now prevails. I believe that the desire and the motive for large and mighty empires; for gigantic armies and great navies—for those materials which are used for the destruction of life and the desolation of the rewards of labour—will die away; I believe that such things will cease to be necessary, or to be used, when man becomes one family, and freely exchanges the fruits of his labour with his brother man. I believe that, if we could be allowed to reappear on this sublunary scene, we should see, at a far distant period, the governing system of this world revert to something like the municipal system; and I believe that the speculative philosopher of a thousand years hence will date the greatest revolution that ever happened in the world's history from the triumph of the principle which we have met here to advocate. I believe these things: but, whatever may have been my dreams and speculations, I have never obtruded them upon others. I have never acted upon personal or interested motives in this question; I seek no alliance with parties or favour from parties, and I will take none—but, having the feeling I have of the sacredness of the principle, I say that I can never agree to tamper with it. I, at least, will never be suspected of doing otherwise than pursuing it disinterestedly, honestly, and resolutely.

**FREE TRADE. XXI.**  
**CORN-LAWS.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, FEBRUARY 27, 1846.** ↩

[On Jan. 27, 1846, Sir Robert Peel announced the policy of the Government on the Corn-laws. In three years they were to be repealed. From the passing of the Act, and until Feb. 1, 1849, the maximum duty was to be 10s., which could be levied when corn was under 48s., but should diminish by a shilling per quarter till the price reached 53s., when it should remain at 4s. The duty on barley and oats were to be proportionate; colonial corn to be free, and maize only at a nominal duty. The debate on this proposal lasted twelve nights, and the resolutions were carried on Feb. 27 by a majority of 97 (337 to 240). On June 23, 1846, the Corn Importation Bill was passed in the House of Lords, without a division; and on the same day, Sir Robert Peel's Ministry was defeated on an Irish Coercion Bill, by a majority of 73 (292 to 219).]

I ASSURE the House that it is impossible for me to trespass long upon their notice, but I am anxious to say a few words before the close of this long debate. I have had the good, or the ill, fortune, to listen to many debates upon this subject in this House; and although it has not been my fortune to listen to this, at all events I have had the pleasure of perusing every word of it.

On former occasions I have had to complain, that although the great object and purpose of the Anti-Corn-law motion was to discuss the principle of the Corn-laws, yet that hon. Gentlemen always evaded the question, and tried to discuss every other rather than the particular question before the House; but however much I may have had to complain of that on former occasions, I think it will be admitted that extraneous matter has been introduced into this debate by hon. Gentlemen opposite to a much greater extent than before. It appears to me that one half of the debate has turned upon the conduct of her Majesty's Ministers, and nearly the whole of the other upon the necessity of a dissolution and an appeal to the country. Now, though there may be ground—I will not say there may be just ground—for hon. Gentlemen below the gangway assailing the Ministers for the course they have pursued, yet the country, I assure them, will not sympathise with them in their quarrel with their leaders, nor will it be without some suspicion that the quarrel has been got up to avoid a discussion of principle; for I wish you to bear in mind that, on former occasions, by similar means, hon. Gentlemen did try to avoid that discussion. In 1841 they denounced the leaders of the Whigs as furiously as they denounce the leaders of their own party now; and when I came into Parliament, in the spring of 1841, I must say that I myself, and the members of the Anti-Corn-law League, were as much the objects of their vituperation as the Ministers are [189] now. The country, therefore, will not sympathise with them; and, on the other hand, it will learn whether or not they have introduced these personal topics because they cannot justify the present law.

Now, if hon. Gentlemen opposite have any fear that their present leaders contemplate, after the repeal of the Corn-laws, doing something else which they may think injurious to their party interests, I beg to assure them that they are taking the most effectual means of arming the present Ministers with the power of accomplishing something else, if they wish it; for the more they attack them—the more obloquy they load them with—the more will the country sympathise with them out of doors. Why, you are making the present Ministry the most popular men in the country. If the right hon. Baronet the First Lord of the Treasury were to go into the manufacturing districts of the north, his journey would be one continued triumph. The right hon. Home Secretary was not personally very popular two or three years

ago. It is a difficult thing for a Home Secretary in troublesome times to become popular; but the magnificent contribution the right hon. Baronet (Sir J. Graham) has given to our good cause, by his able speeches and authoritative statements of facts, has sunk deep into the mind of the country; and, spite of the martyrdom you are inflicting upon him, he has rendered himself so popular that I do not think we could parade any one in Manchester or Liverpool who would meet with a more cordial reception. I do not think you (the protectionists) are pursuing a good party course. I think you are as badly off, on the score of good judgment and tactics, as ever you were.

I will now, however, draw your attention to the second topic to which I have referred, and which is of still more importance. If I understand your position rightly, it is this—you say, ‘We wish for an appeal to the country; if the country decides that Free Trade shall be the national policy, we will bow to that decision. I believe I am fairly interpreting your meaning. I tell you then, in the first place, that if you are believers in the truth and justice of your principles, you are unworthy advocates of those principles if you would think of abandoning them on such grounds. If you believe in the truth of your principles, you should not bow to the decision of a temporary majority of this House. When I came into Parliament, in 1841, I met you with a majority of 91 in your favour. Did I then bow to that majority, and submit to the Corn-law? No; I said I would never cease my exertions till you abrogated that law. If you have confidence in the truth and justice of your principles, you should use the same language. You should say, ‘It is not one defeat that shall make us abandon those great principles, which we consider essential to the welfare and prosperity of the great mass of the people. No; if we are thrown to the ground now, we will spring up with renewed determination and vigour.’ You may ‘Yes, yes,’ that sentiment, but you have already told me, by your cheers, that you do not intend to do anything of the kind; and I am conscientiously of opinion that you are unbelievers in the doctrines you advocate.

But I will assume that you carry out your principles; that you can force a dissolution; and to this point I wish particularly to draw your attention, and, what is of still more importance, the attention of persons in another place. We have had some pretty frank allusions—especially in the peroration of the speech of the hon. Member for Dorsetshire—to what is to be done in another place, where there is no representative of the middle classes—no merchant, no manufacturer, no spinner, no farmer. In that other place, however, what I now say on the subject of a dissolution may probably be read. You want a dissolution in order to ascertain the opinion of the country. Have you ever thought, or considered, or defined what ‘the opinion of the country’ means? Do you think it means a numerical majority [190] of this House? We shall have that to-night. You are not satisfied with that. You are preaching the democratic doctrine, that this question must be referred to the people. Now I want to have well defined what you mean by ‘public opinion.’ You will perhaps say, ‘We will abide by the decision of a numerical majority in this House,’ and you will consider that the decision of the country.

Well, I totally disagree with all those who consider for a moment that you would obtain a numerical majority in this House in the event of a dissolution. I ought to know as much about the state of the representation of this country, and of the registration, as any man in the House. Probably no one has given so much attention to that question as I have done; and I distinctly deny that you have the slightest probability of gaining a numerical majority in this House, if a dissolution took place tomorrow. Now, I would not have said this three months ago; on the contrary, at a public meeting three months ago I distinctly recognised the great probability of a dissolution, in consequence of your having a numerical majority. But your party is broken up. Though you may still have a firm phalanx in Dorsetshire and Buckinghamshire, what has been the effect of the separation from you of the most authoritative and intelligent of your friends? What has been the effect, also, of the defection

in the boroughs, and among the population of the north?

I told you, three years ago, that the Conservatives in the towns in the north of England were not the followers of the Duke of Richmond. They were, almost to a man, the followers of that section of the Government represented by the First Lord of the Treasury and the right hon. Home Secretary. Every one acquainted with the towns in the north of England will bear me out when I say that those Conservatives who follow the right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) comprise at least four-fifths of the party, while the remaining one-fifth look up to the Duke of Richmond as their leader, and sympathise with the section below the gangway. That large portion of the Conservative party in the north of England has ever been in favour of Free Trade. The language they have used to Free-traders like myself has been this:—'Sir Robert Peel will do it at the proper time. We have confidence in him, and, when the proper period arrives, he will give us Free Trade.' Then, I say, that in this state of your party I wholly deny the possibility of your gaining a numerical majority.

But I will assume, for the sake of argument, that, in the event of a dissolution of Parliament, you obtained a numerical majority: let us see of what that majority and the minority opposed to you would consist. There are eighteen Representatives in Parliament for this metropolis, and there are two Members for the metropolitan county. We have the whole twenty. They represent 110,000 electors; they represent a population of 2,000,000 of souls. They are the most intelligent, the most wealthy, the most orderly, and, notwithstanding my acquaintance with the business habits of those in the north of England, I must add, with respect to business and mechanical life, the hardest-working people in England. Do those people express public opinion think you? Why, this metropolis assumed to itself, centuries ago, the power and privilege of closing its gates in the face of its Sovereign—a power which is still retained, and which is exercised on State occasions. This metropolis is now twenty times as populous, twenty times as wealthy, twenty times as important in the world's eye as it was then; and do you think it will be content that you count it as nothing in your estimate of public opinion?

But turn elsewhere. What says the metropolis of Scotland, Edinburgh? Do you reckon on having a Member for that city to vote in the glorious majority you anticipate? Turn to Dublin. Will you have a Representative for that city with you? Go to Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, and Liverpool; take [191] every town containing 20,000 inhabitants, and I defy you to show that you can reckon on a single Representative for any town in the kingdom which has a population of 20,000, or, at all events, of 25,000. I tell you that you have not with you now a town containing 25,000 inhabitants in Great Britain. No, no, no; you have neither Liverpool nor Bristol. That shows you have not weighed these matters as you are bound to weigh them. Do not be led away by the men who cheer and halloo here, like the school-boy whistling in the church-yard to keep up his courage. Examine these facts, for your leaders that were have weighed them already; and there are none among you deserving to be your leaders, unless they have well considered these important matters.

I repeat that you cannot reckon upon any town of 25,000 inhabitants sending up a Representative to vote with the great majority you expect to obtain. True, you will have your pocket boroughs, and your nomination counties. And I will say a word or two directly as to the county representation; but I now place before you broadly the situation in which you will find yourselves after a dissolution. I will assume that you have a majority, derived from pocket boroughs and nomination counties, of twenty or thirty Members. But on this side you will see the Representatives for London, for South Lancashire, for West Yorkshire, for North Cheshire, for North Lancashire, and the Members for all the large towns of Scotland—nay, not one Member will come from any town in Scotland to vote with you.



Now, what would then be your situation? Why, you would shrink aghast from the position in which you would find yourselves. There would be more defections from your ranks, pledged as you are—steeped to the chin in pledges. So much alarmed would you be at your position, that you would cross the floor to join us in larger numbers than you have ever yet done. I tell you, there would be no safety for you without it. I say that the Members who came up under such circumstances to maintain the Corn-laws, from your Ripons and Stamfords, Woodstocks and Marlboroughs, would hold those opinions only until they found out what has been determined by public opinion. They would not hold them one week longer; for if the country found that they would not give way to moral force, they might think it requisite to place them in another Schedule A. Had there been such an amount of public opinion, as now exists in favour of the repeal of the Corn-laws, in support of Charles Stuart in 1745, the dynasty of the Stuarts would now have occupied the throne of these realms. That amount of public opinion is sufficient to change the constitution of this country; to alter your forms of Government; to do anything, in short, that public opinion is determined to effect.

But you may probably tell me, that though we have the electors of the great constituencies I have mentioned in our favour, the great mass of the people are not with us. That is a rather democratic sentiment. You never heard me quote the superior judgment of the working classes in any deliberations in this assembly. You never heard me cant about the superior claims of the working classes to arbitrate on this great question; but you say the mass of the people are not with us. What evidence is there that this is the case? Will you shut your eyes to proofs? Will you go blindfold against a stone wall? You say the petitions presented to this House have not been honestly signed. I cannot disprove that assertion: it must go for what it is worth; but we have ten times as many signatures to our petitions for Corn-law repeal as you have to your protection petitions. You may assume that the signatures to those petitions are fictitious. Do so, if you please. I will give you another test: I will challenge you to the old Saxon mode of ascertaining what are the opinions of the country, by calling public meetings. Now, if you really entertain democratic opinions, this is the way in which to elevate the working man to an equality with his [192] master—ay, to an equality with the Peer of the realm. Bringing them out into public assemblies, where every man has an equal vote—assemblies which make laws for the conduct of their own proceedings, and elect their own chairman. Call your public meetings to support the Corn-laws. I challenge you to call one anywhere. Why, it is not in the manufacturing districts alone that meetings have been held since the 1st of November last. Public meetings convened by the authorities have been held in every large town—meetings not confined to a particular class, or consisting of men pledged to particular opinions, but convened to determine, ay or no, whether the people should petition for Free Trade or not. These meetings have not been confined to the manufacturing districts alone; they have been held at Exeter, Brighton, and Oxford, and the opinion of the people was as unanimous at those places as at Bolton, Stockport, and Manchester. Now, cannot you call a public meeting and test the opinions of the people? Would not one meeting, at all events, be something like a proof that you are practical men, and not disposed to be misled by the chimeras of those hot-headed, halfwitted people, who try to deceive you?

I have seen some of your notices calling protection meetings. One was forwarded to me from Epworth in Lancashire, by a gentleman who complained that the notice was so framed that protectionists only could attend, and that no amendment could be proposed. Why, in the purely agricultural district of Haddingtonshire, in the centre of the Lothians, a protection meeting was called about six weeks ago. All the neighbouring nobility and landed proprietors attended; they talked of the British Lion, and of the nation being with them. Soon after, another meeting was held, to petition for the repeal of the Corn-laws. The protectionists fled from the room, the largest room in the place; but it was quite full without them, and resolutions in favour of repeal were adopted. Was this evidence of public opinion? Was it

not? Then what will teach you what public opinion is? Must you be tossed in a blanket? Must you be swept out of this House into the Thames? What must be done to convince you that the feeling of the nation is not with you? You will be abandoned to fatuity and destruction if you are left to persons who have so little mercy upon you as to delude you on this question.

I said that I would refer to the county representation. You are pluming yourselves on the result of the recent county elections, and you are reckoning, no doubt, on the attainment of great strength from your purely agricultural counties in the event of a dissolution; but I beg to remind hon. Gentlemen that the county representation under the 50*l.* tenant-at-will clause of the Reform Act is not the old county representation. We never heard twenty years ago of requisitions being got up to candidates by tenant-farmers. The requisitions were then got up by freeholders. You introduced into the Reform Act, by a great mistake on the part of those who then had the power to have prevented it, a clause innovating on the old constitutional custom, and giving tenants-at-will a vote for counties. Do you mean to tell me that the votes of these tenants-at-will are an evidence of public opinion? We heard a definition of tenant-at-will votes, which, with the permission of the House, I will read. The hon. Member for Dorsetshire (and I congratulate the Free Traders on his advent here), told us with great *naïveté*—

'He [Mr. Seymer], with his hon. colleague, came forward at the recent election for Dorset, in consequence of a requisition signed by the great body of the tenant-farmers. Three or four of the largest properties in the county were in the hands of Free-traders, and naturally the tenants on those estates held back, and refused to sign the requisition, till they knew what were the wishes of their landlords; for it was notorious that English tenants generally wished to consult the feelings of their landlords. He did not think tenants to blame for that. Knowing that their land [193] lords were Free-traders, the tenants in question made inquiry, previous to signing, whether those landlords would object to their taking the course their consciences dictated; the landowners, very much to their credit, said, that this being a farmer's question, they would not interfere; and then, almost without exception, the farmers on those properties signed the requisition.'

Yes, yes; it is all very well for those who get the consent of their landlords to vote, but recollect what the hon. Gentleman says at the commencement of his remarks. He tells us that he and his colleagues were put in nomination in consequence of a requisition signed by tenant-farmers,—that is, in consequence of a requisition got up by command of the landlords and signed by the farmers. Now, I put it to you candidly,—Is it not an understood etiquette in counties that one proprietor who is a candidate should not canvass the tenants on the estate of another till he has obtained the sanction of the owner? Am I to understand that the protectionist gentlemen in a body below the gangway contradict me when I state that as a point of etiquette in counties, one proprietor, who is a candidate, does not think it proper to canvass the tenantry on the estate of another proprietor without first intimating to the landowner his intention and desire to do so? Well, there are only two or three faint noes; I think the ayes have it. But, however, this point, at all events, is admitted, that as a rule the farmers vote with the landlords; that the vote goes with the land; nobody denies that the farm carries the vote. What right, then, have you to call this the opinion of the farmer? You cannot have it both ways. It cannot be both the opinion of the landlord and the opinion of the tenant. What becomes, then, of all those interesting romances in which the Duke of Richmond has indulged in public about the bold, independent, and gallant yeomanry of the country? Why, these are the men who have not the right of using their suffrages. It is your own statement. This country certainly will not be governed by a combination of land-lords and tenants. Probably you are not aware on what a very narrow basis this power of yours rests. But I can give you some information on the subject. There are about 150,000 tenants who form the basis of your political power, and who are distributed throughout the counties of this country.

Well, let it come to the worst;—carry on the opposition to this measure for three years more; yet there is a plan in operation much maligned by some hon. Gentlemen opposite, and still more maligned in another place, but which, the more the shoe pinches, and the more you wince at it, the more we like it out of doors. Now, I say, we have confronted this difficulty, and are prepared to meet it. We are calling into exercise the true old English forms of the Constitution, of five centuries' antiquity, and we intend that it should countervail this innovation of yours in the Reform Bill. You think that there is something very revolutionary in this. Why, you are the innovators and the revolutionists who introduced this new franchise into the Reform Bill. But I believe that it is perfectly understood by the longest heads among your party that we have a power out of doors to meet this difficulty. You should bear in mind, that less than one-half of the money invested in the savings'-banks, laid out at better interest in the purchase of freeholds, would give qualifications to more persons than your 150,000 tenant-farmers. But you say that the League is purchasing votes and giving away the franchise. No, no; we are not quite so rich as that; but be assured that if you prolong the contest for three or four years (which you cannot do)—if, however, it comes to the worst, we have the means in our power to meet the difficulty, and are prepared to use them. Money has been subscribed to prepare our organisation in every county, and we are prepared to meet the difficulty, and to overcome it. You may think that there is something repulsive to your [194] notions of supremacy in all this. I see a very great advantage, even if the Corn-laws were repealed to-morrow. I think that you cannot too soon widen the basis of our county representation. I say, with respect to a man, whether he be a small shopkeeper or a mechanic, who by his prudence has saved 50*l.* or 100*l.*, and is willing to lay it out in the purchase of a cottage or land bringing in 40*s.* a-year as a freehold,—I say that it is to that man of all others that I would wish to entrust the franchise.

Let it be understood that all this extraneous matter is not of my introducing, for your debate has turned on the question of dissolution. No one can complain of my having, on this question, been guilty of often introducing irrelevant matter; I generally keep close to the argument; but you have chosen to say now that you will not settle the question by argument, and by an appeal to facts and reason in this House; that you will have nothing to do with this House, but that you will go to the country. Now, I have given you some idea of what is your prospect in the country. I do not ask you to take my opinion for it; but as mischief may be averted more from yourselves—more from another place to which allusion has been made, than from others—I do ask you to take these facts home, to study them for yourselves, to look over the registry, to count the population of the towns, and then to come down and say whether you think the public opinion of the country is with you or against you.

So much of the argument has turned on this extraneous question, and what little argument has been addressed to the merits of the case has been so abundantly answered by other persons, that it would be impertinent in me to trespass at too great length on the time of the House. Well, I will tell you what my thoughts were as I sat at home patiently reading these debates. As I read speech after speech, and saw the fallacies which I had knocked on the head seven years ago re-appearing afresh, my thought was, what fun these debates will afford to the men in fustian jackets! All these fallacies are perfectly transparent to these men, and they would laugh at you for putting them forward. Dependence on foreigners! Who in the world could have supposed that that long-buried ghost would come again to light? Drain of gold! Wages rising and falling with the price of bread! Throwing land out of cultivation, and bringing corn here at 25*s.* per quarter. You forget that the great mass of the people now take a very different view on these questions from what you do. They formerly, seven years ago, did give in, to a certain extent, to your reiterated assertions that wages rise and fall with the price of bread. You had a very fair clap-trap against us (as we happened to be master manufacturers), in saying that we wanted to reduce wages. But the right hon. Baronet at the head of the Government, and the right hon. Baronet the Home Secretary, are not suspected by

the English people of having such motives on these questions. The English people have no disinclination to refer to high authorities on these matters. They assume that men high in office have access to accurate information, and they generally suppose that those men have no sinister motive for deceiving the great body of the people on a question like the present. You see I do not underrate the importance of your leaders having declared in favour of Free Trade. On the contrary, I avow that this has caused the greatest possible accession to the ranks of the Free-traders. Well, then, the working classes, not believing that wages rise and fall with the price of bread, when you tell them that they are to have corn at 25s. a quarter, instead of being frightened, are rubbing their hands with satisfaction. They are not frightened at the visions which you present to their eyes of a big loaf, seeing that they expect to get more money and bread at half the price. And then the danger of having your land thrown out of cultivation! Why, what would the men in smock-frocks in the south of England say to that? They would say, [195] 'We shall get our land for potato ground at ½d. a lug, instead of paying 3d. or 4d. for it.' These fallacies have all been disposed of; and if you lived more in the world—more in contact with public opinion, and less with that charmed circle which you think the world, but which is really anything but the world—if you gave way less to the excitement of clubs, less to the buoyancy which arises from talking to each other as to the effect of some smart speech, in which a Minister has been assailed, you would see that it was mere child's-play to attempt to baulk the intelligence of the country on this great question, and you would not have talked as you have talked for the last eleven days.

Now, with respect to the farmers, I will not deny that you have a large portion of the farmers clinging to you landlords on this question. They have been talked to and frightened by their landlords, as children by their nurses, and they dread some hideous prospect, or some old bogie, ready to start up before their eyes. They do not know what is to happen, but they have not strict and implicit faith in you. They are afraid lest anything should happen to render them unable to make terms with the landlords in the matter of rent; or otherwise they are perfectly easy, and willing to receive Free Trade to-morrow. They are afraid of how the adjustment might be conducted; and the question, therefore, I have no hesitation in saying, is a landlords' question. On this subject the farmers have had some hints given them in the following paragraph, which appeared some time ago in the *Standard* newspaper:—

'Under what head, then, is the farmer to look for relief? Under the head "rent." The landlord must reduce rent; but the farmer knows, by rather bitter experience, the process by which this reduction must be effected. He must be first himself rendered unable to pay rent, and then the landlord will give way, and not before.'

This is the character given by the *Standard* newspaper of the landlords, and in this consists the great difficulty with the farmers. I do not think that the farmers generally believe all that you have told them. I believe that farms let as high now as ever they did. There is something remarkable in this. Since the right hon. Baronet has proposed his measure, I have directed my attention to this point, because I conceive that it solves much of our difficulty. I have inquired of land agents, land proprietors, lawyers, &c., as to whether land has suffered any depreciation in value in consequence of the proposition on this subject made by the Government. Now, it is remarkable, that though silks have been rendered almost unsaleable, and though the proposed change has produced almost a paralysis in every trade touched, yet land is letting and selling for higher prices than ever. I will give you an example. I will mention a case, and I am at liberty to mention the name. The hon. Member for Somerset will corroborate what I am going to state. Mr. Gordon, a near neighbour of that hon. Member, has had sixty farms, and he made the tenants an offer that he would take their land off their hands on equitable terms at Lady-day; yesterday was the last day for giving notice of accepting his offer, and not one farmer proposed to do so. I think it is not very complimentary to the hon. Member for Somerset. Mr. Gordon is a near neighbour of his, and his tenants of course have

been favoured to hear some of those eloquent addresses which the hon. Member has made in Somerset, wherein he has told them that land will not be worth cultivation at all, or, at least, that there will be such an avalanche of corn from the Continent and from America as will quite supersede the cultivation; and yet these farmers seem to have so little alarm that they are willing to hold their farms at their present rents. Let me read you, too, the account that is given me by a gentleman in the City, an eminent solicitor, whom I have known for some years, and who is largely interested in landed property:—

'I have for many years been connected with the management of landed property [196] and with the purchase and letting of estates in several different counties, and am at this time negotiating for the renewal of leases and letting of lands in Bedfordshire, Herts, and Essex. In the latter county, the tenant, who has occupied a farm of 500 acres for fourteen years, under a lease, and who has always spoken of his rent as somewhat high, and of his own farming as the best in his own neighbourhood, has now offered a considerable increase of rent (15 per cent.) for a new lease of fourteen years, and to covenant to underdrain two-thirds of the farm, the landlord finding drainingtiles; now acknowledging that the cultivation may be greatly improved, so as to meet the increase of rent. The farmer has another occupation, and is not, therefore, under any fear of being without a farm. He is a protectionist in words, and a supporter of Sir John Tyrell. Under the rumour that this farm might be given up, there were eight or ten most respectable applicants for it.

'In Hertfordshire, I am at this moment renewing leases upon two large farms, both with the offer of increased rents, and with covenants for greatly improved cultivation, particularly as to underdraining.

'In Bedfordshire, upon two moderatesized farms, the same has been the result; and on the application for one of them, which the farmer is quitting in consequence of age and infirmity, the following conversation took place, on the application to me by an intelligent farmer for the farm:—

' "I understand, Sir, that you have the letting of Mr. L.'s farm, as he is quitting?"

' "I have."

' "I should like to have the offer of it. My name is—, and I can refer you to the clergyman of my parish, and to several gentlemen, for my character and responsibility."

' "You are, I presume, a farmer?"

' "Yes, Sir; I have one farm, and I should like another, to extend my occupation, as I have sufficient capital."

' "You know the farm, I presume, and the rent which the present tenant pays?"

' "Yes, Sir, I know the farm and the rent; and as we are no longer to have any protection, and the Corn-laws must now be repealed, I hope you will consider that point in the rent."

' "Pray, as you say that the Corn-laws must be repealed, what, in your judgment, will be the effect?"

' "Why, Sir, the first thing will be the waking up of thousands of farmers who have hitherto been asleep; and we must look to increased efforts and increased production."

' "With respect to rent, I must have a small increase, and I must require covenants for better cultivation, more especially as to underdraining, which must be done very extensively."

' "Sir, my intention is, if I have the farm, to underdrain the whole of it, being allowed tiles."

' "Well, as you are a man of observation, and acquainted with different districts in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Herts, tell me whether I am right (so far as your observation goes) in saying that, under improved cultivation, one-third more corn can be grown, and the sample much better?"

' "I have no doubt that you are right."

' "Then, if I am right, what have you to fear from the abolition of the Cornlaw?"

' "Nothing at all, Sir."

' "This person has hired the farm at an increased rent, and undertaken to underdrain the whole, if required by the landlord so to do."

Now, hon. Gentlemen must, of course, be better able than I can be to judge from their own experience whether this be a fair statement of the case or not; but I would put it to them, Are any of them prepared to sell their own estates for one farthing less now than they were twelve months ago? But if farmers will take the land at the same rent, and if you will not take less than thirty years' purchase now upon the present rental, where are the proofs that you are in earnest in all that you predict as the consequences of the repeal of the Corn-laws?

Nay, this is a proof that there has been a system of mutual self-delusion, or mutual deception, between you and the farmers. You have preached doctrines which the farmers have affected to believe, but which neither of you have believed at heart. Either you have been doing this jointly, doing it that you might practise upon the credulity of your countrymen, or else you are now [197] pursuing a most unworthy and inconsistent course, because, after telling the farmers at your protection meetings that wheat is to be sold at 30s. to 35s. a quarter, and that they cannot carry on their business in competition with the Russians and the Poles, even if they had their land rent free, with what face can you now let your land to farmers at existing rents?

But the truth is, that you all know—that the country knows—that there never was a more monstrous delusion than to suppose that that which goes to increase the trade of the country and to extend its manufactures and commerce,—that which adds to our numbers, increases our population, enlarges the number of your customers, and diminishes your burdens by multiplying the shoulders that are to bear them, and giving them increased strength to bear them,—can possibly tend to diminish the value of land. You may affect the value of silks; you may affect the value of cottons or woollens: transitory changes of fashion may do that—changes of taste; but there is a taste for land inherent in human kind, and especially is it the desire of Englishmen to possess land; and therefore, whilst you have a monopoly of that article which our very instincts lead us to desire to possess, if you see any process going on by which our commerce and our numbers are increased, it is impossible to suppose that it can have the effect of diminishing the value of the article that is in your hands.

What, then, is the good of this 'protection'? What is this boasted 'protection'? Why, the country have come to regard it, as they do witchcraft, as a mere sound and a delusion. They no more regard your precautions against Free Trade than they regard the horseshoes that are nailed over the stables to keep the witches away from the horses. They do not believe in protection; they have no fear of Free Trade; and they are laughing to scorn all the arguments by which you are trying to frighten them.

How can protection, think you, add to the wealth of a country? Can you by legislation add one farthing to the wealth of the country? You may, by legislation, in one evening, destroy the fruits and accumulations of a century of labour; but I defy you to show me how, by the legislation of this House, you can add one farthing to the wealth of the country. That springs from the industry and intelligence of the people of this country. You cannot guide that intelligence; you cannot do better than leave it to its own instincts. If you attempt by legislation to give any direction to trade or industry, it is a thousand to one that you are doing wrong; and if you happen to be right, it is a work of supererogation, for the parties for whom you legislate would go right without you, and better than with you.

Then, if this is true, why should there be any difference of opinion between us? Hon. Gentlemen may think that I have spoken hardly to them on this occasion; but I want to see them come to a better conclusion on this question. I believe, if they will look the thing in the face, and divest themselves of that crust of prejudice that oppresses them, we shall all be better friends about it. There are but two things that can prevent it: one is, their believing that they have a sinister interest in this question, and therefore not looking into it; and the other is, an incapacity for understanding political economy. I know there are many heads who cannot comprehend and master a proposition in political economy; I believe that study is the highest exercise of the human mind, and that the exact sciences require by no means so hard an effort. But, barring these two accidents—want of capacity, and having a sinister interest—I defy any man to look into this question honestly, and come to any other than one conclusion. Then why should we not agree? I want no triumph in this matter for the Anti-Corn-law League; I want you to put an end, from conviction, to an evil system. Come down to us, and let us hold a Free-trade meeting in our hall at Manchester. Come to us now, protectionists, and let [198] us see whether we cannot do something better for our common country than carrying on this strife of parties. Let us, once for all, recognise this principle, that we must not tax one another for the benefit of one another.

Now, I am going to read to you an authority that will astonish you. I am going to read you an extract from a speech of the Duke of Wellington in the House of Lords on the 17th of April, 1832: it is his opinion on taxation:—

'He thought taxes were imposed only for the service of the State. If they were necessary for the service of the State, in God's name let them be paid; but if they were not necessary, they ought not to be paid; and the Legislature ought not to impose them.'

Now, there, that noble Duke, without having had time to study Adam Smith or Ricardo, by that native sagacity which is characteristic of his mind, came at once to the marrow of this question. We must not tax one another for the benefit of one another. Oh, then, divest the future Prime Minister of this country of that odious task of having to reconcile rival interests; divest the office, if ever you would have a sagacious man in power as Prime Minister, divest it of the responsibility of having to find food for the people! May you never find a Prime Minister again to undertake that awful responsibility! That responsibility belongs to the law of nature; as Burke said, it belongs to God alone to regulate the supply of the food of nations. When you shall have seen in three years that the abolition of these laws is inevitable, as inevitable it is, you will come forward and join with the Free-traders; for if you do not, you will have the farmers coming forward and agitating in conjunction with the League. You are in a position to gain honour in future; you are in a position, especially the young members among you, who have the capacity to learn the truth of this question, they are in a position to gain honour in this struggle; but as you are going on at present your position is a false one; you are in the wrong groove, and are every day more and more diverging from the right point. It may be material for you to get right notions of political economy; questions of that kind will form a great part of the world's legislation for a long time to come.

We are on the eve of great changes. Put yourselves in a position to be able to help in the work, and so gather honour and fame where they are to be gained. You belong to the aristocracy of the human kind—not the privileged aristocracy,—I don't mean that, but the aristocracy of improvement and civilisation. We have set an example to the world in all ages; we have given them the representative system. The very rules and regulations of this House have been taken as the model for every representative assembly throughout the whole civilised world; and having besides given them the example of a free press and civil and religious freedom, and every institution that belongs to freedom and civilisation, we are now about giving a still greater example; we are going to set the example of making industry free—to set the example of giving the whole world every advantage of climate, and latitude, and situation, relying ourselves on the freedom of our industry. Yes, we are going to teach the world that other lesson. Don't think there is anything selfish in this, or anything at all discordant with Christian principles. I can prove that we advocate nothing but what is agreeable to the highest behests of Christianity. To buy in the cheapest market, and sell in the dearest. What is the meaning of the maxim? It means that you take the article which you have in the greatest abundance, and with it obtain from others that of which they have the most to spare; so giving to mankind the means of enjoying the fullest abundance of earth's goods, and in doing so, carrying out to the fullest extent the Christian doctrine of 'Doing to all men as ye would they should do unto you.'

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**FREE TRADE. XXII.**  
**MANCHESTER, JULY 4, 1846.** ↩

[After the repeal of the Corn-laws, the Council of the Anti-Corn-law League resolved on suspending the action of the organisation which they had set in motion, as long as no attempt was made to revive protection.]

If this were a meeting for any other purpose than that of business, in the strictest sense of the word, I am quite sure that I should feel more embarrassed at meeting you on this occasion than I have done at any previous time; for I feel myself almost oppressed with the consciousness of the importance of the events we have been passing through lately, and of the great interest which is involved in the present meeting; and I am sure I could not do justice to the feelings which are now affecting me.

We are met here on the present occasion as a meeting of the Council of the League. We have, in the working of this body, as you are aware, an executive committee of gentlemen living in Manchester, and also the Council of the League, consisting of the subscribers of 50*l.* and upwards. The Executive Council of the League have called you, the Council, together, for the purpose of taking your opinion as to the course we shall now pursue; and I think the importance of that question is such, that I shall confine myself as strictly as possible to business details in what I have to say, because I do not wish to prevent the many gentlemen who have come from distant parts the opportunity of giving their advice and assistance on this occasion. The Executive Council of the League in Manchester have talked over the matter repeatedly, and are now prepared to submit their views; and, as I may as well put you in possession of what the general purport of all the resolutions is, I will just explain the substance of the whole.

We propose to recommend, not that the League shall be absolutely dissolved in the strict sense of the word, and yet we propose to take such steps as amount to a virtual dissolution of the League, unless the protectionist party compel us again to revive our agitation. We propose to ask from you the authority and instruction to wind up and suspend the affairs of the League. We recommend that you should pass a resolution, absolving all those gentlemen who have put their names down to the large guarantee fund, and paid their first instalment, from any further liability. We propose that you shall pass a resolution, authorising the gentlemen in Manchester, who have acted on the Council of the League, in case they should see any serious efforts made by the monopolists to revive the system of protection, or to induce Parliament to retrace its steps, then to request these gentlemen again to call the League into active existence. Gentlemen, we have thought that the course by which we shall fulfil our duty [200] to the general body of subscribers, and likewise our pledges to the public. We have pledged ourselves not to retire from this agitation, or disband the League, until the Corn-laws were totally and immediately abolished. We are, therefore, not competent to dissolve this League. At the same time I ought to say, that with reference to our practical operations, it would be exceedingly difficult to draw a line between a total suspension of the League and a partial suspension. If we continue active operations at all, it must be on a large scale, and at an enormous expense. I do not think you can draw a distinction between 500*l.* a week and nothing. We have been spending the last three years at least 1000*l.* a week. Under these circumstances, I think it is a fair practical question to consider, what can be the object gained if we continue the active agitation of the League. In two years and a half the Corn-laws will be abolished by an Act now upon the statutebook; and let us entertain the supposition that our efforts in agitation out of doors should be ever so successful, it is hardly

possible that in less than two years and a half we should succeed in altering the law which now exists; therefore I do not see that any practical good can result from continuing the agitation in any form whatever.

Now many people may say, 'Are you safe in disbanding this great organisation? Are you safe in taking off your uniform (if I may use the expression), of casting aside your weapons of moral warfare? Will not the protectionists gain strength and confidence if they see you abandon the field?' I am of opinion that there is no danger of anything of the kind. I look upon it that the mere boasting and vapouring of a few of the less wise part of the protectionist party may be very well excused by us. It is quite natural that men who felt worsted in an argument, and in all the tactics of political action during the last seven years, should console themselves with the promises of what they will do the next seven years. But I hold that you may as soon abolish Magna Charta, or do away with Trial by Jury, or repeal the Test and Corporation Act, or the Catholic Emancipation Act, as ever reenact protection as a principle again in this country.

Some people say we go back in this country. I maintain that we never go back after a question has been discussed and sifted as ours has. You have never gone back in any of the great questions; if settled once, they have been settled altogether. People do say that we went back after the Reform Act was passed. I will tell you what we did. We got hold of a machine which we did not know how to use, and the proper use of which we are now learning, but we never went back. Nobody ever proposed the repeal of one enactment of the Reform Act. Therefore I hope our friends everywhere will bear this in mind; and if they should hear a noble lord, or even a noble duke, talking of what they will do, not let their nervous system be excited or alarmed. They must raise a fresh crop of statesmen to carry out their principles, for we have all the statesmen now on our side of the question. Such being our position, we have very good grounds for congratulation on the present occasion. I confess I hardly know whom to thank, or how to account, for our present position; there has been such a combination of fortunate accidents, that I must confess that I am disposed to thank that Providence which has overruled so many apparently conflicting incidents for this great and mighty good. I believe we, at all events, may say, that, humanly speaking, we owe a debt of gratitude to our gracious Sovereign the Queen. I believe it is not in strict etiquette to allude to our Queen's personal views and feelings in any matter, but it is well known that her Majesty's predilections are strongly in favour of the cause we have been agitating. Then, there is her late First Minister; along with our success, we have seen the downfall of that Minister. Some people say he has lost office by giving us Free Trade. Well, if he has lost office, he [201] has gained a country. For my part, I would rather descend into private life with that last measure of his, which led to his discomfiture, in my hand, than mount to the highest pinnacle of human power. Among the statesmen, we owe a debt of gratitude to Lord John Russell. Individually, I believe, we owe to him and his firmness, to his letter, and to his firmness during the intrigues of the last six months in London—I believe we owe it to his individual firmness that we had the support of the Whig aristocracy at all in this measure. I am anxious as an individual on this occasion, that I should lose sight of nobody to whom the country is indebted for the passing of these measures, because I do feel there has been a disposition to make one of us a great deal more a monopolist in this matter than he deserves. ['No, no.'] I speak of myself, and I say, that when I entered upon this career we found the road very much prepared; the mighty impediments had been removed by the labours of others; we had had men preceding us who had been toiling to beat down great prejudices, and destroy fallacies, and prepare a path for us which we had simply to macadamise to win our way to victory. There are many of these men here around me. I would not forget men who, like the late Mr. Deacon Hume, Mr. Macgregor, and Mr. Porter, in the privacy of their closets, furnished the world with statistics, arguments, and facts, which, after all, have swayed mankind more than any declamation or appeals to the passions can possibly do. There is one man especially whom I wish not to forget: it is

Colonel Thompson. Colonel Thompson has made more large pecuniary sacrifices than any man living for Free Trade, and we all know his contributions in an intellectual point of view, which have been invaluable to us—we will not forget the worthy Colonel amidst our congratulations amongst each other.

I said I should not detain you with a long speech, and in fact I cannot do it, for I do feel oppressed with the feelings which now pervade my mind. I believe we are at an era which in importance, socially, has not its equal for the last 1,800 years. I believe there is no event that has ever happened in the world's history, that in a moral and social point of view—there is no human event that has happened in the world more calculated to promote the enduring interests of humanity than the establishment of the principle of Free Trade,—I don't mean in a pecuniary point of view, or as a principle applied to England, but we have a principle established now which is eternal in its truth and universal in its application, and must be applied in all nations and throughout all times, and applied not simply to commerce, but to every item of the tariffs of the world; and if we are not mistaken in thinking that our principles are true, be assured that those results will follow, and at no very distant period. Why, it is a world's revolution, and nothing else; and every meeting we have held of this League, and this its last meeting probably, may be looked back upon as the germ of a movement which will ultimately comprehend the whole world in its embrace. I see and feel, and have always felt, the great social and moral importance of this great question. I believe many who have taken an active part in this question have been influenced solely by its moral and social consequences.

We have amongst us on this occasion a gentleman who has come from a neighbouring country, France, an eloquent advocate of Free Trade there, Mons. Duffour Dubergier, the Mayor of Bordeaux. It is gratifying that we should attract by a kindred sympathy the visit to our meeting of so distinguished a man; and I know he will go back, not with fresh emotions of sympathy towards our cause, for those he has entertained already, but I have no doubt he will go back inspirited by what he sees here, and that he will be anxious that France should not stand long apart from England in this glorious career, but that we join hand to hand in setting nations the example of the mutual advantages of peace and prosperity.

[202]

Well, this League must dissolve—it must suspend. Our elements must be scattered. I cannot help saying personally for myself, that the greatest pleasure I have found in the course of those proceedings has been in the acquaintances I have formed with, and the kindness I have received from, the men connected with this association. If I could ever have despaired of this country, after the acquaintances which I have made with the men in connection with this question—men who will be found the salt of this land in whatever good is to be accomplished—having known what I do of my fellow-countrymen in this agitation, I shall never despair of this moral power to conduct this good ship through whatever storm may arise, which will save us from anarchy at one end, or tyranny at the other end of society. I am going to be egotistical; but I will say that, so far as I myself am concerned—so far as my tastes go—a release from an active life of agitation will not be unacceptable to me. I ought, in order to enjoy the full pleasure of an agitator, to be differently constituted; and I don't think nature ever intended me for that line. I say it most unaffectedly, that I entered upon the career of agitation without the slightest idea that it would ever have conducted me to the point to which I have arrived. I had not the most distant idea of it. I don't think circumstances would have warranted myself in taking the step eight years ago, if I could have seen what it would lead to. We got into the groove, and were pushed along, and we found ourselves carrying a train of good hardy spirits who would not leave us; and having given us their support, we were impelled forward in the groove at an accelerated speed, and with a constantly increased sympathy.

Well, for myself, you will hardly credit it, when I say that with regard to myself, I have precisely the same feeling now with respect to the ordeal of public meetings that I had when I began this agitation. It is a matter of great reluctance and difficulty for me to appear before an audience at all. Many people would think that we had our reward in the applause and *éclat* of public meetings; but I declare upon my honour that it is not so with me, for the inherent reluctance I have to address public meetings is so great, that I don't even get up to present a petition in the House of Commons without reluctance. I therefore hope I may be believed when I say that if this agitation terminates now, it will be very acceptable to my feelings; but if there should be the same necessity, the same feeling which has impelled me to take the part I have will impel me to a new agitation,—ay, and with tenfold more vigour, after having had a little time to recruit my strength.

We are going to dissolve; those good spirits must disband, and I am not quite sure that it is not wise and proper that it should be so. We have been kept together for seven years without one single dispute, without anything to cause the slightest alienation. We have had the bond of freemasonry and brotherhood so closely knit about us, that I don't think there has been a keen word in the happy family of the Anti-Corn-law League. That is the spirit in which we should break off. Were we to continue our agitation, when the object for which we associated is gone, I am afraid that the demon of discord would be getting in among us. It is in nature so. It is in our moral nature necessary that when an organised body has performed its functions, it must pass into a new state of existence, and become differently organised. We are dispersing our elements to be ready for any other good work, and it is nothing but good works that will be attempted by good Leaguers. Our body will, so to say, perish; but our spirit is abroad, and will pervade all the nations of the earth. It will pervade all the nations of the earth because it is the spirit of truth and justice, and because it is the spirit of peace and good-will amongst men.

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**FREE TRADE. XXIII.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, MARCH 8, 1849.** ↩

[On March 8th, 1849, in the House of Commons, Mr. Disraeli moved for a Committee of the whole House, to take into consideration such measures as might remove the grievances of the owners and occupiers of real property. On this motion, Mr. Hume moved an amendment; and the debate was adjourned to the 15th March, when Mr. Cobden delivered the following speech, in opposition to Mr. Disraeli's motion, which was rejected by a majority of 91 (280 to 189).]

I HAVE been alluded to so frequently in the course of this debate, that I am not willing to allow it to cease without saying a few words. I shall not weary the House by a reference to the speech of the honourable mover of the original motion; I consider that to do so, after the able speech of the right honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir Charles Wood), would be to slay the slain. I will not stop to say a word on the jocular misrepresentations which have been made of the speech of the honourable Member for Montrose (Mr. Hume); but I may say that to-morrow I shall probably refer to those misrepresentations, as to the amount of expenditure on our naval and military establishments, which I think are very much calculated to mislead the country.

The plan of the honourable Gentleman opposite has at length been resolved into this—that it is a proposal to lay on between 400,000*l.* and 500,000*l.* of additional taxation on the farmers, on the plea of benefiting them. And this is the proposal which is made in the interest of the tenant-farmers. That is, upon the assumption that it is demonstrated beyond all possible cavil or contradiction that the local burdens laid upon property are borne by the owners of property, and not by the floating capital of the country. If you deny that, of course you can go to the country with your proposition for favouring the farmer by reducing the burdens on real property; but is there a human being whose opinion is deserving a moment's consideration who will deny this proposition, that if you relieve the burdens upon real property, the relief will go into the pockets of the owners of that property? Take this case: Two farms are to let of exactly equal intrinsic value, as to quality, soil, and situation. One shall be rated at 2*s.* in the pound to the poor-rate; the other at 8*s.* Would you let the two farms for the same rent? I ask even a nod of assent from the honourable Gentleman opposite. There is not a farmer or land-agent who would say that the two farms would let for the same money. Deducting in each case the amount of the rate, the remainder is the amount of rent in each. Is not this coming before us under false pretences? It is altogether very much like a hoax. First of all, the tenant-farmers are paraded before us. You come in hot [204] haste from Willis's Rooms with the case of the tenant-farmers. Not a man is allowed to speak there but a tenant-farmer: by the way, they are for the most part land-agents. I know the most of them, because I have met them in the country. But you come here professing to serve the tenant-farmers, and you try to raise a quarrel between them and the manufacturers. What was the peroration of the speech of the hon. Member for Buckinghamshire (Mr. Disraeli)? Was it not an attempt to array the tenant-farmers against the manufacturers, by the classing the former under the insidious title of the landed interest. But there is no difference between the manufacturers and the farmers in relation to the question before the House. The farmer is a manufacturer; he hires the land for manufacturing purposes. But, as farmers and landlords, your interests are antagonistic, in spite of anything that may be said to the contrary.

I do not wish to set farmers against landlords by saying that. ['Oh, oh!'] You may cry, 'Oh!' but I will be understood by the farmers as well as by the landlords in this House. As members of one community I do not say that landlords and farmers have not common

interests in good and equal laws; but if you come before this House, and ask for a measure to benefit landlord and tenant exclusively, then I tell you, that as landlords and tenants your interests are antagonistic—for the interest of the one is to rent the land as cheap as he can, and the interest of the other to let it as dear as he can. I say, then, that it is impossible to combine both in one measure, so as to give an equal amount of benefit to both interests. You might as well expect to combine the cotton brokers of Liverpool and the cotton spinners of Manchester in one measure, which would be equally advantageous to both. The two cases are precisely the same. And I do hope the time is not far distant when these discussions will put the tenant-farmers in their real position in this country.

I have been accused by honourable Gentlemen with having said that I considered the farmers had been injured—nay, the honourable Member for Buckinghamshire went so far as to say that I was a party to injuring them. I wish honourable Gentlemen would have the fairness to give the entire context of what I did say, and not pick out detached words. If they did so, it would save time and my explanations. What I said at Manchester was this, that as we carried the principle of Free Trade with respect to corn, we owed it to the farmer to carry out the same principles, by removing as far as possible every impediment to the free employment of capital and labour upon the soil. The farmer complains of the interference of the malt-tax with his business, and it is not inconsistent with my principles to remove that impediment out of his way. I do this without pretending to any particular affection for the farmer above other classes. If I did so, I would follow your error, by attempting to legislate for a particular class. I said on a former occasion, that I would not enter again into the subject of Free Trade, unless a motion was laid on the table of the House for the purpose of restoring protection to corn. But this motion has been made a protection debate, and we have been challenged by honourable Gentlemen opposite to make good our case; and it has been asserted that we are the authors of all kinds of disasters, not only to the farmers everywhere, but to the labourers, and even to the manufacturers.

I deny the charge, and I bring you to the facts. You complain of the condition of the agricultural labourer—you complain that he is suffering from the low price of provisions. The noble lord the Member for West Sussex (the Earl of March) spoke of the halcyon days of high-priced corn, and how well off the agricultural labourers were then. I have taken pains to inquire into that matter, and I deny that they were better off. Take one of those darling years of which you are so fond—take the year 1847, and compare it with the present time. An agri [205] cultural labourer's family, consisting of five persons, if they consumed as much bread as is allowed per head by the Poor-law Unions to out-of-door paupers, should consume ten 4lb. loaves in the week. Then ten loaves in 1847 cost 9*d.* a loaf, or 7*s.* 6*d.* for the whole; they cost now 6*d.* a loaf, or 5*s.* for the whole; so that he pays 2*s.* 6*d.* less for his bread now than he did in 1847. The reduction of wages generally is about 1*s.* a week, so that he is a gainer by 1*s.* 6*d.* But I will take the extreme case put by the honourable Gentleman opposite, and assume that wages have fallen 2*s.* a week, and even then it leaves a balance of 6*d.* a week in his favour, independently of the measures passed in consequence of Free Trade for the reduction of sugar, which conferred a further benefit on the labourer. But take the ordinary case of the labourers and mechanics in towns—take the case of the manufacturing labourers in the north of England and in London—and I maintain that, at the present time, as compared with those high-priced years gone by for ever, those years for which the noble lord sighs in vain—the mechanical operatives and labouring population in our great manufacturing seats save at least from 2*s.* to 3*s.* a week in their weekly wages, which is tantamount to fifteen per cent. on their income.

The honourable Member for the North Riding of Yorkshire (Mr. Cayley) said that we failed in all our predictions, and he made us appear as if we expected a great many things which I never expected. He said that we caused a great reduction of wages. Well, if you say

you have reduced wages in the agricultural districts, I hold that you are good authority for that statement: but I deny that wages have been reduced in the manufacturing districts; nay, more, I deny that they have been reduced in the neighbourhood of those districts. On the contrary, there has been a tendency to a rise in wages during the six weeks that the Corn-law has been abolished. I will state a case which the noble Lord the Member for Stamford (the Marquis of Granby) will comprehend. Within a few weeks a body of men for whom he and his brothers professed great sympathy—the stockings and glove-makers of the midland counties—struck for an increase of wages. I find it stated in the Nottingham newspapers, that they have had four successive strikes for wages, and that the men gained the advantage on every occasion—a thing which was not known for seventy years before—during the whole of which period there had been a gradual diminution of wages. Take again the district with which I am connected—take Lancashire. What is the state of things there at the present time as compared with the days to which the noble lord is so anxious to go back, and to which you are all anxious to return? Why, it is in a state of comparative prosperity now. Look to Bradford, and compare its condition now to the state it was in twelve months ago, when I accompanied a deputation to the right honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer, asking for relief in its behalf.

But I need not confine myself to the manufacturing districts. I will take the condition of the farmers themselves. I call on the honourable Member for East Somersetshire (Mr. Miles) to go over some figures together with me. I admit the farmers are suffering in certain districts. But I am not going to let honourable Gentlemen off as to the cause of that distress. Do honourable Gentlemen forget that the farmers suffered sometimes before? Do they read *Hansard*? Do they recollect the years 1819, 1820, and 1822, when petitions were presented every night, and debates and speeches upon them—when county meetings were held day after day to protest against the distress and oppression which the agriculturists were labouring under, and when they showed themselves more sensible than they did now, for then they always accompanied their petitions for redress, with a demand for a reduction of expenditure and taxation? They did not then suffer themselves to be bamboozled as they do now, when not a word is uttered by them about a reduction of [206] public expenditure. What do you think of the year 1821, when Sir E. Knatchbull declared that all the farmers were nearly ruined in 1820—that they were quite ruined in 1821? In 1822 a Committee of Inquiry was granted to inquire into agricultural distress. Now, bear in mind, that you had all this time a law which gave you a monopoly of the wheat market up to the price of 80s. What said the report of that Committee? Why, it said, ‘it must be admitted that protection could not be carried further than monopoly, and that the agricultural interest enjoyed a complete monopoly since 1819.’ No wheat had been imported from 1819 to 1822, and yet the agricultural interest was in a state of universal distress, and even in a state of bankruptcy. Well, in 1835, you were in the same condition precisely, and you had a committee which made no report, because no case could be made out during the time of the sliding-scale. In 1836, again, the Marquis of Chandos made a motion for the repeal of the malt-tax, and he said that the landlords were abandoning their mansions to go and live abroad, the farmers were going to the workhouse, and the labourers, instead of drinking beer, drank water from the pump. Do you recollect that Mr. Bennett, the Member for Wiltshire, when slyly threatened with the income tax, said that this was no threat to the landed interest, for the land was no longer theirs—it belonged to mortgagees and money-lenders? Well, all this was during the height of protection—and with this before you, how can you come and say that, with Free Trade only in existence for six weeks, we are the cause of the distress of the farmers?

I believe that this distress has partly arisen in consequence of our principle of an immediate repeal not being carried out. I stated my opinion emphatically in 1846, that the farmers were making a mistake in not having the Corn-law immediately repealed, because I knew that during the three years that it was to continue a stimulus would be given to the

production of wheat all over the world, for the purpose of pouring it into the market here, when the duty was entirely taken away. The duty, which was run up to ten shillings, came down suddenly, and this was partly the cause of the distress. I believe that the parties who imported this wheat are selling it now at a loss. But if we are not the cause of the farmers' distress, who is the cause of it? Let us go back to a time when farmers were generally doing well. Between the years 1785 and 1790 the farmers had a quiet, steady trade: there were no complaints then. Why were there now? Why did not the farmers get the profit now which they got in the period between the American war and the French revolution? In 1790 the price of iron and implements of husbandry was double what it is now; clothing of every kind was nearly double; cotton articles were four or five times their present price; salt was double the price at which it is now selling. Tea, sugar, coffee, soap, fuel, were dearer then than now. Spices, preserved fruits, and all the moderate luxuries of life were then dearer than at present. But, on the other hand, butcher's-meat, bacon, butter, cheese, poultry, and eggs bring higher prices now than then, so that all the articles in which the farmer dealt sold as cheap or cheaper then than at present; while, with the single exception of beer, which we, the Free-traders, are anxious to put on the same footing, there is no article of domestic use or implement employed in his business which the farmer cannot buy cheaper now than in 1790. The price of labour in the purely agricultural districts has not changed more than one or two shillings a week, and taking its productiveness into account, it is far cheaper now than in 1790. Why, then, does the farmer complain now? There is one little item which you all forget, but which I do not forget, and that is simply the rent of land, which in any case is double, and in some places treble, what it was in 1790. I say, without hesitation or fear of contradiction, that the rent of agricultural land in England [207] is now double what it was in 1790, and in many cases treble; while in Scotland it is generally more than treble.

I am not going to speak to you, now that the Corn-laws are repealed, in language different from that which I used when agitating for the repeal of those Corn-laws. I have never, in the presence of farmers, in any county in England—and I have met them in open assembly in almost every county—much as I am charged with telling one story in one place and another story in another place—I have never dwelt on a probable reduction of rents as a reason for repealing the Corn-laws. I have, however, always said that with free trade in corn, and with moderate prices, if the present rents were to be maintained, it must be by means of a different system of managing property from that which you now pursue. You must have men of capital on your land; you must let your land on mercantile principles—you must not be afraid of an independent and energetic man who will vote as he pleases at the hustings—you must abandon that modern innovation of battue shooting, which was not known to your ancestors in 1790. Well, now, you laugh at that. I said before that I knew I was speaking in the presence of landowners and landlords, and I now ask you to deal fairly with me when I tell you a home truth; it is, that when you laugh at this battue shooting, you are doing precisely the contrary of what the farmers would do if I were speaking about it to them. I know that farmers regard this system of game preserving as a very great nuisance,—as a very great hindrance to the employment of capital. I know an instance of one of the greatest agitators for Corn-laws, a large landed proprietor, who has driven some of the best tenants that could be found in this kingdom—men of capital—from his estates, because he perseveres in keeping up an inordinate amount of game. I am not going to be fanatical with you, even on the subject of game. I never yet met a farmer—I now speak in particular of the Lothians—who wished to extirpate game. You may have all the game necessary for exercise; but if you will keep up such an amount of game as is necessary for the shooting of five hundred head in one day—and I have heard of that being done by a noble lord and some of his friends—let me tell you that you cannot get men who will pay you in rent, pay you in game, and pay you also in votes. You must be content with a money rent. Give up your game, and give up the votes of your tenants, or you will not be able to retain your money rent. There is nothing unreasonable, though there may be something very inconvenient, at this late



hour, in my talking to you in this way. If you come to this House and parade the distress of the farmer—if, besides, you utter something like a threat of robbing the Exchequer, and deal out alarming predictions of what is going to happen if the farmers are not made to prosper in their business, it becomes us, who take a different view, to tell you what are the reasons why the farmers are not more prosperous.

Now, Sir, something has been said about the very painful ordeal of sending away small farmers who have an insignificant amount of capital. Well, in the first place, it is not very complimentary to a system of Corn-laws and protection, that the farmer's trade is the only one in this kingdom in which capital is deficient. It is overflowing in every other trade. I defy you to show me any other trade in the kingdom, wholesale or retail, which is not glutting the market. And farming being the most inviting business of all, is one to which capital will gladly flow, if you will accept energetic men and men of capital as tenants. Give such men fair leases, and let them do what is best for their own prosperity, and capital will always come to the land in abundance. But what I wish particularly to show you is this—that it is a mistaken humanity to keep on your estates farmers who are deficient in capital, and, I should add, intelligence also, if what the honourable Member for Dorsetshire [208] stated be strictly correct—namely, that if you went to the farmers of that county and explained to them what the honourable Member for Buckinghamshire meant to do for their benefit, they would all, without being coerced by their landlords, at once say, 'We shall be very glad if you will take off these local rates, for we feel quite sure that the landlords will not put the amount into their pockets, but will take it off our rent.' If such be the real character of the farmers, I must say that they want intelligence as well as capital.

What I say on that subject is this, that while you are looking at the interests of men who are without intelligence and without capital, you are losing sight of the interests of the agricultural labourers, who are much more numerous, and therefore more deserving of consideration, than even these small farmers. If you have not men of capital on your land, the labourers cannot be employed. Go to any district—for example, North Devon or Dorsetshire—where the farmers are most deficient in capital, and there you will find the poor-rates highest, and the labourers most depressed. Well, then, I say, whatever may be the inconvenience of doing so, you must take steps to draw capital to your land. You must invite it—you must tempt it—and if you do so, you will be able to employ your labourers. It is perfectly true, as was stated by the noble lord the Member for West Sussex, that in seasons of depression a number of labourers are thrown out of employment in the agricultural districts; and that while the depression lasts, it tends to raise the amount of the poor-rates, so that it is made to appear that the poor-rate has not a tendency to fall in cheap years, as we maintain it ought to do. But what is the cause of agricultural labourers having been thus thrown out of employment when a depression suddenly arises? It is because the tenantry have made false calculations as to the mode in which they are to carry on a profitable cultivation of the land. Farmers have depended on high prices being maintained by Act of Parliament; and, when those prices fail them, as they always have done from time to time, once in seven or ten years, these men, who have insufficient capital to rest upon, and who have depended upon nothing but artificial prices, break down, and come petitioning Parliament for relief.

Well, then, you must put an end to this state of things. I exhort you to tell the farmers honestly that it is 'a delusion, a mockery, and a snare,' to teach them that you can restore one shilling of protection in this House. I admit that you may tamper with the Navigation Laws. That matter rests with the noble lord and his Government; and, if I were in his place, I would stand or fall by the Navigation Bill without altering a clause. But I tell him in the most amicable spirit, that there will be no agitation for the repeal of the Navigation Laws. The public mind considers the Free-trade question as settled; but the public also expect that the Government will show some vigour in completing the measures of Free Trade, by equalising

the duties in the tariff, the duties on coffee, and other articles of general consumption, and by getting rid of the Navigation Laws. They expect the Executive Government to show the same vigour, with a majority of fifty or sixty in this House, as the right honourable Gentleman (Sir Robert Peel) showed in laying the foundation of Free Trade by the repeal of the Corn-laws. The effect of this measure being rejected would not be to create an agitation, but to strike the country with despair of any strong and vigorous administration in the hands of the noble lord.

I say, then, that whatever may be the fate of the Navigation Laws, the Corn question is a different thing. I was always an advocate for confining the public mind to that one question; I call it the keystone of the arch; the rest will fall of itself. But if the Government were to propose a 1s. duty on corn—it was a fearful scene in 1815, when the people surrounded this House whilst you were passing the Corn-law; but, depend [209] upon it, you will be surrounded by a totally different class, if you attempt to pass another Corn-law. Now, if you value your own interest, if you value the interest of the farmer,—above all, if you value the interest of your labouring population, dissipate this delusion, which some of you are attempting to propagate; proclaim, once for all, that any renewal of protection on corn is as impossible as it would be to revoke Magna Charta. Tell them to rely upon their own energies, and that you will co-operate with them. Go to them, and talk to them, and do not come here, talking to the Government or the Prime Minister about reviving protection. Take your proper place, and do your duty alongside of your tenants. Join together in adopting such measures as are suitable to your altered circumstances—and to that which is irrevocable. Don't dream of high prices again. High prices are incompatible with the well-being of this country, and with the interest of the manufacturing population of the large towns. Do you want to follow out the policy of the noble lord the Member for West Sussex, the Earl of March, and to bring us back to the state in which we were in 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842, the years included in his list of high prices, and when he says everybody was prosperous? Have you forgotten the state of Stockport, almost a desolation? Have you forgotten Sheffield, with its 20,000 people existing on the poor-rates; or Leeds, with its 30,000, in the same condition? Have you forgotten a state of things in which political excitement almost bordered on insurrection? and would you dare to bring back such a state of things, and, above all, call it prosperity? No, you have a fair career before you with moderate prices, provided you will alter the system on which you conduct your affairs.

Thirty years ago the manufacturers and merchants of this country had to go through precisely the same ordeal as you have now to pass through. Many of you remember what a revulsion there was within three years after the war in every article of manufactures. Why, a great number of people were then ruined by the losses which they sustained through the stocks which they had on hand. But what occurred gave rise to a totally different description of trade—a trade aiming at a large production and small profits; and let me tell you for your encouragement, that, from 1817 up to the present time, the fortunes made in manufactures and commerce have not been realised by selling at high prices, but almost every successive fortune has been made by selling at lower prices, though in larger quantities. Now there is abundance of scope for you to carry out the same thing. I believe we have no adequate conception of what the amount of production might be from a limited surface of land, provided only the amount of capital were sufficient. There is no reason whatever why I should not live to see the day when a man who lays out 1,000*l.* on fifty acres of land, will be a more independent, more prosperous, and more useful man, than many farmers who now occupy five or six hundred acres, with not one quarter or one-tenth of the capital necessary to carry on the cultivation.

I sincerely thank the House for having listened to me with so much attention at this hour of the morning. I should be sorry if the motion of my honourable friend the Member for Montrose were ignored in the great discussion which we have had about local taxes. My

honourable friend seems to me to have very properly met the case as it at present stands. It is quite clear that the honourable Member for Buckingham-shire has been put out of court. That is quite certain. When the farmer reads the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech—and I would certainly recommend every farmer in the country to do so—when he reads that speech, aided by the analysis which I find in *Punch* to-day—when he sees that the sum total of advantage to the farmer, shown by the speech and the analysis, is an increase of taxation to the amount of 400,000*l.*, [210] I don't think he will consider that any boon has been offered to him. The Chancellor of the Exchequer himself does not, indeed, promise anything much better. He declares that he cannot give us any remission of taxation. Well, then, my honourable friend the Member for Montrose steps in in the most timely way; and, though now probably, as he has always been, a little before his time, still he is right. Now, I am quite sure that you cannot benefit the farmer except by a general reduction of the national expenditure. Let us further tell the land-owners that that is the only means of staving off that tendency to a reduction of rent, which must arise in a transition state, though I maintain that the value of land will ultimately be higher under a system of Free Trade than it ever could have been under protection.

My honourable friend proposes to repeal the malt-tax. Now, though I am a very great advocate for the repeal of that tax, yet, being a sober man myself, I do not take such an interest in the question as some honourable Members do. But I shall vote for the repeal, chiefly because I wish to diminish the waste of our national expenditure, and thus, to find means of reducing taxation. Let there be sufficient pressure, and the Government will find a way of reducing our costly establishments. I will add, that my own course with regard to the reduction of taxation is supported by that of the noble lord (Lord John Russell), who in 1816, after the war, contended for a reduction of the army below the Government estimate of 99,000 men. The men were voted, but there was an immense excitement against the property-tax, and when it came to be voted, it was rejected by a large majority; hereupon the Secretary at War asked to withdraw his estimates, with a view to their revision, and they were revised and reduced most materially. So, if the Government now was made to take the malt-tax and other taxes in hand, with a view to their reduction, they will soon find it necessary to reduce their estimates; and, therefore, as one very sound reason, do I hope that the House will support the proposition of my honourable friend for a reduction of expenditure.

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**FREE TRADE. XXIV.**  
**LEEDS, DECEMBER 18, 1849.** ↩

[In 1847, Mr. Cobden was returned unopposed for the West Riding of Yorkshire, and sat for that constituency for nearly ten years. For some time after the repeal of the Corn-laws he was absent from England, but on his return he made several speeches on topics of public interest during the year 1849.]

THERE is a peculiar advantage in Members of the House of Commons coming, from time to time, in contact with the people, and especially with their own constituencies. It enables us to take their judgment upon the course which we, their Representatives, have followed in times past; and, what is equally important, it enables us to confer with them as to the line of conduct which we should pursue in future. I was, therefore, anxious to-night to have had the opportunity of listening, at greater length, to the speeches of the inhabitants of Leeds; and I sincerely regret that my friend, Mr. Baines, and other gentlemen who have spoken, should have curtailed their remarks out of consideration for me, or a desire that I should be heard addressing you instead of them. I think more good would have arisen if they had favoured us, at greater length, with their views and opinions upon the important questions now before us. Amongst the questions which have been launched this evening by our worthy chairman, is one which I fondly hoped I should never again have had the necessity of speaking upon,—I mean the old, worn-out, the disgusting question of protection. Why, I thought it was dead and buried years ago. It is now eleven years this very month, and I believe this very week, since the first great meeting was held in Manchester, from which originated the Anti-Corn-law League. On that occasion, in December, 1838, two hundred persons from all parts of the kingdom assembled, and many gentlemen here present were at the meeting. For seven years afterwards there was a continual agitation of the Free-trade question throughout the country, and I believe nearly 1,000 public meetings were held upon it in every part of the kingdom. Hundreds of tons' weight of tracts were printed and distributed upon the subject; debate after debate took place upon it in Parliament—sometimes scarcely anything else was debated there for months—and now, at the end of eleven years, we are told that we are to have this question up again for discussion. And why, and on what ground? Amongst other pleas why we should have this question again re-agitated is, that the agriculturists were betrayed, and protection was suddenly abandoned, after seven years of discussion only! Now, gentlemen, so far as I am concerned, I have allowed certain people to go about talking in the country, and talking in the House of Commons, [212] without ever having condescended to answer them. Nay, I candidly confess that I felt the most supreme contempt for all they said. I viewed it as nothing but the contortions of a body that had lost its head; just as we read of unfortunate criminals whose limbs writhe and move by a sort of spasmodic action after they had been decapitated. I thought their party, having lost its brains, had still some muscular action left in it, but I never believed it was to be treated again as a sentient intelligent body, worthy the holding a discussion with in this country.

But, gentlemen, I have been told, by those in whose judgment I have confidence, that we have allowed our opponents to go unanswered too long, and that there is, amongst a very large portion of the farming class in this country, a belief that, from our silence, protection is gaining ground again in this country. Why, let them understand that our silence has been the result of supreme contempt. In those meetings, which we read of in the agricultural districts, we hear the reiterated assertion that the whole country is preparing to go back again to protection, and I concur with the view taken by our respected chairman, that we ought, if possible, to prevent the delusion which is being practised upon the farmers, which prevents

the farmers having an adjustment and arrangement with their landlords—that we ought, if possible, to put an end to that delusion here, in order that agriculture may resume its old course, and the landlord and farmer may come to some agreement as to terms between each other. Where is the proof of reaction? I admit that, in some of our rural villages, where men,—or rather, we ought to call them, old women—still put horse-shoes over their stable-doors to keep the witches from their horses—there may, in some of those parishes, be found men who will gape and cheer when told that we are going back to protection. But I think there is somebody else to be consulted before they put on another bread-tax; and amongst other parties to be consulted, I calculate the West Riding will have a voice in it. Now, where is the proof of reaction in the West Riding? We have in this Riding—the population of which I have the honour to represent—about 1,400,000 souls, which is about one-twelfth part of the whole population of England, and a far larger proportion of its wealth, intelligence, and productive industry. Well, I presume this community is to have a voice in this question of the bread-tax. In answer to these village heroes, these men, who, when they have put their parish in a turmoil, that vastly resembles a storm in a tea-pot, fancy the whole of England gathered together, when it is nothing but an agitation of the squire, his agent, and probably a parson and a doctor. In answer to these protectionist noodles, and their organs of the press, who are continually telling the farmers, what they have been telling them now for eleven years, that they are going to have protection and keep it, I tell them they never shall have one farthing's worth of protection. These are only a couple of predictions. Some time or other, I presume, the farmers will wish to have friends who tell them the truth. Whenever the time comes when the farmers understand who it is who has been telling them the truth,—those who say they are going to have protection, or those who say from this platform they never shall have one farthing more of Corn-law,—when that time comes, then I think the age of delusion will be over in the agricultural districts. I want to know how long they will require before they make up their minds whether I am right, or those squires are right. The time will come. I give them seven years, if they like; only let it be understood, that they remember the promise made on the one side by their own leaders, and here by the men of the West Riding; and then I calculate the farmers will throw off their foolish blind guides, and co-operate with those who have proved themselves to have some sense and foresight in the matter. What is it these landlords [213] want to do with you? There is no disguise about the matter now. When we were agitating the Corn-law question before, they said their object was plenty, the same as ours; but what is their cry now? Why, they complain that you get the quartern loaf too cheap, and they want to raise the price of it to you; and that is the only business they have in hand. You get a couple of stones of decent flour now for 3*s.*; two or three years ago you paid 4*s.* for a single stone. Well, those landlords were satisfied when you were paying 4*s.* a stone for flour, and now they are dissatisfied when you get two stones for 3*s.*, and they want to go back again to the 4*s.* for the one stone. Will you let them? [Cries of 'No, no.')] No; you are not Yorkshiremen if you will. We are told that all parts of the country are in distress and dissatisfaction. That is the old story again. Because the landlords feel a little uneasy—they who have been so long accustomed to consider themselves the whole community—(I believe many of them think so)—they get up and say the whole community is suffering from extreme distress.

Now, I say, the West Riding of Yorkshire has been growing more prosperous, and suffering less and less distress, in proportion as the price of corn, of which those landlords complain, has become more moderate; and, if they can ever return—if they can ever succeed in returning again to the price I have mentioned, 4*s.* for the stone of flour, you will have your town swarming with paupers, your mills stopping work, and every class in this community suffering distress, as they were in 1842. And that is what they want to bring you back to; for, having looked into the matter with attention for ten years past, I declare that I find no period since the war when the manufacturing interest has been, for two years together, in a state of moderate prosperity, but the landlord class in this country have been up in arms, and

declaring they were ruined, and calling out for those measures which, if successful, must again throw the manufacturing community into that state of distress from which they had emerged; and, if we look back to the debates in Parliament, we find the landlords always assuming, that, because they were in distress all the community were in distress likewise. I remember, in 1822, reading in the debates in the House of Commons, that Lord Castlereagh himself was obliged to remind the landlords of that day, that, though they were suffering some inconveniences from the price of corn, the manufacturing interest was eminently prosperous. Do we hear complaints now from Manchester, Lancashire, or Yorkshire, Lanark, Nottingham, Staffordshire, Leicester, or Derbyshire? No, they have not been for many years past, both capitalists and labourers, in a more healthy state than they are at this moment. Is the revenue falling off? No, the revenue is flourishing, too. Where, then, are the signs and symptoms of national distress? It is the danger of rents and tithes. Well, now, we are told by these protectionist scribes that there is a reaction, because there have been two or three elections for places which have returned protectionists, and for which formerly they say, Free-traders sat. They talk of Kidderminster and Reading. That opens up another question. I tell them that the decision of such places as Reading and Kidderminster will not have a feather's weight in the scale, in deciding this question of the bread-tax. Let them see a Member returned for any one of the metropolitan districts, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leicester, Derby, Nottingham, Leeds, West Riding, Halifax, Bradford, Huddersfield. Let any one of these large communities, where the constituencies are free and beyond corruption and coercion—let them but return one man pledged to restore one shilling of the Corn-laws from any one of those great constituencies, then I will admit that there is reaction. Why, I feel so anxious that the farming class of this country should be emancipated from this delusion, and placed in a position to cultivate their land, and to come to a [214] proper adjustment with their landlords, and that they shall not be carried away after this *ignis fatuus* any longer, that, I declare, if they will allow me to offer a test—which may be called a national test—and if they will promise to abide by it, I will promise to accept the Chiltern Hundreds at the opening of Parliament, and come down for re-election; and, if they can return a Member for the West Riding of Yorkshire pledged to restore one shilling of Corn-law, in any shape whatever, then I will give up the whole question. But do not let them talk to us about these petty boroughs, and, still less, do not let them talk to us about Ireland. I see these men's reliance; I have long seen symptoms of this unholy alliance between the protectionist part of the House of Commons and the landlordism of Ireland, the very name of which stinks in the nostrils, not only of the people of England, but of the whole civilised world. Yes, I see that the landlords of Ireland are putting forth their strength, and mustering their factions, to restore protection; and, I am told, upon very good authority, that, let a dissolution take place the next year, and ninety at least out of the one hundred and five Irish Members would come up pledged to restore the Corn-law. Well, I say, if the whole of them came up to restore the Corn-law, they could not do it.

That, again, opens up another question—the question of the representation of the people. The representation of Ireland is a mockery and a fraud—rotten, rotten to the very core. Why, I do not believe, after giving some attention to the matter, that there are more *bonâ fide* voters on the register of Ireland at this moment, entitled to vote, than the 37,000 electors that are upon the Register of the West Riding of Yorkshire. It is acknowledged by all parties; nobody will deny it: but I tell the men nominated by landlords, and sent up under pretence of representing the 8,000,000 of the people of Ireland, they shall not decide the question of your bread, and the bread of the people of England. No; they very much mistake the temper of this people if they think that we will submit to a famine law at the hands of the landlord class of Ireland, who have not only brought their own people to beggary, and ruin, and starvation, but they have beggared and ruined themselves at the same time. What were we doing last session? One half of our time was spent either in caring for the paupers of Ireland, or in passing laws to enable the landlords of that country to be extricated, by extra-judicial means,

from ruin and bankruptcy, brought on by their own improvidence. And now, what is this class—this bankrupt landlord class—aiming at? Is it to pass a law to prevent corn being brought to Ireland? No, that is not their immediate object; because, in ordinary times, you cannot have Ireland importing food from abroad, for they have nothing with which to pay for it. But if England subscribes its 8,000,000*l.* to fill up the void of starvation in that country, then, indeed, you may buy the Indian corn from America to feed the people. But in ordinary times, Ireland must be an exporter of corn; and the object of the landlords of Ireland is to prevent you, the people of England, from getting corn from America and Russia, in order that you may be forced to go for corn from Ireland, and thus enable them to extort increased rents from their beggared tenantry. Do they think that Englishmen and Yorkshiremen are going to submit to a transaction like this? No; let the English landlords—that portion of them who are entering upon this new crusade against your bread-basket—let the English landlords enter this unholy alliance with the bankrupt and pauperised landlords of Ireland, and become themselves equally degraded in the eyes of the world—and I much mistake the temper of Englishmen, especially of Yorkshiremen, if you do not make such an example of the conspirators as will make them regret the day that they ever attempted it. Now, we have given them fair notice that we know what they are about, and what their objects are, and that we are perfectly [215] wide awake in Yorkshire. We do not intend that they shall have one shilling more of protection. And something else we do not intend they shall have. There is another thing they are going to do—if we will let them—and which I always suspected they would do. They will try to extort it from us in some other shape; and so the new dodge is, that they shall put their taxes off their shoulders on to yours. There is a society formed in Buckinghamshire, I believe, for the relief of burdens upon real property.

Well, I belong to another association; and it is to relieve the burdens of those who have no property. Their plan is this—that the burdens hitherto put upon the land shall henceforth be paid out of the taxes wrung from the agricultural labourer upon his ounce of tea, and the half-starved needle-woman in London upon her half-pound of sugar. That is the thing, undisguised, and stripped of the transparent veil of mystification that is thrown over it by those new champions of the agricultural interest, who talk to us in strange parables anything but English—I hardly know whether it is Hebrew, or what it is. Yes, all their mystification amounts to this, that the 12,000,000*l.* of local taxes for poorrates, highway-rates, church-rates, and the rest, shall be, half of them, if they cannot get the whole—they had rather put the whole upon your shoulders—shall be taken off the land, and put upon the Consolidated Fund; that is, taken out of the taxes raised upon the necessities and comforts of the masses of the people. Well, I tell them I have had my eye upon them from the first, and always expected it; and, mind you, I am afraid we shall have some people joining in this from whom I expected better things. Allusion has been made to-night to my friend Mr. Gisborne, and no one has a higher opinion of his sterling character and racy talent than I have; but, I think, he has got a twist upon this subject of the burdens of real property. He asked, in the speech to which my friend has referred, ‘By what right or justice should the whole of these local taxes be laid upon the real property of the country?’ My first answer to him is this: Because those burdens have been borne by the real property of the country from two to three centuries at the least. Poor-rates have been nearly three centuries borne by the real property of the country, and the others are nearly as old as our Saxon institutions. Well, these taxes having been borne by the real property of the country for three centuries, this property has changed hands, either by transfer, succession, or in trust, at least a dozen times; the charges have been endorsed upon the title-deeds, and the property has been bought or inherited at so much less in consequence of those charges, and, therefore, the present owner of real property has no right to exemption from those burdens, having bought the property knowing it to be subject to those burdens, and having paid less in consequence. That is my first answer, and I think it is sufficient. But I have another. The poor have the first right to a subsistence from the land, and there is no other security so good as the land itself. Other kinds of property may take wings

and fly away. Moveable property has very often been known to 'flit' the day before quarter-day; capital employed in trade may be lost in an unsuccessful venture in China; wages sometimes disappear altogether: and, therefore, the real and true security to which the people of this country should look, is in the soil itself.

But I have another reason why this property should bear those local burdens, and it is this—it is the only property which not only does not diminish in value, but, in a country growing in population and advancing in prosperity, it always increases in value, and without any help from the owners. These gentlemen complain that those rates have increased in amount during a recent period. I will admit, if they like, that those local rates have increased. During the last one hundred years they have increased, I will say, seven millions of money. That is taking an outside view. Well, but the real property upon [216] which those rates are levied—the lands and houses of this country—has increased in value four times as much; and, therefore, they stand in an infinitely better situation now, paying twelve millions of local rates, than ever they did at any former period in the history of this country. I think I have given my friend Mr. Gisborne some fresh points for consideration, showing why the landlords should pay those taxes.

Now, I warn the landlords against the attempt to enter the lists in this country with the whole mass of the population—I warn them, in these days, and in the temper and spirit of the time, from entering upon a new conflict with this population, to try and put on the shoulders of this already overburdened people those taxes which of right belong to them as a class. Let them bear in mind what Sir Charles Wood, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, told us in the last session of Parliament—that, even including these local rates, and including what they pay of the general taxation of the country, the landed proprietors pay a less amount of taxation, in proportion to the whole amount raised in this country, than any other people of Europe. [A voice: 'They ought to pay it all.'] Well, I tell them that if they renew the struggle with the whole population of this country, whether for the resumption of the breadtax, or to transfer the burdens which in justice belong to them, to the shoulders of the rest of the community, they will have the question re-agitated in a very different spirit from what it was before. Let them take my word for it, they will never have another agitation carried on with that subserviency to politico-economical argument which was observed by the Anti-Corn-law League. It cost me some argument, as my friends know, to prevent the League from going into other topics; but, let another agitation arise, a serious one, such as these individuals would try to persuade their followers to enter upon—let it be seen that they bring the Parliament into such a state of confusion that Government is compelled to dissolve—let it be seen that a protectionist statesman, like Lord Stanley, is prepared to get into the saddle, and to spur over the country with his haughty paces—and they will hear this question argued in a very different manner from what it was before. They will have the whole aristocratic system, under which the country has been governed for the last 150 years, torn to pieces; they will have the law of primogeniture, and the whole feudal system which exists in this country, and exists on sufferance only after it has been abolished everywhere else—they will have these questions brought up in a way which they, weak and foolish men, little expect,—and let them once enter the list again, either for another Corn-law, or for the transference of this taxation upon your shoulders, and I give them my word of promise that they will come out of the conflict right happy to abandon not only the Corn-law and any taxation which they are going to try to avoid, but they will be glad to escape by a composition of much heavier terms than that. Bear in mind, when I speak of this question, I speak of the landlords, and not of the farmers. I treated, on a former occasion, most tenderly the landlord class. I will tell you why I did so. I always had more faith in the proprietors than the farmers for repealing the Corn-laws; and therefore, I never trod heavily on the toes of the landlords; but if this question is to be revived again by the landlord class, I promise them that I will probe the whole question to the bottom, and there shall not be a farmer, however dull he may be, but shall understand



right well that they are humbugs who tell them, that, in questions of rent and the revision of taxation, landowners and farmers, forsooth, row in the same boat—and I will undertake to satisfy you that when they talk of the difficulty of cultivating the land under this system of Free Trade, there is no difficulty whatever, provided the landlords and tenants come to an adjustment according to the present and future price of corn.

I speak from experience. I stand before you—you may perhaps be surprised [217] to hear it—but I stand before you as one of the humblest members of the much-talked-of landlord interest. I happen to be possessed of a very small estate in Western Sussex, very near to the Duke of Richmond, and I am next door neighbour to Lord Egmont, who is the most notorious personage I know for making foolish speeches at agricultural meetings, and for overrunning his neighbours' land as well as his own with game. I wish, instead of roaming about the country, calling me a republican, at protection meetings, that Lord Egmont would go down to West Sussex, and cause some of those rabbits and hares to be destroyed which give some humble people, on land of mine, the trouble of killing for him. Being myself a landlord, and possessing land-right in the midst of the greatest landed proprietors, and the most ferocious protectionists, I have had an opportunity of testing how far it is practicable by reasonable arrangements with tenants—I have two of them, they are very small, but they are sufficient to test the principle—I have had the opportunity of seeing how far it is practicable, with tenants upon land, not of first-rate quality, to secure them, in future, as good prospects as in times past, and under Free Trade, as well as protection. I am not going to tell you how I did it; but I will promise, before the meeting of Parliament, I will go into Buckinghamshire—I will have a public meeting at Buckingham or at Aylesbury, and will explain the whole case, and give every particular—how the landlord, instead of bawling for protection, can, by the commonest exercise of judgment, justice, and policy, enable the whole of his land to be cultivated, just as it was before, and every farmer and labourer to be in better spirits in future than in time past.

Now, I am going into Buckinghamshire to tell the farmers the whole case; and I will tell the whole case and a little more; but I am not going to trouble you with it now. I will turn to the question of the general taxation of the country. I quite agree with gentlemen who preceded me, that you will not have the agricultural counties, or their Members, with you, for the reduction of the general expenditure of the country, until you can make them fully convinced that you will not let them indemnify themselves from high taxation by raising the price of your loaf. As soon as they are satisfied that they must pay their taxes out of the moderate prices which prevail, they will join with you in compelling Government to reduce its expenditure. For myself, I can conscientiously declare that, from the moment I returned from the Continent, two years since, I have always had the present position of the country in view. I have always contemplated a transition state, when there would be pinching and suffering in the agricultural class, in passing from a vicious system to a sound one; for you cannot be restored from bad health to good, without going through a process of languor and suffering; and my great aim has been, from the moment I returned from the Continent, to try to ease that transition by reducing the expenditure of the country, feeling that, if you could, within a few years, cause a large reduction in the expenditure of the State, you will give such an impetus to trade and commerce, and so improve the condition of the mass of the people, that you would aid very materially in relieving the farmers and labourers from the inconvenience of that transition state, from which they cannot escape. It was with that view that I preferred my budget, and advocated the reduction of our armaments: it is with that view, coupled with higher motives, that I have recommended arbitration treaties, to render unnecessary the vast amount of armaments which are kept up between civilised countries. It is with that view—the view of largely reducing the expenditure of the State, and giving relief, especially to the agricultural classes—that I have made myself the object of the sarcasms of those very parties, by going to Paris, to attend peace meetings. It is with that view that I have directed attention [218] to our colonies, showing how you might be carrying out the principle

of Free Trade, give to the colonies self-government, and charge them, at the same time, with the expense of their own government. There is not one of these objects that I have taken in hand, in which I have not had, for a paramount motive, serving of the agricultural class, in this transition state from protection to Free Trade.

How, hitherto, have I been requited by them? Have I had a single aid from any of them? No. At the close of last Parliament I was taunted by their leader on account of my want of success. Have you heard them say one word about the reduction of the expenditure of the country? Has their leader—if I may call him so—for they have a plurality—has he ever said one word to indicate the slightest wish that they desired to reduce the expenditure? No. I am convinced that it would be distasteful to the landlord party to have a general reduction of the expenditure, particularly in that great preserve of the landlord class for their younger sons, the army and navy. I believe they are averse to retrenchment—at least, they have done nothing to aid those who wished to accomplish it; and now, I tell them again, as I told them before from this great metropolis of industry, that to a farthing of protection to agriculture they shall not go. And if they will make us pay high taxes to keep up useless establishments, and unnecessary sinecures, and wasteful expenditure, in every department of the State, why, they shall pay their share of that taxation, with wheat at 40s. per quarter.

Gentlemen, allusion has been made to our expenditure for the army, navy, and ordnance. Mr. Marshall has referred to the case of our colonies. He was unfortunate in speaking when the crowd was at the door; but I hope that his facts and his arguments will fully appear reported in the papers, because they went to the very bottom of this question. You cannot materially reduce your expenditure, unless you relieve yourself from the unnecessary waste of expenditure in the colonies. Sir Robert Peel has, again and again, in his budget speeches, pointed out clearly the vast expenditure in our colonies. He has, again and again, said that two-thirds of our army are either necessary for garrisons in our colonies, or else to supply depots at home to furnish relief for those retiring; or else that thousands of men may be always on the wide ocean, visiting one place or another. He has pointed that out time after time; and he has repeated these things so often, that I have long been of opinion that Sir Robert Peel is anxious to diminish public taxation, by preventing this waste of national resources. He saw the mischief; he would like public opinion to be directed to it; and, if public opinion enabled him to effect a change, I am sure that Sir Robert Peel is the man who would like to accomplish it.

You send drilled Englishmen to serve as policemen to Englishmen in Australia, New Zealand, and the Cape of Good Hope. Do not you think that Englishmen there are quite capable of taking care of themselves, without putting you to the expense of doing it? What have they been doing lately? You have spent two millions of money, in the last four years, to defend the settlers of the Cape of Good Hope against the inroads of the barbarous tribes of Caffres. What is taking place at this very moment? Why, these very men, whom you have treated as children, incapable of defending themselves against a few untaught savages—they have proclaimed your own governor in a state of siege—invested your own troops—refused to allow them even provisions—and sent away a ship under the colours of the Queen; and, in their speeches and letters, the leaders of the anti-convict movement do not hesitate to declare that they are ready to defend their country, if necessary, against the whole force of the English empire. Do not you think there is sufficient pluck about them to defend themselves against a few untutored savages? The same thing is going on in Australia. They [219] quote the example of America; and some of these people are holding their great meetings on the 4th of July, the anniversary of American independence. I do not respect them the less—I respect them the more. I think they would be unworthy of the name of Englishmen, if they did not stand up against their country being made the cesspool for our convict population. But what I want to show is this: that there is not the shadow of pretence for requiring our armies to

defend them.

But, besides the colonies, we keep up an enormous amount of force against foreign countries, which, I think, may be diminished; and, I believe, all other countries would be willing to diminish their armed forces, provided a fair and reasonable proposition had been made by our Government to the French Government, to reduce our armaments, if they will reduce in the same proportion. No; they do not do so; but we ferret about, and find some new man-of-war in the French dockyard about to be built, or some new 32-pounder gun going to be made, instead of an old 24-pounder, and we set to work, and make that a reason for increasing our armaments. But, do you think your honourable Member here would conduct his business in such a way as that? Do you not think, if he saw another person in the same branch of business, conducting it with a large amount of waste, which threatened both with destruction; and, if he knew that the work was profitless to the individual who began the system, do you not think that, if he found a rival in his business entering upon such a career as that, he would go and say to him, 'You are entering upon a system which compels me to do the same, and it will lead us both into the *Gazette*, if we don't stop it? Do you not think that we had better abandon it?' Now, this very day, I believe, there has been some sort of consultation, some feeling of pulses, between the directors of two rival railroads, to prevent that waste and competition to which they had been subjected by acting upon the principle which we have adopted in regard to foreign armaments. It is not for protecting ourselves against pirates, or barbarous powers, that you keep those powerful armaments. It is that you may keep upon a level with another nation, whom you are taught to imagine is ready to pounce upon you, like a red Indian, the moment he finds you without your armour on or your sword by your side. I think it is a great mistake to suppose that, in order that you may display a great deal of power to the world, all the power should be put into the shape of cannons, muskets, and ships of war. Do not you think that, in these times of industry, when wealth and commerce are the real tests of a nation's power, coupled with worth and intelligence—do you not see that, if you beat your iron into ploughshares and pruning-hooks, instead of putting it into swords and spears, it will be equally productive of power, and of far more force, if brought into collision with another country, than if you put all your iron into spears and swords? It is not always necessary to hold up a scarecrow to frighten your neighbours. I believe a civilised nation will estimate the power of a country, not by the amount laid out in armaments, which may perhaps be the means of weakening that power, but it will measure your strength by your latent resources—what margin of taxation you have that you can impose in case of necessity, greater than another country, to which you are about to be opposed—what is the spirit of the people, as having confidence in the institutions or government under which they live—what is the general intelligence of the people—what is, in every respect, their situation and capacity to make an effort, in case an effort were required? These will be the tests which intelligent people will apply to countries; not what amount of horse, foot, and artillery, or how many ships you have afloat.

Look to America. The United States has only one line-of-battle ship afloat at this moment; and very often she has not one. She keeps a number of small [220] vessels, and always in activity—never allowing three or four to stay in harbour, as ours are, but always running about to see if her merchant ships require assistance. With only 8,500 soldiers—for that is all her force—and with but one line-of-battle ship afloat—is not America at any time prepared to take her stand in the face of France with 500,000 troops, the finest in the world, and with a navy three times as large as the American navy? Is not the United States always able to take the position of equality? and has she not been even taking very high ground? And we see that this nation, with 500,000 soldiers, have brought their finances into an almost hopeless state, and they dare not come into collision with a country so lightly taxed, and with so much elasticity, as the United States; and if all the Governments of Europe continue this policy, and if the United States pursues hers, I only hope their Government may not assume

that arrogant tone which it may assume towards every Government in Europe, which is broken down by the load of debt and taxes, which are the result of the hideous system to which I have referred.

These are the reasons, I have said, and I say again, that you may return with safety to the expenditure of 1835. Nay, more, you will not stop when you get there. But mark me, with all their sarcasms, they are on the high-road to it, and we will compel them to do it. They will be obliged to return to the expenditure of 1835, and to the budget which I brought forward last year, and in a short time. But how? Why, by such a movement out of doors as I have mentioned, and I wish to see it avoided.

And, last, I come to the point of the greatest importance. I am anxious to see our representative system altered. I am anxious to see it, because it will put an end to this double trial of all public questions—trying it in the House of Commons, in the face of what are called Representatives of the people, and then coming to the people, and asking them to compel their so-called Representatives to carry out the policy which they wish them to carry out. I say it is a clumsy machine; for, when you are wishful to have it self-acting, you find that the engine will not perform its work. When you have set up your forty-horse steamengine, you have to call forty horses to do its work. You must not only have an extension of the suffrage, but a redistribution of the franchise. You must have no such absurdity as the constituency of the West Riding of Yorkshire, with its 36,000 electors, outvoted by a constituency of 150 or 200 electors. I wonder how anybody can believe that such things exist, except those who live in the country, and suffer from the inconveniences of it.

But it is not merely a re-distribution of the franchise, but you must shorten the reckonings of Members of Parliament with those constituencies. Now, do you suppose, if a committee were to sit down to make a constitution, without having the precedent of the present constitution to guide you, anybody would make such an absurd proposition as that a Parliament should sit for seven years without giving an account to their constituents? Nobody would dream of it. Ask your railroad companies, your bank proprietors—anybody in the world that has to delegate power to another body—is there on the face of the world an example (except in our Septennial Act) of people giving up their power for seven years' duration? It is no answer to me to say that Parliaments do not last, on an average, more than three years. If we knew that Parliaments only lasted three years, that would be an answer to the question; but men go there expecting that it will last five, six, or seven years, and they act accordingly; and when they come near the end, they begin to go through a process something like a death-bed repentance, and to put their house in order. Yet they do not do it at the end of three years, because when Parliament is dissolved at the end of three years it is only by accident—the decease of the sovereign, or the necessity of testing the opinion of the [221] people; and, therefore, you have no benefit from it.

But, gentlemen, whether you want these or other reforms in Parliament, I reiterate here, what I have said elsewhere—I do not think you will get it by petitioning the House of Commons, or by any other demonstration calling upon the House to reform itself. I tell you why. We have all agreed that we should pursue our agitation by moral means. Well, moral means threaten no noble lords in St. James's Square with brickbats or anything else. They see decent respectable men meeting, and they say, 'They will never lend themselves to anything violent.' They look upon it as a moral demonstration, and they are quite content to let these respectable middle-class demonstrations keep the peace for them and confine themselves to moral force. All this is exceedingly proper. Nothing is so absurd as to think of returning to the time of Burdett and Hunt, bawling after noble lords and breaking open and firing the houses of your opponents, and getting knocked upon the head or hung for your pains. But then, if you do pursue moral means, take care you do use all the moral means in your power.

And that brings me to the doctrine I have been preaching of late. I say, Qualify yourselves. I could say more upon it, but I shall not say so much here as I shall say elsewhere, because I do not think it is meet that I, as the Member for the West Riding of Yorkshire, should come here and be carrying on a perpetual canvass with you in order to get you to qualify yourselves to vote for me. Therefore you will be good enough, if I should be speaking at Ipswich or Aylesbury, on this topic, to apply what you like of those observations to yourselves. I have calculated that there are only one in eight of adult males who are qualified to vote for the counties; seven-eighths have no votes for counties. If you can take one-eighth out of those seven-eighths and put them upon the county list, you will have more county voters added than the whole number of county voters now on the list.

I do not think that is difficult to be done; and we are going on rapidly, and we are indebted to a working man, Mr. James Taylor, of Birmingham, for making the greatest and best system of reform I know. Oh, if in the days of Burdett and Hunt, they had had some Mr. Taylor to preach to them, and say, that for every three-pence you drink you swallow a yard of land, we should have had a million of voters qualified. The difference between Mr. Taylor's plan and the old plan was this: formerly the leaders used to say, 'Come to the House of Commons, make a noise, bawl out, and tell them you want to get in, and ask them to let you in.' But Mr. Taylor tells you that 'You have got the key in your own pocket, make use of it—go to the door, unlock it, and enter, without asking anybody's permission.' I like this plan, because it teaches men self-reliance. When allusion has been made to self-reform—I mean the government of your own appetites—I am glad to see by the response, not only here, but in London and elsewhere where I go, that the English people are determined so to work out their own emancipation.

I am anxious to see this extension of the suffrage accelerated in every possible way: and I think I have always given every possible evidence of my sincerity by direct votes in the House of Commons, and outside the House by urging men to qualify themselves, and use every means to get a vote. I do it, because I believe the extension of the franchise gives us a better guarantee not only for the safety of our institutions, but for the just administration of our public affairs; and I have latterly felt another motive for wishing for an extension of the franchise, in what I have seen going on upon the Continent within the last eighteen months, which has convinced me that the great masses of mankind are disposed for peace between nations. You have the fact brought out in strong relief that the people themselves, however they may be troubled with internal convulsions, have no desire to go abroad and molest their neighbours. You have seen [222] Louis Philippe driven from the throne. We were told that he kept the French nation at peace; but we find the masses of the people of France only anxious to remain at home, and diminish, if possible, the pressure of taxation.

Where do we look for the black gathering cloud of war? Where do we see it rising? Why, from the despotism of the North, where one man wields the destinies of 40,000,000 of serfs. If we want to know where is the second danger of war and disturbance, it is in that province of Russia—that miserable and degraded country, Austria—next in the stage of despotism and barbarism, and there you see again the greatest danger of war; but in proportion as you find the population governing themselves—as in England, in France, or in America—there you will find that war is not the disposition of the people, and that if Government desire it, the people would put a check upon it. Therefore, for the security of liberty, and also, as I believe, that the people of every country, as they acquire political power, will cultivate the arts of peace, and check the desire of their governments to go to war—it is on these grounds that I wish to see a wide extension of the suffrage, and liberty prevail over despotism throughout the world.

**FREE TRADE. XXV.**  
**AYLESBURY, JANUARY 9, 1853.** ↩

It gives me particular pleasure to follow a gentleman who has addressed you in the capacity of a tenant-farmer, one who, to my knowledge, in his own business, by the growth of more corn, and raising more cattle, and employing more labour to a given area of soil, excels most of his neighbours—a man so well entitled to speak to you on the subject of the interests of the agriculturists of this country. We are met here under the denomination of a reform meeting—a parliamentary and financial reform meeting; but it will be known to every one present that the general impression, both here and abroad, is, that this is a meeting for the purpose, so far as I am concerned in the matter, of discussing the question of protection or Free Trade, especially with reference to tenant-farmers' interests in this matter. I remember speaking to an audience in this hall six years ago, and on that occasion going through the arguments necessary to show that the Corn-law was founded upon impolicy and injustice; I remember on that occasion maintaining the proposition that the Corn-law had not proved beneficial to any class of the community, and I ventured to say that the country would be more prosperous without the system of agricultural protection than it had been with it. Well, I am here now to maintain that by every test which can proclaim the prosperity or adversity of a nation, we stand better now without the Corn-law than we did when we had it. [Cheers, and some cries of 'No.')] I am rather glad to see that there are some dissentients from that proposition; our opponents will not say that this is a packed meeting. We have got some protectionists here. And now, if you will only just keep that order which is necessary for any rational proceedings, I will endeavour to make you Free-traders before you leave.

I have said that, by every test which can decide the question of national prosperity or national adversity, we stand in a better position than we did when we had the Corn-law. What are the tests of a nation's prosperity? A declining or an improving revenue is one test. Well, our revenue is better than it was under a Corn-law. Our exports and our imports are better than they were under the Corn-law. Take the question of pauperism. I will not shrink even from the test of pauperism in the agricultural districts; I have the statistics of many of your unions in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, and I warn the protectionist orators, who are going about persuading themselves that they have a case in the matter of pauperism, that when Parliament meets, and Mr. Baines is enabled to bring forward the Poor-law statistics up to the last week (not going to the 'blue books,' and bringing forward the accounts of the previous year), I warn the protectionists that, with regard to the test of pauperism, even in the agricultural districts, it will [224] be seen that things are more favourable now, with bread at a moderate price, than they were in 1847, when prices were to their hearts' content, and the loaf was nearly double the price it is now. Take the state of wages; that is a test of the condition of the people. What are the people earning now, compared with 1847, when the protectionists were so well satisfied with their high prices? Why, as a rule, throughout the country, there is more money earned now than there was then; and they are getting the comforts and necessaries of life in many cases at two-thirds, and in some cases at less than that, of the prices of 1847. [A Voice: 'It is not so with the agricultural labourers.')] I will come to them by-and-by. What I want you to agree with in the outset is that your labourers are not the nation; and if your agriculture be an exception to the rule, we must find out the reason why it is so; we will come to that by-and-by.

I remember quite well, when I came here to see you before, how my ears used to be dinned by the argument, that if we had free-trade in corn, the gold would all be drained out of this country, for that you could not bring in 5,000,000 quarters of grain without being drained

of your gold; that the foreigner would not take anything else in exchange. Why, we have had between 30,000,000 and 40,000,000 quarters within these last four years, and the Bank of England was never so encumbered with gold as it is now. I have spoken of wages, and I say that in every branch of industry the rate of wages has improved. You may say that agriculture is an exception. We will come to that, but I do not make an exception in favour of any trade in your district; I do not make an exception in the case of the employment of women in your district, for I have made particular inquiry, and I find, even in the article of straw-plaiting, that families who could not earn 15s. in 1847, are now earning 25s. ['No,' and some confusion.] I say families. I know we have some of the most extensive manufacturers in this hall. Then there is the lace trade, the pillow-lace trade, employing a great number of women in Buckinghamshire. [Renewed confusion, owing to a gentleman pressing his way towards the platform. A Voice: 'He is a reporter.')] Well, we are delighted to see the gentlemen of the press; the more of them the better; what we say here will be read elsewhere, and we speak for that purpose. I was about saying, that even the wages of the pillowlace makers have advanced, and they are getting their bread at two-thirds the former price. Even the poor chair-makers of this and the adjoining county—a trade that has hardly known what it was to have a revival—are getting better. I repeat it, there is not an exception of any trade in which there is not an advantage gained by the moderate price of food that now prevails. ['Not the lace makers?'] They are getting more employment.

But I want now to come to the question which interests you in this immediate neighbourhood. If every other great interest of the State is thriving—and no one can deny it—how is it that agriculture is depressed? how is it that the interests of agriculture are found in antagonism with the interests of the rest of the community? Why, these people have been proceeding upon a false system, they have been upon an unsound basis; they have been reckoning upon Act of Parliament prices; they have made their calculations upon Act of Parliament prices, and now they find they are obliged, like other individuals, to be content with natural prices. What is the reason that agriculture cannot thrive as well as other trades? We find meetings called, purporting to be meetings of farmers, complaining of distress? and what is their remedy for that distress? Is it to go and talk like men of business to their landlords, and ask them for fresh terms of agreement, fresh arrangements, that they may have the raw material of their trade—the land—at the natural price, and free from those absurd restrictions that prevent their giving [225] the natural value to it? No. Go to a meeting where there is a landlord in the chair, or a land-agent—his better-half,—and you find them talking, but never as landlords and land-agents, but as farmers, and for farmers. And what do they say? Why, they say, 'We must go to Parliament, and get an Act of Parliament to raise the price of corn, that you may be able to pay us your rents.' That is what it amounts to.

Now, what ought to be the plan pursued by the landlord and tenant on an occasion like this? The landlord, as Mr. Disraeli very properly observed yesterday at Great Marlow, is an individual who has land, which is a raw material, and nothing more, to dispose of; and the farmer is a capitalist, who offers to take this raw material, in order that he may work it up and make a profit by it: in fact, the farmer and the landlord stand in precisely the same position that the cotton-spinner and the cotton-merchant stand in. The cotton-spinner buys his cotton wool from the cotton-merchant, in order that he may spin it up at a profit. If he can get his raw material cheap, he can make a profit; and if not, he cannot. But we never hear of the cotton-spinner and the merchant going together to Parliament for a law to keep up the price of cotton. I declare, when I find landlord and tenant running about raising a cry for 'protection,' and going to Parliament for a law to benefit them by raising the price of corn, I cannot help feeling humiliated at the spectacle, because it is a proof of want of intelligence on the one side, and, I fear, want of honesty, too, on the other.

Now, suppose you were to see a crowd of people running up and down the streets of Aylesbury, shouting out, 'Protection! protection! oh, give us protection! we are all rowing in the same boat!' and when you inquired who these people were, you were told they were the grocers of Aylesbury and their customers, who were crying out for a law which would raise the price of all the hogsheads of sugar in the grocers' stores,—would you not say that this was a very curious combination of the grocers and their customers? Would not you say that the interest of the men who had the hogsheads of sugar to sell, and who wished therefore to raise the price, could not be identical with that of the men who had to buy the sugar? Yet, that is precisely the position in which the tenant-farmers and the landowners stand. [Cries of 'No, no,' and 'Yes!'] Well, will any gentleman rise on this platform, and explain where I am wrong? Now, the plan I would recommend the tenant-farmers and the landholders to pursue is precisely the plan which has been adopted by my own tenants and myself. I will explain how I acted in this matter. I promised I would explain my conduct, and I will do so; and if those newspapers that write for protectionist farmers report nothing else of what I may say to-night, I beg them to let their farming readers know what I am now going to say. [A Voice: 'How large are your farms?'] I will tell you all about it. I happen to stand here in the quality of a landlord, filling, as I avowed to you at the beginning, a most insignificant situation in that character.

I possess a small estate in West Sussex, of about 140 acres in extent, and a considerable part of it in wood. It is situated in a purely farming district, in the midst of the largest protectionist proprietors in Sussex; the land is inferior; it has no advantages; it is nearly ten miles distant from a railroad; it has no chimneys or growing manufacturing towns to give it value. Now this is precisely the kind of land which we have been told again and again by Lord John Manners the Marquis of Granby, and other protectionist landlords, cannot be cultivated at all with wheat at 40s., even if it were given to the cultivator rent-free. This property came into my possession in 1847. [A Voice: 'You got it from the League funds.'] Yes; I am indebted for that estate, and I am proud here to acknowledge it, to the bounty of my countrymen. That estate was the scene of my birth and of my [226] infancy; it was the property of my ancestors; it is by the munificence of my countrymen that this small estate, which had been alienated by my father from necessity, has again come into my hands, and that I am enabled to light up again the hearth of my fathers; and I say that there is no warrior duke who owns a vast domain by the vote of the imperial Parliament who holds his property by a more honourable title than that by which I possess mine.

My first visit to this property, after it came into my possession, was in 1848. At that time, as you are aware, prices ranged high in this country; but never expecting those prices would continue, I thought that the proper time for every man having an interest in the land to prepare for the coming competition with the foreigner. I gave orders that every hedge-row tree upon my estate should be cut down and removed. I authorised the two occupying tenants upon the property to remove every fence upon the estate, or, if they liked, to grub up only a portion of them; but I distinctly said I would rather not see a hedge remaining on the property, inasmuch as it was surrounded with woods, and I did not think fences were necessary. That portion of the land which required draining, I had instantly drained at my own cost. The estate, as I have said, was situated in the midst of large protectionist landowners, who, as a matter of course, were great game preservers; and it had therefore been particularly infested with hares and rabbits. I authorised the tenants on my land to kill the rabbits and hares, and to empower any one else they pleased to kill them.

So troublesome had been the hares and rabbits on that little property, that they even entered the gardens and allotments of the labourers; and one of those labourers appeared before the Committee of the House of Commons on the Game-laws in 1845, and stated that the rabbits had not only devoured his vegetables, his cabbages, and his peas, but had actually



dug up his potatoes! At that time—in 1845—the property did not belong to me: but I took care to explain to this worthy man, in 1848, when I visited the estate, that if the hares or rabbits ever troubled him, or the other labourers living upon my property, that under the present law any man may destroy hares on his own holding without taking out a licence, and I advised the labourers to set gins and snares upon their allotments and in their gardens, to catch all the hares and rabbits they could; and when they caught them, to be sure and put them in their own pots and eat them themselves. That is the way in which I dealt with the game on my property. I must confess that I have no taste whatever for the preservation of such vermin, which I believe to be utterly inconsistent with good farming, and the greatest obstacle to the employment of the labourers. For my own part I would rather see a good fat hog in every sty belonging to my labourers, than have the best game preserve in the country.

That, then, was the course which I took in 1848, to prepare for the coming competition with the foreigner. It was a time when prices ranged high; nothing was settled about rents. In the course of the last year, however, I received a letter from one of my tenants, saying, ‘When I took this land from your predecessor, it was upon the calculation of wheat being at 56s. a quarter; it is now little more than 40s., and I should like to have a new arrangement made.’ I wrote in reply, ‘The proposition you make is reasonable. We will have a new bargain. I am willing to enter upon an arrangement, estimating the future price of wheat at 40s.; but whilst I am willing to take all the disadvantages of low prices, I must have the benefit of good cultivation, and therefore we will estimate the produce of the land to be such as could be grown by good farmers upon the same quality of soil.’ Now, from the moment that this reasonable proposition was made, there was not the slightest anxiety of mind on the part of my tenants—not the least difficulty in [227] carrying on their business of farming under a system of Free Trade as well as they had done under the system of protection. From that moment the farmers on this small property felt themselves no longer interested in the matter of Free Trade and protection; and the labourers felt that they had as good a prospect of employment as they had before, and they had no interest in the question of protection. We settled our terms. I have bargained for my rent. It is no business of the public what rent I get. That is my business, and the business of the farmers; but if it is any satisfaction to my protectionist friends, I will admit that I am receiving a reduced rent, notwithstanding that I have drained the land, and given them the game, and removed the hedges, and cleared away every hedge-row tree.

What, then, becomes of the argument that it is impossible to carry on agriculture in this country with wheat at 40s. a quarter? I am getting some rent—and not so very large a reduction from the rent I got before; and it is enough for me to say that the land is being cultivated, and that farmers and labourers are employed and contented.

Now, with regard to a lease, I said to both my tenants, ‘Either take the land from year to year, with an agreement binding each of us to submit to arbitration the valuation of unexhausted improvements when you leave the land; or, if you like, take a lease, and I will bind you down to no covenants as to the way in which you are to cultivate the land while you possess it.’ What possible excuse, then, can the landowners in any part of the country have for coming forward and telling us that land cannot be cultivated because wheat is 40s. a quarter? The answer I intend to give to those noble dukes and lords who are running about the country, and who are so angry with me, and are scolding me so lustily, is this—‘Let me have the arranging of the affairs between you and your tenants,—the terms, the rent, and condition of the holdings,—and I will undertake to ensure that your land shall be cultivated better than it was before, that farming shall be as profitable to the farmer, that the labourer shall have as full employment, and at as good wages, provided you allow me to enter into the same arrangement that I have made with my own tenants.’ But that would not suit these parties. It would make a dry, dull, unprofitable matter of business of what is now made a

piece of agitation, which ought to be called moonshine.

Now, if I had been a protectionist, I might have made money by this. I will show you how I should have done so. When my tenants wrote to me to say there ought to be a fresh agreement between us, what would have been my answer had I been a protectionist? I should have said, 'That is true, my good friends; we will have a meeting at Great Marlow or High Wycombe, and we will petition Parliament to pass a law to protect you.' Well, we should have had a meeting, my tenants would have been invited to attend, and would have shouted, 'We are all rowing in the same boat!' and after two or three hours of dull speeches, you would have had a conclusion with 'three groans for Cobden.' After this meeting was over, my tenants might have gone home, and might have been prepared, until the next audit, to pay their full rents as before. And if I were a protectionist landowner, I should have then wanted some fresh excuse against the next audit-day. Consequently, I should probably have told the farmers to come to the next meeting, at 17, Old Bond-street, to memorialise her Majesty,—for they were not to be told to petition the House of Commons, but to lay their complaints at the foot of the throne. After my poor tenants had done all this, and had gone home, and prepared their rents for the next audit-day, then some fresh excuse must be found, and we might have told the farmers, that instead of memorialising the Queen, they should agitate for a dissolution of Parliament. In this case, we should have been safe in respect to our rents for the next three years, because [228] that is an agitation which would last such a period.

In the mean time what would be the consequence to my tenants? With heartsickening delay, and with the hopelessness inspired into their souls by these dreary, dull, protectionist speeches, telling them that they could not cultivate their land even if no rent were paid; and with the constant drain on their resources to pay their old rents, without amelioration in their holdings, one-half the tenants might be ruined, and I am not sure that a large proportion will not be ruined by the tactics of the protectionists at the present moment. But was it necessary for any farmer to be ruined if the landlords pursued the same system as myself? This is simply and purely a rent question. And if the farmers cannot carry on their business, it is because they pay too high a rent in proportion to the amount of their produce. I do not say that in many cases the rents of the landlords might not be excessive, provided the land were cultivated to its full capacity. But that cannot be done without sufficient capital, and that sufficient capital cannot be applied without sufficient security, or without a tenant-right, or a lease amounting to tenant-right. We want to bring the landowner and the tenant together, to confront them in their separate capacity as buyers and sellers; so that they might deal together as other men of business, and not allow themselves to play this comedy of farmers and landlords crying about for protection, and saying that they are rowing in the same boat; when, in fact, they are rowing in two boats, and in opposite directions.

There is a new red-herring thrown across the scent of the farmers; they are told that protection cannot be had just now; but in the mean time they must have half the amount of the local rates thrown on the Consolidated Fund. I am really astonished that anybody should have the assurance to get up, and, facing a body of tenant-farmers, make such a proposal to them for the benefit of the landowners. The local rates at present are paid on the real property of the country. Such is the nature of the poor-rates and of the county-rates, &c. They are not assessed on the tenant's capital. [Hear, and a cry, 'Mr. Lattimore said they are!'] He said no such thing. [Some expressions of dissent.] He did not say that the assessment was on the ploughs and oxen of the tenantry. It is on the rent of land, and not on the floating capital; for it is known to everybody that the assessment is on the rent, and, if the rate is assessed on the rent, why the tenant charges it to the landlord when he takes his farm. He calculates what the rates and taxes are, and, if the farm is highly rated, he pays less rent. Did you ever know a landlord let his land tithe-free on the same terms as land which had the tithe on it? At present the rates were laid on the rent of land, and were ultimately paid by the landlord. I admit that

at first the tenant pays it out of his pocket, but he gets it again when he pays his rent. But only think of this wise proposal of the farmers' friend, who says, 'in order to relieve you tenant-farmers, I will take one half of these 12,000,000*l.* of local taxes off, and put it on the Consolidated Fund—that is to say, on tea, sugar, coffee, tobacco, and other articles which you tenant-farmers and labourers consume.' There is a pretty project for benefiting the tenant-farmers!

But there is another scheme; there are two ways of doing this. The other way is by assessing the rates on the floating capital of the country. The argument is—why should not the shop-keepers, the bankers, and the fundholders be assessed? But if you allow the bringing in of stock-in-trade to be assessed, you must bring in the farmers' stock-in-trade to be assessed. I now ask the farmers in Aylesbury and its neighbourhood, what they would gain if the value of all stock held upon land within the neighbourhood of Aylesbury were assessed? Has not Mr. Lattimore told you that the estimated value of the farming stock of this kingdom is 250,000,000*l.*? then I can only say it is [229] five times as much as the capital invested in the cotton trade, and more than that employed in the great staple manufactures together; and under such circumstances, how can those landlords tell the farmers that they would put rates on the floating stock? And is it not, then, a wise proposal to make to the farmers, to take off half of the rates, and to put the assessment on the floating capital, of which the farmer possesses the greater proportion? I am humiliated when I read of these meetings, in which the farmers listen and gape at such speeches; and I feel a relief that it is not my duty to attend at such meetings, and that I have no landlord to oblige by being present at these meetings.

What is the course, then, which ought to be pursued by the farmers at the present time? If they had such leaders like Mr. Lattimore, and the courage to follow him, they would meet together simply as farmers—as tenant-farmers only. If it had been a question affecting one of our mechanical trades in Lancashire and Yorkshire, the persons connected with that trade would have met together, and would have discussed among themselves exclusively what should be the course to be pursued under the circumstances. But the farmers are led out to parade by land-agents, and land-valuers, and landlords, who talk in their name, delude them in the face of the country, and make a lamentable exhibition of them to the rest of the country. The tenant-farmers should do on the subject of corn as the manufacturers did in reference to their interests—they should meet together in one community.

But let me not be misunderstood. I do not say that on other questions the small squire and tenant-farmer should be separated. I do not say that the landlords and the farmers should not go to the same church together, and meet in the same market. But when the tenant-farmers meet to talk on the subject of Free Trade, they should meet together alone, and should exclude every landlord from their council. This I say in reference to any occasion when the tenant-farmers meet together to talk about the subject of protection, in which they have an interest totally distinct from the land-lord who lets them their land; and they should not only exclude the great landed proprietor, but also the man whose predominant interest is that of the landowner, though he may be at the same time a tenant-farmer to a subordinate extent. The occupying tenants are men who employ their capital on the raw material, as Mr. Disraeli called it, and it was a good term. The tenant-farmers in this matter of protection have a totally distinct interest from the landowners, or small squires, or land-agents; and until they meet in their several localities totally distinct from all other classes, they never will have a chance of arriving at a just appreciation of their own position, or their own difficulties. They never will be able to combine together to get such terms and conditions as are necessary to enable them to carry on their business under the system of Free Trade.

Let me not be misunderstood. I do not say that under a natural state of things all classes have not a common interest in the general prosperity of the country. Let them only act towards each other with fairness, justice, and with honesty, and they would be promoting in

the end not only their own, but the general interests of the community. We have come here, I believe, to talk about financial and parliamentary reform, as well as other matters, and as I have been suffering from a cold, as you perhaps are aware, I will leave to other speakers to deal with those general topics, having preferred myself to touch more particularly upon the question concerning the tenant-farmers and the landlord.

[230]

**LETTER FROM MR. COBDEN  
TO THE TENANT FARMERS OF ENGLAND.**

TO THE FARMING TENANTRY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Gentlemen,—The question for you now to determine is, Shall the repeal of the Corn-law be gradual or immediate? Deny it who may, this is the only question that deserves a moment's consideration at your hands. Public opinion has decreed that protection to both agriculture and manufactures shall be abolished; and Ministers and statesmen have at last reluctantly bowed to a power from which there is no appeal. Let no designing or obtuse politicians delude you with the cry that the House of Lords, or a dissolution of Parliament, can prevent the repeal of the Corn-law. All men of average sagacity are now agreed that Free Trade in corn and manufactures is inevitable. How, then, shall we apply this new principle?—timidly and gradually, like children; or boldly and at once, as becomes men and Englishmen? Upon this point, I wish to submit to your consideration a few remarks which I believe to be of the utmost importance to your interests; they are offered in good faith by one who has sprung from your own ranks, and who, although deemed by some to be your enemy, will, I hope, live to be regarded as a promoter of the independence and prosperity of the farming tenantry of the kingdom.

The Government measure proposes to abolish the Corn-law in February, 1849, putting on for the three intervening years a new scale of duties, sliding from 10*s.* to 4*s.* The moment this law is passed, the duty will drop from 15*s.* to 4*s.* Here will be change the first, fright the first, and with many, I fear, panic the first. But there will be no settlement. You will not be able to foretell whether the duty during the years 1847 and 1848 will be 4*s.* or 10*s.* It is quite probable that, in February, 1849, the duty will be 10*s.*; if so, on the 1st of that month, it will drop again suddenly, from 10*s.* to 1*s.* Here will be change the second, fright the second, and, possibly, panic the second. The fall of duty in these two changes would have amounted to, first, from 15*s.* to 4*s.*; next, from 10*s.* to 1*s.*; making, together, 20*s.*; but, mark, if the duty were immediately reduced, from 15*s.* to 1*s.*, the fall would be only 14*s.* So that, by this clumsy contrivance, you are not only to be kept for three years in a state of suspense and embarrassment, and exposed to double panics, but are liable to a drop of 20*s.*, instead of 14*s.*, duty; you are actually subjected to the shock of the withdrawal of 6*s.* more of protection!

But this is only a small part of the danger to which you will be exposed by the delay. From the moment that the new Corn-law is passed, foreigners and corn-importers will begin to make preparations for the day of its extinction; they dread a sliding-scale in any shape, owing to former losses, and will keep their eyes steadily fixed upon the 1st of February, 1849.

[231]

What a precious policy is this which advertises for three years to all the land-owners and speculators of the entire world, offering them a premium to hold back their supplies, and then to pour upon our markets, in one day, a quantity of corn which, but for this contrivance, might have been spread over twelve or eighteen months! And what may your fate be under these probable circumstances? Supposing the crop of 1848 to be abundant in this country,

you will be liable, in the spring of 1849, to the sudden and unnatural influx of the corn accumulated by foreigners for this market; thus beating down prices artificially, to the loss of all parties, but more especially of the British farmer.

How different would be the operations of an immediate repeal of the Corn-law! There would then be no stock of foreign corn waiting for the opening of our ports. Nobody expected last year in Poland or America that the English Corn-law would be repealed—nobody prepared for it; not a bushel of grain was raised upon the chance of such an unlooked-for contingency. Is there an intelligent farmer in the kingdom that will not at once exclaim, ‘If we are to have a repeal of the Corn-law, give us it this spring, when the foreigner is unprepared for it, and when not a single quarter of corn sown after the news reaches him can be brought to this market in less than eighteen months.’

But the present is, beyond all comparison, the most favourable moment ever known for abolishing the Corn-law. If ever it could be repealed without even temporary inconvenience to the farmer, this is the time. There is a scarcity at present over nearly all the Continent. One-half of Europe is competing for the scanty surplus stock of grain in America. Millions of our countrymen are deprived of their ordinary subsistence by the disease of the potato, and they must be sustained at the public expense upon a superior food. Do what we will, we cannot, during the present year, secure low prices. Abolish the Corn-law to-morrow, and still wheat must rise during the spring and summer. If the farmers had the power of ordering time and circumstances, they could not contrive a juncture more favourable to them than the present for the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-law. Nay, I believe that if the Corn-law could be abolished by a secret edict tomorrow, the farmers would never make the discovery of open ports by any injurious effect produced upon their interests.

I cannot believe that Sir Robert Peel is favourable to the gradual repeal; he supported it by no other argument in his speech than the fear of panic amongst the farmers; but he has told us again and again, in proposing his former alterations in the tariff, that he believes all such changes are less injurious, if suddenly made, than when spread over a period of years. I have the strongest conviction, derived from his own past changes in the tariff, that he is right. Why then should you, in deference to unfounded fears, be deprived of the benefits of experience? If you speak out in favour of an immediate settlement, who will oppose your wishes? Not the Government—they are anxious, so far as public opinion and the exigencies of the moment will allow, to conciliate your favour; not the great landed proprietors, whose interests and yours are in this respect identical, who desire also, on political grounds, to put a period to an agitation, the prolonged duration of which they believe to be injurious, and who would willingly take any step which shall at once consult your interests and dissolve the League.

Let me entreat you to take this subject into your instant and earnest consideration. Do me the justice to believe that I have no other object in view in writing this letter but to serve your interests. If you should be induced to concur in its views, you will avoid the only danger to which, in my opinion, the farmers were ever exposed from the repeal of the Corn-law—that of the transition state. From the first I have always entertained and expressed the [232] conviction that Free Trade, far from permanently injuring the farmers, would ultimately tend to their prosperity and independence. I never disguised from myself, however, the temporary evils to which they might be exposed in the change. But let us unite in seizing the present opportunity, and the triumph of sound principles may be achieved without the bitter ingredient of one particle of injury to any class or individual. From the most exalted personage in the realm down to the humblest peasant, all may witness, with unalloyed pleasure, one of the greatest victories ever achieved over past prejudice and ignorance, whilst each class may derive peculiar gratification at the close of our long domestic struggle. The Sovereign may glory that her reign was reserved for the era of a commercial reformation,

more pregnant in beneficial consequences to the destinies of mankind than all the wars of her illustrious ancestors; the landed aristocracy will see in the consummation of our labours an opening for the resumption of their social influence, based upon the only sure foundation—the respect and confidence of the people; whilst to the middle and industrious classes will be presented a constantly widening field for the employment of their peaceful energies, together with greater means and more leisure for that moral amelioration which, I trust, will accompany their improved physical condition.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,  
Your obedient Servant,  
RICHARD COBDEN.

LONDON,  
*30th January, 1846.*

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## FINANCE.

### FINANCE. I.

MANCHESTER, JANUARY 27, 1848. ↪

[On Jan. 4, the *Morning Chronicle* published a letter of the Duke of Wellington to Sir John Burgoyne, in which the great change which modern improvement in attack had induced on all systems of national defence was insisted on. The Duke urged that a large addition must be made to the military forces of the country, in order to make it secure. Mr. Cobden, in a meeting at Manchester, where general politics were discussed, combated this opinion.]

I HAVE, in the first place, to tender you my thanks, and the thanks of those gentlemen who represent North and South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, for the honour which you have done us. I believe that a very large proportion of the Members of those divisions of the two counties are now Free-traders, and, I have no doubt, will be found to do their duty to the satisfaction of this assembly.

Now, gentlemen, I have been asked a dozen times, I dare say, what is the object of this meeting. I confess to you that I do not wish to regard it as a meeting to celebrate past triumphs, still less to glorify ourselves or one another. I wish rather that it should be made to show that we are alive to the future—that, having secured upon the statute-book a guarantee for free trade in corn, we intend to make that the prelude to free trade in ships—that we intend to prevent the West India proprietors from taxing this community for their advantage—and that, in fact, we intend to carry out in every article of commerce the principles of Free Trade, which we have applied to corn.

Now, gentlemen, our esteemed Representative (Mr. Milner Gibson) has so ably and efficiently anticipated some points which I intended to refer to in connection with the sugar question, and other applications of our principles of Free Trade, that I am relieved from the necessity of repeating them, and I thank him most heartily for the speech which he has delivered upon this occasion, which is one of the ablest that I ever heard in this hall. I believe that the question of Free Trade, the question of Free Trade in all its details, is understood by this assembly—that what I have told you to be the future objects of this meeting has the concurrence of every one in this assembly, and I have no doubt that every Member of Parliament now upon this platform will aid us in carrying our principles into effect.

But now, gentlemen, I wish to allude to another subject, and although I deem that subject to have an intimate connection with the question of Free Trade, yet I wish to be distinctly understood, and I do not for a moment presume that, in what I am going to say, I shall speak the sentiments of any Member of Parliament or gentleman beside me. I speak only for myself, and I wish to be understood [234] as compromising no other individual. I allude, as you may probably anticipate, to the intention which has been announced of increasing our warlike armaments.

Now, gentlemen, you will bear me out, that throughout the long agitation for Free Trade, the most earnest men who co-operated with us were those who constantly advocated Free Trade, not merely on account of the material advantages which it would bring to the community, but for the far loftier motive of securing permanent peace between nations. I believe that it was that consideration which mainly drew to our ranks that great accession of ministers of religion which gave so powerful an impetus to our progress at the

commencement of our agitation; and I, who have known most of the leading men connected with the struggle, and have had the opportunity of understanding their motives, can say that I believe that the most earnest, the most persevering, the most devoted of our coadjutors, have been prompted by those lofty, those purely moral and religious motives to which I have referred, especially for the object of peace. Well, gentlemen, I am sure that every one of those men have shared with me the shock which my feelings sustained, when, within one short twelvemonths after we had announced our adoption of Free Trade to the world, we were startled with the announcement that we were going to increase our warlike armaments.

I ask, what is the explanation of this? Probably we may find it in the Duke of Wellington's letter—in the private efforts which he announces therein that he has made with the Government, and to the correspondence which he has had with Lord John Russell. I may attribute this, then, to the Duke of Wellington and his letter, and to his persevering efforts. Well, I do not profess to share the veneration which some men entertain for successful warriors. But is there amongst the most ardent admirers of the Duke one man, possessing the ordinary feelings of humanity, who would not wish that that letter had never been written or never published? His Grace has passed the point of the ordinary duration of human existence, and I may say, almost without a figure of speech, that he is tottering on the verge of the grave. Is it not a most lamentable spectacle that that hand, which is no longer capable of wielding a sword, should devote its still remaining feeble strength to the penning of a letter,—and that letter may possibly be the last public letter which he may address to his fellow-countrymen,—which is more calculated than anything in the present day to create evil passions and animosities in the breasts of two great and neighbouring nations? Would it not have been a better employment for him to have been seen preaching forgiveness and oblivion of the past, rather than in reviving recollections of Toulon, and Paris, and Waterloo; and, in fact, doing everything to invite a brave people to retaliatory measures, to retrieve themselves from past disasters and injuries? Would it not have been a more glorious object to contemplate, had he poured the oil into those wounds which are now almost healed, rather than have thus applied the cautery—reopening those wounds, and leaving to other generations the task of repairing the mischief which he has perpetrated? I will leave the subject of the Duke's letter with this remark, which I made when I read it and came to the conclusion, where he says, 'I am in my 77th year'—I said, that explains it all, and excuses it all. We have not to deal with the Duke of Wellington; we have to deal with those younger men, who want to make use of his authority to carry out their own special purposes.

Now, what I wish to impress on you and the people of England is, that the question before us is not a military, not a naval question, but a question for civilians to decide. When we are at war, then the men with red clothes and swords by their sides may step in to do their work—and, as Sir H. Smith fitly described it, in a speech which he recently made, a damnable trade it is. But we are now at peace, and we wish to reap [235] the fruits of peace, and in order to do so we must calculate for ourselves the contingency of a possible war. That is a civilian's question—that is a question for the decision of the tax-payers who have to pay the cost of a war. It is a question for the merchant; it is a question for the manufacturer, for the shopkeepers, for the operatives, for the farmers of this country—ay, and, pardon me, my Lord Ellesmere, it is a question for the calico-printer.

What is this prospect of a war? Where does it come from? You, I say, are competent to judge on this subject better than military men. You are more impartial; you are disinterested; at all events, your interest does not lie on the side of war. Any man who can read a book giving an account of France—any man who can read a translation from a French newspaper—any man who will take the trouble of studying the statistics of the progress of their commerce and wealth—any man who can study these things, is as competent as a soldier to pronounce an opinion on the probability of a war. I have had better opportunities than any



soldier of studying these things, and I say that there never was a time in the history of France and England when there was a greater tendency to a pacific policy in France, and especially towards this kingdom, than there is at the present time. Why, the French people have gone through a process which almost disqualifies them for going to war. They have gone through a social revolution, which has so much equalised property that the tax-payers are equally spread all over the country, and, paying a large portion of the taxes in indirect taxation, they have a direct interest and a most sensitive feeling in the expenditure which would be necessary to go to war. There are in France far more people of property than in England. There are some five or six millions of real proprietors of the soil in France. You have not one-tenth of that number in England. These are all thrifty, painstaking, careful men—all with their little savings, their little hoards of five-franc pieces—all anxious to do something for their children, for there is not a more domestic and affectionate race in the world than the French. I have seen with horror, and shame, and indignation, the way in which some of our newspapers speak of the French people. They have placed us before the community, before the world, in so ignominious, so degraded a condition—they have marked us as such an ignorant people, to say nothing of our prejudices and want of Christian charity, that, I say, nothing but an uprising of the people in multitudinous assemblages like this, and repudiating the doctrines put forth by those pretending to speak and write in their behalf, can set us right with the world or with ourselves.

There is one paper in this city, which I would always wish to treat with respect, if it will allow me—there is, I say, one paper here which, I see, last week gravely entered into this argument, gravely adopted this line of reasoning, that it is necessary we should have a police in Manchester, and that we have had a constantly increasing police here to protect us—against what? thieves, ruffians, pickpockets, and murderers; and, therefore, we must have increasing naval and military armaments to protect us against the French. Are the majority of the French people thieves and pickpockets, ruffians and murderers? If they are, could they exist as an organised community? And yet they are a community as orderly as ourselves, for there has been as little tumult in France during the last five or six years as there has been in England.

I see that there is another newspaper in London, a weekly newspaper, which used to write with some degree of credit to itself, but I presume that it has been panic-stricken,—that it has lost its wits. That paper tells us that the next war with France will take place without any declaration of hostilities on the part of that country, and that, literally, we have to protect our Queen at Osborne House against these ruffianly Frenchmen, who may, otherwise, come and carry her off [236] What a lesson has our courageous Queen read to these men! She went over to France, unfriended, unprotected, and threw herself on shore at the Chateau d'Eu, literally in a bathing-machine. Now, there is either great courage on one side, or great cowardice on the other.

But, gentlemen, this is a sort of periodical visitation which we have. I sometimes compare it to the cholera—for I believe that the last infection which we had of this kind came about the time of the cholera. The last time that a cry of this sort was got up, we were threatened with an invasion of the Russians, which my friend (Mr. Milner Gibson) has told you of. Now, I am rather identified with and interested in that invasion of Russia. It was that which made me an author; it was that which made me a public man; and it is quite possible, if it had not been for the insanity of some of the public newspapers—and some of them are just as insane now as they were then—that I should not have come into public life. They then told us that the Russians would be coming over here some foggy day, and that they would land at Yarmouth. If it had not been for that insanity I should never have turned author, never have written pamphlets, but must have been a thrifty, painstaking calico-printer to this day.

Now, again, what I want is, that you should understand a little better about these foreigners. You may remember that about three weeks or a month ago I had occasion to address a few remarks to the electors assembled at Newton, on the occasion of the election of my friend Mr. Henry; and that there I let fall some observations favourable to the reduction of our armaments, and showing how necessary it was that we should reduce our expenditure in that department, in order to enable us to carry out fiscal reform. I little dreamt then, that within a few hours of the time when I was speaking, a large meeting was being held at Rouen, the Manchester of France, at which there were 1,800 electors assembled, to promote, at a public dinner, the progress of parliamentary reform, and that a gentleman was there making a speech so similar to my own, that he sent me a newspaper containing a report of it, and expressed his astonishment that two speeches, made without collusion, should have so nearly resembled each other. I will, if you please, read that gentleman's remarks, and notice the cheers of the company as I go on. It is Mons. Vicienne who speaks:—

'How long will it take to turn from theory into practice the very simple idea that, apart from the precepts of religion, which we do so often quote, but so seldom practise, and upon the merest calculations of an enlightened self-interest, nations have a far different mission upon earth than to excite in each other mutual fear? How long will it be before they discover the selfish objects of those who have an interest in persuading them that the name of a foreigner is synonymous with that of enemy? When will they learn that, as children of the same Father, their real and only enemies, those which they ought to struggle to destroy, are ignorance, oppression, misery, and superstition?—[cheers]—that in proclaiming their mutual friendships, they will tend to the consolidation of peaceful relations with each other? When will they discover that the maintenance of formidable armaments, in countries whose nationality is not seriously menaced, inflicts an evil upon all, and confers benefits on none? [Shouts of "That's true—that's true."] But, better to define my idea, do you not think that if, confident in the maintenance of an honourable peace, we were to deduct from the 500 millions francs which our army and navy cost us, 20 millions to be applied to the education of the people, and a like sum for the purpose of converting 20,000 soldiers into road-makers; if we gave back to agriculture and manufactures 50,000 more soldiers, leaving in our pockets the sum which they cost to pay and support them—think you not that this would be a good result of the *entente cordiale*, I will not say between the Governments—we know what that is worth—[laughter]—but the nations, which have no dynastic interests to serve, and do not play at diplomacy. [Cheers.] Do you not think that this example of common sense and feeling [237] of security given by us would have its influence upon the other countries of Europe, would lead to other disarmaments, would facilitate everywhere those fiscal reforms which are postponed from day to day on the plea of the necessities of the treasury, and would give to productive industry that capital and labour which are now diverted into unproductive channels? [Expressions of assent.]'

Now, at the same meeting, another gentleman, an eminent Member of the Chamber of Deputies, spoke, and said:—

'Heaven grant that the day may come when the world shall be one nation! God gave us the earth, not to bathe it with blood, but that we might make it smile with fertility. [Cheers.] Oh! gentlemen, which nation has found the grandest success in war? What country can exhibit such glorious triumphs as France, whose soldiers rushed to the field of battle in search of death, or rather immortality? [Applause.] But after glory comes reverses; we have found that if war has its immense triumphs, it has also its immense disasters. Besides, what changes are going on around us! If war, during so many ages, was the rule, and peace the exception, in our day peace ought to be the rule and war the exception. [Cheers.] See, in fact, what is passing throughout civilised Europe. People are fraternising by their industry, and by those novel means of communication which are almost annihilating distances. In four days you are at the extremity of

Germany; in five days you may visit Berlin and Vienna; in seven days you are upon the banks of the Vistula. In a short time we shall be as near to the empire of Russia; already travellers are carrying ideas of liberty into that country, frightening tyranny, which will one day fall from its seat. Enough of conquering! Who would wish again to arm people against each other? Why should they think of the aggrandisement of territory when there are no longer any barriers between nations? [Prolonged cheering.] Let me not be told that this is a dream—a Utopia; already we begin to realise it. By their intercourse, nations are beginning to know and understand each other; they are ridding themselves, one and all, of those ancient prejudices and hatreds which have hitherto separated them. Why should they not fraternise together? Why should they be enemies? Are they not the children of one God? Have they not all the same immortal spirit, which is the emanation from heaven? And, upon earth, have they not the same interests to protect and develope? [Prolonged sensation—bravos!] And I demand of you, if France, warlike and conquering, has seen the nations offering to her the tribute of their acclamations, what a part will she perform in this long peace of the world! [Applause and long interruption.]

Now, gentlemen, those extracts are very long, but I thought they would interest you—to know what was passing in a popular assembly, representing the active public opinion of the chief manufacturing town in France; and when you see such sentiments as those applauded in the way in which they were in a French assembly, why will you, people of Manchester, believe that the French are that nation of bandits which some of your newspapers would make you believe? I do not mean to say that there may not be prejudices in France to root out; and Heaven knows that we have prejudices enough in England to extirpate; but this I do say, that it is not with a few insignificant brawlers in Paris—men without station, stake, or influence in their country—it is not with those we should attempt to pick a quarrel, but it is rather to such men as those from whose speeches I have quoted that we should hold out the right hand of fellowship.

Now, I will be practical with you on this question of armaments, for I shall not have another opportunity of speaking to you again before this question comes before the House of Commons. I have said that it is a question for civilians to determine—that military and naval men should have no voice in it—that it is for you only, the tax-payers. Do not let me be misunderstood. I am not going to enter into the technicalities of war. I do not claim for civilians—Heaven forbid I should—a knowledge of the horrid trade of war. I only contend that, whilst we are in a state of profound peace, it is for you, the tax-payers, to decide whether you will run [238] the risk of war, and keep your money in your pockets, or allow an additional number of men in red coats and blue jackets to live in idleness under the pretence of protecting you. Now, I say this, that I am for acting justly and fairly, for holding out the olive-branch to all the world, and I am for taking on myself, so far as my share goes, all the risk of anything that may happen to me, without paying for more soldiers and sailors.

But it is not merely the question, whether you will have more armaments, that you civilians are competent to decide. You have already expended this year 17,000,000*l.* sterling in your armaments, and it is a question on which you are competent to decide, whether the best possible use is made of your money—whether, for instance, the navy, for which you pay so largely, is really employed in the way best calculated to answer the design of those men who profess themselves so anxious to accomplish it, if you will give them more money—that is, the protection of your shores. Where do you think all your great line-of-battle ships go? I have picked up a few secrets abroad—for you know that I have travelled by water as well as by land. I venture to say that there is not more perfect idleness, nor more demoralisation, the consequence of idleness, going on in the same space on the face of the earth as in our ships of war, from their want of having something to do. Where do you find them? Where are those great line-of-battle ships, of whose payment and equipment you hear, and which you read of going out of your harbours with such a display of power? Do they go where we have any

great commerce? Go to Hamburg, and there you will never see an English man-of-war. Go to the Baltic, where we carry on so much trade, and you will rarely see one. There is rough weather, and not many attractions on shore there. Well, go, then, to America. There is North America, with which, I suppose, we do one-fifth or one-sixth of the foreign trade of this country—at least, I hope we shall very shortly come to that. Do you think any of these great men-of-war are upon that coast? Why it is the rarest thing indeed for one to be seen in those waters, and if one does appear there the fact is recorded in the American newspapers. They do not go there; for there are no idle people on shore, and the officers do not like the society they meet with. In fact, the ships are not wanted there, and they would do more harm than good if they went there.

Well, then, where do they go? I am trying to get the information for you. I moved for a return, just before the close of the last little session of Parliament, which will throw some light on the subject, and I ask you to keep your eye on that return. I will tell you what it is. I moved for a return of the amount of our naval force that has been in the Tagus, and the waters of Portugal, on the 1st of each month during the last twelve months—the name of the ships, the complement of guns, and the number of men. Now, when that report turns up, I should not be surprised if you see that you have had a naval force in the Tagus and the Douro, and on the coast of Portugal, which, in the number of guns, will not fall much short of the whole American navy. Lisbon is a pleasant place to be at, as I can vouch, for I have seen it. The climate is delightful. Geraniums grow in the open air in the month of January. I do not quarrel with the taste of the admirals or captains who go and spend twelve months in the Tagus, if you will let them. But now, I ask, what are they doing in return for the money which they cost you? Are they promoting, even in the remotest degree, English interests there? Nothing of the kind. Our fleet has been in the Tagus, at the absolute disposal of the Queen of Portugal, positively and literally nothing else. Our papers have avowed that our fleet went there to protect her Majesty of Portugal, and to give her and her court an asylum, in case the conduct of her people should compel her to seek it.

[239]

Now, this is a subject upon which every gentleman, nay, every lady, is competent to judge. I never like to speak disrespectfully of any country, and, therefore, I do not wish to be thought to speak slightly of Portugal, when I say that it is one of the smallest, poorest, and one of the most decayed and abject of European countries. I am sorry for it, but such is the fact. What in the world has England to gain by going and taking this country under her protection? Is it her commerce that you seek for? Why, you are sure of her commerce, for this simple reason—that you take four-fifths of all her port wine, and if you did not, no one else would drink it. Now, I would not like to be thought capable of using an atrocious sentiment, and what I am about to say I mean only as an illustration of an economical argument; but, positively, if the earthquake which once demolished Lisbon were to come again, and sink the whole of Portugal under the sea, it would be an immense gain to the English people. That, however, is not the fault of Portugal; for our ships go there—to do what? Why, to help the Queen and Government of Portugal to misgovern the people. When they rebel, our forces go on shore and put them down by the strong arm. Why, our statesmen actually undertook to say who should govern Portugal, and to exclude a particular family from all participation in the Government. They also stipulated that the Cortes should be elected on constitutional principles. Well, the Cortes was elected, and the people have returned almost every man favourable to that very statesman whom Lord Palmerston and Co. said should not have any influence in Portugal.

Now, gentlemen, I ask you just to follow out this question of English interference with Portugal. Understand the whole subject—the increase of your armaments which is thus caused; apply your common sense to it. There is a constant complaint that the English public

do not give any attention to foreign politics. What is the reason of that? It is common sense, and a very sound instinct on the part of the English people. They turn their heads and eyes from foreign politics, because they know that they have never done them any good. But you must do one thing: you must change from apathy to knowledge; you must superintend your foreign minister; and when you do that, I undertake to say that you may save a great deal of money—and that will be one good result, at all events, in these bad times. What I wish to bring home to your convictions is this, that if the people in Brighton—if the old ladies of both sexes there are frightened lest they should be taken out of their beds some night by the French—why not bring home the fleet from the Tagus, and let it cruise in the Channel? I am no sailor, but I feel sure that no sailor would gainsay this,—that it would be a great deal better practice, better exercise, better for the crew, for the condition of the ships, for the quality of the officers and men, if the fleet were sailing in the Channel, than lying in demoralising idleness at Lisbon.

Now, gentlemen, if you go into the Mediterranean—if you follow your ships there—you will find precisely the same thing going on. Why, the Mediterranean is crowded with English ships of war—not to look after your commerce: they can do no good in that way. We have settled that question: we have repudiated protection. But there you find them, nevertheless. Leaving Portsmouth, they sail directly for Malta; and Malta is the great skulking-hole for your navy. I was at Malta at the commencement of winter, in the month of November. Whilst I was at Malta, a ship arrived there from Portsmouth; it had come direct; it had 1,000 hands on board when it left Portsmouth; it came into Valetta Harbour, when I was there, with 999 people on board, men and boys, having lost one hand on the passage. Soon after the arrival of that vessel I started from Valetta, went to Naples, and from thence to Egypt and Greece, and when I returned she had [240] never stirred. Her officers had gone on shore to live in the club, and the lieutenant and other officers in command found the utmost difficulty for even a pretence of work. The crew were ordered to hoist up the sails and to let them down again; and they scrubbed the decks until they scrubbed the planks almost through. Well, I was introduced to the American Consul at Malta, and he spoke to me in a very friendly manner on the subject of our navy. He said, ‘We Americans consider your navy to be very slack.’ ‘Slack!’ I said; ‘what do you mean by slack?’ ‘Why,’ he said, ‘they are too idle; they are not sufficiently worked. You cannot have a crew in good order if they lie for three or four months in a harbour like this. We have never more than three or four vessels in the Mediterranean, and rarely one larger than a frigate; but the instructions which we have from the Government at Washington are these,—that the American ships are never to be kept in port at all; that they are to go from one port to another, to take care of the traders, and see if there are any pirates, although there are not often any of them in the Mediterranean. But the vessels are always in motion, and the American sailors and American ships are in a better state of discipline and equipment than the English ships, on account of their idleness.’ Now, again, this is a question on which every man and woman in the country is competent to form an opinion; and I say that if any one talks to me about increasing our armaments, I tell them, if they are frightened in the Channel, let them bring home those useless ships which are lying in the Tagus and the Mediterranean. If they tell me that the ships of war in the Tagus are lying there for the protection of the Queen of Portugal, I tell them that her subjects are her proper protectors.

Now, one word, rather personal to myself, without the slightest reference to the opinions of the gentlemen around me; I had been, somehow or another, rather singled out on this question of armaments. I dropped a few remarks at Stockport on the subject, in the most harmless and incidental way. To confess the honest truth, I did not go there to say anything about armaments or taxation; but, in the course of my speech, as people here can testify, a man shouted out, ‘But ain’t taxation something to do with it?’ and then, under the impulse of the moment, I alluded to the army, navy, and ordnance, as the only item on which a reduction of taxation can be effected. The papers in London—I suppose for their own convenience’

sake—tried to make me ridiculous, if they could, by making me say that I wanted to save the whole expenditure on the army, navy, and ordnance. I have no hesitation in declaring what my opinions are on this subject. I stated at Stockport, very candidly, what I shall state here—what I stated in my pamphlets twelve years ago on this subject—that you cannot have a material reduction in your armaments until a great change takes place in public opinion in this country with regard to our foreign policy. I have stated that opinion over and over again in my writings. I said at Stockport that you cannot reduce that item until there is a change in public opinion, and the English people abandon the notion that they are to regulate the affairs of the world. Indeed, those were my very words at Stockport, as people here can testify. I wished to do no injustice—to offer no factious opposition to Ministers with respect to the maintenance of our armaments. All I wanted was to invoke public opinion, as I do now, and as I always will invoke public opinion. When the public opinion, the majority of the influential opinion of the country, is on my side, I shall be content to see my views carried out. Until that time, I am content to be on this question, as I have been on others, in a minority, and in a minority to remain, until I get a majority.

But, gentlemen, the real and practical question before the country is not the question of a reduction of armaments. This, however, has been very carefully [241] mystified. It is not a question, as this paper in Manchester, in its latest number, says, whether we shall dismantle fleets and leave our arsenals defenceless. That is not the question, and it is dishonest to put that as the question. The real question is, will we have an increase of the army, navy, and ordnance? Now, when I admit that public opinion does not go with me to the extent which would enable me to carry a great reduction in our armaments, I at the same time maintain—speaking for the West Riding of Yorkshire—speaking for Lancashire—speaking for Middlesex—speaking for London—speaking for Edinburgh—speaking for Glasgow—I say that, on the question of the increase of our armaments, public opinion is with me in those places, and against the Ministers. And if that public opinion is expressed, and expressed through public meetings, I, for one, have no hesitation in saying that a large portion of the press has neglected and forsaken its duty on this question. I say that if public opinion be expressed in public meetings throughout the country, before the estimates are brought on in the House of Commons, there will be no increase of our armaments. But whether that manifestation of public opinion takes place or not, I—speaking for myself, as an individual Member of the House of Commons—say that not one shilling shall be added to the estimates for our armaments, without my having forced a division of the House upon it.

I began by identifying this question of our armaments with the question of Free Trade, and I tell you, in conclusion, that the question of Free Trade is jeopardised all over Europe by the course which it is intended to take. Why, I receive the papers from Paris, and what do they tell me? There is a band of Free-traders there associated together; they publish their weekly organ, as we published our Anti-Corn-law paper. It is called the *Libre Échangé*, and is edited by my talented and excellent and able friend, M. Bastiat. That paper, last week, was mourning in sackcloth and ashes over the course which they there think England is going to pursue. And what says the organ of the protectionists, the *Moniteur Industriel*? They are deluging, not only France, but England, with the last week's number of that paper, in which they leap with exultation at the condition of this country. 'We told you,' says that journal, 'that England was not sincere on the Free trade question. She has no faith in her principles; she sees that other nations are not following her example, and she is preparing her armaments to take that by force which she thought to take by fraud.'

Now, I exhort my countrymen everywhere to resist this attempt to throw odium on our principles, which, if carried out, the Free-Traders believe would bring peace and harmony among the nations. The most enthusiastic of us never said, as some of the papers pretend that we did say, that we expected the millennium soon after we had got Free Trade. We never

expected but that we should have to give time to other nations for the adoption of our principles, precisely as we required time to adopt them ourselves. But what we did hope was this: that the Continent of Europe, with eyes steadily fixed on this country, in connection with this question, would, at all events, not have seen that we were the first to have doubt as to the tendency of our own principles, and to be arming against the world when we pretended to be seeking only their friendship and kindness. We permitted too many of the good and peaceful men who joined this agitation to try to make it the harbinger of peace, which it was intended to be; we planted the olive-tree, never expecting to gather the fruit in a day; but we expected it to yield fruit in good season, and, with Heaven's help and yours, it shall do so yet.

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**FINANCE. II.**  
**MANCHESTER, JANUARY 10, 1849.**

I MUST bespeak your kindness for keeping silence and order during the meeting, for I am afraid I am so much out of practice, that I shall not make myself heard over this vast audience. I have to move a resolution, which I will read to you. It is:—

'That this meeting resolves to co-operate with the Liverpool Financial Reform Association, and other bodies, in their efforts to reduce the public expenditure to at least the standard of 1835, and to secure a *more equitable* and economical system of taxation.'

We have often, gentlemen, met in this hall to advocate a cause which has brought upon us the charge of being the farmers' enemies; and now we come forward in another character—we appear here as the farmers' friends. We have been accused of having subjected the agriculturists of this country to a competition with foreigners. They have complained to us that they are more heavily taxed than the foreign farmers. Now, gentlemen, we come forward to offer them the right hand of fellowship and union, to effect a reduction of ten millions in the cost of our Government. I have moved, and in your name I hope it will go forth to the country, that we co-operate with the financial reformers of Liverpool in their agitation for financial reform, on the condition that we advocate a return to the expenditure of 1835. In 1835, the affairs of this Government were carried on for ten millions less of money than they are this year, and I have ventured to propose, in a letter which may have probably met the eyes of some of those present, that we should go back to that expenditure. I have waited three weeks before I should have the opportunity of saying a word in public in defence of my views, to see what would be said against that recommendation. I must confess that my opponents have not given me much to answer. I have heard it said, and it is probably the most valid argument that can be urged, that the population has increased since 1835. True, it has; our numbers are 12½ per cent. more than they were then, and our opponents say that we must allow a larger sum for the government of a greater number than a smaller; and I admit the argument so far as civil government goes, and in my plan I allow forty per cent. more for the civil government than was expended in 1835. But I deny that thirteen years of duration of peace is an additional argument why we should have an increase of our forces. And here I am very glad to call to my aid the opinion of a statesman who probably will be allowed by our opponents to be an authority in this matter. Towards the close of last session of Parliament, Sir R. Inglis, the Member for the University of Oxford, uttered this extraordinary doctrine—very extraordinary everywhere but at Oxford—that the longer you remain at peace, the greater the probability was that you [243] would go to war. His idea seems to be, that men in time of peace were only being fattened up for a speedy slaughter. Now, hear what Lord Palmerston said in reply to him:—

'But I look to the general tendency of men's minds towards peace, and I differ from the hon. Member for the University of Oxford, who thinks that the long duration of peace renders war more probable: I think, on the contrary, that the duration of peace renders its continuance more likely, and will make countries more disposed to settle their differences otherwise than by war.'

It appears that in 1835 we spent 11,600,000*l.* for our army, navy, and ordnance, and I propose that we now shall not expend more than 10,000,000*l.* What I take from the expenditure for warlike purposes in 1835, I add to the civil expenditure in 1848. We spent for purposes of civil government in 1835, 4,300,000*l.*; I allow 5,900,000*l.* for the civil



expenditure of the Government now; and taking into account the saving which I contemplate in the cost of collecting the revenue, and in the management of the Crown lands, which I have seen estimated by a financial reformer at something like half a million—taking these into account, I am allowing more than actually we are now expending for the ordinary expenses of the civil government of this country, and thus we get rid altogether of the objection, that increase of population requires an increase of expenditure to govern the people. Then, there has been another argument used also, and it is this: that, during the last year, and the year before, there was a deficiency of revenue. We have spent more than we have received, and we borrow money; and, therefore, even if my financial plan should be carried out, there still will not be the ten millions to dispose of in the remission of taxes. Well, my answer to that is this—and these cunning financiers who meet me with this argument ought to know it—that if the revenue has fallen off during the last year and the year before, it has been because the balance-sheets of our merchants and manufacturers have been equally adverse. The revenue has been deficient because the profits have been annihilated in the trade of every man in the country; but now that you have food at moderate prices, trade revives, and instantly you see the revenue increasing, and next year, perhaps this year—the next year, certainly—will see you with a surplus revenue as certainly as you had a deficiency last year. But I say, gentlemen—and I want to keep the financial reformers to this point, because we must have one simple article of faith, or we cannot march together—I say, give me the expenditure back again of 1835, and I will guarantee you the remission of ten millions of taxation. If you want—if the country wants to reduce their duty on tea one-half; if you wish to abolish altogether the duty upon timber, upon butter, upon cheese, upon soap, upon paper, upon malt, upon house-windows; if you wish to put an end to a system that curtails those necessities and comforts—then raise your voices throughout the country, simultaneously, for the expenditure of 1835.

Now, where is the difficulty? Where is the difficulty of returning to the expenditure of 1835? Why, the whole question lies in the amount of your warlike armaments. The whole question is, Will the Government be content to waste ten millions of money in unproductive services like your fighting establishments—I mean your fighting establishments in a time of peace? Will our Government be content with ten millions? and if not, why not? I want the arguments—why not? I was asked the other day by an M.P., ‘When are you going into the details to show how you propose to carry on the Government upon your plan?’ My answer was this: ‘I should be a very bad tactician, and but a poor logician, if, when I have made a proposal that the Government should support its warlike establishments with ten millions of money, I did not call upon them to give me an answer, and to show me why they cannot [244] maintain them with ten millions.’ I put them on the defensive. I ask them whether they have made the most of the money they receive. How do you think they dispose of the money? Why, you maintain one hundred and fifty admirals, besides fifty retired admirals. Well, but how many do you think you employ? Why, during the heat of the great French war—the greatest war on record—when you had nearly one thousand pennants flying, you never employed more than thirty-six admirals at one time—and at this time you have but fourteen admirals in active service. With all their ingenuity of putting admirals to work when they are not wanted, they can only find employment for fourteen. Well, then, I find in the army you have a colonel for every regiment who does the work; and you have another colonel of every regiment, who is the tailor to the regiment—who never goes near it—who never sees it—whom the men would not know if he did go near it; but he supplies clothes to them, and gets the profits of a tailor. These are illustrations how money is wasted. But I won't confine myself to the abuses and waste that occur. I tell you plainly from the outset, that, in order to effect such a reduction of expenditure for your armaments as you require for a relief to the country, a material relief—that will be felt in the homes and at the firesides of the population of this country—you must reduce the number of men. You must be content with a smaller manifestation of brute force in the eyes of the world. You must trust something to Providence

—something to your own just intentions—and your good conduct to other nations; and you must rely less upon that costly, that wasteful expenditure, arising from so enormous a display of brute force.

Now, gentlemen, I will bring this matter home to my opponents with a very few figures. How is it we have had this great increase in the cost of our armaments? Has it been only an increase of waste, an increase in the number of admirals, and an increase in the number of colonels? No; it is because you have augmented the number of your men. I hold in my hand a statement made by Lord John Russell in the House of Commons last session. I will quote his own figures. He gives me the increase of the army, navy, and ordnance, since 1835; and in 1835 the number of men in all these services was 135,743; in last year they were 196,063. The increase in the number of men in the army, navy, and ordnance, since 1835, has been 60,320. Now, what has been the increase of the expenditure? In 1835, the total cost for all these services was 11,600,000*l.* In the present year it is upwards of 18,000,000*l.* The increase of the men has been as nearly as possible fifty per cent., and the increase in the money has been about fifty per cent. also. It is perfectly understood when Parliament votes the men, it must vote corresponding establishments in every direction; and, therefore, while I admit there are abuses, and great waste and mismanagement, I say, if you want a material reduction in the cost of your armaments, you must at once boldly proceed on the plan of reducing the number of armed men.

Why should you not reduce them? Why have they been increased? There has always been a ready excuse for adding to the force when an augmentation of the army, navy, or ordnance has been proposed; but what I complain of is, that when the alleged occasion of the increase has passed away, we never have a diminution. In 1835, as I have told you, our armaments were at the lowest point. In 1836, a cry was got up that the Russians were coming to invade us. I remember penning a pamphlet, to expose the absurdity of the cry, that the Russians were preparing to invade the coast of Norfolk some foggy morning; but that cry was an excuse for an increase in our navy. Then, again, in 1839, after the unfortunate scenes at Monmouth, in which Frost, Williams, and Jones were concerned—I suppose I must call it rebellion—there was immediately a proposal made by Lord John Russell for an increase of 5,000 men to the army. [245] That increase was made specifically to meet the case of the Chartist riots; but when tranquillity returned, we never heard a word about reducing those 5,000 men. If you follow step by step the increase in our armaments, you will find the same course pursued. At one time, we must needs go and settle affairs in Syria, and we sent a large fleet to bombard Acre, and fight Ibrahim Pasha, or some other Pasha. Then we had a quarrel with the French at Tahiti. Then in 1845, there was a dispute about the Oregon boundary. As President Polk talked a great deal about fighting, and some men in the House of Representatives uttered more nonsense than usual, our Government proposed a large increase in the navy, and we had the ‘squadron of evolution’ fitted out,—this squadron of evolution is still going on with its evolutions. This was as a demonstration against America; but the Oregon question was settled—the Tahiti question is settled—the Chartists, I hope, are now well employed and comfortable; where, then, is the pretence for keeping up all these increased armaments? But I have not forgotten the last excuse. You remember, this time last year, standing on this platform, I raised my voice in conjunction with yours—and we stood almost alone—against that wicked attempt to impose on us by increasing our national defences to protect us against an invasion from France. By way of parenthesis, for your encouragement and the encouragement of the country, let me just remind you of the progress of opinion since then. We then had to contend against the increase of our overgrown establishments—we had an up-hill battle, but we succeeded. Now here is a proposal before the country to reduce the cost of our armaments nearly one-half, and that proposal is receiving more favour with the public within twelve months than our resistance to an increase of the armaments did last year.

And why is it? Because, in spite of all the efforts to mystify the public mind on the subject, events on the Continent have trumpet-tongued declared, that the attempt to frighten us with the threat of an unprovoked attack from France, was a vile slander upon that nation. We were told this time last year, 'It is true the French are quiet now, because Louis Philippe, the Napoleon of Peace, is on the throne; but wait till he dies, and you will see how the French people, that are now kept in by this wise monarch, will break loose on their neighbours.' Louis Philippe is politically dead; the French people were thrown entirely on their own resources—the bridle on their necks, the bit in their mouths, the masses were allpowerful, and the Government, on its knees, was ready to follow them to the utmost bent of their passions. Has there been amidst that 35,000,000 of people, your next neighbours, one whisper that could justify the accusations made against them last year by those wicked alarmists and panic-mongers whom I will never forgive, or, if I do, I will never forget to remind them of their wickedness? Has there been one act of the French people to warrant the imputation that they wished to come and attack you? But I won't confine myself to that. There were countries nearer home which everybody supposed the French more likely to attack than to attempt to conquer England. Has there been the slightest wish displayed on the part of the French people to make the Rhine the boundary of their empire? Have they invaded Belgium? Have they entered Holland? Have they conquered Italy? Have they shown the slightest disposition for conquest in any way? On the contrary, wherever a public man has sought to conciliate the French people, has he not addressed them in terms of peace, and promised them, above all things, that he will follow a pacific policy? Take their President—a Napoleon Buonaparte—I say nothing of his fitness to be President of the Republic, that is the affair of the French people, not ours; but observe, when such an individual canvasses the French people for their suffrages, how he accosts them. Does he promise them a war against England, or [246] at least an invasion of Belgium? What said Louis Napoleon in his address to the French people?—

'With war, there can be no mitigation of our sufferings. Peace shall, therefore, be the most cherished object of my desires. At the time of her first revolution France was warlike, because others compelled her to be so. She was attacked, and she rolled back the tide of conquest upon her invaders. But now that nobody attacks her, she can devote all her resources to peaceful amelioration, without abandoning a firm and honourable policy.'

Now, does that look as if you had been wisely spending your money in fortifying yourselves, and keeping up your enormous standing armaments, because certain parties, who are interested in clothing regiments, or being admirals, with nothing to do, choose to tell you that the French people are a mighty hobgoblin, ready to come over and devour you some morning. I have dwelt longer on this subject, because what I stated with reference to the great mass of the French people last year was perverted: I said that property in France was more divided than in any other country in the world. I said there were 8,000,000 or 10,000,000 of real proprietors in France. The whole soil of that vast empire—and it is the richest on the surface of Europe—is cut up in small properties, held in fee-simple by those who cultivate it. And when those who write in certain aristocratic journals talk of dangers arising to a country from the minute subdivision of its property, I am very much disposed to whisper in their ears whether the lessons of history have not taught us that the danger is wholly different. Let them point out the nation that has been ruined because its property was in too many hands. Does not ruin rather proceed from property being accumulated by a small number of persons, and the consequent indulgence of luxury and corruption by the few, and the degradation and misery of the mass? The argument I drew last year, and which I repeat here now, confirmed by experience since, is this, that the people in France, being nearly all proprietors, and having to pay for any war they may wish to carry on, they will not vote for a war, as they would have to vote for more taxation. I believe that Louis Napoleon, Cavaignac, and Guizot, whose

book was published only yesterday, and every man in France, including M. Thiers, will agree with me, that if there be one passion more predominant than another among the mass of the French people, it is the desire for peace. But I do not confine myself to France. I will take Germany; I will take Italy; and I ask, where, amidst their convulsions—where monarchs have abdicated, where popes and potentates have run away in the disguises of lacqueys, or gone down on their knees before the mob in their ascendant—where, in all Europe, has there been among the mass of the people one sign or symptom of a desire for aggressive war on their neighbours?

Beware of another mystification. One of the most favourite of the enemy's devices is this—they raise a confusion in your minds by pointing to the internal disorders in foreign countries, and persuade you it is a state of war. I told you the people abroad were for peace, and so they are; but when the revolutions broke out, these fallacy-mongers exclaimed, 'Here's Cobden, just come back from the Continent, tells us the people are all for peace—now they are all for war.' They have been in a state of revolution to obtain precisely the same ends for which this country went through a revolution two centuries ago. And though in France the gain, even in the way of practical liberty, has not been so great as in other countries—for they had a great amount of practical freedom before their last revolution—yet, when you compare the state of Germany and Italy with what it was when I was there not two years ago, I say that, with their convulsions, slight and evanescent compared with our war against prerogative under our first Charles, Germany and Italy have gained an amount of freedom which required ten years' civil war in England to achieve. I left [247] them in those countries with every newspaper and every book under the strict control of the censor. I left them with closed courts of justice administering law, not by oral testimony in presence of the accused, but by written documentary evidence. I left them without a representative form of government, without trial by jury; and now, though they may blunder and stumble in the path of freedom, they are at least in the highway for obtaining the same constitutional privileges—as soon as they can use them they may have them—as we have ourselves. In spite of all the attempts of the press and public men to cry out 'Reaction,' and applaud the despots and their soldiers, who are willing to fight for tyranny, I, in the presence of this great assembly and in their name, do express sympathy for the people who are struggling for their liberties. Do not think I am talking to you of politics foreign to your interests here. It is by studied misrepresentation of what is going on upon the Continent that our enormous standing armaments are maintained and defended in this country. I say that the progress of constitutional rights on the Continent must be favourable to the preservation of peace, because I think I have proved to you that the mass of the people on the Continent, like the mass of the people in this country, are favourable to peace, and averse to war. But you have another safeguard. I defy you to show me how any Government or people on the Continent can strengthen themselves, even if they chose to carry on a war of conquest. Let France invade Germany, it only makes Germany unite like one man—the whole Teutonic race are united as one man to repel the French. What is their predominant sentiment? The union of Germany, not for aggressive force, but for defensive succour. What is the cry in Italy? Italian nationality. What is the contest between Lombardy and Austria? The house of Austria may call Lombardy part of its territory, but there is another race,—the Latin race say, 'We will not be governed by a Teutonic race;' and, though the Austrians may keep down the Italians by Radetski and his 100,000 troops, Lombardy will be a source of weakness, not of strength, to them. I defy you to show me any partition where an accession of territory has not been rather a source of weakness than of strength. Take the very worst that can happen:—suppose any power on the Continent is going to attack its neighbour, is there any reason why we should be armed to the teeth in order to take part in the struggle? In ancient times, when the people were counted as nothing, and when sovereigns told out their subjects as a shepherd would his flock; when a royal marriage united the crowns of two kingdoms, and the people of both became the willing subjects, or even serfs, of the one sovereign, there might have been

danger in an acquisition of territory. But now that the people count everywhere for something, and we see on the Continent of Europe great lines of demarcation of race—the Italian Peninsula, for instance, one; Spain, another; Germany, another;—and when you find the great mosaic mass of Austrian dominion broken up, as it were, into Sclaves and Magyars, I see new limits assigned to conquest. I repeat, there is no longer any reason to fear that one empire will take possession, by force of arms, of its neighbour's territory; but, if it should, the accession of territory would be a source of weakness, not of strength. Take it at the worst, then; let the nations of the Continent attack each other; who is coming to attack you, if you only let their politics alone?

This brings me to another position which has an important bearing on the reduction of our armaments, and that is, we must let other people manage their own affairs. The Spaniards, who have very wise maxims, say, 'A fool knows more of what is going on in his own house than a wise man does in that of his neighbour.' Now, if we will apply that to nations, mind our own [248] business, and give foreigners the credit of being able to manage their own concerns better than we can do for them, or they with our interference, it will save us a great deal of money, and they will have their affairs settled better and sooner than if we intermeddled with them. But what are we doing? There cannot be a petty squabble in any country in Europe or the globe, but we must have a great fleet of line-of-battle ships sent from England to take part in it. We have just interfered between Naples and Sicily—what is the consequence? We are detested by both parties. In all Italy it is the same. They speak of Englishmen with contempt and execration; not because they undervalue our qualities as men—no, they pay as high a tribute to the qualities of Englishmen as we could desire—but, as a nation, as a Government, interfering with their politics, from one end of the Peninsula to the other, the Italians cordially hate and detest us. So with regard to Spain—we have spent hundreds of millions on Spain, and what is the present state of feeling there? I travelled from one end of Spain to the other, and I never heard the name of the Duke of Wellington mentioned, although he fought their battles, as we persuade ourselves—I never saw his portrait or bust through all my travels, but I saw Napoleon's and his Marshals' everywhere. At this very moment, Napoleon and France are more popular in Spain than England and Englishmen. It is the same in Greece—the same in Portugal. The English people are hated, because we interfere with their politics. Is not that a very undignified attitude for a great nation like this to occupy? If we kept aloof from their squabbles, and contented ourselves with setting foreigners a good example—if we put our own houses in order—if we set our mud cabins in Ireland in order—we should show a great deal more common sense than in attempting to manage the affairs of other nations when we are not responsible for their government. But an argument has been used why we should interfere; and I like to hear it, for it shows that our opponents are at their last extremity. They say, 'If we don't interfere, France will interfere;' and so it is,—we have sent a fleet to Naples, because the French had a fleet there. I remember, at the last stage of the Anti-Corn-law agitation, our opponents were driven to this position—'Free Trade is a very good thing, but you cannot have it until other countries adopt it too;' and I used to say, 'If Free Trade be a good thing for us, we will have it: let others take it, if it be a good thing for them; if not, let them do without it.' So I say now, if our constant interference with the affairs of the Continent be a costly, useless, pernicious policy for us, and if France—if Austria, choose to adopt that policy and ruin themselves by it, let them do so, but don't let us follow their example. This is common sense, although it does not pervade high quarters in this country.

We have another argument to meet. We are told we must keep up enormous armaments, because we have got so many colonies. People tell me I want to abandon our colonies; but I say, do you intend to hold your colonies by the sword, by armies, and ships of war? That is not a permanent hold upon them. I want to retain them by their affections. If you tell me that our soldiers are kept for their police, I answer, the English people cannot afford to pay for

their police. The inhabitants of those colonies are a great deal better off than the mass of the people of England—they are in the possession of a vast deal more of the comforts of life than the bulk of those paying taxes here; they have very few of those taxes that plague us here so much—excise, stamps, and taxes, those fiscal impediments which beset you every day in your callings, are hardly known in our colonies. Our colonies are very able to protect themselves. Every man among them has his fowling-piece, and, if any savages come to attack them, they can defend themselves. They have another guar [249] antee—if civilised men treat savages like men, there is never any occasion to quarrel with them. With regard to our navy, they tell us it is necessary because of our trade with the colonies. I should have thought it was just that trade which wanted no navy at all. It is a sort of coasting trade; our ships are at home when they get to our colonies. We don't want any navy to protect our trade with America, which is a colony emancipated; and we may thank our stars it has broke loose; it never would have been such a customer if the aristocracy of England had held that field of patronage for their younger sons. You don't want a ship of war to protect your trade with the United States; and last year you exported to them 10,900,000*l.* of your produce, more by upwards of a million than you exported to all your colonies together, India excepted. Sir William Molesworth, in that admirable speech of his on the colonies, showed that, by a better administration, not by taking away altogether your force from the colonies, but by an improved system of government, you might save 2,000,000*l.* per annum.

You have to make up your mind to one thing,—you cannot afford all this waste. It is not a matter of choice with you. I tell you, you are spending too much money as a nation. It is not merely your general taxation—your local taxation likewise oppresses you. Mark me, the greater the cost of your armaments falling on general taxation, the more you will have to spend in poor-rates and other taxes. The more you waste of the capital of the country, the more people will be wanting employment; and when they want employment, it is the law of England that the poorest, who are the first to begin to suffer under a course of national extravagance or decay, have the right to come to those above them and demand subsistence, under the name of poor-rate; so that, in proportion as the extravagance of Government increases, poor-rates and the expenses of a repressive police increase also. You must, therefore, lessen the national expenditure, or the catastrophe cannot long be deferred. I have detained you already too long, but there is one thing I wish to impress upon you before I sit down. It is of paramount moment to the English people that we should not allow ourselves to entertain an undue or exaggerated notion of our own importance as a nation, or to take a too unfavourable view of other countries. It is through your national pride that cunning people manage to extract taxes from you. They persuade you that nothing can be done abroad unless you do it; and that you are so superior to all other countries, that your next neighbour, France, for instance, is nothing but a band of brigands, and unless you are constantly on the watch, they will be ready to pounce upon you and carry off your property. Until, as a nation, we give credit to other people for being able to work out their own liberties—unless we believe there is something of honour and honesty in other countries to shield us from unjust aggression on their part, we must always be armed to secure ourselves from the imaginary attacks of our neighbours. Other nations are far too intelligent to require that we should always be armed to the teeth, in order to let them know how strong we are. I don't believe that the French will come to attack the English merely because we happen to have a few less ships of war or a few less regiments than we now possess. Their Government will look far beyond your manifestation of force. They will inquire what is the wealth, the power, the public spirit of our people; are we a contented nation, attached to our institutions, governed well, united as one man against an enemy: and if they see the indications of this latent national power, depend on it they won't wantonly rush into war with us, even if we don't always go armed to the teeth, and show ourselves ready for fighting.

Take the case of the United States. America has three times, within the last few years, had a misunderstanding with two of the greatest Powers of the world—twice [250] with England, once with France. We had the Maine boundary and the Oregon territory to settle with the United States, and America had her quarrel with France, arising out of a claim for compensation of 1,000,000*l.*, which the French Government refused to pay. What was the issue of those controversies? When the claim was refused by France, General Jackson, then the head of the American Government, published his declaration, that if the money was not paid forthwith, he would seize French ships and pay himself. At that time—I have it from Americans themselves—the French had three times the force of ships-of-war that America had; Admiral Mackau was in the Gulf of Florida with a fleet large enough to ravage the whole coast of America and bombard her towns; but did France rush into war with America? She paid the money. Why? Because she knew well, if she provoked an unjust war with the United States, their men-of-war were nothing compared with the force that would swarm out of every American port when brought into collision with another country. France knew that America had the largest mercantile marine; and, though at first the battle might be to the stronger in an armed fleet, in the end it would be that country which had the greatest amount of public spirit, and the greatest number of mercantile ships and sailors. What was the case with England? In 1842 there was a talk of war with America, on account of the Maine boundary question. Bear in mind that America never spent more than 1,200,000*l.* on her navy, in any year of peace previous to 1842. We are spending this year 7,000,000*l.* or 8,000,000*l.*; but will anybody tell me that America fared worse in that dispute because her resources in ships-of-war were far inferior to ours? No; but we increased our navy, and we had a squadron of evolution, as it was called. America never mounted a gun at New York to prevent the bombardment of the city; but did she fare the worse? We sent a peer of the realm (Lord Ashburton) to Washington; it was on American soil that the quarrel was adjusted, and rumour does say that America made a very good bargain. It is the spirit of a people, the prosperity of a people, the growing strength, the union, the determination of a people, that command respect.

Now, what I want you as a nation to do, is to believe that other countries will just take the same measure of us that we took of America. They won't come and attack us merely because we reduce our armaments to 10,000,000*l.* On the contrary, other countries, I believe, will follow our example. I believe, if we are not very quick, France will set us the example. I see General Cavaignac, and all their best men, advocating a reduction of the army. A formal proposal has been made to reduce their army one-half, as the only means of saving the country from financial confusion. Let us encourage these good men in their good work. And, though our Government do not set the example, let us from this Free-Trade-hall tell General Cavaignac and his followers that we will undertake to reduce the cost of our fighting establishments, man for man, as they do theirs. When they tell us that we are in danger of a collision at any moment with foreign powers—when they tell us that a couple of drunken captains of frigates at the Antipodes may suddenly embroil this country in war with France, and that this is a reason why we ought always to be armed and prepared for hostile conflict—I ask you, as reasonable Christian men, why should we not adopt the proposal which has been made at so many public meetings, and which I shall submit to the House next session—to insert a clause in a treaty with foreign nations, binding each other that in case of collision between two drunken captains, or a dispute arising from the conduct of some indiscreet consul at Tahiti—in case of a misunderstanding on any point whatever, each should be bound to submit the subject-matter of dispute to [251] arbitration—that, instead of drawing the sword being the point of honour to which nations shall resort, it shall be to fulfil honourably the treaty by which the dispute shall be referred to arbitration, and abide honourably by the decision when pronounced?

To conclude, I tell you, if anything is to be done in this matter of financial reform, it must be done by the people out of doors. There never was a time when independent men in the House of Commons—I mean the very few independent, both by circumstances and by feeling—of both the two great parties who have hitherto divided the sway in this country, were so weak as they are at this moment. And why? Because the party in power is nominally the same party as ourselves; because their followers mingle more or less with ourselves, and we are neutralised at every turn, or, at all events, we find a wet blanket on our shoulders, whenever we go into the House of Commons. Now, if you want to carry financial reform, it must be carried precisely in the same way that Free Trade was carried. You must speak out of doors in a voice that will be heard and felt in the House of Commons. The representative system, as we have got it, is a very clumsy machine. The House of Commons nominally has to look after the purse-strings of the people, and see that taxes are lightly and equably laid on; but you are obliged to leave your business, and form financial associations, to compel the House of Commons to do that which it is designed to do, but does not. There is no help for it. We must do it ourselves. I honour that excellent and tried veteran friend of ours—Mr. Hume. I admire his efforts; I venerate the constancy, the downright pluck, the granite-like hardihood and consistency of the man, who, through good and bad repute, for thirty-seven years, has advocated the people's interest in the most material and useful form. We will back him. We will strengthen his hands, and enable him to do that in future he has not been able to do in times past.

I hope next session we shall have many of the county members voting for retrenchment. I predict you will see many of the county members compelled by their constituents to vote for a reduction of taxation. I wish here to express my sympathy with the farmers in their efforts to get rid of a tax which they consider the most obnoxious of all,—I mean the malt-tax. I crave pardon of the teetotallers. The objection mainly urged against the malt-tax is, that it interferes so much with the business of the farmers. They tell me that not having malt to give cattle is a very great impediment to their feeding. On Monday last, I saw one of the ablest farmers in the country, who told me he bought great quantities of malt-dust, which he mixes as the best ingredient with the food he gives to his lambs. We sympathise with the farmers. We never will tolerate one single shilling by way of protection to corn; but we will cooperate with them in getting rid of that obnoxious tax—the malt-duty. We owe this to the farmers, and we will try to repay them in kind. We are financial reformers. We have a habit of doing one thing at a time. Perhaps it is weakness; but I own to it, I can only accomplish one thing at a time. I promise you, and my friends everywhere, that I will never cease the advocacy of this question until I see the cost of our armaments reduced to 10,000,000*l.*; until I see the expenditure of the country reduced to what it was in 1835, at least. I don't say I will stop there. But let us understand each other; the least we intend to do is the reduction of our establishments to the standard of 1835. I repeat, I won't stop there. I sincerely believe that, with your assistance, and with the growing tendency for peace throughout the world, we shall not rest with the horrid waste of 10,000,000*l.* for our fighting establishment in time of peace. I believe we shall live to see one-half sufficient; and, with such meetings as this, it will not be long before it is so.



**FINANCE. III.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, MARCH 8, 1850.** ↩

[On March 8, 1850, Mr. Cobden moved the following resolutions:—"That the net expenditure of the Government for the year 1835 (Parliamentary Paper, No. 260, 1847 amounted to 44,422,000*l.*; that the net expenditure for the year ended the 5th day of January, 1850 (Parliamentary Paper, No. 1, 1850) amounted to 50,853,000*l.*; the increase of upwards of 6,000,000*l.* having been caused principally by successive augmentations of our warlike establishments, and outlays for defensive armaments. That no foreign danger, or necessary cost of the civil government, or indispensable disbursements for the services in our dependencies abroad, warrant the continuance of this increase of expenditure. That the taxes required to meet the present expenditure impede the operations of agriculture and manufactures, and diminish the funds for the employment of labour in all branches of productive industry, thereby tending to produce pauperism and crime, and adding to the local and general burdens of the people. That, to diminish these evils, it is expedient that this House take steps to reduce the annual expenditure with all practicable speed to an amount not exceeding the sum which within the last fifteen years has been proved to be sufficient for the maintenance of the security, honour, and dignity of the nation.' The resolution was negatived by 183 (272 to 89).]

THE reason why I propose this motion, on this day and at this precise time, is, that I am anxious, before we commence voting away the public money, that we should have an opportunity of taking a view of the whole financial interest of the country in order to a large reduction of the expenditure. I know no other way than this of bringing the general view of our finances before the House, for we have a peculiar way of dealing with the finances and expenditure of this country. The House never has brought before it, as in other countries where constitutional laws and usages are in force, a full statement of the whole income and expenditure, with the view of having the sense of the House taken upon both. We have only statements regarding our finances laid before us in detail. After the Government has decided what any particular estimates shall be, they are brought before the House, and the House has then scarcely any other alternative but that of going through the empty form of sanctioning those estimates.

One of the reasons why we are almost uniformly ready to assent to these estimates is, that a refusal to assent to them would be taken as a vote of want of confidence in Ministers, and therefore tantamount to their dismissal. I think, however, that we ought to have the opportunity of discussing the whole of these questions apart from any such considerations. I do not bring forward this motion in a spirit of hostility to the Government. I have not framed it in the shape of an address to the Crown, praying the Crown [253] to adopt a certain course; but I have put it in the shape of a resolution, to the effect that in the opinion of this House it should take steps to reduce the expenditure of the country to the standard of 1835. Now, I must not be misunderstood, as I was on a former occasion, for there are always attempts made to misrepresent any movement of the kind; I must not be accused of meditating an immediate reduction of expenditure to the standard of 1835. I have framed my motion in precisely the same words as last year. I then moved for a reduction of expenditure to a certain amount with all convenient speed, and I make the same motion now. I do not say that we can return to the expenditure of 1835 in one year or in two, but I assume that in the present state of the country, in the state of our domestic affairs, and of our foreign relations, there is no obstacle to a gradual return to the expenditure of 1835, provided the Executive Government has the sanction of this House for resorting to such a course. If events should happen to

change the circumstances of the country, there is no reason why we should not next year reverse the decision we may come to in the present.

I only ask you to consider now, whether, in the existing state of our foreign and domestic relations, we are not entitled to expect from the Government a return to the expenditure of 1835 as speedily as possible? I am anxious to bring forward this motion on another ground. We have heard intimations in this House that there will be motions made for a reduction of taxation. Now, I hold it to be self-evident that we can have no large reduction of taxation unless we have a corresponding reduction of expenditure. I know that there are certain parties who think that we may shift the burden of taxation from one shoulder to another, from one class to another, and thereby give relief to the country. I know there are writers who affect considerable scorn of those who merely take the vulgar view which I do,—that we must reduce expenditure in order to reduce taxation. They call such persons as myself vulgar politicians, and argue that more good is to be done by a shifting and a modification of taxes than by what I propose. Now, I have no faith in any such device for relieving the distress of the country. In fact, there is no means of modifying taxation in this way, by which we can relieve one interest without increasing the burden upon another. I defy you to put your hand on any interest of the country that is willing to receive an addition of taxation; and, therefore, if you propose to modify the pressure, by taking it off one to place it on another, you will find as much resistance from those on whom you are going to lay the tax as of assistance from those who are to be relieved. If we are anxious to effect a reduction of any tax that presses on the industry of the country—I do not confine myself to those that press on trade and commerce, but such, for example, as the malt-tax or the hop-duty—it is only possible to accomplish this by entering on such a path as I now point out to you.

I am anxious that, before we come to a vote on the motion of the hon. Member for the North Riding of Yorkshire (Mr. Cayley), or on any similar motion, we should first decide whether or not we are willing to sanction such a reduction of expenditure as will warrant a reduction of taxation. I do not take the expenditure of 1835, to which I wish we should return, as an arbitrary point. I felt anxious, in common with other gentlemen, for the reduction of the expenditure, and I looked about to see what were the causes of the increase of that expenditure. In the course of these inquiries, I naturally turned to the first point from which the increase began. I went back to 1835, but I took it only as a guide to enable me to put my finger on some starting-point—a point to rest my arguments for a reduction upon. And I am doing nothing new. That was the course always taken by the Whig party; for a quarter of a century, they always returned to 1792. The hon. Member for Montrose (Mr. Hume) will bear me out, that from the [254] close of the war till the time of the Reform Bill, constant reference was made to 1792 when speaking of the expenditure. And not merely the Whigs but the Tories did so. In 1817, Lord Castlereagh, when moving for the appointment of a committee on this subject, took 1792 as the point to which chief reference was made in his motion.

I am, therefore, not taking an undue course in fixing on 1835, and am not entitled to be ‘pooh-poohed’ by those who have taken the same course on previous occasions. I do not ask you to go back to 1835, because a certain expenditure existed in that year; but it is to enable you to satisfy your own minds as to whether any necessity exists for the increase that has since taken place, and to show the grounds on which persons resist a gradual return to the expenditure of 1835. And when I speak of 1835, I am equally prepared to take the average of 1835, 1836, and 1837. I hope, therefore, that gentlemen opposite will bear with me while I read a few figures, and ask them to discard altogether from their minds any feelings or prejudices that may arise from differences of opinion on other questions. I wish you to go into the subject as a matter of business, and with a desire to arrive at a conclusion beneficial to those whom you represent in Parliament, and who feel on this question precisely as my

own constituents do. I will read the particulars of the expenditure for the years ending the 5th of January, 1836, and the 5th of January, 1850. In 1836, the interest of the funded and unfunded debt was 28,514,000*l.*; last year it was 28,323,000*l.*, making the interest on the debt nearly 200,000*l.* less now than in 1836. The expenditure for the army in 1836 was 6,406,000*l.*; last year, 6,549,000*l.*; for the navy, in 1836, 4,099,000*l.*; last year, 6,942,000*l.*; for the ordnance, in 1836, 1,151,000*l.*; last year, 2,332,000*l.* The civil expenditure of all kinds, in 1836, was 4,225,000*l.*; last year, 6,702,000*l.*—making the whole expenditure of 1836, 44,395,000*l.*, and the whole expenditure of last year, 50,848,000*l.*

When I brought forward my motion last year, taking the finance accounts of 1848, I stated that the increase of expenditure was nearly 10,000,000*l.* as compared with 1835; but the finance accounts of the last year, as compared with the previous year, show a reduction of 3,344,000*l.* We have, therefore, to deal with an expenditure of 50,838,000*l.* against an expenditure of 44,395,000*l.* in 1836, leaving an excess in 1850 of 6,453,000*l.* This was by the last year's finance accounts; but I believe we may assume that in the forthcoming estimates we shall see another reduction of say 1,000,000*l.*, which will bring the excess at the end of the present year, as compared with 1835, to about 5,500,000*l.* Now, I ask, is not this very satisfactory, and does it not encourage us to pursue the same course which we had already held in this House, viz. pressing on the Exchequer for further and further reductions; for I will venture to say, that if these efforts had not been made in the House, and if they had not been made by gentlemen resident in Liverpool (I mean the Financial Reform Association), the reduction I have referred to would not have been made? We all know that there is an amount of resistance to curtailments in certain quarters, an amount of pressure such as we have just heard on the subject of the brevets, such an amount of importunity from the different professions, that, unless the Executive is backed by this House and the country, it will be impossible to resist the demands made upon us.

Now, then, seeing that we have an excess of expenditure of 5,500,000*l.*, as compared with 1835, how do I propose to reduce that excess so as to return to the expenditure of 44,399,000*l.* in 1835? I wish it to be understood that I am now dealing with an excess of 6,453,000*l.*, and I propose to take 5,823,000*l.* from the amount expended on the army, navy, and ordnance last year, leaving 10,000,000*l.* for those purposes, and the remaining 630,000*l.* I would take from [255] the civil expenditure, from the cost of collection, and from what may be gained by the better management of the Woods and Forests.

To begin with the civil expenditure. I find that last year it amounted to 6,702,000*l.*, while in 1835 it was 4,225,000*l.* Of the different items which make up this expenditure I find that last year the civil list was 396,000*l.*, and in 1835, 510,000*l.* With regard to the civil list, as appropriated to the service of Her Majesty, I have not one word to offer. The amount settled on the Queen on her accession to the Crown having been given as an equivalent for hereditary revenues, it is my opinion that the Queen has as good a title to that amount during her lifetime as any of our ancient nobility possess to their estates; therefore I must not be misunderstood on this point, after so plain an avowal of my convictions. Nobody ever heard me propose any different arrangement from this, and I do not do so now. There is an impression throughout the country that the Queen has an exorbitant income, because the sum of 395,000*l.* was put down on her civil list; but the country should know that Her Majesty herself had only 60,000*l.* a year at her disposal, the rest going to the expenditure of different departments of her Majesty's household, to maintain, as it was called, the pomp and state of the Throne. It is on some of these items of expenditure that I should be disposed to raise a question. There are items that I think might, with great credit to the Crown, be transferred to other purposes. Take the case of the buckhounds—a department which costs 6,000*l.* or 7,000*l.* a year; is it not an absurdity to suppose that such an establishment can add to the dignity of the Crown? Let that sum be taken to pay one of the Queen's judges, the Chief

Justice, for example. It would be much more conducive to the dignity of the Crown to spend the money in that way than in throwing it away upon buckhounds, and I question whether it would not be more satisfactory to Her Majesty. The expenditure of items like these does not contribute in the least to the honour and dignity of the Sovereign. We all know that the Queen lives in the affections of her people; but this affection is not attributable to such idle pageants as these,—it is rather due to those quiet domestic virtues that peep out from the retirement of Osborne than to such displays as are supported by this expenditure of the civil list.

But, to pass on to the next item, which is for annuities and pensions for civil services charged by various Acts of Parliament on the Consolidated Fund. Last year it was 464,000*l.*, and in 1835 it was 524,000*l.* These I do not propose to touch, as they are granted under Acts of Parliament, and those holding them have no doubt made their arrangements on the faith that they would be theirs for life. But I hope the House will agree with me that we ought to prevent the repetition of such things in future. There are a great number of items under this head that I am tolerably certain never will be repeated; but it will require vigilant guardianship, on the part of this House and the country, if they expected to profit by the demise of these annuities and pensions. It will be seen from the age of the parties who are recipients of these pensions, that in all probability there will be a very considerable and probably rapid diminution of the payments under this head, and we are all aware that the largest annuity has lapsed within the last six months. We may, therefore, expect that something handsome will shortly be got towards my reductions from the payments that would fall in under this head.

The next item is for salaries and allowances, which come under a different category altogether. One thing must have struck those who look over the accounts under this head, and that is the great number of commissionerships. I should very much prefer to a commission, one well-paid responsible functionary. I cannot understand why, when we give to the home or foreign ministers such power as we do, we [256] cannot give to one individual, of good character and talents, the duties of the most responsible commissionership. The public business would be better done by one man than by a dozen; and not only better, but cheaper. Therefore I do hope that in future we shall have boards transformed into individuals.

The next item is for diplomatic salaries and pensions, being last year 160,000*l.* and in 1835, 176,000*l.* Here there is a rich harvest to reap. Our ambassador in France has 10,000*l.* a year, that in Austria 9,900*l.* Now, what did the United States pay for the same services? The hon. Member for Kent smiles, and I know what is passing in his mind. He thinks that I am going to be exceedingly democratic in what I am about to say. Certainly, if I were going to compare the expenses of the monarchical chief and the elective chief of a republic, I should be dealing unfairly with my case; but when we come to speak of the representatives of two countries living at Paris, one from England and the other from America, and both exposed to the same necessary expenses—for of unnecessary expenses I do not speak—then a comparison may fairly be drawn. Now, our ambassador at Paris has 10,000*l.* a year; the American ambassador has 2,000*l.* Our Austrian ambassador has 9,900*l.*; the American ambassador, 1,000*l.* Our Turkish ambassador has 6,500*l.*; the American, 1,300*l.* Our Russian ambassador has 6,600*l.*; and the American, 2,000*l.* Many of our embassies might be suppressed altogether, such as those at Hanover and Bavaria. Gentlemen opposite see all these things as well as I do, and laugh at them in private, whatever they may say in public. They never denounce such extravagance in public, unless, indeed, they sometimes do so for mischief. I believe that the expenses under the diplomatic head might be reduced at least one-half.

I next come to the courts of justice, the payments for which last year amounted to 1,105,000*l.*, and in 1835 to 430,000*l.*, showing an increase of nearly 700,000*l.* The constabulary force in Ireland, amounting to 550,000*l.*, no doubt adds to the amount under this

head, but still there is much useless expense. I am anxious to see the judges well provided for; but really such salaries as 7,000*l.* and 8,000*l.*, especially in Ireland, are out of the question. I find a judge in Ireland receiving 8,000*l.* a year, while the highest judicial functionary in the world, sitting at Washington, charged with the settlement of all the international disputes between the States of the Union, and with the interpretation of the Constitution itself, had only 1,200*l.* a year. Such anomalies as these should not be allowed to exist. The miscellaneous charges I find to be 398,000*l.*, and in 1835, 274,000*l.*, these charges being fixed on the Consolidated Fund. There is 60,000*l.* for commissions in Ireland; but surely these commissions are not to last for ever. Then there are miscellaneous charges on the annual grants of Parliament, these being last year 3,911,000*l.*, against 2,144,000*l.* in 1835.

I now come to the payment for public works and salaries of public departments, together with all our colonial and consular establishments. Under this head there has been the most extraordinary profligacy of expenditure. The expense of the House we are in, or which we ought to get into, is a scandal to us. It seems to me, that from the beginning to the end this has been the most melancholy and disgraceful proceeding the country has ever heard of. We have adopted for our style the most costly that can be thought of; and it appears as if we had studied how we could lay on the greatest expense, in such a way that it could neither be seen nor appreciated, when we selected the florid Gothic style for our new Houses. The whole system, the whole proceedings of the House of Commons in this matter, from the top pinnacle of the new Houses to the sweeping of the floors, are characterised by as much disgraceful waste and extravagance as could be found in any portion of the public service. In this [257] department of public works, salaries, &c., I propose a large saving in the expenditure. I hope that in this proposal I shall have the co-operation of the hon. Member for Oxfordshire (Mr. Henley).

Last year I showed the House, that from 1836 to 1848 there had been a continual succession of increases in the expenditure; and that when the special exigencies which caused the increases had passed away, no return was made to the old expenditure. I refer to such exigencies as the Oregon and Maine boundary disputes, Tahiti, Syria, and the like. We come to the discussion of the subject now with the advantage of another year's experience. We are another year further removed from that great crisis of European affairs which everybody expected was to lead to certain calamitous consequences, in the form of an international war. If there is one consoling remembrance, one drop of sweet in the cup of gall which Europe has drained during the last two or three years, it is this. We have extracted from all that turmoil and convulsion the fact that there is not a disposition, on the part of the bulk of the people of any nation, to pass their own frontiers to make war upon any other nation. I speak of the people as distinct from their Governments, because we have always been told that when Louis Philippe should die, the French people are so inclinable to war that they will break the prison bars, and ravage Europe more like wild beasts than human beings. Well, we have now seen that these same people, while having the reins in their own hands, have shown no disposition to carry war into their neighbours' territories. I do not wish the House to assume that the millennium is come, or that there will never be another international war; I do not ask you totally to dismantle your ships, or leave your ports defenceless; but that in which I am anxious you should concur with me is this,—that during the last twelve months events have rather been confirmatory than otherwise of the views I then expressed with reference to the safety of making a gradual reduction of our armaments.

Another point which I considered last year afforded a chance of a great reduction of the army, was the state of our colonial relations. Now since that time a most important event has occurred. The Prime Minister of the Crown has adopted language in reference to the colonies which I have myself often held as to the principle of self-government on the part of those colonies. The noble Lord (Lord John Russell) went the full length of the views which I have

ever entertained upon that subject; and has most agreeably surprised me when discussing the constitutions to be established in Australia, and more especially at the Cape of Good Hope. The noble Lord proposes to give to those colonies the right of framing their own constitution, of levying their own taxes, of determining their own tariff, and of disposing of their own waste lands. The noble Lord has thereby disposed of those vast continents which the English people has held to belong to them, and which they once thought might yield them something to aid and assist them in bearing their burdens and maintaining their position in the country. The noble Lord has given those vast continents to the people who live amidst them. Well, it is perfectly right; but look at the consequences. This House cannot hereafter by legislation give 160 acres of land, which the American Government gives so frequently to those who deserve it, if Parliament even desired to favour the most deserving patriot in Her Majesty's service. I do not complain of that; but what I wish to ask with reference to this question is, did the noble Lord intend to stop there? Is this country to give to the colonies as complete independence as, nay, even greater independence than, the separate States of the American Union possess, since they cannot dispose of an acre of waste ground, nor touch their tariff,—are the people of this country, I ask, to be called upon by the same Prime Minister [258] who gives to the colonies the right of governing and taxing themselves to pay and maintain the military police which occupied those colonies? It is utterly impossible, under the altered circumstances arising out of the policy of the Government towards those colonies, that any Minister with a head on his shoulders, after declaring what I have heard declared with reference to Australia, the Cape of Good Hope, New Zealand, and Canada, can permanently impose upon the people of this country the charge of maintaining the military police of those colonies. It is but a military police, and not an army kept up for the defence of the colonies from foreign attack: for this country charges itself with the expense of defending the colonies in the case of war. These military establishments are maintained 10,000 miles away. We send out relief at an enormous expense, and that to maintain a police which the colonists are better able themselves to pay for than are the people of this country.

In assuming that we may make a considerable reduction in the public expenditure by gradually withdrawing our troops from the colonies, let me not be answered by a reference to the case of our arsenals at Gibraltar, Malta, and Ceylon, or in those places where the African race predominated. I confine myself to those colonies where the English race is likely to become indigenious and paramount. What is the object of maintaining these establishments? Is it in order to secure the connection between England and her colonies? Such a ground can hardly be alleged; and yet I know of no other motive, unless it be to preserve the patronage which the system afforded to the Minister. It is for the House to say whether the maintenance of patronage in Downing street is a sufficient reason for taxing the people of this country. It will be found that, taking into account the force kept in those colonies, the force kept at home for the necessary reliefs, and the number of men always on the ocean on their passage to and fro, there are means of reduction to an amount not much short of 20,000 men.

But since 1835 we are placed in a different position with regard to the army required at home. First, with reference to the means of transport, since the introduction of railways, the same number of troops gives a vast increase of power. We have a piece of very interesting evidence on that subject. General Gordon, Quartermaster-General, stated in his evidence before the Committee on Railways in 1844:—'I should say that this mode of railway conveyance has enabled the army (comparatively to the demand made upon it, a very small one) to do the work of a very large one: you send a battalion of 1000 men from London to Manchester in nine hours; and that same battalion marching would take seventeen days; and they arrive at the end of nine hours just as fresh, or nearly so, as when they started.' What has been the practice of individuals in consequence of the facilities afforded by railways? Men of business keep smaller stocks on hand, because they can be easily supplied from their wholesale dealers. The Committee of last year on the Ordnance Estimates recommended the

application of the same principle. There were found to be enormous stores scattered over different parts of the country, and the Committee contended that the Government should avail themselves of the railroads as private individuals do. The Government promised to adopt that regulation; but I want them to understand that they may go a little further, and avail themselves of that mode of communication, and thereby do the same amount of work, in case of need, with a smaller number of troops.

Assuming soldiers to be the proper means of keeping order in this country—though I concur in the opinion which was maintained thirty years ago by the right hon. Gentleman opposite (Sir Robert Peel), that this is a constitutional and civil country, and that the Government ought not to have recourse to military force at all—but assuming that bayonets are necessary to preserve order, [259] one soldier was at this moment, by means of the facilities of railways, more powerful than ten were in 1835. But this is not the only ground why I believe that we possess prospective means of reducing the army. Since 1835, we have very largely increased our armed force in other ways. We have embodied 14,800 pensioners, 9,200 dockyard men are enrolled, formed into battalions, and regularly drilled; and there are about 3,000 county constabulary. Here is an increase of 26,000 armed men in England, to which I may add an increase of 5,000 constabulary in Ireland. All these things form additional ground why I hope to see a gradual reduction of our armed force.

Take the case of Ireland. Ireland has always been the unhappy excuse for keeping up a large army at home. Ireland is now tranquil. Pass your measures for bringing Ireland into closer approximation with this country,—for giving her your own institutions, and a better representative system,—and I believe we shall do more to preserve order there than if we were to send a dozen regiments to that country. Ireland has never been so free from political excitement or disorganisation. That country will soon be brought within a short day's journey of London, and need not be treated in any respect in future but as a province. But there are now in Ireland 25,000 regular troops, to which are to be added the 5,000 additional constabulary and upwards of 5,000 pensioners, making in all between 35,000 and 36,000 armed men; whereas there were only between 16,000 and 17,000 rank and file in Ireland in 1835. Ireland, then, affords means for a further reduction of the army. But it is not merely by a reduction of the force that I desire to see economy attained.

I cannot speak with practical knowledge of military affairs, but I speak from high military authority when I state that the organisation of the British army is the most extravagant of any army in Europe, and justifies the assertion that it is an army maintained especially for officers. What is the process going on in the army? Last year we withdrew a few thousand drunken men from the service; but the complaint of the country was, that the number of officers ought to have been reduced instead of the number of men. This process is going on again. You have announced it to be your intention to reduce 1,800 rank and file, but nothing is said of withdrawing a major, or a second-captain, or a second-lieutenant, from any of the regiments; but all in the higher grades are maintained as before. Great economy might be gained in the army by a different organisation. It does not require one to be a military man to know that.

With regard to the cavalry regiments, more particularly, does the system require change. According to the present mode in which those regiments are organised, they have become the laughing-stock of all the military men in Europe. There is a very distinguished man now in London, a general officer in the service of Austria, and who acquired some celebrity in the war with Hungary. I asked that officer to look over our army list, and just give me some notion how far it corresponded with the system of his own country, which was regarded as a model of organisation, and which does not differ very much from that of Prussia and France. When he saw the number of officers assigned to one of our cavalry regiments he laughed outright. In the light cavalry, in the time of peace, there are eight squadrons of 180 men each,

and of about 200 in war. These are commissioned by one colonel, one lieutenant-colonel, two majors, eight captains of the first rank, eight captains of the second rank, sixteen lieutenants of the first rank, and sixteen lieutenants of the second rank, making fifty-two officers in all. This gives one officer to every twenty-eight men. In the English Guards there are thirty-two officers to a regiment of 351, or an officer to every eleven men; in the cavalry and the line there are twenty-seven officers to a regiment of 328 men, or one officer to every twelve men. Put two English regiments into one, and maintain only half the present [260] number of officers, still you would have twenty more English officers than there were in an Austrian regiment. I would recommend the Government to alter this system, if it be only to take away the justification which it affords to the Liverpool and Manchester Reform Association for alleging that the army is kept up for the purpose of serving the aristocracy. Until you remove this fact, no one, either in this country or abroad, will believe that these forces are organised for promoting the interests of the people. If you wished to reduce the army with the greatest economy to the people, and with the least loss of force, you should reduce the number of regiments by amalgamating them, and retain their bayonets at the expense of the officers. While we discharge the men and retain the officers, we shall destroy that which constitutes the strength of the army, and retain that which constitutes all the expense.

With reference to the navy, the expense of that branch of our force has greatly increased since 1835. In 1835, the estimate was 4,494,000*l.*; and last year the amount was upwards of 6,260,000*l.* I know of nothing to deter us from contemplating a gradual reduction in our marine force. If we compare the British service with that of the United States in maritime matters, we shall find, that whilst the United States have only one line-of-battle ship at sea, wherever their commerce extended, the oceans and seas were visited by a body of small vessels of war, because these were intended to be what a navy should be in time of peace—a police protecting the mercantile marine. But this country keeps up an enormous force of line-of-battle ships which never can be used for the safety of commerce. By using small vessels of war, we might save a deal of expense. But large line-of-battle ships are maintained in order to afford opportunities of preferment to the higher classes.

There are other reasons why the navy might now be reduced which did not exist in 1835. Independently of our regular navy, there is an immense available reserved force in the mercantile steamers of the country, which have been built for maintaining the Post-office communications. Last year a Committee sat to inquire into the practicability of using large merchant steam vessels, in case of necessity, as a means of national defence. The Committee reported that it was practicable to call into use an amount of steam-power, should it be desirable for national defence. The report stated that there were 180 steamers of upwards of 400 tons burden, besides between 700 and 800 smaller vessels, which might all be made available in case of war. Beyond this, there are thirty-five other vessels in the mercantile steam navy, which could all be got ready in the course of a few weeks, if needed. There were none of these resources in 1835. They have all grown up since.

With respect to the navy in the Mediterranean, I do not see any use in it. The great line-of-battle ships now in the port of Piræus had much better be lying up in ordinary, or on the stocks. I am very much afraid that, as long as we keep up in time of peace that enormous armament, there will always be a disposition, either on the part of the Government, or of the Foreign Minister, or of the Admiral on the station, to bring these ships in some way into action, in order that at the end of the year the estimates might be renewed for the maintenance of that force. We ought to view this question in the way in which the United States has done. The foreign policy of the United States is a lesson to this country. They never arm themselves to the teeth; they never put out their whole strength; they calculate that foreign countries will give them credit for the strength which they have lying latent. The policy of this country is quite the reverse. We seem to think that foreign nations never give us



credit for power, unless we display it by having a large number of line-of-battle ships afloat.

Increase the prosperity and happiness of the people by a reduction of taxation, [261] and they will add to their real power quite as much as if they maintain large armies and powerful fleets. Money is the sinews of war; and those nations that are encumbered by an armed force, as is the case at this moment with Austria and France, are in a position to be bullied by a country that has not the tenth part of the force in ships and regiments, but which has an easy exchequer with a wide margin for expenditure, and which is capable of drawing upon its latent resources. When I say this, I am not for disbanding the army, or dismantling the navy; but I speak in degree, and say that 10,000,000*l.* of money are enough to be expended upon that army and that navy, upon which 15,000,000*l.* are now expended.

With respect to the ordnance, it is impossible to deny that great economy might be gained by better management in that department. The Committee on the Ordnance Estimates found it necessary to remonstrate with the Government for keeping too many stores. By adopting the recommendation of the Committee, both in the navy and the ordnance, a saving of fifteen per cent. will be effected, while the stores will be better manufactured. There will be no further loss on the sale of stores, which has amounted during the last year to between fifty and sixty per cent. upon a sum of not less than 500,000*l.* It has been suggested that the sappers, miners, and engineers, might be usefully employed at the fortresses abroad—Gibraltar and Malta—instead of the troops of the line, who might be better employed elsewhere. I believe a great saving might be effected in the Ordnance department. Everybody connected with that branch, of the service is dissatisfied with it, and requires a reorganisation of it. I have come to the conclusion that in a very few years we may very largely reduce the military and naval establishments, without in the slightest degree endangering the peace and security of the country. What are the 10,000,000*l.* which I propose to reduce? It is as much as the whole expenditure of the United States before the Mexican War, and more than the whole expenditure of Prussia.

Those who think there is any danger to the defences of the country in my proposition, I beg to ask whether they do not see any risk, inconvenience, if not danger, in leaving our taxation in the state in which it now is! Some one in the City has written a pamphlet with a view to show that the country is lightly taxed. It may be perfectly true that there is more wealth in the country now than during the great war; but I maintain that wealth does not pay the taxation of this country. If it did, we should have no rich man in the City writing a pamphlet to show that taxation is no evil. Whatever plan you may pursue, you cannot refrain from altering and abolishing many of those taxes that press upon the industry of the manufacturing and agricultural interests of the country.

There is another doctrine recently enunciated—which is, that the country must not have a remission of taxation, even if it could be effected by a saving of expenditure, but that whatever surplus there is must be applied to the reduction of the National Debt. Whatever may be thought of that doctrine, I am quite content if the country is able to pay the interest upon the principal of the National Debt. It is a poor beginning, with a surplus of 2,000,000*l.*, to attempt paying off a debt of 800,000,000*l.* There should be some grander scheme than that before talking of paying off a debt of so enormous an amount. I believe it is proposed to limit the plan to paying off the debt which has been contracted with in the last three or four years. I consider that debt no more pressing in its nature than any portion of the debt contracted during the war. It may not be so objectionable, but all the debts were bad, and happy would it be if we could pay them all. But, whether the principal were ever paid or not, the country will never recover the waste which the contracting of those debts has occasioned.

The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Tamworth (Sir Robert Peel) in 1842 [262] began a new system—that of reducing the taxes on industry, and of relieving trade and commerce, by substituting for duties on the necessaries of life a more direct system of taxation in the imposition of a tax on income. It was not enacted in the most desirable shape; but, bad as it is, I hope we never shall part with it, though I should like to see some modifications of it. Something greater must be done before we can afford, out of our surplus, to pay any part of the debt, and at the same time have the means of abolishing those taxes which more immediately interfere with the productions of industry.

I humbly submit that both those things must be done; but Government will be compelled to part with the whole of their surplus of 2,000,000*l.* in relieving those who suffer from indirect taxation and are clamorous for its remission—not because it takes so much money from their pockets, but because it interferes with the progress of business, whether it be the article of paper or any other that is hampered by the Excise. Whatever Government, therefore, is in power, must contemplate a plan of finance by which it must look to have a much larger surplus than 2,000,000*l.* But how can that be done, if you do not adopt my plan, except it be by some other mode of taxation? I would vote for 10 per cent. direct taxation, if the Government would propose it; but they cannot do that. They can, however, do without it, if they would reduce the expenditure to the standard of 1835. They would then get a present and a growing surplus, and at last a surplus of 10,000,000*l.* from this time. That would be a sum for abolishing something important. If you divide it into two, with half you might convert some part of the debt into terminable annuities, and with the other relieve the industry of the country from the duties on paper, soap, malt, hops, and other articles. Without such a plan, it will be only child's play to look to a surplus.

Is there not less danger, then, in trusting to our good intentions and to Divine Providence, instead of 10,000,000*l.* being expended on our armaments? Is it not better to trust to those elements of security, and have it in our power to relax taxation and give contentment to the people in the way which I have put before the House? It is to enable you to take that course that I ask the House to pass the resolutions I am about to move. It is not a vote of want of confidence—it is, in fact, a vote of confidence; for there is a power that resists improvement in this country. It does not appear in public, but works by covert means, and it requires the counteraction of the House to enable the Government to take any step for the relief of the country. I ask you, then, as I regard the interests of those who sent you here, not to look at this as a party question—not to oppose my motion, because I bring it forward—but to vote upon it *bonâ fide* and upon its merits, and to go out into the same lobby with me in its favour.

**FINANCE. IV.**  
**INTERNATIONAL REDUCTION OF ARMAMENTS.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, JUNE 17, 1851.** ↩

[The discussion to which Mr. Cobden alludes in the commencement of this speech was a motion and division made and taken by Mr. M. T. Bass on the reduction of the Malt-duty by one-half. Mr. Cobden's motion was supported by Mr. Roebuck, Mr. Milner Gibson, and others, and opposed by Mr. Urquhart. It was met by an amicable explanation on Lord Palmerston's part, and was ultimately withdrawn.]

THE resolution which I have now to move is a logical sequence to the discussion in which the House has just been engaged. It has been said, in the course of this discussion, that it is impossible for certain interests to support the present amount of taxation. One of the actuating circumstances that has influenced me in bringing forward this resolution is, that I think it will be so far suited to the present circumstances of the country that it will tend to produce a diminution of burdens and a relief from taxation.

I wish the real scope and purport of my motion to be understood at the outset, so that it may not be misrepresented in the debate. I do not propose, then, to discuss or entertain the amount of the armies maintained upon the Continent. When I speak of warlike preparations, I allude to naval preparations and fortifications. Our army is maintained without reference to the armies of the Continent, and the armies of the Continent are never framed or maintained with reference to the army of England. In speaking of armies, which I regard as the standing curse of the present generation, the matter is usually complicated by questions of a purely domestic character. I am told that the armies of the Continent are not kept up by the Governments of those countries for the sake of meeting foreign enemies, but for the purpose of repressing their own subjects. This being the case, I am asked how I can persuade foreign Governments to reduce their armies, seeing that they were not kept up from the apprehension of a foreign foe, but in order to maintain internal order, as it is called. Now, I believe, if I can succeed in my motion with France, the examples of the two countries may be at once followed by other countries in the reduction of their navy, and that, if a reduction in the naval forces and fortifications of England and France takes place, other countries may afterwards follow with a reduction in their armies.

I presume it will be admitted that the maintenance of a naval force, beyond what is necessary in time of peace for the protection of commerce, is an evil; but I shall be told it is a necessary evil. If I ask why, it will be said, 'Because other countries are armed as well as [264] ourselves.' Well, admitting that, and assuming that France and England maintain a certain amount of naval force, not for the purpose of protecting commerce or acting as the police of the seas, but in order to hold themselves in a menacing attitude towards each other, that must be an unmitigated evil, and not only a pure waste, but it would be better and more economical if both voted that money and threw it into the sea, for both would then save the labour which was employed upon ships of war, and which might be more productively occupied. These two countries will be equally well prepared for warfare with each other if they reduce their force to one as if they both maintain their force at twenty, as their relative proportions will remain the same, and no advantage can be gained, in the event of hostilities, by keeping up this unnecessary force.

Why do I assume that England arms against France, and France against England? I am prepared to show that it is the avowed policy of both countries to arm themselves, so as to be prepared to meet the armaments provided by the other country. In the debate in the French Chamber of Deputies in 1846, when a motion was made for a vote of 100,000,000*l.* for a great augmentation of the navy, M. Thiers, who carried the resolution for this augmentation, said:—

'There is nothing offensive to England in citing her example, when our navy is under consideration, any more than there would be in speaking of Prussia, Austria, or Russia, if we were deliberating upon the strength of our army, We pay England the compliment of thinking only of her when determining our naval force; we never heed the ships which sally forth from Trieste or Venice,—we care only for those that leave Portsmouth or Plymouth'

I am told that the noble Lord below me was in the Chamber of Deputies when this speech was made. The noble Viscount (Palmerston), in the debate on the financial statement in 1848, said:—

'So far from its affording any cause of offence of France that we should measure our navy by such a standard, I am sure any one who follows the debates in the French Chambers, when their naval estimates come under discussion, must know that they follow the same course,—adopting the natural and only measure in such cases, namely, the naval force which other nations may have at the same time.'

In the same debate on the financial statement in 1848, the noble Lord (John Russell), after showing that the expenditure for the navy in France had increased since 1833 from 2,280,000*l.* to 3,902,000*l.*, proceeded to observe:—

'I am not alluding at all—it never has been the custom to allude, and I think we are quite right in that respect—to what may be the military force of foreign Powers. I do not, therefore, allude at all to the amount of the standing army that is kept up in France, or in Austria, or in Prussia, or in other foreign countries; but so great an increase in naval estimates, I think, does require the attention, and, at all events, should be within the knowledge of the House.'

I have two objections to that policy: first, it is an irritating policy, having a constant tendency to increase the evil, and to which I see no remedy unless it is in some way met; and secondly, it is a proceeding on exaggerated reports and ideas spread upon the subject of the armaments of the two countries. When these things are exposed, they always bear the trace of great exaggeration. I will mention an instance. Our naval estimates were greatly increased in 1845. The French were alarmed. A Committee of the Chamber of Peers was appointed to inquire into the state of the French navy. They made a report. In that Report they said:—

'We have now to announce the execution of a great scheme which the English Government is pursuing with its usual foresight, and which cannot fail to have a vast influence upon the naval policy of other countries.' (The report then goes on to state that, under the modest pretence of providing steam guard-ships, the British Admiralty is converting eight sailing-vessels into formidable steam batteries, capable of remaining fifteen days at sea; that they [265] will be completed during that year; and that it was expected they would be doubled in the following year.) 'If' (continues the Report) 'we compare the powers of destruction possessed by the broadsides of these floating fortresses with those of the most formidable batteries ever employed by an army upon land for the destruction of fortified places, we shall then know what to think of an armament provided under the modest and defensive guise of steam guard-ships. It is, then, for France an absolute necessity to prepare an armament of a similar character and of equal force, so that we may have nothing to dread in future, in case of a

possible misunderstanding with England.'

Now, in that Report it is broadly stated that eight steam guard-ships were being prepared by the British Government against France; and there was some ground for it, inasmuch as eight guard-ships were being altered with screw propellers; but when I sat on the Committee on the Navy in 1848, I found, on examining the authorities of the Admiralty, that only four of these steam guard-ships were ever completed, and that, instead of being of the character stated in the Report, they were only capable of going to sea for four days instead of fifteen, inasmuch as they were not prepared for carrying a large supply of coal. I will give another illustration of how the two countries play at see-saw in this respect. After the proceedings of England in 1845, and those of France in 1846, Mr. Ward, who was then Secretary of the Admiralty, came down to the House and proposed again an increase of our navy, citing the example of France. The proceedings of France, he said, ought to be a lesson to us, and imposed a great responsibility upon those who were in power in this country. But the British Government could not stop there. They ran the estimate up to 42,000, or, I believe, to 44,000 men. That produced its fruits in France. I hold in my hand an extract from a Report of the National Assembly on the Navy in 1849. It says:—

'Let us see whether foreign Powers really show us the example of a reduction of naval armaments. This very spring, England has voted 40,000 men for the sea service. This vote will amount to 6,000,000*l.* sterling, without including the cost of artillery, &c., which is defrayed out of the Ordnance estimates. We content ourselves with twenty-four vessels of the line afloat, and sixteen in an advanced state upon the stocks, for our peace establishment; the English have seventy afloat, besides those in course of building. With our peace establishment, such as it was fixed in 1846, we should be one-third inferior in strength to the English navy.'

But to illustrate this point further I will quote to the House an extract from a speech of the First Lord of the Admiralty (Sir Francis Baring). In moving the naval estimates for the present year, the right hon. Gentleman the First Lord of the Admiralty said (and it was this remark of the right hon. Gentleman that has induced me to give notice of this motion):—

'It was impossible to fix upon what was necessary in their own establishment without looking to the establishments of foreign countries. He might, however, observe that they had had sufficient proof in the course of the last year that a gallant, active, and intelligent people, not far from themselves, had not by any means neglected their naval establishments and naval power.'

And the right hon. Gentleman went on to give a description of the naval evolutions at Cherbourg, and that great fortified place was held up to this country, with a formidable account of its preparations. I now hold in my hand a Report of a Commission of the National Assembly for the outlay of 6,800,000*f.* to continue the defensive works at Cherbourg; and it bears date the 11th of April, 1851. It says:—

'If we would be fully alive to the necessity of no longer leaving in a defenceless state the point most important and certainly the most menaced upon the whole coast of the Channel, we have only to listen to the opinion entertained of Cherbourg by the English, and especially by one of their most renowned sailors. Admiral [266] Napier, in his recent letter to the *Times* We have only, in fact, to cast our eye upon the map, and to observe the vast works which the British Admiralty are now executing at Jersey and Alderney for the purpose of creating a rival establishment to our own. This is the more necessary, inasmuch as the railroads and steam-boats in England are every day increasing, and their powerful means of transportation give to those who possess them the facility of concentrating upon any given point a sudden expedition. We must be on our guard against so powerful an enemy, situate at so short a distance from our

shores, and who, by the aid of steam, will be henceforth independent of wind, tides, and currents, which formerly impeded the operations of sailing vessels.'

One of the best things this House has done for a long time was to suspend the other night the works for the fortification of Alderney. These works are a menace and an affront to France, and are meant as a rival to Cherbourg. Now Cherbourg, as every one knows who has sailed along that coast, is a most useful, and valuable, and indispensable port of refuge for merchant ships,—in fact, a breakwater at Cherbourg might have been made by subscription from all the maritime States of Europe, so important is it to all who sail along that coast. But Alderney could mean nothing but a great fortified place, within a few miles of France, intended to menace that country. Now, these fortifications arise out of a panic in England. If any one could get at the professional springs applied to panic, it would be a most amusing history. In 1845 the country was led to suppose that we were to be invaded by some maritime Power. A number of engineers had a roving commission to go along the coast and point out places where money could be spent in raising fortifications, and when they had exhausted the coast of England they went over to Jersey and Alderney. I have heard the evidence of some of those gallant gentlemen. One of them said he went down to Plymouth—he found the people there expecting their throats would be cut the next day; and, said he, 'strange as it may appear, I shared their alarm.' It was understood that this panic had projected our harbours of refuge, as they were called, upon which it was suggested that between 4,000,000*l.* and 5,000,000*l.* should be expended. It was under the same panic that the works at Keyham, upon which 1,200,000*l.* had been wasted, and the works at Alderney, which had cost four times as much as the value of the fee-simple of the whole island, were projected. And thus it was that France had now an eager rivalry with us. M. Chevalier, in a pamphlet which he has published on the subject, endeavouring to stem this torrent of rivalry, said that while England had projected her fortifications on the coast of England, France at the same time had projected works to the extent of between 10,000,000*l.* and 11,000,000*l.* sterling, without including the fortifications of Paris, and he gives a comparative estimate of the increased expenditure both of France and England from 1838 to 1847, and shows that in that period England and France have constantly augmented their naval expenditure to the extent of between 13,000,000*l.* and 14,000,000*l.* sterling, and that both going on in that neck-and-neck race of rivalry, the two countries have, in fact, spent nearly the same amount. Now, is there a remedy for that rivalry? Is it possible to bring human reason to bear upon that mass of folly? I am sure that Gentlemen who think it necessary to have a precedent for what they do, will admit the force of the precedent I am about to quote. I am not going back to 1787, to the demolition of Dunkirk, or to an armed neutrality, or to an arrangement made for a specific object for any armament, but there is a case in modern times bearing upon this question. There was a convention between this country and the United States to limit the amount of force in the lakes that separate Canada from America. The convention was this:—

'Arrangements between the United States and Great Britain, between Richard [267] Rush, Esq., acting as Secretary of the Department of State, and Charles Bagot, his Britannic Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary, &c., April, 1817.—The naval force to be maintained upon the American lakes by His Majesty and the Government of the United States shall henceforth be confined to the following vessels on each side, that is:—On Lake Ontario, to one vessel not exceeding 100 tons burden, and armed with one 18-pound cannon; on the upper lakes to two vessels, not exceeding like burden each, and armed with like force; on the waters of Lake Champlain, to one vessel, not exceeding like burden and armed with like force. All other armed vessels on these lakes shall be forthwith dismantled, and no other vessels of war shall be built there or armed. If either party should hereafter be desirous of annulling this stipulation, and should give notice to that effect to the other party, it shall cease to be binding after the expiration of six months from the date of such notice. The naval force so to be limited shall be restricted to such services as will in no respect interfere with the

proper duties of the armed vessels of the other party.'

It was entered into in 1817 at the close of the war with the United States, in the progress of which, in 1814, the Duke of Wellington was at Paris, and he then wrote to Sir G. Murray thus:—

'I have told the Ministers repeatedly that a naval superiority on the lakes is a *sine quâ non* of success in war on the frontier of Canada, even if our object should be solely defensive; and I hope that when you are there they will take care to secure it for you.'

So that, in case of any rupture between England and America, the occupation of the lakes was considered by that great authority to be necessary for success in hostilities; and yet notwithstanding that, immediately after the war, the two countries had the good sense to limit the amount of force upon the lakes. And what has been the result of that friendly convention? Not only has it had the effect of reducing the force, but of abolishing it altogether. When I sat on the Committee I did not find that any vessel was left on the lakes as an armed force. I would ask, then, whether it is not possible to devise some plan, if not by actual convention, as in the case of America, yet by some communication with a Power like France, and say, 'We are mutually building so many vessels each in the year; our relative force is as three to two, and if we increase it tenfold, still the relations will be the same. Will it not be possible, by a friendly understanding, to agree that we shall not go on in this rivalry, but that we shall put a mutual check upon this mutual injury?' Lord Auckland stated before the Committee in 1848 that the amount of force left in the Pacific was always governed by the force left by other Powers. Now, I may be told that I am dealing merely with France; but there are only two countries of any importance as naval Powers, namely, France and Russia, for America had set an example, and was out of the question. When California was discovered, America might have placed two or three line-of-battle ships off that coast, but she withdrew the only one she had there, and turned her artisans and shipwrights to construct some of the most magnificent steam-vessels that were ever seen; and yet her commerce was extending, as our own is. The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Urquhart) may, perhaps, refer me to Russia; but I contend that no country that has not a mercantile marine can be a great naval country. You may build up a navy as Mehemet Ali has done, and put his fellahs on board, but if you have not a mercantile marine you never can become a great naval Power. Russia has, no doubt, a great number of ships at Cronstadt—I have seen them all—but if Russia had power she kept it at home; and there may be very good reasons why she did so, for I have heard remarks from American skippers lying at Cronstadt to the effect that her vessels were not much to be admired. She has about 30,000 sailors, but they are men taken from the interior, unaccustomed to sea duty, and are, of course, a complete laughing-stock to British seamen. I do not consider [268] that any country like America or England, carrying on an enormous commerce, and with 100,000 mercantile sailors, can ever be endangered by a country having no mercantile marine. With reference to our distant stations, at all events America offers no obstacle, but rather invites us to this course by her example. France is the only country that presents herself with any force upon foreign stations; and I ask, is it impracticable to carry out the same rule in regard to France that had been agreed to with the United States, or are we to go on *ad infinitum*, wasting our resources, and imposing unnecessary taxes in order to keep up that waste? I may be told, probably, that this is not the proper moment for such a resolution as this. I think that it is the proper moment. I believe that nations are disposed for peace, and I am glad to be able to cite the opinion of the noble Lord at the head of the Government, and of the noble Lord the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, that there is a great disposition on the part of the people towards maintaining peace. I hold in my hand also an extract from the most powerful organ of public opinion in this country—the most powerful vehicle of public opinion in the world—a paper which certainly everybody would admit has

the best possible opportunity of knowing what the tendency of public opinion is throughout the world—I mean the *Times* newspaper. That journal, in a recent leading article, says:—

'Wars of nation against nation are not the evil of the day, but the contests between classes in the same country. Europe is already so much governed by the representatives of tax-payers, that an European war is an affair of improbable occurrence. Even in countries where constitutional government is not understood, the ruling power would be very slow, for its own sake, to impose taxes for purposes of war. England has remained at peace, although European society has gone through convulsions in the course of the last five years of which history presents no example since the breaking up of the Roman empire.'

If there were not a disposition on the part of the people of the continent to go to war, where is the use or the necessity of the enormous naval force which France keeps up? Surely there must be as great a disposition on the part of that country as of this to reduce the burdens of taxation by diminishing expenditure. I have conversed with French statesmen upon this subject, and when I have put it to them, as I have done to English statesmen, they have admitted that the plan which I propose would be most desirable for them. They say that they keep up their navy because England keeps up hers, but that it would be the greatest possible relief to them to be able to reduce it. I believe that if our Government made a friendly proposal to France, it would be met in an amicable spirit. France does not pretend that she is as strong as England by sea, and she does not aim at being thought so, for it is invariably admitted in the discussions in the French Chamber that she has no pretensions to rival England in the amount of her naval force. I say, then, that if a friendly proposal of this sort were only made to France, I fully believe it would be accepted. This leads me to what I consider the strongest reason why this system should be abolished, and it is this—that while the spirit of rivalry is maintained by two countries so equal in point of resources, taking the army and navy together, it is impossible that one could ever gain a permanent advantage over the other. If one were exceedingly weak and the other strong, and the strong could have some extraordinary motive to oppress the weaker, I might despair to convince by argument; but the case of England and France is very different. Whenever England increases her armaments and fortifications France does the same, and *vice versâ*. We are pursuing a course, therefore, which holds out to neither country a prospect of any permanent gain. We are not actuated by motives of ambition or aggression, but are simply acting for self-defence, and no rational mind in either country supposes anything else, than that a war [269] between the two countries must be injurious to both. Every country will have an interest in putting an end to this mutual rivalry and hostility by the course which I recommend. I shall be anxious to hear what the noble Lord says upon this. I do not ask the noble Lord to do it in any specific form. My resolution merely says that a communication should be entered into in a spirit of amity with France. I do not stipulate for a diplomatic note in this form or that. I shall be perfectly satisfied if I see the attempt made, for the objection that I have to our system of policy was that there never had been an attempt made to stay the progress of this rivalry—there never had been anything done that could by possibility tend to bring the two countries to an understanding. All I stipulate for is, that diplomacy should put itself a little more into harmony with the spirit of the times, and should do that work which the public thought ought to be the occupation of diplomacy. I shall be told that it is an affair for public opinion, or for the operation of individual enterprise. Why, public opinion and individual enterprise are doing much to bring England and France together. Compare the present state of things with that which existed twenty-five years ago. I remember that at that time there were but two posts a week between London and Paris, Tuesdays and Fridays. Down to 1848, thirty-four hours were allowed for transmitting a post to Paris; we now make the journey in eleven hours. Where there used to be thousands passing and repassing, there are now tens of thousands. Formerly, no man could be heard in our smaller towns and villages speaking a foreign language, let it be what language it might, but the rude and vulgar passerby would



call him a Frenchman, and very likely insult him. We have seen a great change in all this. In this, the first year of the second half of the nineteenth century, we have seen a most important change. We are witnessing now what a few years ago no one could have predicted as possible. We see men meeting together from all countries of the world, more like the gatherings of nations in former times, when they came up for a great religious festival,—we find men speaking different languages, and bred in different habits, associating in one common temple erected for their reception and gratification. I ask, then, that the Government of the country should put itself in harmony with the spirit of the age, and should endeavour to do something to follow in the wake of what private enterprise and public opinion are achieving. I have the fullest conviction that one step taken in that direction will be attended with important consequences, and will redound to the honour and credit of any Foreign Minister who, casting aside the old and musty maxims of diplomacy, shall step out and take in hand the task which I have humbly submitted to the noble Lord (Palmerston). I beg to move ‘An Address to Her Majesty, praying that she will direct the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to enter into communication with the Government of France, and endeavour to prevent in future that rivalry of warlike preparations in time of peace which has hitherto been the policy of the two Governments, and to promote, if possible, a mutual reduction of armaments.’

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**FINANCE. V.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, DECEMBER 13, 1852.** ↩

[On December 3, 1852, Mr. Disraeli made his financial statement. Among other particulars, it proposed to extend the income-tax to Ireland. After a debate extending over five nights, the resolutions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer were rejected by a majority of 19 (305 to 286), and Lord Derby retired from office.]

If the hon. Gentleman (Mr. Davison) who has just sat down, had offered one word of argument in reply to the speech of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Halifax (Sir Charles Wood), on Friday evening, I should have felt it my duty to have recurred to the topics he then urged; but as the hon. Gentleman has not ventured to grapple with that speech, the statements contained in it remain unanswered, and that relieves me from the necessity of touching on the principal parts of the Budget of the right hon. Gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Disraeli). I wish, however, to refer to one part of the speech of the hon. Gentleman who has just sat down. He represents the city of Belfast; and on a question which touches the taxation of the people of England, I think he would have exercised a sounder discretion if he had remained silent. By the obtrusive activity of the hon. Gentleman, attention is directed to that on which I should not have observed if he had been silent—that the question does not touch his constituents. The hon. Gentleman is an illustration of the evil of what is called an United Kingdom which is subjected to different modes of taxation in its different portions. We are now discussing the question of the house-tax, and the hon. Gentleman cordially concurs in the proposition which has been made. Now, it is a house-tax for England and Scotland, and the city of Belfast has no interest whatever in the matter. We are going to deal with England—the hon. Gentleman has only himself to thank for any remarks I may make—and the hon. Gentleman is about to give his support to an income-tax, which is to be levied upon the trades and professions in England, and on my constituents in Yorkshire, and upon the manufacturers of linen-yarn at Leeds and Barnsley. I take this to be an illustration of the evils and absurdities of the present system. There are in Belfast, as every one knows, establishments for the manufacture of linen-yarn and linen-cloth, which enter into competition with establishments for a similar manufacture possessed by my constituents in Leeds and in Barnsley. In Belfast labour is cheaper, the raw material is cheaper, capital is quite as cheap, and there is little difference in the price of coal. Now, my constituents pay to the Government 3 per cent. on the profits of their manufactures, while the constituents of the hon. Gentleman, who are engaged in the same trade, are exempt from that [271] tax. Is it not evident that my constituents labour under a great disadvantage in competing with the constituents of the hon. Gentleman? And since he has entered into this discussion, I put it to him, whether he will be ready, by-and-by, to agree to a proposition which is threatened to be made by my hon. Friend the Member for Marylebone (Sir B. Hall), to extend the same incometax to Ireland as it is to be levied in England? I leave the question to the consideration of the hon. Gentleman.

With reference to the question which is immediately before the Committee, I will observe, that in some remarks which were made by an hon. Gentleman on Friday night, who spoke before the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Halifax, it was stated that somebody on this side of the House objected to the Budget, because it created an addition to the direct taxation of this country. The hon. Baronet the Member for Hertfordshire (Sir E. Bulwer Lytton), and the hon. Gentleman the Member for Cambridgeshire (Mr. E. Ball), threw out such taunts as these against the Freetraders, and said, ‘Now we will put you to the test; carry

out your own principles now that we are all Freetraders.' Now, I am prepared to answer the challenge thrown out with regard to the promotion of direct taxation. I say, on the part of the Freetraders, that we do not object to direct taxation, where, in the first place, it is shown to us that it is levied equally on all descriptions of property; and where, in the second place, it is shown that a direct tax is one which will prove beneficial to all the interests of the country. But we do not recognise any right on the part of the representatives of the agricultural districts, or any claim arising out of Free-trade, which entitles them to levy a tax on some particular kind of property in the towns, in order to relieve certain kinds of property in the country from taxation, for that would be a one-sided, partial, and unjust system, and just the kind of system which we have been struggling for the last fourteen years to get rid of by the abolition of the Corn-laws. It would be, in fact, adopting the odious principle of compensation. Our first answer to the taunt from the other side of the House is, that we do not recognise, on the part of Members representing the agricultural districts, any grievances or losses incurred by them which entitle them to ask anybody else to submit to taxes which they do not pay themselves. Hon. Gentlemen opposite seem to doubt this very point themselves. The hon. Baronet the Member for Hertfordshire (Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton) says, that a great deal depends on the way in which relief is granted. 'Do it graciously,' he said; 'even if you don't grant that the farmers are distressed, still they think they are, and therefore give them something, in the way of the abolition of the malt-tax, which may console them.' This is a very sentimental way of dealing with a great question, which involves a sum to be counted by millions, and one which I do not understand. I deny that there is any distress which entitles them to ask for compensation. I had a note the other day from one of the most enterprising and intelligent farmers in the East Lothians, which I will read to the House, as I believe it will afford not a bad explanation of the condition of the farming world in general. He says:—

'The farmers of the Lothians of Scotland, essentially a wheat district, never were, as a body, in a more flourishing condition; and the demand for land, in consequence, is beyond parallel for the last thirty years. Every farm that is to let brings an advanced rent of from 10 to 30 per cent. I have four years of my lease to run, but have made a new arrangement at an increased rent of 15 per cent., which I begin to pay immediately, and I have always one-fourth of my land in wheat. Two farms have been let in this parish, within the last six months, at a similar advance to my own, and an adjoining farm, belonging to the Marquis of Dalhousie, is at present to let, the factor being in London, with the offers in his pocket, to show to his Lordship's commissioners; and I know for a fact that first-rate tenants, men of capital [272] and skill, have offered 30 per cent. increase on the rent which the farm was let nineteen years ago, when it was advertised for six months, and then let to the highest bidder. My brother took a farm last week adjoining the one on which he resides of 225 acres imperial, and for which he pays 20 per cent. increase of rent. Sheep-farms have brought higher additional rents; but I have said enough to show you that any talk of agricultural distress is sheer nonsense, and for myself I have done, and am doing, as well as I could possibly desire. One of the principal reasons for this is, that where land is properly drained, by a liberal use of guano and other artificial manures, the crops have been increased one half at least, and every acre is made to carry as much corn as can stand. It costs me as much as 700*l.* per annum for artificial manures, on a farm of 650 imperial acres. I know several farmers whose outlay in proportion is greater; but then, in place of four quarters of wheat per acre, we have now six or seven quarters, and other grains in proportion; while root crops are also much heavier, and their value per ton is as great or greater than ever—thanks to the numerous consumers of butchers' meat.'

I mention this in the outset, because I have observed in the papers this morning a letter written by a Member of the Cabinet—if he is not a Member of the Cabinet, he is an exponent of the policy of the Ministry—and he states to his constituents, that although the Government do not intend to propose a return to protection, yet that they do intend to propose

compensation, and that the Budget is the first step towards it, and that the repeal of the malt-tax is peculiarly a measure of relief to the landed interest. If such is the case, I say that we are entering on the old controversy between town and country, and you compel us to go into this controversy in a spirit that I thought was never to have been revived. An hon. Gentleman opposite says, 'Carry out your principles of direct taxation with regard to the duty on soap and on paper.' I say that I am ready to carry out direct taxation, if you propose a tax which shall be equitable, and levied on all kinds of property alike; but my objection to the Budget is, that it does not carry out direct taxation fairly and equitably. The proposal now made with regard to the house-tax is most unjust. What do you propose? You have already imposed a property-tax of 3 per cent. on all land and on all houses. You next go to Schedule A, and you lay an additional house-tax of ninepence in the pound, or  $3\frac{3}{4}$  per cent., making the tax on houses to be at the rate of  $6\frac{3}{4}$  per cent. as against 3 per cent. on land. Then you say, 'We want more money by direct taxation,' and you come with your scheme of compensation, or rather I should call it spoliation; and you go to Schedule A again, and select houses, and lay on another ninepence in the pound, or another  $3\frac{3}{4}$  per cent., thus making the tax  $10\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on houses as against 3 per cent. on land.

But that is not all; for we all know that in making an assessment on real property and on houses, you assess houses at a much fewer number of years' purchase than you do land; for land is usually assessed at thirty years' purchase, while houses are only assessed at the utmost at fifteen years' purchase; and therefore, if you levy the same rate of taxation on both of them, you cause a double pressure of taxation upon houses as compared with land. If you invest 1,000*l.* in land, and 1,000*l.* in houses, while the one is assessed at thirty years' purchase, and the other at fifteen, if you lay the same tax on both of them, it is, in fact, double on the sum invested in houses, making in the whole  $10\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., and that brings the whole amount you levy on houses up to 21 per cent., and that is what you propose to levy on houses as against 3 per cent. on land. That is a great injustice on the part of the Government, and the House will do wrong even to attempt it; for, even if it is carried by a majority, do you think you will ever be able to maintain it? Do you think that the intelligent people of the towns will ever submit to it? Do you think that those centres from which radiate the light and intelligence of the country— — Why, whence do you [273] get your literature and your science? Is it not from the towns? I never heard that we went into country hamlets to seek for such things. I say, if you pass such a law, you cannot expect it will be submitted to; and it would be the worst thing that could happen for you, for you will revive the old controversy between town and country—but not in the old form, when hon. Gentlemen opposite could say it is a contest between cotton-lords and landlords—but they will have every little market-town taking sides against them, for they will all see the injustice that is practised on the owner of house property. Your argument is, that this house-tax would be a tax, not on house property but on rents. I think myself that this, as well as every other tax, would ultimately be felt more or less by everybody. But, at all events, as regards the great proportion of house property, it can be clearly shown that you tax the owners as well as the occupiers, inasmuch as there are a large number of houses in the towns which are owned by those who live in them. Let the House see how the tax will work. You have benefit building societies, whereby frugal mechanics and humble tradesmen manage, in the shape of weekly payments, to get together sums of money sufficiently large to build or purchase houses for themselves, and many of these houses would be generally 10*l.* houses; and in future they will be still more numerous than they have been, for I am glad to say the saving character of this class of society is increasing, and they are now happily bent on improving their dwellings. Well, what kind of justice is it to meet these men, immediately that they have accumulated as much savings as enables them to become possessors of small houses, with this inordinate taxation? Your notion of justice is to say that they shall pay at the rate of 21 per cent. on their investment, in proportion to the 3 per cent., which is all that is paid by the owners of the large landed estates. Take another example. Look at the vast landed property in the metropolis owned by noblemen, who let it

out on building leases. Take Belgrave-square, for instance. You would find houses built there on land held on a 99 years' lease, and at a ground-rent of about 50*l.* a year for each house. Well, the person who had put the bricks and mortar on the ground, or who has bought it, is subjected to this direct taxation, but it does not reach the ground landlord. He carries off his 20,000*l.* or 30,000*l.* a year, and is left untouched. Is there any justice in that? Let me remind you, further, that the householders in towns are subjected to very heavy charges of another kind—to a vast number of local charges, not only for the support of the poor, but for police-rates, for highway-rates, for lighting, and for every description of impost; and bear in mind that inequality of the pressure of the rating, which I alluded to before—that the smaller number of years' purchase that this house property is rated at, presses with equal severity on the owners of that property in assessing it for the local rates, as in the case of the property and house-tax. Not only, therefore, has this property higher general taxes to pay, proportionally, but it has higher taxes to pay for local purposes. You cannot expect a system of direct taxation, which would work like this, can ever be maintained. And what is this direct tax to be laid on for which we are now discussing—for it is the house-tax which is now before you? It is to be laid on for the purpose of enabling us to remove one-half of the malt-tax. The right hon. Gentleman the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Christopher) has stated, with his usual frankness, what the object of it was. He tells us that the Government are about to take off one-half of the malt-tax for the benefit of the land. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, however, tells us that he makes the proposition in the interest of the consumer.

Well, which are we to believe? I certainly think the Government would do well to come to some understanding with respect to their principles, or, at least, if they cannot agree, that one or [274] the other section of them should engage to be silent. My idea of the malt-tax is precisely that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer—that it is a tax paid by the consumer, but that, undoubtedly, as with all taxes laid on a commodity we produce, the producer is subjected to inconvenience and to loss by it. The illustration which the right hon. Gentleman gave is precisely analogous. The cotton printers protested against the 3½*d.* per square yard duty on printed cottons, because that duty tended to hamper them in their business, and to diminish the consumption of their goods. I quite agree, therefore, with the right hon. Gentleman, that the consumer will primarily be benefited by the remission of the malt-tax, and also that the producer will be benefited, although to a small extent comparatively. But I have always understood that the great grievance of this tax consists in the Excise regulations which it imposes. This does not affect the farmer, it is true; but in one way it does affect him. An intelligent farmer, with whom I have the honour to be acquainted—one who has been a Free-trader from the time the Anti-Corn-law League began its agitation—I mean Mr. Lattimore of Hertfordshire, who is a model farmer, and admitted to be so by all his neighbours,—Mr. Lattimore was the first who converted me to the importance of repealing the malt-tax, on the ground that it would enable the farmer to feed his cattle with malt. How far this is a valid ground I cannot say; but I have so much faith in Mr. Lattimore's judgment, that I believe it to be a valid ground, and I have always considered the claim of the farmer to the repeal of the tax to be founded upon that fact, if it be a fact. I have, therefore, publicly stated, that if we could by any means produce the necessary revenue without the malt-tax, I would advocate its total remission; but I have at the same time always said this—that I would never be a party to imposing a substitute for the malt-tax. I don't know that you could point out to me any tax, however little objectionable in its form, which I would substitute for the malt-tax, if the amount of revenue it produces is indispensable. And I am not less strongly opposed to removing only one-half of the malt-tax. I voted some two years ago against the proposition of that kind of my hon. friend the Member for Derby (Mr. Bass). My objection to the remission of one-half the malt-tax is on principle. I won't agree to halve an Excise tax, especially the malt-tax. I object, independent of my objection, to the way in which you propose to make up the deficiency. As the right hon. Gentleman (the Chancellor of the

Exchequer) has put the case—as the case merely of the consumers—it is open to objections of a serious kind. The right hon. Gentleman says that beer, like bread, is a primary necessary of life; and that idea has been complacently repeated by all the hon. Gentlemen who have spoken on that side since—that it is a necessary of life, indispensable to the health and strength of the labourer. Now, the fact is, that there is a wide difference of opinion on that subject; and I have repeatedly said, both in this House and out of it, that the great difficulty you have to meet in dealing with the malt-tax is, that there is a large, a growing, and an influential body in this country—some of them very fanatical, too—who hold the opinion, that beer is not only not a necessary of life, but that it is a very pernicious beverage to the individual, indulgence in which leads to the infliction of serious evils on the community. You think they are wrong, no doubt; but you have to deal with that class, which, within my knowledge, is a numerous and a highly influential one among our constituencies; and I think that, wrong or right, they are entitled to be heard in this House. This class is not speaking wildly, or without considerable authority; and it may not be amiss if I read to the House what has been said on the subject by certain persons, begging hon. Gentlemen not to give way to any lively emotion until they have heard the names attached to this document. These persons say:—

'An opinion, handed down from rude [275] and ignorant times, and imbibed by Englishmen in their youth, has become very general—that the habitual use of some portion of alcoholic drink, as of wine, beer, or spirits, is beneficial to health, and even necessary to those subjected to habitual labour. Anatomy, physiology, and experience of all ages and countries, when properly examined, must satisfy every mind, well informed in medical science, that the above opinion is altogether erroneous. Man, in ordinary health, like other animals, requires not any such stimulants, and cannot be benefited by the employment of any quantity of them, large or small; nor will their use during his lifetime increase the aggregate amount of his labour in whatever quantity they are employed,—they will rather tend to diminish it.'

Now, that is a very strong opinion; and that 'opinion' is signed by upwards of seventy of the principal medical men of the kingdom, amongst whom I find the great names of Sir Benjamin Brodie, Dr. Chambers, Sir James Clark, Mr. Barnsby Cooper, Dr. Davies, Mr. Aston Key, Mr. Travers, and Dr. Ure. I think that, after having got such a declaration as that, I am entitled to say that this question—whether an increase in the consumption of beer would increase the health and strength of the people of this country—is, at least, an open question; and in this direction, therefore, I claim leave to differ with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his friends. I observe that this increased house-tax would fall on very many thousand professors of 'temperance,' and that some of you avow your object, in imposing that tax, is to cheapen the price of beer. The 'teetotallers' among my constituents would naturally say, 'We don't want to be relieved from the malt-tax; we have already repealed it, so far as we are concerned; we are trying, by tracts and lectures, to induce our fellow-citizens to imitate us; and we think your Budget unjust, and we won't have it.' And, more than that, they believe that the consumption of malt is pernicious to the interests of society, and take pains to persuade their fellow-subjects that it is so; and yet the Government ask them to submit to the house-tax, in order that beer may be cheapened, and that a greater consumption of it may be occasioned. Had the Chancellor of the Exchequer put his proposition on any other ground—on the scientific ground, that the malt-tax was a nuisance to the trader, and that it prevented the farmer giving desirable food to cattle—all the principles of political economy would come to his aid, and we should be compelled to acquiesce in the project. But, as it is, the obstacles you have to encounter are twofold: first, that you substitute a partial tax not levied equally on property generally; and next, that the malt-tax is to be reduced to a purpose to which the great bulk of the people are indifferent, and to which hundreds of thousands—I have heard them estimated at millions—are wholly opposed, on strong grounds of moral

principle. Such being the ease, I don't think you have the least chance whatever of passing a house-tax. I don't know what a present majority of the House may do; but I can tell you, you can't maintain that tax if you pass it. You have seen lately with the window-tax, how long-lived is an agitation against an unjust impost; and, depend upon it, you are embarking in a contest out of which you will come as disastrously as you have done out of the battle for Portection—with this difference, that you will be far more easily beaten. And what is more, you are going to fight a battle not worth fighting for. I can hardly bring myself to regard this as an attempt at compensation. I did not want to allude to the thing; but the statement of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster does not leave me a chance of passing it over, and I have been obliged, in some respects, to deal with it in that manner. There is another proposal, in connection with this subject, in regard to which I think the Chancellor of the Exchequer has really quite wrecked his character as a financier; and that is the proposal to remit one-half of the hop-duties. I have often had communications with the [276] growers of hops in Sussex, who have represented that they wanted the whole duty off, but have expressed apprehensions, in consequence of the Kent hopgrowers advocating only a removal of half the duty; and I have comforted them in this way,—'Don't alarm yourself for a moment; for, after the great doings of Peel, we shall never have a half-and-half Chancellor of the Exchequer making two bites at a cherry.' Here is a most exceptional tax—the only tax you have collected upon the produce in the fields and gardens of the country—worthy, no doubt, of Persia, or of Turkey, but too ridiculous for this England of 1852. How is it collected? Every September the Chancellor of the Exchequer sends a little army of tax-gatherers into half-a-dozen counties; and every Member of Parliament knows that every spring he is asked by some unfortunate poor fellow to use his influence to get for him this temporary employment in collecting the hop-duty. In September the hops are picked, carried, and dried, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer disperses his little army of taxmen over half-a-dozen counties. They take stock of the hops, and thus an estimate of the tax is got. It comes sometimes to 200,000*l.* a year, sometimes to 300,000*l.*, sometimes to 400,000*l.* a year; hardly ever to half a million. Thus it has all the evils that can attach to any tax; it is cumbrous and costly in its collection; it is uncertain in amount—no Chancellor of the Exchequer ever being able to calculate to any positive amount on it; and it bears with most unequal pressure on different parts of the country. In some districts, the hops are hardly worth half the price of hops grown in other districts; and as this is a tax on the quantity and not on the value, of course it falls with the severest pressure on the poorest soils and the poorest quality of hops. Well, is it conceivable that the right hon. Gentleman, after the experience we have had of the great works that some of his predecessors have done—after the Corn-laws had been abolished, and the vast system of Navigation-laws had been done away with—could come down to the House of Commons, and as a great scheme of finance, propose such a mockery, the remission of one-half the hop-duties? I hope the House will never consent to such a paltry and trifling policy as this. If no one else will make the motion, I will myself undertake to propose the total repeal of the hop-duties, and even should that not be carried, I will still vote against the repeal of only one-half the tax; for it is far better to keep it as it is, if we cannot get it done away with altogether.

With regard to the proposed modification of the income-tax, I feel bound to give the Government every credit for the way in which they have dealt with that question. I do say it is most remarkable that a Government supported almost exclusively by county Members—representing territorial interests only—should be the first Government to deal—at all events, in principle, if not going to the full extent—fairly with the income-tax, as it relates to trades and professions. Most assuredly that proposal should have come from a Government representing this side of the House. My own opinion is, in spite of all that mathematicians and philosophers may say, that when you are going to levy a tax upon income and property, you must adopt one of two courses—either vary the tax upon incomes, making it lighter than the tax upon property, or take the plan which has been adopted in the United States, and

capitalise the whole property of the country, whether it is in land, or in capital or stock engaged in trade—capitalise it all, and levy the same rate on all. Either you must capitalise all in this way equally, or you must make a distinction between permanent property and incomes derived from precarious sources—the practice of professions—the midnight working of the physician, and the daily toil of the lawyer—from trades such as that of a farmer, whose profits depend upon the changing manner in which his capital fructifies on the soil, and the [277] income of a man who sleeps while his property fructifies. I repeat that I must give the Government credit for their intentions to make this distinction; and I am persuaded that if it is not done by them, it must very speedily be done by some one else.

But in dealing with this question the old curse of the party has settled on the right honourable Gentleman, and he could not deal fairly with it; he was obliged to make a miserable, paltry attempt to get a special benefit for the tenant-farmer. Instead of charging the farmer the tax on one-half of his rent, he proposes to reduce it to one-third. In the time of Pitt, the farmer paid on three-fourths; Sir R. Peel reduced the three-fourths to an estimate on one-half of the rent; and now it is asked to go down to one-third. Well now, really, I will ask hon. Gentlemen—say, the hon. Member for Somersetshire (Mr. Miles)—whether they think farming would be worth following as a trade, if the tenant-farmer could only get a profit equal to one-third of his rent?—that the income derived from profit and interest on his capital—from profit arising out of his own skill and industry—would altogether only amount to one-third of his rent? Would it not be better for you to say at once, if that is so, he ought not to be taxed on his income at all? But would it not be much nearer the mark to say that it ought to be equal to the whole rent?

You are proposing to extend the area of the income-tax, so as to embrace incomes of 50*l.* a year from real property, and of 100*l.* a year from trades and professions; and, as a principle, I am bound to say that I do not object to an extension of the area of direct taxation. But I say, too, include all alike within the area—tax every description of income and property. Certainly, you are embarrassed in applying the principle; for you have such an amount of indirect taxation, comprising seven-eighths of your whole revenue, and which, no doubt, presses with the greatest severity on smaller incomes, and especially on the labouring classes, that there are large sections of the community who have a claim to exemption from direct taxation. There is, in fact, no other ground on which you can resist the application of the principle, that your direct taxation should be universal.

The proposal of the Government is to extend the area of the tax to incomes of 50*l.* on property, and 100*l.* from trades and professions. Let us see how this extension to incomes of 50*l.* and 100*l.* affects the justice of the case, as compared with what you are going to do towards the farmers. I will put a case of a farmer with a farm of 250 acres of moderate land, and paying a rent of 280*l.* a year. By your proposals, farmers paying rents under 300*l.* a year are exempt from this tax altogether, because it is proposed that the tax shall not apply to farmers whose rents are under 300*l.* a year. If the farmer I speak of farms as he should do in Free-trade times, he has 2,000*l.* or 3,000*l.* capital. In fact, 10*l.* an acre is not so much as he should have; he would be better with 15*l.*; but, at any rate, he should have not less than 10*l.* an acre. Here, then, would be a man with a capital employed of 2,500*l.* paying no income-tax whatever, the Government assuming that he does not make 100*l.* a year. Let that be assumed. This farmer goes into the market town, riding his nag, and looking in fine health and great spirits; and he passes by a lawyer's clerk, who gets 100*l.* a year, and who is subjected to an income-tax of 5¼*d.* in the pound. The farmer has 250 acres of land, many labourers employed, stables full of horses, sheds full of cows, pens full of sheep, yards full of stacks; and yet the lawyer's clerk pays, and this farmer does not pay, income-tax.



Now, do not deceive yourselves; do not suppose for a moment that this could last. Is there any judgment or common sense in making such a proposal? Is it not provoking a quarrel with us on the most miserable grounds? You say you want in this way to benefit the farmer; but I do believe, on my honour, unless [278] the farmers are very unlike the rest of their countrymen, that they will not thank you for putting them in this invidious position. They do not want these special exemptions; they want to be regarded as contributors to the revenue on the same footing as the rest of their countrymen.

By your proposal you are widening the operation of the income-tax, so as to embrace a greater number of people who were not included in its range before; you do that on 'principle.' But you have especially framed your measure so as to prevent any new class of farmers from being brought under the range of the tax. Is it worthy of the territorial party? What do you mean by it? Are you always to keep the farmers on your hands as a separate and distinct class? I put it to the farmers—have they not had enough of it themselves? Have they felt it to be their interest to be kept apart as a separate class, to be made political capital of? I thought the example which had been shown in the last few years, in the case of the farmers, of the way in which they have been most ridiculously bamboozled, would have been enough for them; I really thought it would have had the effect of preventing them, or any other class, from being made a separate class for political objects. I never thought we should have had a body of men setting up as friends of the tailors, or friends of the grocers, or friends of the shoemakers. I thought that trade would have been kept out of the arena of politics for ever, after the ridiculous way in which the farmers have been bamboozled; and I sincerely hope that this Budget will be modified and withdrawn, and that farmers will be placed on an equality with other classes, and will be made to pay on their profits just the same as other people. I know the objection that is made to that. You say farmers do not keep books, and that, therefore, they cannot give an account of their profits. Well, here is a good opportunity for making them keep books. You cannot do the farmers a greater service than by inducing them to keep books, and to know exactly what they realise in a year.

No, Sir, I did not expect that on this occasion we should have had these old grievances revived. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has thrown over local burdens, and we were to hear no more about exclusive taxation of that kind; I thought that we were about to get rid of this farming interest altogether; but it seems to me that hon. Gentlemen have not entirely comprehended their position, and do not yet understand what Free Trade is. It seems to me they have confounded two subjects which are not the same—the question of protective duties and the question of direct taxation.

Now they will perhaps excuse me if I give them a little A B C on this matter. I see the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire (Mr. Ball) here. He has not been much accustomed to hear Free-trade speeches. I want to show him and other hon. Gentlemen what it is we have been doing. I beg to inform that hon. Member and other hon. Gentlemen on the same side, that the advocates of Free Trade have not been necessarily the advocates of direct taxation. Direct taxation is indeed a distinct question from that in which we have embarked. We have been opposed to protective duties, and we have said, 'Give us freedom of exchange with other countries; do away with the restrictions on our commerce, and we do not enquire what the effect of that freedom will be on price; all that we want is to have free access to as great a quantity of these good things as can be got.' What is running in the minds of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire and of other hon. Gentlemen opposite—I believe the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire has shed tears on the subject—is sheer prejudice on this question—that as Free-traders we mean low prices for everything. Now, what we want is abundance. We do not say that Free Trade necessarily brings low prices. It is possible with increased quantities still to advance prices; for it is possible that the country may be so prosperous under Free Trade, that whilst you have a greater quantity of anything [279] than

you had before, increased demand, in consequence of the increased prosperity, may arise, so that the demand will be more than the supply, and you may raise the prices on some articles. In some articles it has been the case; it has been so in wool and on meat, and we may not know yet what effect it may have on wheat itself. But hon. Gentlemen opposite seem always to proceed on the assumption that the Free-traders want to reduce prices, and that, therefore, they ought to have some compensation for those reduced prices. And then they talk of competition with foreigners; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer told us that he was going to prepare a Budget which would enable the industrious classes of this country to sustain themselves under the pressure of this unrestricted competition.

Now I thought it had been universally admitted that the industrious classes were in a much better position under the competition than they were before under the old system of restriction. I and my friends do not want commiseration for the working classes for the evils which they have suffered in the progress of Free Trade, for the working-classes themselves declare that they have derived great advantages from Free-Trade measures. Free Trade has, indeed, conferred great benefits upon the community at large, and it is intended that it shall confer upon them still greater advantages. I do not acknowledge, however, that it is necessary to propose any remedial measures to benefit anybody against the evils which are alleged to be caused by Free Trade. The Chancellor of the Exchequer—who, I think, is not yet very enthusiastic in the cause of Free-trade principles—has told them that he had framed a great measure to enable the country to adopt and conform itself to this new system of commerce. Nobody, that I am aware of, has asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer for any such measure. The right hon. Gentleman said that his proposition would cheapen the necessaries of life; and, in the opinion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, beer seems to be one of the chief necessaries. Well, how does the right hon Gentleman intend to cheapen beer? By raising the price of lodgings. But are not lodgings as necessary to the people of this country as beer? If we are competing with foreigners, which would lower the price of commodities, I say that to reduce the price of beer, to raise the price of lodgings by putting a tax on houses, is not, after all, a benefit to the people of this country. I do not admit that the people of this country will come *in formâ pauperis* to this House for anything of the kind. The truth is, you have got into a false position by making promises you ought never to have made. You have tried to appear consistent when consistency was impossible. But what I am anxious to do is to see that you do not mix up Free Trade with any question of compensation. I say the effect of Free Trade hitherto has been to change a failing revenue into an overflowing exchequer. Free Trade has made the people more prosperous, has diminished pauperism and crime, and in every possible way has promoted the prosperity of this country. Do not come to the House and say we must do something to enable the people to bear up under the load of this competition. And then hon. Gentlemen opposite ask us to give a new name to the principle, and to call it ‘unrestricted competition.’ I think it is Lord Byron who says a party has a right to fix the pronunciation of his own name; and I think Free-traders have a right to put their own name on their own principles. I never insulted you by calling you ‘Monopolists’ when you choose to call yourselves ‘Protectionists,’ and do not you go out of the good old Saxon ‘Free Trade,’ and give us this new name—I really cannot pronounce it. How can we call ourselves an ‘Unrestricted Competition Party?’ You must adopt our principles, name and all.

Now, one word with regard to the alteration of the tea-duties. I think that is a question which the late Chancellor of the Exchequer ought to have [280] dealt with; and I am sure, that if I had been Chancellor of the Exchequer I should have done what the present Chancellor of the Exchequer now proposes, four or five years ago. I do not think the right hon. Gentleman is far wrong in that proposal; but, on the whole, I doubt whether the Budget is the Budget of the Chancellor of the Exchequer at all. I do not believe, either, that the passage in the Speech from the Throne, alluding to this matter, was drawn up by the right hon

Gentleman. I think the Budget has been cut and snipped away, patched, dove-tailed, and swopped away, until at last—as in the Queen's Speech, when somebody suggested that an 'if' should be put in, that all parties might be accommodated—so in this case some one suggested one thing and some another—until at last, all the bold things that were intended were abandoned, and what was left was the proposal which has been submitted to the House. The fact is, that the Budget does not at all correspond to the magniloquent phrases in which it was introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was not at all worthy of a five hours' speech. Indeed, I humbly conceive that I could have discharged the duty in about an hour and twenty-five minutes. But the right hon. Gentleman, I suppose, has done his best.

And now with regard to this controversy as to the direct taxes. I have long foreseen that this would be discussed. The hon. Member for West Surrey (Mr. Drummond) stated the other night that I was consistent in advocating direct taxation, because I have said that such taxation would not be paid, and that then the public establishments could not be maintained. I have never said the taxes would not be paid. I have always had the opinion of the people of England, that they would pay their just debts under any circumstances; but I have always said this—if you come to get more of the taxes from the people in the way of direct taxes, they will come to scrutinise the expenditure more closely—and I think so still. The House may depend upon it that we are now entering upon a controversy as to how the Imperial taxation is to be raised. When we come to have what the Chancellor of the Exchequer has promised us, the whole of our accounts of the taxation brought into a balance-sheet—even the cost of collection—we shall find that our expenditure is approaching to 60,000,000*l.*; that is, about as much as the annual income from real property in England, and pretty nearly as much as the trades and professions are assessed to the income-tax. You will find that the great body of the people will be galled with the yoke, and that there will be pressure against some particular tax. Take, as an instance, the paper-duties. Since I have been in this House, a gentleman has shown me an American newspaper, printed on paper made out of straw, at an exceedingly low price. Now, the raw material of that paper is worth two guineas; but the tax in this country would be fourteen guineas; and therefore, before a paper-maker in England can manufacture such paper, he must pay upon two guineas' worth of raw material fourteen guineas of taxation. I have also received a letter from Bristol, enclosing specimens of the same paper, and stating that, if it were not for the Excise regulations, the paper could be manufactured in England quite as well as it is in America. Then, besides paper, there is the tax on soap. What an abominable tax is that! Only conceive of an agitation against the Excise duty on soap. Why, the supporters of the tax would have it said of them, that they were the advocates of dirt. Then take the insurance duties. For an insurance from fire to the amount of 100*l.* you pay 1*s.* 6*d.* for the risk, and Government makes you pay 3*s.* for the duty. I will not go over the rest, but their name is legion. But, as they are discussed, you will feel more and more the necessity of resorting to some other mode of taxation. It is not merely that you are competing, but the change in the habits of business renders these [281] obstructions impossible. The greater velocity of business will render them impossible.

Look at your Customs regulations; there has been an agitation about them, and you cannot see the end of the difficulty, except by abolishing customhouses altogether. The late Sir Robert Peel effected a reduction of duties upon a great many articles; and many of us thought that the reduction of Customs duties would cause a great reduction in your Custom-house establishments. But no; you cannot allow articles to pass without examination; if you did, goods that do pay duty would come in in the guise of those that do not. For instance, if you allow cotton bales from America to come in without examination, how soon would these cotton bales be metamorphosed into tobacco bales? Look at the magnitude of your transactions. You are receiving from 25,000 to 30,000 bales of cotton a week, and how difficult it is to examine all of them. How different it was thirty years ago, when you had not as many hundreds!

Then, suppose any other country, such as America, should adopt the system of getting rid of these Custom-house regulations, you must adopt their system. You may make up your minds that, having got rid of protection, with the large mass of taxation hanging over this country, you are entering upon a long controversy on the subject of taxation, in the course of which you will have to deal with many of the duties to which I have referred; and if the growing surplus of the revenue does not enable you to abolish these duties, you will find it necessary, especially in the case of the Excise duties, to increase the amount of direct taxation. When you do that, you must make up your minds to come to a fair and honest system of direct taxation; for there is too much intelligence and discussion in these days for any party to escape his fair share of taxation.

This country is adopting the system of Free Trade, and yet it is extending its colonial empire, and spreading its establishments all over the world; and all the expenses are paid from the taxation of this little speck of an island. That might have been very well a hundred years ago, when Adam Smith had not laid down the law of political economy, but Adam Smith said, seventy years since, that he did not suppose the time would ever arrive when protective duties would be altogether abolished. We have arrived at those days; but they have entirely changed the aspects of your policy with regard to your colonial empire, and you ought to make up your minds to that change. Our colonies must maintain their own establishments. We cannot keep armies in Canada and elsewhere—we cannot afford it. The taxation of this country, which impoverished the people, will drive them to those colonial settlements, where so many inducements to emigration exist.

Twenty-five years hence there will be removed not only many of the physical but other obstacles in the way of emigration. Emigrants can now perform their voyages in one-half the time, and at one-half the expense, they could do five years ago, and they now feel that they are not going into exile, for many of them have friends or families in our own colonies or in America, and they go there as on a visit; but can you suppose, if you allow mismanagement to go on here, that the people will not be eager to go there, to escape the effects of your taxation? That has been the effect of enormous taxation everywhere.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said the other day that this emigration did not tend to impair the consumptive ability of the country. It may be that the emigration of some 200,000 or 300,000 people may not have impaired the national resources; but what will be the effect if one-half of the population of the country quitted its shores? There is every reason why we should look this question in the face, as the beginning of a movement which will widen in its extent and scope.

I wish the House to consider, when the people of this country have so many burdens of taxation to bear, whether you [282] ought to increase the taxation, as has been done already. We have wasted a great deal of money, and our expenditure is much too large; but it is of no use my saying so, because you call me a Quaker if I do. You have added 1,200,000*l.* to your expenditure lately; and while we have this large amount of expenditure, let no man in this country expect to escape from taxation. I will not undertake to exempt the 10*l.* householders from taxation to meet the expenses of our establishments, if they send up to this House Members to vote an increase of those establishments. Already we are spending 16,000,000*l.* in the expenses of our establishments. Then let the middle class make up their minds that they must pay for this.

We are now, however, dealing particularly with the house-tax, which the Government propose to levy to meet the deficiency arising from the reduction of the malt-tax. If they can show me that there is a deficiency arising from an excess of expenditure, and that expenditure is supported by public opinion out of doors, I will lay that tax upon the shoulders of those who have sent Members to this House. But it is an entirely different thing when the

Government propose to create a deficit by reducing the tax upon malt. I say there is no tax I will vote for—I know of no tax I would vote for—in substitution of the malt-tax. It is only in the case of a sufficient surplus that I would vote for the reduction or the abolition of the malt-tax; and that not being the case, I cannot vote for the reduction now proposed.

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**FINANCE. VI.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, APRIL 28, 1853.**

[In December, 1852, Mr. Disraeli brought forward a Budget, the leading feature of which was a relaxation of the malt-duty, and the substitution of an equivalent to it, in a tax on inhabited houses. The Budget was received unfavourably, the Ministry collapsed, and with it the last attempt to maintain agricultural protection. On April 18, 1853, Mr. Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Aberdeen's Administration, proposed his scheme, which contained an extension of the legacy-duty, in a very modified form, to real estate, and the abolition of all duties on 123 articles. It proposed also a gradual abolition of the income-tax. Unfortunately, the aims which Mr. Gladstone had before him were not carried out, for, three days after the Budget resolutions were carried, Prince Menschikoff presented his ultimatum, and those diplomatic negotiations were commenced which ended in the Russian War.]

THE Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his remarkable, nay, his marvellous speech, has dwelt with some emphasis—indeed, with a sort of pathos—on the extent to which the House, by its expenditure, has anticipated the surplus revenue, and the remarks on this subject, I think, have come from the right hon. Gentleman in a tone which seems to invite the special attention of the House to that particular part of his financial statement. I, for my part, rise thus early in the debate with the hope that I may induce the Committee, in taking a review of their public assets and liabilities, in their character of trustees of the people, anxious to do their best for the interests of those who have intrusted them with the management of their affairs, to pay some attention to the mode in which that surplus has been appropriated. I am not going to make a peace oration, nor am I going to blame this Government or the late Government for anything which either has done in the way of expenditure; those I blame in the matter are the parties out of doors, who, by their proceedings, have rendered it almost inevitable that the expenditure I so regret should be incurred. Nay, I will go even further, and thank the noble Lord (Aberdeen) at the head of the Government that he has not taken advantage of the opportunity which many silly and many, I fear, not over-honest people have given him to increase the expenditure still more largely. Had the noble Lord been so disposed, he might, in January last, have proposed an increase to the army of 20,000 men and to the navy of 10,000 men, and his proposal would have been received with acclamations—the unhappy Peace party escaping with, at the very least, a sound drenching under the pump, had they ventured to raise a murmur of objection. None the less is it a matter of deep regret that so large and permanent an increase to our establishments has been forced upon the Government. For how, let me ask, does the matter stand? Since 1851—I do not go back to 1835—since 1851, in two years we have added to our [284] expenditure for army, navy, and ordnance, including the militia, the commissariat, and other outgoings of the same kind, no less a sum than 1,870,000*l.*

What I wish to call the attention of the House to, and particularly that of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. Newdegate), who said that the Manchester school were going to ruin the aristocracy—what I wish to call their attention to is, that if they had not since 1851, in those two years, made this addition to the expenditure, there would be at this moment in the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer a surplus large enough to enable him to make all the remissions and modifications he proposed to make, without any increase of taxation whatever. Do not let the hon. Member for North Warwickshire blame the Manchester school for the increased taxation that he said was going to ruin the aristocracy. I do not for a moment suggest that nothing should be spent on our armaments; I have been

content that 10,000,000*l.* should be appropriated to that purpose; but the point to which I immediately invite attention is that, under the circumstances to which I have adverted, not merely has a sum of 15,555,000*l.* been expended in 1851 on our armaments, but since 1851 a further sum of 1,870,000*l.* has been appropriated to the same purpose. No wonder that, under such circumstances, the Chancellor of the Exchequer should touch in tones of pathos on the state of the surplus.

The cause of all this expenditure has been the panic which the public has taken into its head to conceive of a French invasion. Where is the panic now? So utterly dispersed that I can find no one who will even admit that he has ever entertained such a notion, much less that he feels it now. But, meanwhile, the mischief has been done; the additions to our expenditure have been made, and the public, who is the party to blame in the matter, will find that the additional expenditure it has occasioned will be for years and years to come an extra burden upon it. These additions to our establishments, once made, are not to be got rid of in a day; I will venture to say that the present generation of taxpayers will not altogether get rid of the additions to the taxation that they have been instrumental in creating in the course of the last two years.

Now, what are the items of the Budgets since 1851 for civil purposes, including the debt, and everything else except military and naval expenditure? Let the Committee mark how slightly the amount has varied. In 1851 the expenditure, other than naval and military, was 34,692,000*l.*; in 1852, 34,732,000*l.*; in 1853, 34,738,000*l.*; so that the whole increase on the civil expenditure, including the debt, for all purposes other than naval and military, is only 81,000*l.* on an amount of 34,000,000*l.*; whereas the increase on the naval and military expenditure has been 1,870,000*l.* on an expenditure of 15,000,000*l.*

It must be obvious to every one who wishes to see the policy carried out which the interests of the country demand, that, for this purpose, he must grapple with the naval and military expenditure. What I wish the Committee to take, along with me, from the outset, is the principle that the remission of indirect taxation is inevitable. You may arrive at this result by savings, the growth of a surplus revenue, of retrenchment, of increased revenue, the product of the increased prosperity of the country; but, assuredly, if you eat up such surplus by additions to the naval and military expenditure, you must, perforce, make up the difference by increased direct burdens upon property and income. Whoever holds the reins of power—whoever the Chancellor of the Exchequer may be—whether the right hon. Gentleman below me, or the right hon. Gentleman opposite, or any one else—the inevitable rule must be to aim at the reduction of the Customs and Excise duties, even at the expense of property and income. The right hon. Gentleman opposite, for example, proposes to take off the malttax, an indirect impost, and to meet the loss, so far as he can, by an additional [285] tax on houses, which may fairly be considered a direct impost, and the right hon. Gentleman fell solely in that attempt to find a substitute for the malt-tax. If the present Government, powerful as it is, hardly sees its way to a majority large enough to carry its Budget, its difficulty is the finding of a direct tax sufficient to enable it to reduce indirect taxation.

I wish Gentlemen on both sides of the House to consider that we have come to a time when if they will be extravagant, they must be extravagant at the expense of property, and not at the expense of consumption. In these days, when every man has, at least on his lips, the profession of deep consideration for the poorer classes, it will never do to leave the main burden of taxation on consumption. More and more emphatically is it found that the prosperity of the country depends on the increase of consumption, this means increasing the employment of the masses, and this employment can alone be fostered by the removal of all impediments in the path of industry. These impediments, it must be borne in mind, tended to accumulate with the growth of the population, and therefore it becomes daily more necessary to provide for their removal.

The Committee is well aware of the great and just cry of alarm that has proceeded from our merchants, in consequence of the obstacles placed in the way of commerce by our Custom-house regulations. Those regulations were bad enough when we had to deal with only 30,000,000*l.* or 40,000,000*l.* of exports and imports; they are grievous, utterly insupportable, now that, instead of from 30,000,000*l.* to 40,000,000*l.*, we have to deal with from 70,000,000*l.* to 80,000,000*l.* of exports and imports. Further, it is to be considered how enormously the velocity of communication has increased, so that, by the aid of steam, the traffic which once occupied forty days on its way to America, now effects its transit in twelve. This alone is a circumstance imperatively demanding that measures should be taken, by a reform of the Customs' regulations, to expedite, and most materially to expedite, the entry and exit of goods.

As our fiscal regulations now stand, the free bale of cotton is delayed in its admission, that it may be overhauled so as to be shown to be not a bale of tobacco, which has 3*s.* per pound of duty to pay before it passes. But to effect that change with reference to tobacco, the duty must be reduced to 3*d.* or 6*d.* in the pound, otherwise the object would fail altogether. I hope there will not be such an increase of smoking in this country as to enable the revenue from a 3*d.* or 6*d.* duty to be as much as from a 3*s.* or 4*s.* duty: and the fact is, that there will be a loss of some millions annually. How are you to deal with that, except by increasing direct taxation? But this is not the case with tobacco only, but with other matters. You must make up your minds to a constant remission of these taxes. As was stated last year by the right hon. Member for Buckinghamshire (Mr. Disraeli), every year since 1842 has witnessed the constant remission of these indirect taxes. The right hon. Gentleman has not, indeed, proposed anything of that sort himself; but there is a selfacting process in the sugar-duties which was effecting that change even last year. This will and must go on.

I come now to the practical question before us. There is at present virtually a deficiency; because I look upon the remission of indirect taxes as so inevitable, that, though the right hon. Gentleman has a surplus of 300,000*l.* or 400,000*l.*, yet he is obliged to create fresh taxes in order to meet the imperative demand for the repeal of indirect taxation. The right hon. Gentleman proposes, then, the continuance of the property and income tax; and he has done so with some arguments very elaborate, very able, and, I may say, very subtle. I must observe, that the part of the right hon. Gentleman's speech in which he dealt with the income-tax is, to my mind, the least satisfactory of all. It was the most declamatory, and appeared, as all such appeals did, to be [286] the least conclusive. The right hon. Gentleman began by an allusion to Mr. Pitt, and said, that that tax having served its purpose during the war, it ought therefore not to be used in time of peace. But, surely, it is time that we had done with that argument, because there is always this answer to it—that other taxes did their work also during the war. The Customs and the Excise were during the war, and, if that were any reason, they ought to put by that grant of the Custom-house, as they proposed to do the grant of the income-tax, and let us remain in repose until we had another war. But no one proposed that. Why not? Is there anything intrinsically worse in the income-tax than in the tax upon tea and wine? In what way is it worse? Does it give rise to greater oppression in its incidence? Why, how large a proportion of the income of a poor man's family is spent on the ounce or half-ounce of tea which he buys every two or three days! There is the same duty upon his tea, which might be purchased in the bonded warehouse at 10½*d.* per pound, that there is upon the finest-flavoured pekoe or gunpowder-hyson, that might cost 5*s.* or 6*s.* per pound. Is there anything in the income-tax more unequal in its pressure than that? Take, again, the wine duty. The gentleman's bottle of Lafitte, which might cost him 5*s.* in the cellar of the grower, pays precisely the same duty as the bottle of vin ordinaire, which may be bought in the south of France for 2*d.* Is there anything in the income-tax more unequal or more unjust than that?



In this way I might go through the whole list of excisable articles, and I should find that in the most necessary articles of consumption the poor family approached more nearly to the rich family than in any other thing. When we lay a tax upon commodities which enter into the daily consumption of the poor, we may be sure that the mass of the people pay a far larger sum in proportion to their incomes than the rich.

Well, then, why are we to make an exception with respect to the income-tax as compared with the other great taxes which served Mr. Pitt in the time of war? Is it because it offends the law of political economy—because it takes more from the pockets of the people than arrives at the Exchequer? No. I question whether we might not collect direct taxes cheaper than any indirect taxes. Is it because it impedes industry more than indirect taxation? On the contrary, however oppressive it might be felt to be upon other grounds, I have never heard that it interfered with the progress of industry, or impeded commerce in any way whatever. Is it the demoralisation that flows from it? Does it produce greater evils than other taxes by demoralising the trader? Does not the levying of the Excise duty produce more demoralisation than any direct tax could possibly do? Let us take, for instance, the case of the tobacco and snuff trade. I remember being present in the Chamber of Commerce in Manchester when a deputation, consisting of a great number of tobacco-manufacturers in Manchester and the neighbourhood, waited upon them to expose the adulterations which were carried on in the trade, and to endeavour to induce the Chamber to interfere to effect some alteration in the duties. Those gentlemen, who were the largest dealers and manufacturers in the neighbourhood, stated frankly—after exposing all the different articles with which tobacco was coloured and adulterated, such as the beard from malt, peatmoss, and things of that kind—that there was not a man in that neighbourhood who carried on the tobacco and snuff trade without illegal adulterations, except Mr. Reed, a gentleman who was present; and Mr. Reed left the trade, and, though he was nearly forty years of age, went to Cambridge, and was now in holy orders. Can you find anything worse than that in the income-tax?

With regard to the criminality arising out of these taxes, let any one go to one of the maritime counties—inquire of the chairman of quarter sessions—go to the gaol at Winchester, or anywhere upon the south coast—and ask what is the [287] number of commitments for smuggling. Let him inquire of the overseers how many children are left destitute and chargeable to the parish, because their parents had fled the country for smuggling. I ask, is there any demoralisation in the income-tax that can be compared with that? The right hon. Gentleman has alluded to the mode of self-assessment as offering temptations to fraud, which are in many cases irresistible. I will suggest whether that might be remedied. I do not see why any one should be called upon to assess himself at all. In America, where direct taxation is levied for all the purposes of the separate States, the taxpayers elect an assessor—an experienced, discreet, sober man of the town or neighbourhood,—and he assesses the value of his neighbour's property. Why should not that system be adopted in England? Then, the assessors having made their assessment, if the party chooses to make oath that he is surcharged, or to produce his books, he would have the same means of redress as in America. The advantage is, that there will be no temptations held out to men to state their property at less than it is.

But there is another thing. It has been found in America that a man has less aversion to an exposure of the amount of his property, when it was known to be only the assessment of others, than he has to expose his own assessment of his property. The consequence is, that you would see, as I have seen in Boston,—I have had the book in my own hands,—a printed list of everybody's assessment in Boston. There is Mr. Abbott Lawrence, for example, figuring away with some 700,000 or 800,000 dollars of personal, and a certain amount of real property. I do not find that there was any grievance complained of there; and, after two or

three years of assessment, you arrive at a much better notion of a man's income than when you take his own return, because the people who are appointed assessors see from time to time the changes that are going on in the establishments, the evidences of prosperity, or the reverse. As a rule, we estimate at its true value what the amount of our neighbour's property is. I think that this deserves the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I hope that it will be taken into consideration by the public at large.

The right hon. Gentleman has stated that he cannot agree to any modification of the income-tax. Now, I believe that there is one fallacy which runs through the right hon. Gentleman's argument upon that subject, which I should have thought could have scarcely escaped so acute a logician. It all amounts to this,—'Don't show me that you can at all diminish the evil; I'll show you that the evil still remains behind, and therefore I will not allow you to touch it.' Admitting the grievance, as I understand the right hon. Gentleman does, can anybody doubt, if you put trades and professions at *5d.*, and real property at *7d.*, that there will not be to some extent a diminution of the injustice? It is true you have terminable annuities besides. It is true that when you come to deal with them and with life-interests, the actuaries may bring you an arithmetical puzzle, which will never work in practice, however well it may look on paper. But the right hon. Gentleman has not told them that they will not be doing some good by mitigating at least the evil which he has admitted. I have no hesitation in confessing, as the result of my experience in the Committee, that there are greater difficulties in the question than I had expected. I have no hesitation in saying so. I went into this question seven or eight years ago, with great confidence as to the practicability of effecting all that was required, but I have found that I was wrong; and my hon. friend, also the Member for Stoke-upon-Trent, who is a great deal deeper in these mysteries than I am, admitted the same thing. But I cannot say that the right hon. Gentleman has shown good grounds for doing nothing; for, if we were to determine upon doing nothing until we arrived at perfection, why [288] then I am afraid that we must put an end to all sublunary things.

Now, there is one matter with respect to my votes on the income-tax which I think requires a little explanation. In 1842, I resisted Sir R. Peel's attempt to impose the income-tax, and for this avowed reason,—that you were retaining the monopoly on corn, that you were refusing to deal with the sugar-duties, that you were therefore destroying the revenue, and that at the same time you wished him to join in imposing a tax in order to repair the mischief which you were committing. I would act in the same way to-morrow if I were in the same circumstances. In 1848, I voted for Mr. Horsman's motion for a modification; but I voted against my hon. friend's the Member for Montrose's motion, to levy the income-tax only for a year, in order that he might have a committee. That I did upon the avowed ground that my hon. friend wanted to unite himself with gentlemen on the other side of the question, and that he did not want to modify, but to abolish the tax, while he (Mr. Cobden) wished to preserve the tax. My hon. friend, however, ultimately obtained his committee, and I cannot say that harm has resulted from it. Having taken that course in times past, I have the income-tax now presented to me again without modification by a Government which I believe will stand or fall by the declaration that they will not agree to any modification. I have at the same time presented to me another portion of the Budget, which I believe goes far to redress the inequality which existed in the old income-tax, and which is a bold and honest proposal. Whatever might be the fate of the Budget, the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, at all events, have earned for themselves the merit of straightforward and honest conduct, by dealing with that which defeated Mr. Pitt in the plenitude of his power, and which no one had attempted to deal with since—I mean the legacy-duty. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman the late Chancellor of the Exchequer was disposed to have recommended that this question should be dealt with. I am quite sure that it would have been dealt with by somebody—that public opinion would have done it; and I must say, looking at the income-tax, coupled with the legacy-duty, and viewing them as the key-stone of the arch of this Budget, I shall take

them both, and shall take them with both hands. Though I myself have spoken as strongly as anybody can speak in this House in favour of the professional man, as well as in the interest of the mercantile and manufacturing community, I am bound to say that I have not found in the north of England any very active opposition to the equal rate of duty laid upon all classes. I believe there is more feeling of resistance and of suffering under the inquisitorial character of the tax among mercantile men and trading capitalists than there is upon the score of the unjust assessment of the tax. I beg that I may not be misunderstood upon this point. I am only speaking for Lancashire and Yorkshire, and I do not wish it to be thought, from what I say, that there is not among traders and professional men elsewhere a strong feeling against this tax. To be very frank upon this subject, I believe that in Lancashire and Yorkshire there is a feeling among the population that a compensation is afforded by the mode in which the surplus gained from the income-tax is disposed of; I mean by the extension of commerce and the freeing of industry from the fetters that bound it. They submit to the income-tax, therefore, without murmuring, partly from the feeling that it is inevitable, and partly from the belief that they receive some compensation in their trades. That will not operate with professional men, or with small traders in rural districts; but I think that the legacy-duty laid upon real property—although I should wish to view that question *per se*, and not as a compensation, though we are made up of checks and compensations in this country—is, if not an equivalent, at [289] least some compensation, to those very classes, the professional and trading people, and ought to tend to reconcile them to the tax in its present form. I think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has acted wisely in extending the tax to incomes of 100*l.* As an advocate for direct taxation, I would, as an abstract principle, levy it upon everybody, where the tax could be collected with a profit. When I say ‘as an abstract principle,’ I am assuming that no other tax existed; but in this country, where so much is already laid upon the mass of the people by indirect taxes, where they paid far more in proportion to their means than the upper classes, it became necessary to compensate them by levying upon the property of those who were richer a direct tax. I do not say that, in the present circumstances of this country, I would propose to levy the income-tax upon all wages; but I think the Chancellor of the Exchequer has acted very wisely in drawing his line at 100*l.* As I have before said, the working people of this country pay a very large amount in indirect taxation. They are sometimes told of the large amount of Customs and Excise which have been remitted; but a great fallacy lurked under that. In point of fact, we had not by that means diminished the taxes upon the working people, but we had been very cleverly and industriously shifting the burden ever since the days of Mr. Huskisson and Mr. Grant. We have taken the load off the head, and put it on the shoulders; or we have been strapping it up under the arms in all kinds of ways, so as to gall less; but the burden was borne just as before. Let me give an illustration of this. The amount of Customs and Excise duties paid in this country in 1831, which was before the Reform Bill, was 35,680,000*l.* The estimates of Customs and Excise for the coming year is 35,320,000*l.*, so that there is only 360,000*l.* less paid now for indirect taxes than in 1831, although during the interval Customs and Excise duties have been repealed to the extent of from 12,000,000*l.* to 15,000,000*l.* per annum. There has been an increase in the population, of course; but that does not affect the question to an extent some people may suppose.

I come now to deal with the question of applying the income-tax to Ireland, which seems to be the great difficulty with the Government upon the present occasion. I hope hon. Gentlemen from Ireland will not suppose that I am anxious to impose any unjust burdens upon them. I am an advocate of religious and fiscal equality to the most perfect point. I have given a proof that, as regards religious equality, whatever might be the odium or passing obloquy which I may suffer from a partial outbreak of bigotry in this country, nothing shall induce me to put a fetter upon the consciences of Roman Catholics. If I could make them so, they should be as free to exercise the practices and observances of their faith in England as if they were to cross the Atlantic and go to the United States. I want the same thing in

commercial and fiscal questions; but there must be a perfect equality between the two. I mean that the taxes which are paid in this country must be paid in the other. I do not want to levy heavy burdens upon either England or Ireland. If I had my will, they should both pay less than they did now. But what I say is, that there is no safety for the proper working of the Legislature so long as there are Members sitting in it from parts of the kingdom where the people paid less taxes than in other parts of the kingdom. I have seen the working of this system for some time, and I will tell the hon. Gentlemen from Ireland what were the symptoms I have observed in consequence of the discrepancy in the amount of taxation. I have observed that the Irish Members take little interest in Imperial expenditure, unless upon some questions where there is a transfer of taxes from the general Exchequer to some locality in Ireland. Hence their fights about that bauble, the Lord-Lieutenancy; hence their fights about Kilmainham Hospital, although it is a mere nest of jobbing. Hon. Gentlemen will [290] allow me to say, that I have had an opportunity of hearing something of Kilmainham, having sat upon a Committee where that matter was brought before us. And, therefore, I speak with some knowledge of the circumstances of the case. What is the reason that no statesman has ever dreamt of proposing that the colonies should sit with the mother country in a common Legislature? It was not because of the space between them, for, now-a-days, travelling was almost as quick as thought; but because the colonies, not paying Imperial taxation, and not being liable for our debt, could not be allowed with safety to us, or with propriety to themselves, to legislate on matters of taxation in which they were not themselves concerned. What happened on the very last occasion on which I addressed myself to the question of the Budget? I followed the hon. Member for Belfast (Mr. Davison), who rose to support a proposition for doubling the house-tax, and laying on an income-tax upon my constituents at Barnsley and Leeds. Those constituents were largely engaged in the linen-trade; the hon. Gentleman's constituents at Belfast were also engaged in the same kind of trade; and the hon. Gentleman got up and declared his intention to vote, that taxes from which his own constituents were free should be laid upon my constituents, at Barnsley and Leeds. But I want to know how that hon. Member is going to vote now? If he were now to vote against putting on a similar tax on his profits at Belfast, I want no better proof that they ought never to allow Members to sit in the same House representing different interests, where they could help a Minister to impose taxes on their neighbours on condition that they were not imposed on themselves. How would the case be if they allowed representatives from the colonies to sit in this House? An ambitious and unscrupulous Minister would be sure to make use of them, if they were not possessed of that virtue which ordinary men have not, for the purpose of oppressing the English people. The Minister would say, 'Help me in such a case, and I'll help you to prevent England from putting some tax on Canada.' The consequence might be, that we should have an irresponsible Government—that we should have constant *coups d'état*, until the people rose and declared for a separation. On the present occasion, the Government, true to the invariable system of compromises, has proposed to grant the Members for Ireland a very large boon indeed, if they will only accept their quota of the income-tax. Now, knowing what I do of the temper of the people out of doors, I will whisper to the hon. Members,—'Close with the bargain, and give the Government your vote.' And why do I say so? Because, if I understand the matter aright, it is proposed to give the Irish almost as much as they asked them to pay. I believe that it is almost an equivalent. But I beg hon. Members for Ireland to look at the exchange, and see how it puts them out of court as the advocates of the poor in Ireland; because, as I understand the matter, the consolidated annuity-tax is levied upon the poor farmers of Ireland. Of course it is levied one-half upon the landlord and one-half upon the tenant, down to those under 5*l.* rent. Now, the class of poor tenants above 5*l.* is to be relieved, according to the proposal of the Government, and an income-tax imposed instead upon all persons having incomes of 100*l.* a year and upwards. Now, I beg hon. Members to remember, that it is only farmers paying 200*l.* a year and upwards of rent who would be liable to pay income-tax; and I will ask them to consider how few farmers there

were in Ireland who have rents to that amount. I believe that 100*l.* a year is considered a very genteel income in Ireland. People there live much cheaper than here; there are no assessed taxes, and provisions are cheaper. Persons with 100*l.* a year in Ireland, then, are quite as well, if not better, able to pay income-tax than people of the same class in England. I have heard a great deal said about the amount of English indebtedness to Ireland, and [291] of Irish indebtedness in Ireland. The hon. Member for South Lancashire (Mr. Brown), himself an Irishman, has estimated that Ireland was in England's debt 300,000,000*l.* The hon. Member for Glasgow (Mr. M'Gregor), who, judging from his name, had some Celtic blood in his veins, has put down the debt at 160,000,000*l.*; while the late Mr. O'Connell has put down the amount the other way, and declared that England is indebted to Ireland 60,000,000*l.* I would say, 'Let the Statute of Limitations apply to both sides. Let Irish Members make up their minds to pay the same taxes as the people of England, and unite with us in advocating retrenchment and economy.' I assure those Members that the thing is inevitable, and that if a dissolution were to take place on the question of the equalisation of taxes—although, no doubt, Ireland would be disposed to avoid taxation, if possible—the thing would be settled without them.

There is another point I wish to refer to, and that is the question respecting licences, which the right hon. Gentleman, I believe, has said is still under consideration. On that question I think the right hon. Gentleman has erred on a matter of principle. I cannot understand on what principle the right hon. Gentleman is going to lay a tax on all traders who deal in tea or tobacco. I can understand why the Excise should require a dealer who sold tea, tobacco, or other articles where surveillance was thought to be necessary, to register themselves, and perhaps pay a nominal fee, but I confess I cannot understand why traders who already pay large taxes should be asked to pay, in addition, an *ad valorem* duty on their rent for licences to carry on their business, and I hope the right hon. Gentleman will alter that part of his plan.

Then, with regard to the advertisement duty, I hope the right hon. Gentleman will not 'make two bites at a cherry' in that matter. I want to see the connection between the press and the Government altogether dissolved. [Laughter.] I know what that laugh refers to. It is an illustration of what I mean to argue. It has been stated that the right hon. Gentleman, in proposing to remit the stamp upon supplements containing only advertisements, would be giving a boon to only one paper; and very free remarks have been passed as to what were his motives in giving that boon to a particular paper. Now, I do not believe the right hon. Gentleman is capable of doing that. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman has with all parties in this House too much credit for sincerity and truthfulness to be supposed capable of being a party to a transaction of this kind; but suspicions are entertained on the subject out of doors,—and how have they arisen? They have arisen because Government were enabled to deal with the tax in a manner which favoured one particular newspaper. And so with the advertisement duty. That also keeps up a connection between the Government and the newspaper press. Certain newspapers want that duty off, and others want it kept on, and Government are tempted to watch and weigh the rival influences, and shape their public course accordingly. I repeat that, in my opinion, the Government should have no connection with the press whatever. I hope, therefore, that if they adhere to their resolution, and deal with the advertisement duty at all, they will abolish it altogether.

And if he deals with the stamp-duty, the right hon. Gentleman must not—as I believe he is now fully aware—deal with it in a manner which would merely favour one newspaper at present, and not more than three or four prospectively. If the right hon. Gentleman should be persuaded by the proprietors of some large provincial newspapers to alter his plans, so as to continue the penny stamp on newspapers—allowing supplements to go free, whether they contain news or advertisements, or both together—he would be falling into an error similar in

character, though not so great in degree, to that into which he fell when he proposed to remit the stamp [292] on supplements which contained advertisements only; because, if he did, there would, at the outside, be only some half-score of newspapers, which were at present in the habit of publishing supplements, which would at all be benefited by it. And how would it act prospectively? It would act in the opposite way to that which the right hon. Gentleman has laid down with regard to licences, for in that case he proposed to levy the tax in proportion to the business which the parties carried on.

But what will be the effect of the plan to which I have just referred with regard to newspapers? It will allow a newspaper twice the size of the *Times* to be published with a penny stamp, while it will impose the same sum of a penny upon the small struggling paper not half the size of one sheet of the *Times*. And I beg hon. Members to mark the effect. The small sheet, having to pay the same tax as the large sheet, will be placed under an immense disadvantage. I have seen in Lancashire, whenever a newspaper publishes a supplement, and gives it to its readers, such is the desire of readers to have a great mass of matter, that all the other papers in the district were obliged also to publish a supplement, or be trampled under foot. If, then, the right hon. Gentleman levies the same stamp upon two sheets as he levies upon one, allowing both news and advertisements to appear in the supplemental sheet, you may depend upon it that the effect will be to destroy all the second and third-rate newspapers. I beg hon. Members opposite to bear this in mind, for I believe that some of the newspapers in their interest are not in the most thriving condition.

I will put this case of the stamp-duty to the test of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's own principles. The right hon. Gentleman said, that if a man kept a gig with two wheels he should pay 15s., but that if he kept a carriage with four wheels he should pay double. But in the case of newspapers he reverses the rule, for he makes the four-in-hand pay only the same tax as a gig. Then, again, with regard to the licensing duty, he proposes an *ad valorem* tax on the rent of a man's shop. If a man happens to have such a prosperous trade that his shop is overflowing with customers, and he is not able to carry on his business on his old premises, does the right hon. Gentleman propose to allow him to open a supplemental shop, and pay only one tax? The question, it will thus be seen, would not bear the test of the right hon. Gentleman's own principles. The right hon. Gentleman must either not touch the stamp-duty at all, or he must be prepared to allow newspapers to be taxed according to weight or size when sent by post, and allow them to be sold on the spot where they are published without a stamp.

With respect to the rest of the Budget, I am glad to find that the soap-duty is to be abolished. That tax has long been a standing reproach on this country. It has marked the hypocrisy of all the pretences to cleanliness, and often, when I have heard of meetings on sanitary reform, I have thought of the soap-tax, and felt ashamed of my country. And so with regard to the paper-duty. You talk of promoting education, and yet here is a tax on the material by which knowledge is conveyed. This, also, will stamp us with hypocrisy on that subject so long as it remains.

I will only add, that I hope this Budget, in its main provisions, will pass this House. I believe, so far as I have had an opportunity of judging, that it is generally acceptable to the country. The imposition of the legacy-tax will remove a sore which has been festering in the minds of the people of this country for a long time. In the interest of the parties concerned, I would say, the sooner that tax was put on the better. I would say, both to the landed gentlemen and the Irish Members, 'Take on your burdens, and it will be the better for you in the end.' I am told that the Members of the other House are looking on with great solemnity. There, they are in possession; but in the House of Commons many hon. Members were only expect [293] ants. I was breakfasting with a gentleman of the diplomatic corps the other morning; the conversation was in French, and my host said it was very easy to explain why

the Chamber of Peers would be favourable to the tax, and the Commons not: because the one is a *Chambre des Pairs (Pères)*, and the other is a *Chambre des Fils*.

There is another point which I wish to allude to before I sit down. I want to be very honest with the House about the income-tax. They are told that that tax was to continue till 1860 only. Now, I am sorry that I cannot give my sanction to that idea. My belief is that we must go on remitting indirect taxes; and I should not be honest if I said that I saw any prospect of our being able to do away with the income-tax in 1860. There are certainly but two ways in which it could be done. It could only be done either by substituting some other tax in its place, or by a very large retrenchment in the amount of our expenditure. Some means or other must be found available for the Chancellor of the Exchequer for his meeting the constant demands upon him for the remission of indirect taxes; and I do not see, therefore, how we can afford to part with the income-tax. I do not, however, for a moment doubt the sincerity of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the matter. I am quite sure, that if the right hon. Gentleman is in Parliament in 1860, and holds a responsible position, he will rather give up his office than be a party to anything like a breach of faith. But it is melancholy to think how few of us may be in Parliament in 1860. I hope the right hon. Gentleman and all of us may be alive then; but, even if they are, who can bind the Parliament that will assemble in 1860? I beg, therefore, to be understood as not pledging myself in favour of the abrogation of the income-tax in 1860.

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**FINANCE. VII.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, JULY 22, 1864.** [↩](#)

[The following speech, recommending the reduction or abandonment of Government manufacturing establishments, as impolitic and wasteful, was the last which Mr. Cobden delivered in Parliament.]

I REGRET that, owing to the necessity which lay on many of us to postpone the notices of Motions which we had on the paper a fortnight ago, I was not able to bring this subject earlier under the notice of the House. The question is important, not only in a financial sense, but in its bearings on the defence and security of the nation. In advocating the view that the Government of the country should not undertake to manufacture for itself that which can be purchased from private producers, I am advancing no new doctrine in this House. On the contrary, this has always been the policy of the House, and the opposite system pursued during the last few years has been in defiance of the reiterated expressions of the opinion of Parliament. I might go back to the celebrated speech of Edmund Burke on economical reform, who so long ago as 1780 laid down, in language which it is impossible to surpass, the reasons why the Government should not resort to the manufacture of its own supplies, but should depend on the competition of individual manufacturers. In 1828, before the Reform era, a Committee of the House of Commons put forth a Report, in which there is a paragraph to this effect:—

"The Committee are not disposed to place implicit reliance on the arguments which have been urged by some public departments against contracts by competition, and in favour of work by themselves. The latter plan occasions the employment of a great many officers, clerks, artificers, and workmen, and not only adds to the patronage, but to the appearance of the importance of a department. Nor can the Committee suffer themselves to feel any prejudice against the contract system, by references to some instances of failure. They believe that most cases of failure may be attributed to negligence or ignorance in the management of contracts, rather than to the system itself.

Now here is the gist of all I have to say. I shall only amplify this passage, and in doing so, I hope I shall not be accused of more illiberality towards the officials than was exhibited by the Committee of 1828. On various occasions this question has been partially raised in reference to particular articles, and an exceptional ground has always been alleged why we should give, for some special branch of production, a preference to the Government manufactories. The consequence has been, that step by step the departments have taken upon themselves an immense increase of manufacture. I have asked myself how [295] is it, that while we have for twenty years, in our commercial policy, been acting on the principle of unrestricted competition, believing that that is the only way to secure excellence and stability of production, and when the private industry of the country is more equal than ever it was to the demands of the Government, how is it that the departments have been allowed to raise up these gigantic Government monopolies? I believe it is in consequence of the weakness of the Executive Government. For many years past there has, I fear, been very little control exercised by the Treasury over the various departments of the Government; and the rein being loosened, the heads of departments have taken the power into their own hands, and embarked in vast manufacturing undertakings, contrary, as I cannot but believe, to the intention of this House and the country. The result of my experience is, that there is little use in the House undertaking by Committees to correct the failures of the Executive Government. By interfering in the management of the details of the Government, you infallibly do more



harm than good. You lower the Executive in the estimation of the permanent officials, and you attempt what is impossible, for the departments laugh at the idea of Parliament superintending the details of the administration. Moreover, the Government, by allowing Parliament to attempt to control these details virtually abandons its own duties and responsibilities. During the last few years we have had Committees of this House on ordnance, on plating ships, and on various other branches of Executive administration connected with the safety and defence of the country. In early years of my experience in Parliament, when Sir Robert Peel was Prime Minister, he would have resisted the appointment of such Committees as tantamount to a vote of want of confidence. He would have said, 'If you think the administration is not satisfactorily conducted by me, then you must find somebody else to undertake it.' My view is, that the House can interfere with great advantage in prescribing the principles on which the Executive Government shall be carried on; but beyond that, it is impossible for the Legislature to interfere with advantage in the details of the administration of the country. The principle I advocate is, that the Government should not be allowed to manufacture for itself any article which can be obtained from private producers in a competitive market; and that, if we have entered on a false system in this respect, we ought, as far as possible, to retrace our steps.

To give the House an idea of the extent to which the system of which I complain has grown, I will quote a few figures. In 1849-50, I sat upon a Committee to inquire into the Ordnance, and we found that the whole amount of wages then paid to artificers and labourers in the United Kingdom and the Colonies on the Ordnance Votes was 141,330*l.* This year I find that we have voted in corresponding votes for the wages of our manufacturing establishments, including the clothing factories, a sum of 584,000*l.*, being more than four times the amount of the sum voted in 1849-50. The wages voted for the gun factory at Woolwich this year were 144,000*l.*, which exceeded the wages for all the departments in 1849-50. Down to and including the Crimean war, the British Government never cast an iron cannon, or made shot or shell. Our ordnance was purchased from the Carron Works in Scotland, from the Low Moor Company, or from the Gospel Oak Works of Messrs. Walker. At the outbreak of the Crimean war, my right hon. friend the Member for Limerick (Mr. Monsell) was Secretary to the Ordnance, and I am afraid that I must charge him with having deposited the nest-egg which has produced the pernicious brood of which I am complaining. From the evidence given by the right hon. Gentleman himself, in 1854, I find that he and Captain Boxer, of the Laboratory Department at Woolwich, laid their [296] heads together, and said, 'If we spend 7,000*l.* in putting up machinery, we can make our own fusees, and bouche our own shells.' That was the beginning of those acres of costly machinery which may now be seen at Woolwich. No very long time elapsed before Captain Boxer said, 'We are now prepared for making fusees, and bouching faster than we can get shells; therefore, let us make shells;' and accordingly they laid out 10,000*l.* in the erection of machinery for casting shells and shot. There is a very interesting narrative in the evidence before the Sebastopol Committee, and I find that the right hon. Gentleman was arraigned before that Committee for acting without the consent of his colleagues. I do not blame him for that. We were at war, and he and Captain Boxer displayed a commendable energy; but I mention these facts to show you how establishments of this kind grow. The next step, after setting up machinery for casting shot and shell, was to erect turning and boring machinery for making the guns. It was resolved, that instead of obtaining castiron cannon from the Low Moor Company, they should purchase from that concern solid blocks of iron, and bore and turn them at Woolwich. Another suggestion immediately followed:— 'We had better cast our own guns rather than buy these blocks from Low Moor;' and so the machinery was set up for that. Now came a difficulty. There are, as I have said, but two or three concerns in England from which it is safe to buy ordnance, of which the Low Moor Works are one, and the Gospel Oak Works of Messrs. Walker another. When casting a 68-pounder at Low Moor, they not only take selected qualities of their own iron, good as it is, but they use coal of a particular kind,

fresh from the earth, to smelt it. That firm would not sell pig-iron to the Woolwich establishment, and the result was, that, having got the machinery for casting the guns, there was no iron fit to cast. They went into the market, and purchased the ordinary kind of pig-iron, and they made about 100 guns; but it is believed that not one of the 100 ever went into the service. They were pronounced rotten, and were never used. After 200,000*l.* had been spent in this way, the establishment at Woolwich for casting guns was abandoned.

Then came the second part of the performance. It had become necessary that the Government should obtain a supply of rifled cannon. No sooner did this necessity arise, than there were men of genius, such as Mr. Whitworth, Sir William Armstrong, Captain Blakeley, Mr. Lancaster, and Mr. Lynall Thomas, preparing to supply the want. The reasonable course would have been to have said to these inventors, 'Go on, and improve your system. Manufacture some guns, and to whichever is most successful, we will be your customer.' But the establishment at Woolwich wished to secure the manufacture of rifled ordnance, and those in authority—some of them in very high authority—seem to have lost their heads altogether, and to have gone almost crazy over Sir William Armstrong's gun. An illustrious Duke is reported to have said, that Sir William Armstrong's gun could all but speak; and another eminent officer declared it was equal to anything in the tales of the *Arabian Nights*. I will venture to offer a suggestion. When we have in future to make a choice of ordnance, our high officials in the army should pursue the same course they do when they hold a court-martial—let the younger officers speak first—because, when the Commander-in-Chief utters such an emphatic approbation, it is hardly likely that junior officers will be found to dissent. I would further suggest, that the authorities should in these matters follow the commercial system, and not begin to praise and puff an article before they buy it. The result in this instance was, that Sir William Armstrong—then Mr. Armstrong—resolved to make a present of his patent to the War Office. And a very costly present it was. It was assigned over to the Secretary for War, and an arrangement was entered into, [297] which to this day I can hardly understand. It seems that Sir William Armstrong was to receive, for ten years, a sum of 2,000*l.* a year for superintending the working of the patent. That arrangement was antedated three years, and 6,000*l.* was paid down, upon which he became superintendent of the Royal gun factory, and chief engineer of the rifled ordnance department. A business was set up at Elswick, in Northumberland, by the War Office—an establishment which previously belonged to Sir William Armstrong—and we made advances in a mysterious manner to the extent of 85,000*l.* Immediately afterwards our officials at Woolwich set up a manufactory of the same kind, and they set it up apparently with a view of controlling the price at Elswick. It is most amusing to see the *naïveté* with which the leading men at Woolwich came before the Committee appointed by this House and tried to show that they were producing the gun cheaper at Woolwich than at Elswick, forgetting that the two were one and the same concern; that they were both started by the Government with the nation's capital. The Committee were evidently unable to understand the accounts of the Woolwich factory, and in their report they passed a resolution begging them to amend them. I believe that the right hon. Member for Limerick will admit that this is a fair statement of the origin and progress of the rifled Armstrong gun. It was to be made of wrought-iron, was to be breech-loading, and built up on the coil principle with bars of forged iron. It is no disparagement to Sir W. Armstrong, who is a man of great mechanical genius, to say that the general impression of scientific men has been unfavourable to his invention; unfavourable to the breech-loading principle, and unfavourable to the material of which he proposed to construct his gun. But the point to which I desire to call the especial attention of the House is this, that the Government set up a manufacture, and installed as its head the author and patentee of a particular gun. The consequence was, that Mr. Whitworth, who was then in the field, found that he had virtually to submit his gun to the inspection and approval of his great rival. There were other men as well who were candidates, but I mention Mr. Whitworth especially, because every one who knows him will allow that he is one of the very foremost practical mechanics of the age,

and everybody will admit, that any system which excluded that gentleman from competition, in a matter to which he had devoted his attention, must be a wrong system. It was not merely the mechanics who were thus excluded. The general impression was, and is, that the great problem to solve is not so much a pattern of rifling, or a form of gun, as the material from which a gun is to be made; and we have for the last ten years been travelling in a direction which will no doubt ultimately land us in this position, that we shall have it in our power, whenever we find it advantageous, to apply steel to every purpose for which we now use iron. Mr. Bessemer was in the field with his invention for cheapening steel. We have it in evidence before the Committee on Ordnance, from Capt. Scott, that Mr. Bessemer told him he should have liked the Government to try his principle of homogeneous metal, which he and many others believe will be found better than wrought iron, but that when he found Sir William Armstrong in possession, he gave up the idea. There is also evidence that the Messrs. Walker, of Gospel Oak Works, who produced some of the best cast-iron guns, made the same remark, that, finding Sir William Armstrong in possession, they should abandon the manufacture of guns. Well, a Committee of this House upon Ordnance was appointed, and sat in 1862-3; and I must say, that on reading the details of the evidence taken before it, I was astonished at the levity with which that evidence was allowed to pass into oblivion without having been brought under the notice of the House. I call my right hon. friend the Member for Limerick, who was Chairman of the [298] Committee, to account for the omission; and the other Members of the Committee are not altogether without blame. The evidence adduced before that Committee was of the most important, and even the most portentous character; for it transpired that we had between 2,500 and 3,000 guns upon the principle of Sir William Armstrong; that there is a confessed expenditure of 2½ millions on these guns; but I believe it was very much more; and it was admitted that 100 of these guns, of the largest size, were made before a trial or experiment was entered into. That there may be no cavilling about what the result of that Committee was, I will read a few words. The Duke of Somerset, the head of the Admiralty, in his evidence, said last year:—

'The whole science of gunnery is in a transition state, and when I was this year asked what gun I approved for the navy, I was obliged to say that I really did not know.'

Recollect, this was after nearly 3,000 guns had been made on the Armstrong principle. His Grace also declared that we had nothing better now for close quarters than the old 68-pounder made at the Low Moor Works. And the Committee report—unanimously, I suppose—that the old 68-pounder is, therefore, the most effective gun in the service against iron plates. The Committee finally say:—

'The Armstrong 12-pounders, although stated by some of the witnesses to be too complicated a weapon for service, are generally approved; "but that" the preponderance of opinion seems to be against any breech-loading system for larger guns.'

They recommend that the different systems should be experimented upon. And they also recommend that the accounts of the Woolwich Gun Factory should be kept in a more intelligible manner. ['No.'] These are not their words, but that is their sense. They say they cannot understand the accounts. I would just add a few words from a naval officer who has given considerable attention to this matter. Writing on the 30th of June last, Admiral Halstead thus summed up:—

'The result is, that the largest and most costly fleet of the world, intrusted with the security of the largest maritime empire, has long been presented to all but England's eyes without a gun fit for the special warfare of the day, and with special guns fit for no warfare whatever.'

I ask, is that a satisfactory state of things in which to find ourselves after spending, perhaps, three millions of money, and making nearly 3,000 of these guns? Admiral Halstead, in another letter, calls this 'the great blind jump of 1859.' What has been the result of the Committee? The consequence is, that you have had set up at Shoeburyness a stunning competitive contest between Sir William Armstrong and Mr. Whitworth; and thus, after this vast outlay of public money upon the invention of one of the competitors, you are trying which of the two has got the best gun. There might, however, be some consolation in this, if the Armstrong guns were now really being tried against Mr. Whitworth's; but what is the fact? If I am rightly informed, the original gun which we took up and have got in stock—that is, the service gun—is not the gun which Sir William Armstrong is trying. I am told that the original breech-loader, of which we have nearly 3,000 on hand, has been abandoned in this competition, and that there is another gun, of an improved construction, substituted. I saw it stated in a report of the trial in the *Times* the other day, that the original breech-loader is withdrawn from the competition. That is not a very consolatory circumstance in the condition in which we find ourselves.

I beg the House to consider what is meant when we are told that we have no naval gun. We have 12-pounders for the field, if we chose to go to war in New Zealand or China; but you are not to reckon on the contingency of an enemy landing here to fight you. When I speak of your having no naval guns, I [299] mean guns to fight with. I observe that Captain Cowper Coles talks of the Armstrong 110-pounder as something to do for a chase—or, in nautical phrase, 'to tickle up a runaway.' Now, let us realise the full force of the admission that we have no gun adapted for modern naval warfare. The hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Caird) stated the other day—and we could have no higher authority—that half the people of this country during the last three years have been fed with grain and food brought from abroad. We are in the position of a garrison depending for subsistence upon our communications being kept open. If, after all your expenditure, you have no guns for your ships to contend with against an enemy, do you suppose that your foe would be so foolish as to attempt an invasion with a view of fighting you on land? No; if they had the command of the sea they would blockade us, and starve us into submission. Our life as a nation depends on our having the mastery of our communications by sea. And yet this is the way in which those who govern us take care to keep open our communications.

Well, the whole secret of the failure is this:—The Government do not understand the functions of a buyer; the whole difficulty of their position arises from their not being able to fulfil the duty of a purchaser, in a common-sense and judicious manner. The true course to have pursued with all these scientific men, when they came with their improvements in artillery, was to have encouraged them to go on, and to have promised their custom to the most successful, or, perhaps, a very small amount of help at starting. I believe that Sir W. Armstrong only asked for 12,000*l.* to begin with, and that Mr. Bessemer would have commenced making his steel guns with 10,000*l.*; and I have no doubt that for less than 100,000*l.* the Government might have set half-a-dozen establishments to work, competing for the prize of supplying them with guns. That is a matter which the Government will never comprehend till this House insists that they shall buy their commodities instead of making them. If they are not capable of buying their commodities in the market, do you suppose they are competent to fulfil the far more difficult task of manufacturing them?

I wish to show you the position in which we, as a nation, are placed by these proceedings. We are in danger of seeing foreigners supplied with better armaments than ourselves from our own private workshops. The very individuals whom the Government have rejected and would not have dealings with, have set up manufactories of ordnance for themselves. Mr. Whitworth has founded an ordnance company for the manufacture of guns. I am told that Sir William Armstrong, having closed his connection with the Government at Elswick, and

received 65,000*l.* as compensation, has set up a manufactory of guns at Elswick; and, being no longer connected with the Government, I am told that he is actually manufacturing his 600-pounders for foreign countries. Within a quarter of an hour's drive from this spot I saw, a few days ago, an establishment where steel guns—600-pounders—are being bored; and this firm, which was rejected by the Government, is, I am told, receiving orders for these monster guns by the dozen, while you are in this experimental mood down at Shoeburyness over the 70-pounder and the 110-pounder. I have now said all that I intend to say respecting this gigantic ordnance failure.

Then, as a still further proof of the necessity for the Government to know how to exercise the functions of a buyer, let me refer to small arms as an illustration. Down to about ten years ago, we bought all our muskets from contractors. The Government did not make a rifle even during the Crimean war. I may here remark, that the ordnance supplied during the Crimean war was of a very satisfactory character. The ordnance and small arms were supplied by private contractors to the army and navy, and they were spoken of in the highest terms [300] in the report of the Sebastopol Committee of 1855, which, at the same time, contained condemnations of the commissariat, of the medical, and other departments. As I have said, previous to 1855 we bought our small arms from private contractors. How does the House think the Government managed their purchases? I mention this as an illustration of their incompetency as a buyer. If hon. Members refer to the evidence given before the Small Arms Committee of 1854, they will find that the Government were in the habit of buying their muskets in component parts. They contracted, at Birmingham and Wednesbury and other places, for the stock with one maker, for the barrel with another, for the lock with a third, and so on, until they had about a dozen separate contracts for the component parts of a musket. All those various parts were sent to the Ordnance Depôt, and from that depôt they were given out to a distinct body of contractors, named 'setters-up,' who fitted them together, and made up the musket. Thus they who completed the musket never came into contact with the contractors for the component parts—a system most ingeniously contrived to prevent all improvement. Mr. Whitworth and Mr. Nasmyth, both eminent men, who were examined before the Committee, spoke of the absurdity of this practice, when large capitalists were ready to undertake to supply the completed article. The Government complained that they could not get muskets fast enough, because there were sometimes strikes among the workmen. They were asked, in return, 'Why do you not give orders to capitalists, who will set up machinery for making the entire musket?' and it was shown that the system of contracting for the separate parts multiplied the risk of delays from strikes, because if, for instance, the men struck who made the locks, they put a stop to the supply of the complete musket. The Government, however, could not be made to comprehend this; and what was the remedy they proposed for the grievance of which they complained? Instead of improving their mode of purchasing, they thought it would be easier for them to manufacture muskets, and therefore the Ordnance Department came before the Committee of 1854 with a plan for erecting an enormous Government manufactory of rifled small arms at Enfield. The Committee were decidedly against that project, and I am glad to see present the hon. Member for North Warwickshire, who was a member of that Committee. They said, 'If you wish to see better machinery introduced for the manufacture of small arms, that is one question; but it is quite distinct from the question whether you are to have a Government factory;' and, in their report, they speak decidedly against the Government setting up this enormous establishment, because, they say, you will thereby extinguish private trade, which it would be well to preserve for your future necessities. The result was, that the Government sent to America to procure machinery. Colonel Colt, the American, had been in this country for twelve months at that time, and he had set up his machinery; but the Government, rather than encourage a Birmingham or a London house to enter into the trade to supply them, rushed into what has become the Enfield Rifle Manufactory. That establishment, which then contained sixty or seventy work-people, has since grown into the employment of from 1,200

to 1,500. I am not about to contend that the rifle factory at Enfield has, up to the present time, done its work badly, or that it has not been profitable. If you set up machinery which is almost self-acting, and if you give it constant employment, it is not easy to make a concern otherwise than profitable; but while doing this, you have been driving out of the trade all those who would have set up the manufacture upon an independent and more durable basis. But the future of this establishment cannot be estimated from the past, for what is now becoming the fate of the Enfield factory? You have no longer full work for it, for you cannot continue to make the one pattern which [301] you have been continuously at work upon—the pattern of 1853. A Committee has decided that Mr. Lancaster's rifle is a better weapon; public competition showed that Mr. Whitworth's was superior; and the consequence has been that the noble Lord the Member for Haddingtonshire (Lord Elcho) has moved, in the present session, the rejection of the estimate for making Enfield rifles, because they were of an inferior kind, and therefore the manufacture ought to be suspended. If, then, these rifles are to be discontinued, and others are to be made, you will be confronted with the difficulties which await you in every Government manufactory where you are your own and your only customer. During this transition period, as your production falls off, the cost of each article increases, owing to the larger proportion of the permanent fixed charges which it has to bear. To evade this, and also in order to find employment for your work-people, you will always be liable to the temptation of going on making things which you do not want, in order to employ the people about you, and the result will be that you will be overstocked with articles which your better judgment would induce you not to buy, if you had to purchase them in the market from private producers.

I have said I do not mean to argue that making one article, and having constant employment, this Enfield establishment has not paid itself. But here are the balance-sheets relating to the rifle factory and the gunpowder manufactory adjoining, which have been laid upon the table, and upon which I wish to make one or two observations. I see they are signed 'Hartington,' as Under-Secretary for War; but I would advise the noble Lord not to put his name to any more of these balance-sheets, as I can assure him they would not pass the Bankruptcy Court. They are not creditable to him, and they are still more discreditable to a commercial nation like this, of which he is a representative. I wish to call attention to some facts connected with these balance-sheets. In that which is dated the 31st of March, 1863, it is stated that the articles produced in the year cost at Enfield 199,177*l.*, while if they had been purchased from the trade the cost would have been 356,378*l.*, showing a saving of 157,201*l.* Among the items are 71,590 rifles, for which it was stated the private trade would charge 63*s.* 1*d.* each. Now, a gentleman who is at the head of the trade in Birmingham informs me that a tender was actually made this year to the Government to supply rifles at 50*s.* each, or 13*s.* 1*d.* less than it is said the private trader would charge. Then, again, it is stated that 13,780 short rifles made at Enfield would have cost 94*s.* 7*d.* if bought of the private trade. The same gentleman informs me that a contract was made last January for the Turkish Government, through our War Office, to supply the same weapons at 65*s.* 9*d.*, or 28*s.* 10*d.* less than is said here to be the trade cost. Then there are 13,000 carbines put down as costing 63*s.* 7*d.* in the private trade, but which this gentleman tells me could have been had for 50*s.* The amount of these overcharges upon these three items alone is 75,000*l.* It may be objected that the balance-sheet is for 1862-3, while the prices of the private trade which I have quoted are for this year. I put that point to the gentleman on whose authority I have spoken, and he said the articles might have been had at about the same price last year, if anybody had applied for them.

I find that you can never make the conductors of these Government establishments understand that the capital they have to deal with is really money. How should it be real money to them? It costs them nothing, and, whether they make a profit or a loss, they never find their way into the *Gazette*. Therefore to them it is a myth—it is a reality only to the

taxpayers. Throughout the inquiries before Parliamentary Committees upon our Government manufactories, you find yourself in a difficulty directly you try to make the gentlemen at the head of these establishments understand that they must pay interest for capital, rent for land, [302] as well as allow for depreciation of machinery and plant. There is an immense capital employed in the Enfield Rifle Manufactory. The fixed and floating capital invested in materials, buildings, machinery, and land, appears from the balance-sheet to amount to 350,000*l.* The private manufacturer, of course, in the shape of either rent or interest, would charge himself on the whole of the amount, or if he did not he would soon find himself in the *Gazette*.

There is more than want of self-respect in the departments which publish such accounts. It is an insult and an outrage to private trade to pretend to show by such fallacious balance-sheets how much the articles cost, and how much they would have cost, if they had been bought of private traders, and to make it appear that we have had all these rifles for 199,177*l.*, while if we had bought them of private traders we should have had to pay 356,378*l.*, or 157,201*l.* more. The whole amount of wages paid during the year was 135,700*l.* and we are asked to believe that there has been a saving of 157,201*l.* as compared with what would have been paid to private manufacturers. Now, we all know that for everything but labour the Government go to the same source of supply as private manufacturers do. They have not as yet established coal and iron mines of their own, and for all raw materials they have to go into the market and buy on the same terms as private establishments buy. Yet the Enfield Rifle Factory professes to have saved more than the whole amount spent in wages during the year! We all remember the story of the two gipsies who sold brooms. Says one of them to the other, 'I can't conceive how you afford to sell your brooms cheaper than I do, for I steal all my materials.' 'Ah!' says the other, 'but I steal the brooms ready-made.' Now I should like to know from the noble Marquis (the Marquis of Hartington), whom I shall persist in holding responsible for these accounts, to which he has appended his name, how he manages this great feat of commercial legerdemain.

Turning over two pages in this Report on the Government Factories, I come to the Waltham Abbey Powder Manufactory. That is an establishment with 160 acres of land, upon which they profess to grow wood for their charcoal, with water-power of immense extent, with large buildings for business and for dwellings, and, of course, with a great amount of machinery. Their business is not a large one. They return themselves as having produced in the year 14,526 barrels of powder, which they value at 34,747*l.* Then, after the usual memorandum, that this is exclusive of interest of capital, depreciation of plant, &c., they show that these 14,526 barrels of gunpowder, if supplied by private makers, would have cost 79,933*l.*, so that they have effected for the Government a saving of 45,185*l.*

Now, I say that, for a country calling itself a commercial nation, to have such accounts published and signed 'Hartington,' is monstrous; and it only shows the utter valuelessness of anything that the noble Marquis may say at that table on this subject. The noble Marquis has shown that he possesses too much ability to make these statements on his own authority; but it is clear that he recites anything that is put into his hands, and therefore what he may say at the table is not worth the slightest attention.

Now, let us see how all this is managed. The capital represented by buildings, water-power, machinery, and rolling stock is 300,000*l.*, and no interest is charged on that. The land is worth 20,000*l.*, but there is no item for rent. Nothing is allowed for rates and taxes, and nothing for insurance. Now, I asked a very well-informed gentleman what the custom was in the private trade with regard to the charge for insurance on a gunpowder manufactory. Of course, the Royal Exchange or the Phoenix Company would not like such risks. So I find that private traders are in the habit of allowing about 25 per cent. for insurance. Nothing of the sort is allowed for here. Enough has probably been said to show that the system on

which these Government manufactories are conducted is wholly unsound; that there is an utter absence of responsibility; that there are none of those motives for saving money or avoiding losses which private individuals have; and that, wanting the motives which are necessary for human action, it is impossible that these establishments can be carried on properly.

Let me just touch for a minute upon another matter—the great clothing establishments. Earl De Grey and Ripon, as the head of the War Department, is not only the largest manufacturer of ordnance and of small arms, but he is the most extensive tailor in the world. [Laughter.] You laugh; but all these tailoring transactions are carried on in his name, and he is responsible for everything. [Laughter.] You laugh at the idea that Lord De Grey should overlook all these details; but is it not a serious thing for the country to have an immense business of this kind carried on virtually without control? About ten years ago, the system of clothing the army was changed, and, instead of clothing-colonels, we had clothing by contract. For a few years that system continued, and the right hon. Gentleman (General Peel) introduced an improvement in the purchasing department. Down to this time the custom was to contract for the clothing by piecemeal, getting the buttons, braiding, and clothing separately; but the gallant officer had contracts made for the whole garment. We were told in evidence before the Army Organisation Committee by the gallant officer, by the Commander-in-Chief, and by another witness, that the system worked very well. But there was a plot all this while to divert the manufacture of army clothing from private makers into the hands of Government officials. The plot was stealthily carried out. A small establishment was first set up at Woolwich for making clothes for the Artillery and Engineers. That establishment was to go no further. Then a small manufactory was started at Vauxhall for making clothing for the Guards.

As one more illustration of the fallacious grounds on which these Government manufactories are established, I will give a brief extract from the evidence given before the Committee on Contracts, which sat in 1858, by Sir Benjamin Hawes, then permanent Under Secretary at the War Office—and we all know that a permanent official often knows more than his chief. He handed in what he was told to give as the cost price of a soldier's garment. There happened to be a man of business on the Committee—my hon. friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyne (Mr. Jackson)—and he, mistrusting the calculation, took the subject in hand, and cross-questioned the witness:—

'You have given the Committee the actual cost to the Government of the clothing and the making of the clothing for one man?—Yes. Independent of all departmental charges and so forth?—Yes. These charges would be plus salaries?—Yes. Plus interest of capital?—Certainly. Plus rent?—Certainly. Plus damage, and every other contingency?—Yes. And carriage, and ink, and pens and paper, and all necessaries for conducting the business?—Yes. Therefore that is not a fair return of what it costs the nation, because, if you have to pay those charges in addition, those prices are not the actual cost to the country?—They are not. So that the return is a fallacious one?—It is not a complete one.'

I will read another extract from the evidence of the same witness. In justice to my late friend, Sir Benjamin Hawes, I must add that he never contemplated the creation of a Government clothing establishment on its present gigantic scale. Alluding to the manufactory of clothing for the Guards, which had been established the previous year at Vauxhall, he recommended only a slight extension of the factory, so as to supply a regiment or two of the Line. He is asked—

'As I understand you, it is not proposed that that establishment should be extended [304] so far as to make all the clothing for the army, but only a portion of the clothing of certain regiments, in order to give you a test as to the price?—



Certainly; I hope never to see a great Government establishment for clothing the army. The more such establishments are used for the purpose of obtaining information and obtaining models the better; but I look with some apprehension upon all great Government establishments.... It is very desirable that a Government establishment should produce the minimum, and the private trade of the country should produce the rest.'

At the very time this evidence was being given, when the House would have refused to sanction a large extension of the clothing establishment, the plot was all laid for getting into the hands of the War Department the manufactory of the clothing of the whole army, with a slight exception. An enormous building has been erected at Pimlico—put up, I believe, upon most costly ground, the item of ground-rent being between 2,000*l.* and 3,000*l.* a year—and they now make there the clothing of every regiment, and manufacture everything, with the exception of the tunics, for about fifty battalions, which comprise, perhaps, one-tenth of the whole supply of clothing for the army; I suppose this exception is maintained in order to enable the noble Marquis to tell this House that the department has not a monopoly. The accounts rendered of this Clothing Department are most fallacious. I find that about 15,000*l.* a year for fixed charges and interest of money have never been brought into the account at all, and that there is no allowance for rates and taxes. Taking into consideration the waste and fraud to which an establishment for a trade like that is so peculiarly susceptible, when the materials used are cut up into pieces, I must say that it is one of the most unwise and injudicious undertakings that could have been entered into.

I have already said, you never find with respect to those establishments that anything is put down for rates, taxes, lighting, or charges of that kind. There is a fallacy in this. If the tailoring business is carried on by the Government, somebody else is deprived of it, who would have paid rates and taxes, including the income-tax. Let us suppose the extreme case, that all the manufactures of the country were carried on by the Government, and that they were all exempt from taxation, how would the Chancellor of the Exchequer get his revenue?

I now come to the management of the Royal Dockyards, to which the remarks I have made apply with greater force than to any other department. We have had repeated debates on that subject, and Committees and Commissions have reported on it without end. The tendency of our debates during the last few years has been to prevent, if possible, the Admiralty from continuing to make things which we knew were of no use—to prevent them from building wooden ships, when everybody knew that iron ships would be wanted—and great three-deckers, when all scientific men were aware that they would be mere slaughter-houses, if opposed to modern combustible missiles. What, in the mean time, has been the tendency of the Admiralty! The heads of the dockyards have been endeavouring to counteract Parliament by securing votes for timber in every possible way, and even by buying timber with money voted for iron ships, in order that, having the timber on hand, there may be an excuse for using it for the purpose of building obsolete vessels of war.

I have spoken plainly with respect to the right hon. Member for Droitwich (Sir John Pakington) and the noble Lord the Secretary of the Admiralty, and I hardly know which to blame the most for bringing in Estimates which they must have known entailed an improper waste of money. If I blame the noble Lord most, it is because I know that he knew better. But, after all, there is probably something to be said on the other side. If you will have these enormous establishments employed for one customer only, you are always in [305] danger, in seasons of transition, of having a great number of workpeople thrown out of employment. This operates on the feelings of humane men, who are responsible for their subsistence, and induces them, under the guidance of their feelings, and against their better judgment, to manufacture articles which ought not to be made at all. There is no doubt that we have been spending millions of money on the construction of valueless vessels, and that you have from

fifty to a hundred great wooden ships which ought never to have been in existence, and will never be of any use, but which were in great part built because you have a system which compels you to find employment for your men. If, instead of being builders, you had been buyers of ships, does any one suppose that you would have purchased one of those useless and obsolete wooden vessels? I speak to hon. Gentlemen on the other side of the House in the confidence that they will co-operate with me on this occasion. They are said to favour large votes for the military and naval services. But no party in the House is interested in the waste of public money on these establishments. They find me but little disposed to vote money for the army and navy; but I am always for paying the men well, and I would give them more money than they get now, though I should certainly be satisfied with fewer of them; but you cannot indulge in more liberality towards the men while you tolerate the waste and extravagance of keeping up these large manufacturing establishments; for all these charges come under the head of Army and Navy, and swell up, in the eyes of the country, the amount expended on the services.

I wish to ask why we should not take advantage of the present time, when passing from wooden ships to iron ships, and do with the hulls of vessels what you do with your marine steam-engines—buy them, keeping up the Government dockyards only, as far as might be wanted, for repairs. Where would be the risk or inconvenience from such a change? Do you think that the ship-builders in private yards could not perform the work as satisfactorily as the Admiralty? There are, I believe, at this moment upwards of 500,000 tons of shipping building in private yards; and during the last year there have been building in this country fifteen ships of war, of an aggregate of nearly 40,000 tons, for the Governments of the following countries:—Denmark, Italy, Spain, Russia, Turkey, China, Prussia, Peru, Portugal, and two rams supposed for the Confederate States. With the exception of a small vessel of 500 tons, which is of wood, all these ships, I am told, are being built of iron. Do you suppose that the private builders, who are constructing ships to this enormous extent, cannot build the hulls of your vessels of war? Why, you already procure from private manufacturers the most important part of your steamers, that which requires the greatest skill and the most reliable probity in its production. You get your steam-engines wholly from private establishments. I remember sitting on a Committee upon the Navy in 1848, when we were just in time to prevent the Government Dockyards from commencing the construction of steam-engines. The rule laid down, and ever since acted upon, was, that the Admiralty should repair their engines, but not make them. This has been found to succeed most admirably; it is the only branch of your naval construction about which you never hear any complaint. No Committees of this House have been called for, no blue-books have been required, for improving the construction of marine steam-engines. The difficulties in the dockyards have been in connection with the building of the hulls of ships. Why should not the plan which has worked so well with the engines be equally applicable to ships? This is a most opportune time for making the change, just when the armour-clad vessels are coming into use. At the present moment you have no means of making iron-plates for the armour-ships, but I have no doubt that, if the House [306] permitted, the authorities of the dockyards would get up plans for having iron rolled in those establishments.

There is an old plea for maintaining these Government establishments on a small scale, upon the ground that you may be able to manufacture a little, so as to serve as a test and a check upon contractors. Such a course might have been to some extent unobjectionable formerly, when there were few competitors; but we live now in a time when such a check is unnecessary; for are not great shipbuilders, great gun-makers, and large tailoring establishments, better checks upon each other, through the force of competition, than you can possibly be upon them? If the accounts in the Government establishments are honestly made out, then you will find that the Government, carrying on a small business without the usual motives for economy, produces things at a very dear rate, and the contractors will expect to

be paid at this price, which you say should be the model one. If, on the other hand, the accounts are made out like those to which I have referred, and private producers are expected to compete on such terms, then every respectable manufacturer will throw aside the invitations for contracts with disgust and scorn, and refuse to have anything to do with such departments. But is not the fact of the perfect success of your marine engines, without any such check as is proposed, a sufficient answer to this plea? Surely, the great waste which we know to have been so long taking place is a sufficient motive for a change. I was talking the other day to an eminent practical shipbuilder on this subject, and this is the substance of what he told me:—

'There has been expended in wages to artificers, naval stores, for the building, repairing, and outfitting of the fleet, steam machinery, and ships built by contract, new works, improvements, and repairs in the yards, from 1859 to 1863 inclusive (five years), 24,350,000*l.* Taking into account the values of all the iron-clads built and building, and giving a large sum for useless constructions of wooden ships, and making a liberal allowance for equipment and repairs, still there will be left more than ten millions out of the above sum, for the expenditure of which a private shipbuilder could assign no rational purpose.'

I remember the noble Lord the Secretary to the Admiralty saying, some time back, that he could not trace several millions of the Estimates in any results to be discovered in the dockyards, and I suppose my friend the shipbuilder has been engaged in a similar search.

It has been said, that if we retain the powers of production in our Government establishments, and a war breaks out, we shall have the means of bringing all these powers to bear on the preparation of our armaments. There is, I think, a great deal more to be said on that score, in favour of my plan of giving the work to private establishments. If our private shipbuilders were employed by our own as well as by foreign Governments, then we should have a dozen or a score of large firms engaged in constructing ships of war, not only for ourselves, but for half the world. In the same way, if the Government merely kept the factory at Woolwich for repairs, or let it, and gave orders to private houses for the supply of their artillery and ammunition, you would have half-a-dozen or half-a-score, as the case might be, of great establishments producing these articles for our own and foreign Governments. In the present very low state of civilisation, in which no country feels itself safe, particularly if a weak Power, but when, fortunately for humanity, there is a principle developing itself in mechanical science, which gives a great advantage to those who act on the defensive, especially against an aggressor from a distance, I am inclined to think there would be constantly a very great demand for munitions of war by foreign countries—South America, for instance, Japan, and others, who would arm themselves, in order to be safe against attack. And I am not prepared to say they would not do well in thus arming themselves, because the stronger a Power is, the [307] less temptation does it offer to outrage. What, then, if you pursued the course I recommend, would be your position? In case of a war breaking out, you could prohibit the exportation of ships of war and munitions of war, and you would be instantly put in exclusive possession of the whole of the resources of all the private establishments which were previously working, not for you alone, but for foreign Powers as well; while, on the other hand, the foreign Governments would find themselves cut off from the supplies on which they had been relying. I can imagine no contrivance by which you could place yourself in so advantageous and economical a state of preparation for war as this.

There is, however, another reason why the two systems of partially manufacturing for yourself as a Government, and partly purchasing from private traders, will not harmonise. The heads of your manufacturing departments must virtually be the buyers of such commodities as their departments want. Colonel Dickson, the head of your rifle manufactory at Enfield, or somebody under him, practically makes all the purchases of small arms; and

there have been repeated complaints from Birmingham of the unfairness of a rival manufacturer being constituted the 'viewer' of the rifles supplied by private contract. At Woolwich, there was an extraordinary example of this state of things, when Sir William Armstrong had to judge the quality of the productions of his competitors. The head of a manufacturing department has always an interest in giving a preference to his own productions or inventions, and disparaging those of outside rivals. There was the case, for instance, of Captain Cowper Coles's turret ship. That was the invention of an outside man; and there is no doubt there has been an unseen, but a felt reluctance on the part of the dockyard people, to carry it out speedily. I live near Portsmouth, and have myself observed what has been going on. It is nearly four years since Captain Coles proposed his plan to the Government. It is more than two years since they began to cut down and plate the *Royal Sovereign*, in order to convert it into a turret ship. In the mean time, Mr. Reed comes into power. I will not say a word in disparagement of that gentleman. I have no doubt he is a man of talent. We, who sometimes complain of routine, have no right to object to an outside man stepping into a high place in the service on account of his assumed abilities. Mr. Reed, however, must be more than a man, he must be an angel, if he did not feel that his importance and value at the head of the construction department of the Navy would be enhanced by his producing something which should be better than Captain Cowper Coles's invention, and should be completed earlier. So he sets to work on the *Research*. I am no authority on these matters; but I hear an universal opinion that Mr. Reed's immovable square battery is anything but an improvement on Captain Cowper Coles's revolving turret. The world have decided that question, as is shown by the course taken in America, and by the orders received here from foreign countries. But what are the facts? Mr. Reed's vessel, the *Research*, though designed later than that of Captain Cowper Coles, was launched and at sea considerably in advance of the *Royal Sovereign*. Now, I am not making any attack on individuals; I am only illustrating the working of a system. If, instead of a construction department in your dockyards, you had a buying department, then Mr. Reed, or Admiral Robinson, or whoever were the heads of it, would seek out such men as Captain Cowper Coles, or the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Laird), and confer with them, would look abroad and avail themselves of inventions and improvements as they arose, without any feelings of rivalry arising from their own personal interest as inventors.

Before I conclude, I must impress on the House the absolute necessity there is for a thorough reform of the buying department of the Government. Do not call it a contract department. That is the old name which was used as an excuse [308] for ignorance and incompetency, when officials gave out contracts according to a red-tape rule, taken, perhaps, from a pigeon-hole where it had lain for fifty years, and scarcely to be understood by the modern manufacturer. If a firm was doing a prosperous business with private customers, it would have nothing to say to such a contract, and it went to some one who had nothing better to do, and who hoped he might possibly make something of it. A person sent me from Manchester a copy of the specification for a tender for tarpauling, in which the most minute particulars were set forth in a tone of dictation, that, if it were not ludicrous from its ignorance, would be really insulting to any respectable manufacturer. It was just such a circular as a man of large business would throw into his waste-paper basket; and it contained a requirement that the canvas should be sent for inspection before being tarred. So that, as my correspondent said, he was expected to send all the canvas from Lancashire to London, and then to convey it back again; when, if it had been required that a strip should have been left untarred, it would have answered the purpose. Why should they not have devised a means for clearing off part of the tar themselves? This is a specimen of the way in which the Government contracts are entered into. I would have all that altered. But my plan involves no disparagement of the services of those able men now in your employ; you will want all the brains you have in your constructing department for your buying department. I have no doubt that Colonel Boxer, Mr. Reed, and the other heads of the different manufacturing

departments, would make most excellent buyers. If they are not competent for that, I would employ men who are, and I would pay them on a far higher scale than you pay the heads of your departments, for you cannot have men fit to be trusted to go into the market and buy things in the way in which they ought to be bought, unless they are placed in a position to be above all temptation. Therefore, I would have men of the utmost capacity; but I should lay down this condition, and insist upon it—that if you cannot in England buy what you want, it is you yourselves who are to blame, and not the producers of the country. England is now sending abroad 150,000,000*l.* sterling worth of productions every year. There is not a shilling's worth of that produce that would be bought here if it could be obtained better and cheaper elsewhere, and yet it continues to be bought in larger quantities every year. If you hear anything disparaging to our modern mode of conducting business, that such and such articles are not made so strong and durable as they were at former times, laugh at all such shallow criticisms. The manufacturers here produce for others just what they wish to buy, although, in consequence of the more rapid changes of fashion, it is certainly not the habit of our daughters to wear silk dresses of the strength which were worn by their grandmothers. Then I say, that if in a country which produces every year 150,000,000*l.* sterling of manufactured articles for exportation, the Government fail to obtain the 10,000,000*l.* or 15,000,000*l.* sterling worth of goods which they want, be assured that it arises entirely from their incapacity to buy them. You must have men selected for their ability to buy the commodities you want. If you consult such great wholesale houses as Leaf's and Morrison's in the City, whose buyers purchase millions' worth of articles in the course of the year, they will tell you at once, 'We can do with comparatively inferior men to sell our goods, but we get the best men we can to buy them.'

I will conclude with a remark in reference to the present state of our armaments. When I consider what has been done in the Armstrong guns, and our armaments generally, I regard it as a deep discredit to the Government of the country, and of itself it ought to compel a change in the system. You have invited this disgraceful state of things by undertaking to do that which you ought never to have attempted. [309] We are governed in this country—I do not use the word invidiously—by a class, and it is a very narrow class indeed, which forms the *personnel* of our Administrations. I do not complain of that, inasmuch as our manufacturing and trading community do not seem disposed to educate their sons to compete for the prizes of official life; but I wish you to bear in mind, that by such a neglect and mismanagement as you have fallen into in regard to your artillery and ships, you may produce the most serious consequences. I know of nothing so calculated some day to produce a democratic revolution, as for the proud and combative people of this country to find themselves, in this vital matter of their defence, sacrificed through the mismanagement and neglect of the class to whom, with so much liberality, they have confided the care and future destinies of the country. You have brought this upon yourselves by undertaking to be producers and manufacturers. I advise you in future to place yourselves entirely in dependence upon the private manufacturing resources of the country. If you want gunpowder, artillery, small arms, or the hulls of ships of war, let it be known that you depend upon the private enterprise of the country, and you will get them. At all events, you will absolve yourselves from the responsibility of undertaking to do things which you are not competent to do, and you will be entitled to say to the British people, Our fortunes as a Government and nation are indissolubly united, and we will rise or fall, flourish or fade together, according to the energy, enterprise, and ability of the great body of the manufacturing and industrious community.

## Endnote↩

[1] 'Ruck,' in the Lancashire dialect, means 'heap'; they put it on all in a heap, or all at once.



**SPEECHES ON QUESTIONS OF PUBLIC POLICY  
VOLUME TWO**

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EDITED BY JOHN BRIGHT & J. E. THOROLD ROGERS  
WITH A PREFACE AND APPRECIATION BY J. E.  
THOROLD ROGERS AND AN APPRECIATION  
BY GOLDWIN SMITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

T. FISHER UNWIN: LONDON, ADELPHI TERRACE  
LEIPSIK, INSELSTRASSE 20. MCMVIII



Richard Cobden 1849

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# WAR.

[310]

## RUSSIAN WAR. I. HOUSE OF COMMONS, DECEMBER 22, 1854.↩

[On Dec. 12, the Duke of Newcastle (War Secretary), introduced a Bill, the object of which was to raise a force of 15,000 foreigners, who were to be drilled in this country. The Bill was opposed by the Conservative party, as impolitic and dangerous, but was finally carried, with very little alteration, by 38 votes, on Dec. 22 (163 to 135). Little more than a month after this, the Aberdeen Government resigned, in consequence of an adverse vote of the House of Commons on Mr. Roebuck's motion of Jan. 29.]

If I ask permission to enlarge a little the scope of our discussion, I have, at all events, this excuse, that the subject-matter more technically before the House has been very ably and fully discussed. There is another reason why the question may be viewed in a more general way, as affecting the conduct of the Government in carrying on the war and conducting negotiations, namely, that we have heard several hon. Members publicly declare that they refuse to entertain the matter now before the House on its merits, but persist in voting, in respect to it, contrary to their own opinions, and simply as a question of confidence in the Government. I must say, among all the evils which I attach to a state of war, not the least considerable is, that it has so demoralising a tendency as this on the representative system. We are called on to give votes contrary to our conscience, and to allow those votes to be recorded where the explanation would not often appear to account for them. It was stated the other night, by the noble Lord (John Russell) the Member for the City of London, that proposals for peace had been made on the part of Russia, through Vienna, upon certain bases, which have been pretty frequently before the world under the term of the 'Four Points.' Now, I wish to draw attention to that subject; but, before I do so, let me premise, that I do not intend to say one word with respect to the origin of this unhappy war. I intend to start from the situation in which we now find ourselves, and I think it behoves this House to express an opinion upon that situation.

I avow myself in favour of peace on the terms announced by Her Majesty's Ministers. At all events, hon. Members will see the absolute necessity, if the war is to go on, and if we are to have a war of invasion by land against Russia, of carrying it on in a different spirit and on a different scale from that in which the operations have hitherto been conducted. I think both sides of the House occupy common ground in this respect; for we shall all recognise the propriety and necessity of discussing this important and critical question. Before I offer an opinion on the desirability of concluding peace on these four points, it will be [311] necessary to ask, what was the object contemplated by the war? I merely ask this as a matter of fact, and not with a view of arguing the question. It has been one of my difficulties, in arguing this question out of doors with friends or strangers, that I rarely find any intelligible agreement as to the object of the war. I have met with very respectable and well-educated men, who have told me that the object of the war was to open the Black Sea to all merchant-vessels. That, certainly, could not be the object, for the Black Sea was already as free to all merchant-vessels as the Baltic. I have met with officers who said that the object was to open the Danube, and to allow the ships of all nations to go up that river. The object, certainly, could not be that, for the traffic in the Danube has, during the last twenty years, multiplied nearly tenfold, and the ships of all nations have free access there. I have heard it stated and applauded at public meetings, that we are at war because we have a treaty with the Sultan,

binding us to defend the integrity and independence of his empire. I remember that, at a most excited public meeting at Leicester, the first resolution, moved by a very intelligent gentleman, declared that we were bound by the most solemn treaties with the Sultan to defend the integrity and independence of the Turkish empire. Now, Lord Aberdeen has even ostentatiously announced in the House of Lords—for the instruction, I suppose, of such gentlemen as I have referred to—that we had no treaty before the present war binding us to defend the Sultan or his dominions. Another and greater cause of the popularity of the war out of doors has been, no doubt, the idea that it is for the freedom and independence of nations. There has been a strong feeling that Russia has not only absorbed and oppressed certain nationalities, but is the prime agent by which Austria perpetuates her dominion over communities averse to her rule. I should say that this class was fairly represented by my lamented and noble Friend the late Member for Marylebone, from whom I differed entirely in reference to his views on the question of interference with foreign countries, but for whose private virtues and disinterested conduct and boundless generosity I have always entertained the greatest veneration and respect. The late Lord Dudley Stuart for twenty years fairly represented the popular feeling out of doors, which was directed especially against the Emperor of Russia, and the popular sympathies, which were centred mainly on those territories which lie contiguous to the Russian empire. I used sometimes to tell that noble Lord, jocularly, that his sympathies were geographical—that they extended to all countries, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, bordering on Russia—that if the Poles, Hungarians, Moldavians, or Wallachians were in trouble or distress, he was sure to be, in this House, the representative of their wrongs; or if any unhappy individuals from those countries were refugees from oppression in this country, they were sure to go instantly to him for relief and protection. Lord Dudley Stuart represented a great amount of public sympathy in this country with respect to nationalities, as it is termed; but I ask, whether the ground on which the public impression is founded—that we are going to war to aid the Poles, Hungarians, Moldavians, or Wallachians—has not been entirely delusive; and whether it may not be ranked with the other notions about opening the Black Sea, or a treaty with the Sultan, and about the Danube not being free to the flags of all nations?

I ask, whether all these grounds have not been equally delusive? The first three grounds never had an existence at all; and, as to setting up oppressed nationalities, the Government certainly never intended to go to war for that object. To set myself right with those hon. Gentlemen who profess to have great regard for liberty everywhere, I beg to state that I yield to no one in sympathy for those who are struggling for freedom in any part of the world; [312] but I will never sanction an interference which shall go to establish this or that nationality by force of arms, because that invades a principle which I wish to carry out in the other direction—the prevention of all foreign interference with nationalities for the sake of putting them down. Therefore, while I respect the motives of those gentlemen, I cannot act with them. This admission, however, I freely make, that, were it likely to advance the cause of liberty, of constitutional freedom, and national independence, it would be a great inducement to me to acquiesce in the war, or, at all events, I should see in it something like a compensation for the multiplied evils which attend a state of war.

And now we come to what is called the statesman's ground for this war: which is, that it is undertaken to defend the Turkish empire against the encroachments of Russia—as a part of the scheme, in fact, for keeping the several States of Europe within those limits in which they are at present circumscribed. This has been stated as a ground for carrying on the present war with Russia; but, I must say, this view of the case has been very much mixed up with magniloquent phraseology, which has tended greatly to embarrass the question. The noble Lord the Member for the City of London was the first, I think, to commence these magniloquent phrases, in a speech at Greenock about last August twelvemonths, in which he spoke of our duties to mankind, and to the whole world; and he has often talked since of this

war as one intended to protect the liberties of all Europe and of the civilised world. I remember, too, the phrases which the noble Lord made use of at a City meeting, where he spoke of our being 'engaged in a just and necessary war, for no immediate advantage, but for the defence of our ancient ally, and for the maintenance of the independence of Europe.' Well, I have a word to say to the noble Lord on that subject. Now, we are placed to the extreme west of a continent, numbering some 200,000,000 inhabitants; and the theory is, that there is great danger from a growing eastern Power, which threatens to overrun the Continent, to inflict upon it another deluge like that of the Goths and Vandals, and to eclipse the light of civilisation in the darkness of barbarism. But, if that theory be correct, does it not behove the people of the Continent to take some part in pushing back that deluge of barbarism? I presume it is not intended that England should be the Anacharsis Clootz of Europe; but that, at all events, if we are to fight for everybody, those, at least, who are in the greatest danger, will join with us in resisting the common enemy. I am convinced, however, that all this declamation about the independence of Europe and the defence of civilisation will by-and-by disappear. I take it for granted, then, that the statesman's object in this war is to defend Turkey against the encroachments of Russia, and so to set a barrier against the aggressive ambition of that great empire. That is the language of the Queen's Speech. But have we not accomplished that object? I would ask, have we not arrived at that point? Have we not effected all that was proposed in the Queen's Speech? Russia is now no longer within the Turkish territory; she has renounced all idea of invading Turkey; and now, as we are told by the noble Lord, there have been put forward certain proposals from Russia, which are to serve as the bases of peace.

What are those proposals? In the first place, there is to be a joint protectorate over the Christians by the five great Powers; there is to be a joint guarantee for the rights and privileges of the Principalities; there is to be a revision of the rule laid down in 1841 with regard to the entrance of ships-of-war into the Bosphorus, and the Danube is to be free to all nations. These are the propositions that are made for peace, as we are told by the noble Lord; and it is competent for us, I think, as a House of Commons, to offer an opinion as to the desirability of a treaty on those terms.

[313]

My first reason for urging that we should entertain those proposals is, that we are told that Austria and Prussia have agreed to them. Those two Powers are more interested in this quarrel than England and France can be. Upon that subject I will quote the words of the noble Lord the Member for Tiverton, uttered in February last. The noble Lord said,—

'We know that Austria and Prussia had an interest in the matter more direct and greater than had either France or England. To Austria and Prussia it is a vital matter—a matter of existence—because, if Russia were either to appropriate any large portion of the Turkish territory, or even to reduce Turkey to the condition of a mere dependent State, it must be manifest to any man who casts a glance over the map of Europe, and who looks at the geographical position of these two Powers with regard to Russia and Turkey, that any considerable accession of power on the part of Russia in that quarter must be fatal to the independence of action of both Austria and Prussia.'

I entirely concur with the noble Lord in his view of the interest which Austria and Prussia have in this quarrel, and what I want to ask is this—Why should we seek greater guarantees and stricter engagements from Russia than those with which Austria and Prussia are content? They lie on the frontier of this great empire, and they have more to fear from its power than we can have; no Russian invasion can touch us until it has passed over them; and is it likely, if we fear, as we say we do, that Western Europe will be overrun by Russian barbarism—is it likely, I say, that since Austria and Prussia will be the first to suffer, they will not be as

sensible to that danger as we can be? Ought we not rather to take it as a proof that we have somewhat exaggerated the danger which threatens Western Europe, when we find that Austria and Prussia are not so alarmed at it as we are? They are not greatly concerned about the danger, I think, or else they would join with England and France in a great battle to push it back. If, then, Austria and Prussia are ready to accept these proposals, why should not we be? Do you suppose that, if Russia really meditated an attack upon Germany—that if she had an idea of annexing the smallest portion of German territory, with only 100,000 inhabitants of Teutonic blood, all Germany would not be united as one man to resist her? Is there not a strong national feeling in that Germanic race?—are they not nearly 40,000,000 in number?—are they not the most intelligent, the most instructed, and have they not proved themselves the most patriotic people in Europe? And if they are not dissatisfied, why should we stand out for better conditions, and why should we make greater efforts and greater sacrifices to obtain peace than they? I may be told, that the people and the Government of Germany are not quite in harmony on these points. [Cheers.] Hon. Gentlemen who cheer, ought to be cautious, I think, how they assume that Governments do not represent their people. How would you like the United States to accept that doctrine with regard to this country? But I venture to question the grounds upon which that opinion is formed. I have taken some little pains to ascertain the feeling of the people in Germany on this war, and I believe that if you were to poll the population of Prussia—which is the brain of Germany—whilst nineteen-twentieths would say that in this quarrel England is right and Russia wrong; nay, whilst they would say they wished success to England as against Russia, yet, on the contrary, if you were to poll the same population as to whether they would join England with an army to fight against Russia, I believe, from all I have heard, that nineteen-twentieths would support their King in his present pacific policy.

But I want to know what is the advantage of having the vote of a people like that in your favour, if they are not inclined to join you in action? There is, indeed, a wide distinction between the existence of a certain opinion in the minds of a people and a determination to go to war in support of that opinion. [314] I think we were rather too precipitate in transferring our opinion into acts; that we rushed to arms with too much rapidity; and that if we had abstained from war, continuing to occupy the same ground as Austria and Prussia, the result would have been, that Russia would have left the Principalities, and have crossed the Pruth; and that, without a single shot being fired, you would have accomplished the object for which you have gone to war. But what are the grounds on which we are to continue this war, when the Germans have acquiesced in the proposals of peace which have been made? Is it that war is a luxury? Is it that we are fighting—to use a cant phrase of Mr. Pitt's time—to secure indemnity for the past, and security for the future? Are we to be the Don Quixotes of Europe, to go about fighting for every cause where we find that some one has been wronged? In most quarrels there is generally a little wrong on both sides; and, if we make up our minds always to interfere when any one is being wronged, I do not see always how we are to choose between the two sides. It will not do always to assume that the weaker party is in the right, for little States, like little individuals, are often very quarrelsome, presuming on their weakness, and not unfrequently abusing the forbearance which their weakness procures them. But the question is, on what ground of honour or interest are we to continue to carry on this war, when we may have peace upon conditions which are satisfactory to the great countries of Europe who are near neighbours of this formidable Power? There is neither honour nor interest forfeited, I think, in accepting these terms, because we have already accomplished the object for which it was said this war was begun.

The questions which have since arisen, with regard to Sebastopol, for instance, are mere points of detail, not to be bound up with the original quarrel. I hear many people say, 'We will take Sebastopol, and then we will treat for peace.' I am not going to say that you cannot take Sebastopol—I am not going to argue against the power of England and France. I might

admit, for the sake of argument, that you can take Sebastopol. You may occupy ten miles of territory in the Crimea for any time; you may build there a town; you may carry provisions and reinforcements there, for you have the command of the sea; but while you do all this, you will have no peace with Russia. Nobody who knows the history of Russia can think for a moment that you are going permanently to occupy any portion of her territory, and, at the same time, to be at peace with that empire. But admitting your power to do all this, is the object which you seek to accomplish worth the sacrifice which it will cost you? Can anybody doubt that the capture of Sebastopol will cost you a prodigious sacrifice of valuable lives; and, I ask you, is the object to be gained worth that sacrifice? The loss of treasure I will leave out of the question, for that may be replaced, but we can never restore to this country those valuable men who may be sacrificed in fighting the battles of their country—perhaps the most energetic, the bravest, the most devoted body of men that ever left these islands. You may sacrifice them, if you like, but you are bound to consider whether the object will compensate you for that sacrifice.

I will assume that you take Sebastopol; but for what purpose is it that you will take it, for you cannot permanently occupy the Crimea without being in a perpetual state of war with Russia? It is, then, I presume, as a point of honour, that you insist upon taking it, because you have once commenced the siege. The noble Lord, speaking of this fortress, said:—'If Sebastopol, that great stronghold of Russian power, were destroyed, its fall would go far to give that security to Turkey which was the object of the war.' But I utterly deny that Sebastopol is the stronghold of Russian power. It is simply an outward and visible sign of the power of Russia; but, by destroying Sebastopol, you do not by any means destroy that power. You [315] do not destroy or touch Russian power, unless you can permanently occupy some portion of its territory, disorder its industry, or disturb its Government. If you can strike at its capital, if you can deprive it of some of its immense fertile plains, or take possession of those vast rivers which empty themselves into the Black Sea, then, indeed, you strike at Russian power; but, suppose you take Sebastopol, and make peace to-morrow; in ten years, I tell you, the Russian Government will come to London for a loan to build it up again stronger than before. And as for destroying those old green fir ships, you only do the Emperor a service, by giving him an opportunity for building fresh ones.

Is not the celebrated case of Dunkirk exactly in point? In 1713, at the treaty of Utrecht, the French King, under sore necessity, consented to destroy Dunkirk. It had been built under the direction of Vauban, who had exhausted his genius and the coffers of the State, in making it as strong as science and money could make it. The French King bound himself to demolish it, and the English sent over two Commissioners to see the fortress thrown to the ground, the jetties demolished and cast into the harbour, and a mole or bank built across the channel leading into the port; and you would have thought Dunkirk was destroyed once and for ever. There was a treaty binding the King not to rebuild it, and which on two successive occasions was renewed. Some few years afterwards a storm came and swept away the mole or bank which blocked up the channel, by which accident ingress and egress were restored; and shortly afterwards, a war breaking out between England and Spain, the French Government took advantage of our being engaged elsewhere, and rebuilt the fortifications on the seaside, as the historian tells us, much stronger than before. The fact is recorded, that in the Seven Years' War, about forty years afterwards, Dunkirk, for all purposes of aggression by sea, was more formidable than ever. We had in that case a much stronger motive for destroying Dunkirk than we can ever have in the case of Sebastopol; for in the war which ended in the peace of Utrecht, there were 1,600 English merchant-vessels, valued at 1,250,000*l.*, taken by privateers which came out of Dunkirk.

Then, again, in the middle of the last century, we destroyed Cherbourg, and during the last war we held possession of Toulon; but did we thereby destroy the power of France? If we could have got hold of some of her fertile provinces—if we could have taken possession of her capital, or struck at her vitals, we might have permanently impoverished and diminished her power and resources; but we could not do it by the simple demolition of this or that fortress. So it would be in this case—we might take Sebastopol, and then make peace; but there would be the rankling wound—there would be a venom in the treaty which would determine Russia to take the first opportunity of reconstructing this fortress. There would be storms, too, there, which would destroy whatever mole we might build across the harbour of Sebastopol, for storms in the Black Sea are more frequent, as we know, than in the Channel; but even if Sebastopol were utterly destroyed, there are many places on the coast of the Crimea which might be occupied for a similar purpose.

But then comes the question, Will the destruction of Sebastopol give security to the Turks? The Turkish Empire will only be safe when its internal condition is secure, and you are not securing the internal condition of Turkey while you are at war; on the contrary, I believe you are now doing more to demoralise the Turks and destroy their Government than you could possibly have done in time of peace. If you wish to secure Turkey, you must reform its Government, purify its administration, unite its people, and draw out its resources; and then it will not present the spectacle of misery and poverty that it does now. Why, you yourselves have [316] recognised the existing state of Turkey to be so bad, that you intend to make a treaty which shall bind the Five Powers to a guarantee for the better treatment of the Christians. But have you considered well the extent of the principle in which you are embarking? You contemplate making a treaty by which the Five Powers are to do that together which Russia has hitherto claimed to do herself. What sort of conclusion do you think disinterested and impartial critics—people in the United States, for instance—will draw from such a policy? They must come to the conclusion that we have been rather wrong in our dealings with Russia, if we have gone to war with her to prevent her doing that very thing which we ourselves propose to do, in conjunction with the other Powers. If so much mischief has sprung from the protectorate of one Power, Heaven help the Turks when the protectorate of the Five Powers is inaugurated! But, at this very moment, I understand that a mixed Commission is sitting at Vienna, to serve as a court of appeal for the Danubian Principalities; in fact, that Moldavia and Wallachia are virtually governed by a Commission representing Austria, England, France, and Turkey.

Now, this is the very principle of interference against which I wish to protest. From this I derive a recognition of the exceptional internal condition of Turkey, which, I say, will be your great difficulty upon the restoration of peace. Well, then, would it not be more statesmanlike in the Government, instead of appealing, with clap-trap arguments, to heedless passions out of doors, and telling the people that Turkey has made more progress in the career of regeneration during the last twenty years than any other country under the sun, at once to address themselves to the task before them—the reconstruction of the internal system of that empire? Be sure this is what you will have to do, make peace when you may; for everybody knows that, once you withdraw your support and your agency from her, Turkey must immediately collapse, and sink into a state of anarchy. The fall of Sebastopol would only make the condition of Turkey the worse; and, I repeat, that your real and most serious difficulty will begin when you have to undertake the management of that country's affairs, after you withdraw from it, and when you will have to re-establish her as an independent State. I would not have said a word about the condition of Turkey, but for the statement twice so jauntily made about her social progress by the noble Lord the Member for Tiverton. Why, what says the latest traveller in that country on this head? Lord Carlisle, in his recent work, makes the following remarks on the state of the Mahometan population, after describing the improving condition of the Porte's Christian subjects:—

'But when you leave the partial splendours of the capital and the great State establishments, what is it you find over the broad surface of a land which nature and climate have favoured beyond all others, once the home of all art and all civilisation? Look yourself—ask those who live there—deserted villages, uncultivated plains, banditti-haunted mountains, torpid laws, a corrupt administration, a disappearing people.'

Why, the testimony borne by every traveller, from Lamartine downwards, is, that the Mahometan population is perishing—is dying out from its vices, and those vices of a nameless character. In fact, we do not know the true social state of Turkey, because it is indescribable; and Lord Carlisle, in his work, says that he is constrained to avoid referring to it. The other day, Dr. Hadly, who had lately returned from Turkey, where he had a near relation, who had been physician to the Embassy for about thirty-five years, stated in Manchester that his relative told him that the population of Constantinople, into which there is a large influx from the provinces, has considerably diminished during the last twenty years,—a circumstance which he attributes to the indescribable social vices of the Turks. Now, I ask, are you doing anything to promote habits of self-reliance or self-respect among this people by going to war in their behalf? [317] On the contrary, the moment your troops landed at Gallipoli, the activity and energy of the French killed a poor pacha there, who took to his bed, and died from pure distraction of mind; and from that time to this you have done nothing but humiliate and demoralise the Turkish character more than ever. I have here a letter from a friend, describing the conflagration which took place at Varna, in which he says, it was curious to see how our sailors, when they landed to extinguish the fire in the Turkish houses, thrust the poor Turks aside, exactly as if they had been so many infant-school children in England. Another private letter, which I recently received from an officer of high rank in the Crimea, states:—

'We are degrading the Turk as fast as we can; he is now the scavenger of the two armies as far as he can be made so. He won't fight, and his will to work is little better; he won't be trusted again to try the former, and now the latter is all he is allowed to do. When there are entrenchments to be made, or dead to be buried, the Turks do it. They do it as slowly and lazily as they can, but do it they must. This is one way of raising the Turk; it is propping him up on one side, to send him headlong down a deeper precipice on the other.'

That is what you are doing by the process that is now going on in Turkey. I dare say you are obliged to take the whole command into your own hands, because you find no native power—no administrative authority in that country; and you cannot rely on the Turks for anything. If they send an army to the Crimea, the sick are abandoned to the plague or the cholera, and having no commissariat, their soldiers are obliged to beg a crust at the tents of our men. Why, Sir, what an illustration you have in the facts relating to our sick and wounded at Constantinople of the helpless supineness of the Turks! I mention these things, as the whole gist of the Eastern Question lies in the difficulty arising from the prostrate condition of this race. Your troops would not be in this quarter at all, but for the anarchy and barbarism that reign in Turkey.

Well, you have a hospital at Scutari, where there are some thousands of your wounded. They are wounded Englishmen, brought there from the Crimea, where they have gone 3,000 miles from their own home, to fight the battles of the Turks. Would you not naturally expect, that when these miserable and helpless sufferers were brought to the Turkish capital, containing 700,000 souls, those in whose cause they have shed their blood would at once have a friendly and generous care taken of them? Supposing the case had been that these wounded men had been fighting for the cause of Prussia, and that they had been sent from the frontiers of that country to Berlin, which has only half the population of Constantinople, would the ladies of the former capital, do you think, have allowed these poor creatures to

have suffered from the want of lint or of nurses? Does not the very fact that you have to send out everything for your wounded, prove either that the Turks despise and detest, and would spit upon you, or that they are so feeble and incompetent as not to have the power of helping you in the hour of your greatest necessity? The people of England have been grossly misled regarding the state of Turkey. I am bound to consider that the noble Lord the Member for Tiverton expressed his honest convictions on this point; but certainly the unfortunate ignorance of one in his high position has had a most mischievous effect on the public opinion of this country, for it undoubtedly has been the prevalent impression out of doors, that the Turks are thoroughly capable of regeneration and self-government—that the Mahometan population are fit to be restored to independence, and that we have only to fight their battle against their external enemies in order to enable them to exercise the functions of a great Power. A greater delusion than this, however, I believe, never existed in any civilised State.

Well, if, as I say is the case, the unanimous testimony of every traveller, German, French, English, and American, for the last twenty years, attests the decay and helplessness of the Turks, [318] are you not wasting your treasure and your men's precious lives before Sebastopol, in an enterprise that cannot in the least aid the solution of your real difficulty? If you mean to take the Emperor of Russia eventually into your counsels—for this is the drift of my argument—if you contemplate entering into a quintuple alliance, to which he will be one of the parties, in order to manipulate the shattered remains of Turkey, to reconstitute or revise her internal polity, and maintain her independence, what folly it is to continue fighting against the Power that you are going into partnership with; and how absurd in the extreme it is to continue the siege of Sebastopol, which will never solve the difficulty, but must envenom the State with which you are to share the protectorate, and which is also the nearest neighbour of the Power for which you interpose, and your efforts to reorganise which, even if there be a chance of your accomplishing that object, she has the greatest means of thwarting! Would it not be far better for you to allow this question to be settled by peace, than leave it to the arbitrement of war, which cannot advance its adjustment one inch?

I have already adduced an illustration from the history of this country, as an inducement for your returning to peace. I will mention another. We all remember the war with America, into which we entered in 1812, on the question of the right of search, and other cognate questions relating to the rights of neutrals. Seven years before that war was declared, public opinion and the statesmen of the two countries had been incessantly disputing upon the questions at issue, but nothing could be amicably settled respecting them, and war broke out. After two years of hostilities, however, the negotiators on both sides met again, and fairly arranged the terms of peace. But how did they do this? Why, they agreed in their treaty of peace not to allude to what had been the subject-matter of the dispute which gave rise to the war, and the question of the right of search was never once touched on in that treaty. The peace then made between England and America has now lasted for forty years; and what has been the result? In the mean time, America has grown stronger, and we, perhaps, have grown wiser, though I am not quite so sure of that. We have now gone to war again with a European Power, but we have abandoned those belligerent rights about which we took up the sword in 1812. Peace solved that difficulty, and did more for you than war ever could have done; for, had you insisted at Ghent on the American people recognising your right to search their ships, take their seamen, and seize their goods, they would have been at war with you till this hour, before they would have surrendered these points, and the most frightful calamities might have been entailed on both countries by a protracted struggle.

Now, apply this lesson to the Eastern question. Supposing you agree to terms of peace with Russia, you will have your hands full in attempting to ameliorate the social and political system of Turkey. But who knows what may happen with regard to Russia herself in the way of extricating you from your difficulty? That difficulty, as respects Russia, is no doubt very



much of a personal nature. You have to deal with a man of great, but, as I think, misguided energy, whose strong will and indomitable resolution cannot easily be controlled. But the life of a man has its limits; and certainly, the Emperor of Russia, if he survive as many years from this time as the duration of the peace between England and America, will be a most extraordinary phenomenon. You can hardly suppose that you will have a great many years to wait before, in the course of nature, that which constitutes your chief difficulty in the present war may have passed away. It is because you do not sufficiently trust to the influence of the course of events in smoothing down difficulties, but will rush headlong to a resort to arms, which never can solve them, that you involve yourselves in long and ruinous wars. I never was of opinion that you had any reason to dread the aggressions of Russia upon any other State. If you have a [319] weak and disordered empire like Turkey, as it were, next door to another that is more powerful, no doubt that tends to invite encroachments; but you have two chances in your favour—you may either have a feeble or differently-disposed successor acceding to the throne of the present Czar of Russia, or you may be able to establish some kind of authority in Turkey that will be more stable than its present rule. At all events, if you effect a quintuple alliance between yourselves and the other great Powers, you will certainly bind Austria, Prussia, and France to support you in holding Russia to the faithful fulfilment of the proposed treaty relating to the internal condition of Turkey. Why not, then, embrace that alternative, instead of continuing the present war? because, recollect that you have accomplished the object which Her Majesty in her gracious Speech last session stated that she had in view in engaging in this contest. Russia is no longer invading the Turkish territory; you are now rather invading Russia's own dominions, and attacking one of her strongholds at the extremity of her empire, but, as I contend, not assailing the real source of her power. Now, I say you may withdraw from Sebastopol without at all compromising your honour.

By-the-by, I do not understand what is meant, when you say that your honour is staked on your success in any enterprise of this kind. Your honour may be involved in your successfully rescuing Turkey from Russian aggression; but, if you have accomplished that task, you may withdraw your forces from before Sebastopol without being liable to reproach for the sacrifice of your national honour.

I have another ground for trusting that peace would not be again broken, if you terminate hostilities now. I believe that all parties concerned have received such a lesson, that they are not likely soon to rush into war again. I believe that the Emperor of Russia has learnt, from the courage and self-relying force displayed by our troops, that an enlightened, free, and self-governed people is a far more formidable antagonist than he had reckoned upon, and that he will not so confidently advance his semi-barbarous hordes to cope with the active energy and inexhaustible resources of the representatives of Western civilisation. England also has been taught that it is not so easy to carry on war upon land against a State like Russia, and will weigh the matter well in future before she embarks in any such conflict.

I verily believe that all parties want to get out of this war—I believe that this is the feeling of all the Governments concerned; and I consider that you have now the means, if you please, of escaping from your embarrassment, notwithstanding that some Members of our Cabinet, by a most unstatesmanlike proceeding, have succeeded in evoking a spirit of excitement in the country which it will not be very easy to allay. The noble Lord the Member for London, and the noble Lord the Member for Tiverton, have, in my opinion, ministered to this excited feeling, and held out expectations which it will be extremely difficult to satisfy.

Now, what do you intend to do if your operations before Sebastopol should fail? The Secretary-at-War tells us that 'Sebastopol must be taken this campaign, or it will not be taken at all.' If you are going to stake all upon this one throw of the dice, I say that it is more than the people of England themselves had calculated upon. But if you have made up your minds that you will have only one campaign against Sebastopol, and that, if it is not taken then, you

will abandon it, in that case, surely, there is little that stands between you and the proposals for peace on the terms I have indicated.

I think you will do well to take counsel from the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Layard), than whom—although I do not always agree with him in opinion—I know nobody on whose authority I would more readily rely in matters of fact relating to the East. That hon. Gentleman tells you that Russia will soon have 200,000 men in the Crimea; and if this be so, and this number is only to be ‘the beginning,’ [320] I should say, now is the time, of all others, to accept moderate proposals for peace.

Now, mark, I do not say that France and England cannot succeed in what they have undertaken in the Crimea. I do not set any limits to what these two great countries may do, if they persist in fighting this duel with Russia's force of 200,000 men in the Crimea; and, therefore, do not let it be said that I offer any discouragement to my fellow-countrymen; but what I come back to is the question—what are you likely to get that will compensate you for your sacrifice? The hon. Member for Aylesbury also says, that ‘the Russians will, next year, overrun Asiatic Turkey, and seize Turkey's richest provinces’—they will probably extend their dominion over Asia Minor down to the sea-coast. The acquisition of these provinces would far more than compensate her for the loss of Sebastopol. I suppose you do not contemplate making war upon the plains in the interior of Russia, but wish to destroy Sebastopol; your success in which I have told you, I believe, will only end in that stronghold being rebuilt, ten years hence or so, from the resources of London capitalists. How, then, will you benefit Turkey—and especially if the prediction is fulfilled regarding Russia's overrunning the greater portion of Asiatic Turkey? I am told, also, that the Turkish army will melt away like snow before another year; and where, then, under all these circumstances, will be the wisdom or advantage in carrying on the war?

I have now, Sir, only one word to add, and that relates to the condition of our army in the Crimea. We are all, I dare say, constantly hearing accounts, from friends out there, of the condition, not only of our own soldiers, but also of the Turks, as well as of the state of the enemy. What I have said about the condition of the Turks will, I am sure, be made as clear as daylight, when the army's letters are published and our officers return home. But as to the state of our own troops, I have in my hand a private letter from a friend in the Crimea, dated the 2nd of December last, in which the writer says,—

‘The people of England will shudder when they read of what this army is suffering—and yet they will hardly know one-half of it. I cannot imagine that either pen or pencil can ever depict it in its fearful reality. The line, from the nature of their duties, are greater sufferers than the artillery, although there is not much to choose between them. I am told, by an officer of the former, not likely to exaggerate, that one stormy, wet night, when the tents were blown down, the sick, the wounded, and the dying of his regiment, were struggling in one fearful mass for warmth and shelter.’

Now, if you consult these brave men, and ask them what their wishes are, their first and paramount desire would be to fulfil their duty. They are sent to capture Sebastopol, and their first object would be to take that strong fortress, or perish in the attempt. But, if you were able to look into the hearts of these men, to ascertain what their longing, anxious hope has been, even in the midst of the bloody struggle at Alma or at Inkerman, I believe you would find it has been, that the conflict in which they were engaged might have the effect of sooner restoring them again to their own hearths and homes. Now, I say that the men who have acted so nobly at the bidding of their country are entitled to that country's sympathy and consideration; and if there be no imperative necessity for further prosecuting the operations of the siege, which must—it will, I am sure, be admitted by all, whatever may be the result—be necessarily attended with an immense sacrifice of precious lives—unless, I say, you can

show that some paramount object will be gained by contending for the mastery over those forts and ships, you ought to encourage Her Majesty's Government to look with favour upon the propositions which now proceed from the enemy; and then, if we do make mistakes in accepting moderate terms of peace, we shall, at all events, have this consolation, that we are erring on the side of humanity.

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[321]

**RUSSIAN WAR. II.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, JUNE 5, 1855.** [↪](#)

[On March 15, 1855, an attempt was made to restore peace, by assembling the representatives of the principal European Powers in Vienna, with a view to finding a basis for negotiations. It was believed that the prospects of peace were brighter since the death of the Emperor Nicholas (March 2). The chief object of the Conference was to limit the naval force of Russia in the Black Sea. But to this Prince Gortschakoff, who represented Russia, would not agree, and the negotiations broke down. The Conference sat till April 26, and the dissolution of the Conference was announced on June 5. The house was engaged in debating two resolutions: one of Sir Thomas Baring, which merely regretted the failure of the Vienna negotiations; and another, of Mr. Lowe, which averred that the refusal of Russia to restrict her naval force in the Black Sea, had exhausted the means of suspending hostilities by negotiation. The former motion was agreed to.]

I CONSIDER that the announcement which the noble Lord at the head of the Government has just made, ought not to prevent this House from discussing the important subject now before it; for, whatever may be the result of the division here, certainly there is no other topic which now so much engrosses public attention out of doors. The minority of Members of this House who wish to raise this question, and who belong to what is called the Peace party, have been stigmatised as enemies of their country, and traitors to the cause in which it is engaged. Why, my impulsive friend the Member for Lambeth (Mr. Wilkinson), and others who followed him, if they had at all read the recent history of this country, would have been ashamed of the charges they have made, because of their very triteness, and because they have at former periods been levelled at men of undoubted patriotism, who were totally undeserving of these reproaches. We know, for example, that it was attributed to Burke, that he had caused the American War, and that distinguished man complained feelingly of having been denounced as an American. We know also that the great Chatham himself did not escape that imputation; and I need not tell the occupants of the Treasury-bench that their illustrious chief in former days, Charles Fox, was ridiculed and denounced in every way as having been the hireling tool of France. In one of Gilray's inimitable caricatures, Fox is represented as standing on the edge of Dover cliffs, with a lantern in his hand, signalling to the French to come over and invade us; and, indeed, we read in Horner's 'Memoirs,' that it was seriously discussed whether Fox was not actually in the pay of France. Therefore I say that hon. Gentlemen who have no facts or imagination of their own on which to base their arguments, ought really to be ashamed to reproduce absurd and calumnious partisan accusations of this kind in such a debate.

[322]

I claim the same standing-ground, in discussing this question of peace or war, as any other hon. Gentleman. I will deal with it as a politician, strictly on the principles of policy and expediency; and I am prepared to assume that wars may be inevitable and necessary, although I do not admit that all wars are so. We, therefore, who took exception to the commencement of this war on grounds of policy, are not to be classed by individual Members of this House with those who are necessarily opposed to all wars whatever. That is but a device to represent a section of this House as advocates of notions so utopian that they must be entirely shut out of the arena of modern politics, and their arguments systematically denied that fair hearing to which all shades of opinion are fairly entitled, no matter from what quarter they may emanate. I say, that we have all one common object in view—we all seek

the interest of our country; and the only basis on which this debate should be conducted is that of the honest and just interests of England.

Now, the House of Commons is a body that has to deal with nothing but the honest interests of England; and I likewise assert that the honest and just interests of this country, and of her inhabitants, are the just and honest interests of the whole world. As individuals, we may act philanthropically to all the world, and as Christians we may wish well to all, and only desire to have power in order to inflict chastisement on the wrong-doer, and to raise up the down-trodden wherever they may be placed; but I maintain that we do not come here to lay taxes on the people for the purpose of carrying out schemes of universal benevolence, or to enforce the behests of the Almighty in every part of the globe. We are a body with limited powers and duties, and we must confine ourselves to guarding the just interests of this empire. We ought, therefore, to cast to the winds all the declamatory balderdash and verbiage that we have heard from the Treasurybench as to our fighting for the liberty and independence of the entire world. You do not seriously mean to fight for anything of the kind; and, when you come to examine the grave political discussions of the Vienna Conferences, you find that the statesmen and noble Lords who worked us into this war, and whipped and lashed the country into a warlike temper by exciting appeals to its enthusiasm, have no real intention to satisfy the expectations which their own public declarations have created. I say, we are dealing with a question affecting the interests of the realm, and one which may be discussed without any declamatory appeals to passion from any part of the House.

I now wish to refer to the speech of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Southwark (Sir W. Molesworth). If there be a right honourable or honourable Gentleman in this House whose opinions I have a right to say I understand, it is the right hon. Baronet. I say most deliberately—and he cannot contradict me—that never in this world was there a speech delivered by any honourable Gentleman so utterly at variance with all previous declarations of opinion as that delivered by the right honourable Gentleman last night. Does the right hon. Gentleman remember a *jeu-d'esprit* of the poet Moore, when dealing, in 1833, with the Whig occupants of those (the Treasury) benches, shortly after they had emerged from a long penance in the dreary wilderness of Opposition, and when the Whigs showed themselves to be Tories when in office? Does he remember the *jeu-d'esprit*?—why, I think he and I have laughed over it, when we have been talking over the sudden conversions of right honourable Gentlemen. The poet illustrated the matter by a story of an Irishman who went over to the West Indies, and, before landing, heard some of the blacks speaking tolerably bad English, whereupon, mistaking them for his own countrymen, he exclaimed, ‘What! black and curly already?’ Now, we have all seen metamorphoses upon those benches—how colours have changed, [323] and features become deformed, when men came under the influence of the Treasury atmosphere; but I must say that never, to my knowledge, have I seen a change in which there has been so deep a black and so stiff a curl. I confess I should very much like to make the right hon. Gentleman read that admirable speech which he delivered, not merely on the great Pacifico debate, when he denounced an intermeddling policy on the part of the noble Lord at the head of the Government, but also the speech which he made in Yorkshire at the time of the threatened rupture with France upon the Syrian question. I wish the right hon. Gentleman could be forced to read to the House the speech he made in the open air to the people of Leeds about going to war for the Mahomedan race, and for the maintenance of its ascendancy in European Turkey. I should like to see the right hon. Gentleman just stand at the table, and to hear him read aloud that speech.

I will now come to the right hon. Gentleman's arguments. The right hon. Gentleman says, the question is now, whether the Government did right in refusing to make peace on the terms proposed by Russia? Now, that, I assert, is not the whole question. The real question which is involved in the debate, and which the House has to decide, is, whether the plan

proposed by the Government was the best and only one that could be desired, and whether the difference between the plan submitted by Russia and that proposed by our Government was such as warranted a recommencement of the war. What is the difference between those propositions? It is the Government of this country that we have to deal with, and shall have to deal with in future. They must be held responsible for the war; they will reap all the glory, if it be successful, and on them must rest the responsibility should it be, unhappily, unsuccessful. What, then, I ask, is the difference between the propositions of the Government and those of Russia? The difference is this—whether Russia shall keep four ships of the line, four frigates, and a proportional number of smaller vessels in the Black Sea; or whether all navies of the world shall have free access to the Black Sea, and Russia be left, like any other country, to have as many ships as she pleases. I will not go over the ground so ably traversed by my right hon. Friend (Mr. M. Gibson), but upon the question of the limitation of force I wish to make one remark. You offer to allow Russia to have four ships of the line, four frigates, and a proportion of smaller vessels. Now, I have been told by a nautical man, fully competent to give an opinion upon such a subject, that if Russia had accepted your terms, had burnt or sunk all her old 74's, and greentimber built ships, and had sent to the United States for four line-of-battle ships of the largest size, fitted with screws, mounting 130 guns of the largest calibre, and for four frigates of that elastic character which the Americans give to their frigates, carrying some 70 or 80 guns of the heaviest calibre, and all those vessels fitted with screws, she would then have possessed a far better and much more powerful navy than ever she had before in the Black Sea. Such a navy would have been more than a match for double the number of ships such as Russia now has in that sea. If that be the case, what injury will you inflict upon Russia—what diminution of naval power will you enforce—what great reduction of force are you going to demand for the protection of Turkey?

I know I may be told, 'Then why did not Russia accede to those terms?' Russia resisted that plan as a point of honour, and not as a question of force; she rejected it on principle. The right hon. Gentleman says, 'If you allow Russia to have free action in the Black Sea, and you are to have free access yourself, then you will be obliged to keep up a large navy and a large peace establishment always to watch Russia.' But suppose Russia had signed her name to a piece of parchment, would [324] you have such implicit faith in her as to reduce your forces to a peace establishment? I would ask the right hon. Gentleman, who, in his inflammatory harangue last night, told us we were to have a six years' war, whether, if the large sums expended in a six years' war were put out at interest, the yearly return would not be more than sufficient to provide a sufficient force to watch Russia in time of peace? No one supposes for a moment that, if you had come to terms with Russia, you were going at once to reduce your war establishment. You will not believe anything which Russia promises. You say, 'It is of no use taking the guarantee of Russia; we must insist on her diminishing the number of her ships in the Black Sea.' And if she did promise to diminish the number, you would not trust her—and, with your present views, properly so.

But when you undertake to maintain the independence of Turkey, you have a task upon your hands which is not to be performed without great expense. It cannot be done without great armaments constantly on the watch over Turkey. You have bound yourselves to the task of maintaining a tottering empire which cannot support itself, and such a task cannot be accomplished without a vast expenditure. You likewise ask for securities. Now I ask the noble Lord the Member for the City of London (Lord John Russell), to hear what the great model of the Whigs in Opposition said upon that subject. Mr. Fox, when the Tories of his day were urging, as the noble Lord is now urging against Russia, that we must have security against future aggressions of France, said:—

'Security! You have security; the only security that you can ever expect to get. It is the present interest of France to make peace. She will keep it, if it be her interest. Such is the state of nations; and you have nothing but your own

vigilance for your security.'

That rule still holds good, and will hold good so long as the world lasts in its present character. I maintain that, whatever parties there be in this House, whether for peace or war, if the majority of this House acknowledges as a duty or a matter of interest or policy, to maintain Turkey against the encroachments of Russia, they can never expect to have a small peace establishment; and, I will say honestly, if we recognise as parts of our policy the sending of armed bodies of land forces to the Continent, into the midst of great standing armies, and into countries where the conscription prevails, I should be a hypocrite if I ever said we could expect to continue what has been the maxim of this country—the maintenance of a moderate peace establishment. If that is to be our recognised policy, we must keep up a large standing army, and place ourselves to some extent on a par with Austria, France, and Russia; and, if we attempt to interfere in Continental politics without such preparations, then, I say, the country is only preparing a most ignominious and ridiculous exposure of weakness.

Is the right hon. Gentleman—who has been equalled by no one in his vituperation of the Emperor of Russia and the Russian Government—aware, as a Cabinet Minister, that the Government has made this country a party to a binding engagement with Russia, to a treaty binding ourselves, in conjunction with Russia, to interfere in the affairs of Wallachia and Moldavia? You, who said last night Russia was without shame, and attributed to her every vile principle, I ask, as a Member of the Cabinet, are you aware that a treaty has already been signed and concluded, so far as can be at present, in which this country binds itself, in conjunction with Russia, Austria, France, and Turkey, to be the guardian of Wallachia and Moldavia; to act with Russia in interfering by force of arms, and, in fact, forming a tribunal which virtually will constitute the Government of Wallachia and Moldavia? I repeat, that by the first protocol, you have bound yourself, in partnership with Russia, to be virtually the governors of Wallachia and Moldavia. I will show [325] you what engagements you entered into with that Government which it suits you for the moment to denounce, because, within forty-eight hours, the newspapers had brought you the news of some imaginary triumph, but which you would slaver with your praise to-morrow, if it suited your purpose. The 7th Article of the first protocol says:—

'In the event of the internal tranquillity of the said Principalities being compromised, no armed intervention shall take place in their territories without being or becoming the subject of agreement between the high contracting parties.

'The Courts engage not to afford protection in the Principalities to foreigners, whose proceedings might be prejudicial either to the tranquillity of those countries, or to the interests of neighbouring States. Disapproving such proceedings, they engage reciprocally to take into serious consideration the representations which may be made on this subject by the Powers, or even by the local authorities.'

So that if the Governor of Bucharest makes a report of some local émeute, you are bound, in conjunction with Russia, to interfere. But what is the conclusion of the protocol? I blushed when I read it, and I believe there are other hon. Gentlemen who share my feelings:—

'On its side, the Sublime Porte will enjoin on the Principalities not to tolerate in their territory foreigners such as above described, nor'—and this is the gist of the article—'to allow the local inhabitants to meddle with matters dangerous to the tranquillity of their own country, or of neighbouring States.'

And the name of 'John Russell' is put at the foot of this protocol, the object of which is to prevent the inhabitants from interfering in matters which may be dangerous to the tranquillity of their own country. Mark the child and champion of revolution when he breathes the air of Vienna. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Layard) cheers these sentiments; he cheers my denunciations of these arrangements; but has my hon. Friend pursued that bold, consistent, and manly course upon this question, which I think, with his declared opinions, he ought to have taken? It is well known that the sympathies of my hon. Friend were in favour of this war, because he believed it would be advantageous to the independence or the good government of such States as Wallachia, Moldavia, and Servia. But has my hon. Friend so little sagacity as not to see that all this waste of blood and treasure has had very different objects? And why has my hon. Friend, seeing what is the tendency of the war—seeing, from these protocols, what is to be its conclusion—not denounced it, since he has declared that a war with such objects as the Government had in view would be a wicked war?

Before the outbreak of the war, I was applied to by some illustrious men, and requested not to oppose it, because, as I was hopefully told, it was likely to tend to the emancipation of the down-trodden communities on the Continent. I gave my opinion upon the subject in writing, more than eighteen months ago, and I would not now change a word of it. I warned those distinguished persons, that if they expected that a war originating in diplomacy, as this war has originated, carried on by enormous regular armies, as this war has been carried on, and having a direction and a purpose given to it by the men who are now at the head of our Government and of the Continental Governments, could by any possibility satisfy their aspirations, they would deceive themselves. I said, my only fear was, that the war would have just the opposite result; that it would strengthen the despotisms they wished to check, and depress still lower the communities they wished to serve. That is the tendency, that is the inevitable destiny of this war. But to revert to my right hon. Friend (Sir W. Molesworth), and his charges against Russia and the Russian Government. I am not here to defend the Russian Government; no one can be more opposed than I am to the policy of Russian despotism; but I must say, I think it is unjustifiable, I had almost said scandalous, for a Member of a Cabinet [326] which has been a party to these confidential, and, as I think, most unworthy engagements, in conjunction with the Russian Government, to get up in this House, and speak of the Russian Government and people as my right hon. Friend spoke of them last night. But this game of see-saw in argument has not been confined to him alone; it has been the characteristic of every Member of the Government. There has been a constant change of tone and argument to suit the momentary impulses of passion out of doors, and of the press. At times, so obvious is the effect produced by a few leading articles, that I could almost imagine, if I were living in another country where constitutional government was carried on with less decorum than in this country, that some secrets had oozed out from some Member of the Cabinet, or from the wife of some Member of the Cabinet, to the editor of a newspaper, to the effect that there were disagreements in the Cabinet; that there was a peace party and a war party; that the war party was less numerous but more active than the peace party, and that the peace party required sometimes to be whipped into capitulation; and I could imagine the newspaper then dealing out a few blows in the shape of leading articles, from day to day, until the peace party had changed its tone, and given way to the war party. So complete a change of language have we seen, that I can almost imagine the case to have happened even here, which I have supposed possible in another country.

What has been the language of the noble Lord the Member for London (Lord John Russell)? At the Conferences he was as amiable, polite, and agreeable as it is his natural wont to be to those with whom he associates in private. But immediately upon his return to England and to the House of Commons, he falls back into his old strain, just as if he had never been to Vienna, and talks of Russia having established great fortifications upon the German frontier, and in the Baltic, and of the system of corruption, intimidation, and intrigue



carried on by her in the German Courts. Have the noble Lord's logical faculties been so impaired at Vienna, that he does not see that the obvious reply to him is: which of the Four Points was to rectify these evils—which of them was to put a stop to the erection of fortifications in the Baltic, or to prevent Russia from interfering with the German Courts? There is surely no guarantee against the rebuilding of Bomarsund, or for the security of the Circassians. The independence, freedom, and civilisation of the world, seem to be entirely forgotten by the noble Lord when he goes to Vienna, for he then drops down to the sole miserable expedient of limiting the Russian fleet. If we go into another place, what is the language held by Lord Clarendon? I felt great astonishment at the speech that noble Lord made the other night; I suppose it was calculated to obtain some object for the moment, but I doubt whether it will attain any permanent object which will be satisfactory to the noble Lord. He talks in the same strain, and denounces Russia as if he had never been a party to these arrangements with regard to Wallachia and Moldavia. Some of the noble Lord's observations with respect to the strength of Sebastopol were, I think, disingenuous; for he asked, why should the Russians have such an immense collection of materials, if it was not intended for some great aggression? But the noble Lord could not be ignorant that the great strength of Sebastopol had been created since our army appeared before it, and that ammunition and provisions have been arriving in convoys of from 500 to, as Lord Raglan has himself stated, 2,000 carts at a time. To talk in such a strain immediately after the Conferences, was not worthy of the audience the noble Lord addressed, and hardly complimentary to the English public. The noble Lord the Member for London also alluded to Germany in a way which will hardly be looked upon in that country as a proof of his good sense or wisdom. He talked of the corruption of the German Courts, and [327] of the manner in which they were interfered with and controlled by the Russian Government; but, from what we are informed by the newspapers is going on in Germany, I fancy we are much mistaken as to the tendency of public opinion, if we suppose there is any difference of views between the people and the Governments of Germany with regard to the war. I am told, and I have taken some pains to inquire—it is our duty to take pains in such a matter—that there is no party in Germany which wants to join in this war. There may be many who are well-wishers to our cause, and others whose sympathies are with Russia; but I am informed, and I believe correctly, that there is no party in Germany who wishes to break the peace, and enter into hostilities with Russia in the present quarrel. And if you reflect for a moment upon the past history of Germany, in relation to France and Russia, you will see reason why in their traditions there should be no feelings of dread and hostility to Russia. The past recollections of Germany are indeed favourable rather than otherwise to Russia, and hostile to France. It may be thought the wrong moment to say it, but I hold that upon this question, and upon all other questions, we should speak in this House without reserve, as if our debates were not published; and I say it is very well known that the feeling in Prussia and the north of Germany is one of dread of France. This feeling may have arisen in part from the long sufferings and dreadful sacrifices made by the people of Prussia and Northern Germany in the great revolutionary war with France, but it also arises in part from the circumstance that France is contiguous to the Rhenish provinces of Prussia, and it has been thought that she entertains rather envious feelings towards them. But, whatever may be the cause, there is in every cottage of Prussia a recollection rather favourable to Russia than hostile, as compared with France. There is, indeed, hanging in almost every cottage in Prussia some memorial of the atrocities and sufferings caused by the French in the last war, while the traditions with regard to Russia are, that she helped to emancipate them from the rule of Napoleon. This may show why Germany is not so anxious to enter into hostilities with Russia. There is another reason. You forget that in this war you have never committed yourselves to any principle which shall be a permanent safeguard against Russia. You have invited Germany to enter into war with Russia, her next-door neighbour, and a powerful neighbour, for your purposes; but you have given Germany no security that Russia, at the close of the war, will not retaliate

upon that Power. And now it may be said, since the result of the Conferences is known, that you have gone to Vienna, and, after talking so boldly about fighting the battle of Germany, of Europe, and of the whole civilised world, you have dropped your pretensions, and do not say a word about giving security to any part of the Continent of Europe.

I was talking, the other day, to a gentleman in this country, a Prussian, who has more right to speak in the name of his countrymen than any man here. He said, 'I confess I think you Englishmen are unreasonable, and a little arrogant. You expect us to go to war with Russia—we, a nation of 16,000,000 or 17,000,000, against a nation of 60,000,000. But you do not take into account, that when you are tired of the war you can withdraw and occupy an impregnable position, while we are always at the door of this vast empire; and yet you try to hound us into this war, and to force us into it, without allowing us a voice in the matter. Your conduct is that of a man who tries to drive a dog to make an attack upon a bull.' Well, if we look back upon the course we have pursued, is there not something that warrants this opinion?

I warn the noble Lord the Member for the City of London, that, in dealing with Germany, he has to do with an educated people, every man of whom reads his newspaper, and where the middle classes are so educated that you may buy bread in the Latin language, it [328] you do not know German. Is it not, then, rather arrogant and unreasonable, when the noble Lord in this House denounces the whole German people as having been corrupted by Russia? I say that, if the English people had the conscription, as they have in Prussia, so that when war was declared every man in the country would be liable to be called out, and every horse and cart might be taken for the purposes of the army, we should be more chary how we called out for war. Our pot-house politicians would not then be calling out for war with Russia, but we should have a Government who would take a more moderate tone than this does, for it would require those sacrifices that bring home the miseries of war to the people.

I have said from the first, and I said it long before you sent a man from these shores, 'If you make war upon Russia, vindicate your rights or avenge your wrongs with your own strong arm, the navy; but do not send a man to the Continent or Turkey in the capacity of a land force. Do not send an army over the backs of the whole population of central Europe, where you have 1,000,000 men with bayonets in their hands, who stand between you and the gigantic Power that you are opposed to, and affect to dread.' I say that you ought to have occupied the same ground that Austria and Prussia took; and if you had done so, instead of rushing into war—driven into it, I admit, by the populace and the press—you would have been right, for you have it proved now that Austria and Germany would have averted these evils that you dread, for Austria and Prussia would have made it a *casus belli*, if Russia had crossed the Balkan. And why, I want to know, were you not content to remain in England, in your island home, your inaccessible fortress, sending your fleet into the Black Sea, if you chose, and telling Austria and Germany, 'Here is a great danger; here is a mighty Power that threatens to engulf this fair Europe; if you take your part for its protection, our fleet shall help you, and we will take care that no harm shall come to Turkey by sea, but not a soldier shall move from England until you put yourself in motion for the defence of Turkey?'

Why, Sir, will any one now say that this would not have been a wise policy? But then it is said, that if we had done this, the Russians would have been in Constantinople. No, they would not; for this is my whole argument—and I am coming to it—that Austria and Southern Germany have more interest in keeping the Russians from Constantinople than we have. I have heard and read in *Hansard*, that every leading statesman in this or the other House of Parliament, within the last eighteen months, has declared that Austria and Germany are more interested in this question than we are. It has been stated by the noble Lord the Member for Tiverton (Viscount Palmerston); it has been asserted by the noble Lord the Member for London (Lord John Russell); it has been stated by Lord Clarendon; it has been asserted by

Earl Derby; it has been alleged by Lord Lyndhurst. In fact, there is not a leading mind in either House of Parliament who has not told us that Austria and Germany have a greater interest in this war than we have. Well, then, in the name of common sense, why did not we, who were infinitely safer from this alleged great danger, wait until those, who had a greater interest than we had, chose to move with us? Why should we go from our position of security, if these pusillanimous empires would not step in? I know it has been said, that we are fighting the battle of civilisation. Yes, we are fighting the battle of civilisation with 30,000 or 40,000 men; and I believe we have never had more than 30,000 men in the Crimea at any one time.

I see it stated by the *Times* correspondent, who re-states what he has before asserted, that we have lost half our army because we had not sufficient men to do duty in the trenches. But is that the proper function and duty of Englishmen, to fight for Germany, because the Germans are corrupt and will not fight [329] for themselves? Give me rather the doctrine propounded by Prince Gortschakoff at Vienna, and let the blood of Englishmen be for England and the English. Now, I do not say this in disparagement of Austria and Germany. I maintain, on the contrary, that they have taken a more enlightened and calmer view of this question than we have. But the English people, partly stimulated by the noble Lord the Member for the City of London—for he has been the great offender—the English people have clamoured for war, and they would not give time for those combinations to be formed that would have averted the danger, and would have enabled us to take common ground with Austria and Germany.

But now, I say, that we know Austria and Germany will not act with us, are we to go on pursuing the same course? It would most certainly be a curiosity to go through *Hansard*, during the last eighteen months, and take out the passages in which statesmen have expressed the opinion that Austria was going to join us. The Government put it into the Speech of Her Majesty from the Throne; and, as if that was not sufficient, they have been repeating it in every speech they have made ever since. I cannot even except the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Carlisle (Sir J. Graham). The right hon. Member for the University of Oxford (Mr. Gladstone), in his celebrated Budget speech, mentioned it as some compensation for the income-tax, and said that while he was speaking it was probable that Austria had actually joined us. It is impossible to read all these extracts to the House; but here is a specimen from the speech of the noble Lord the Member for London, delivered no later than December 22, 1854. The noble Lord said:—

'If, however, Russia should not consent to such very moderate terms as it will be our duty to propose,. . . I feel convinced that we shall, before the opening of the next campaign, have the alliance of Austria, both in offensive and defensive operations.'

Now, I ask, are you going to carry on the war upon land? I mean, are you going to commit yourselves to take Sebastopol? Are you about to re-commence the war for an object which you have repudiated? because, although the noble Lord and the right hon. Gentlemen who sit on the Treasury-benches, come here one day and tell us one story, and another day tell us another story (I admit, we, on this bench, have been beguiled by them, but I promise them we will behave better, and be more cautious for the future)—although, I say, we allow this to go on, foreign Governments are not deceived by such double dealing, and it is seen by these protocols, which are published all over the world, that our Government proposed, in the late Conferences, to withdraw from the Crimea, leaving Sebastopol a 'standing menace' as before. That is the proposal made by our own Government. The only difference between us and Russia is the infinitesimal question of the armed ships; and I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester (Mr. M. Gibson), that for the safety of Turkey, the Russian proposal is better than that of the Allies.

Now, everybody knows that we are re-commencing the war with the determination—at least, if we can gather from the language of the noble Lord and the right hon. Gentleman what they mean—with the determination to take Sebastopol. But I would ask those upon whom the responsibility for the future rests, whether it is worth the blood and treasure which we must pour out like water in order that we may take Sebastopol (if we take it at all),—if, on the other hand, the capture of the place is to be accompanied by that policy of the Government which, I think, will prevent as much as anything their obtaining any popular support on the Continent, namely, that under no circumstances will they make any change in the existing territorial arrangements of Europe? If that policy is adhered to, there seems to be no other object in taking Sebastopol than knocking about [330] the ears of brave men a certain amount of bricks, mortar, and rubbish—sacrificing an immense amount of human life, in order that we may point to those mounds and say, ‘We did it;’ although Russia may, after the peace, borrow the money of any banking-house in London, and in three years build it up again stronger than ever.

Now, what is the plan, what the object, of this re-commencement of the war? Is it to reduce the preponderance of Russia in the Black Sea? Let us discard passion, and bring this question to the test of our own homely common sense. Let us take, for example, some other country. Suppose it was proposed to reduce the preponderance of the United States of America in the Gulf of Mexico; what would be the train of reasoning, in the absence of all passion, and with the benefits of unclouded intellects? Should we not naturally say, the preponderance of America in the Gulf of Mexico springs from her possessing New Orleans, the great outlet of the commerce of the Southern States, and from her having vast and fertile territories on the banks of the Mississippi, the Missouri, and the Ohio, where many millions of industrious men are cultivating the soil, and adding to the internal wealth of that great empire? and would not the conclusion be: this is a natural preponderance, inherent in the very nature of her territory, and her occupation? Now, then, turn your eyes to the Black Sea, and you have precisely the same causes, leading to the same consequences. Why has Russia preponderance in the Black Sea? Because she has fertile provinces, which are cultivated and made productive, and rich and prosperous ports and harbours, where her commerce is carried on. I was speaking lately to a gentleman who knows that country well, and has the largest commercial relations with it of any man in England, and he tells me that he does not believe there is any part of the United States of America which has made such rapid progress in wealth and internal production, since the repeal of our Corn-laws, as those southern provinces of Russia. It was estimated that Russia exported the year before last, from ports in the Black Sea, 5,000,000 quarters of grain of all kinds; and the calculation has been made, that if for the next twenty years those exports went on increasing as they have increased during the last five years, Russia would then be exporting from 15,000,000 to 20,000,000 quarters of grain annually. Believe me, that is the source of Russian preponderance. The country is developing itself. I admit, if you please, it is a youthful barbarism, but it will, doubtless, grow into something better; and, so long as a vast amount of produce is brought into the Black Sea for shipment to the rest of the world—so long as the territory of Russia borders on that sea, with no other neighbour than Turkey—a country wholly unproductive and unimproving, in comparison—all the Powers on earth cannot take away the preponderance of Russia, because it is founded in the inherent nature of things.

What, I again ask, are we fighting for? It has been whispered that we are fighting because it is more the wish of France that we should fight than our own. But are we quite sure that the war now carrying on is not against the wishes of the French people? Gentlemen who have communications with France, and sources of private information, tell me they hear that the war, never looked upon enthusiastically, is regarded with more and more dislike by the French people. What is the wish of the French Government? I know I am about to tread on delicate ground, but I hold it is our duty to speak out in the face of such mighty events, and,

as I believe, possible calamities, as are impending over this country. I come, then, to this point: Is it the wish of the French Government that this war should be carried on, or is it ours? It is industriously whispered, that the French dynasty has so much at stake, that it dare not withdraw the army from Sebastopol, on account of the moral [331] effect it would produce on the French people and on the army. My hon. Friend (Mr. Bright) and myself received a communication of some authenticity, as we believed, that the French Government had given an intimation to our Government, that they were willing, if we were, to accept an alternative upon the terms which are the last published proposals in the protocols which have been presented to us. We all know a meeting of what was called the 'party supporting the Government' was summoned not long since at the noble Lord's office in Downing-street. There and then, after the noble Lord had said it was for the purpose of private and confidential communication, and that the newspaper press were not present, he was asked by the hon. Member for Manchester (Mr. Bright) whether what we had heard and believed to be true was founded upon fact—that intimation had come from the French Government to lead our Government to understand that terms similar to those offered at Vienna by M. Drouyn de Lhuys would be accepted, and that a refusal had been given by our Government? The noble Lord refused to answer that inquiry, though he was pressed to do so. I myself pressed him to answer, and, that it may not be supposed I am committing any breach of confidence, I said, if he would answer the question—merely say, No—I should treat it confidentially; but if he allowed me to go out of the room with a confirmed impression of that which I had received from very good sources, I should make no secret of what had passed there.

Now, I say, this is a most serious thing for this country, for this reason: You have now contrived to detach all Germany from you—that is to say, you have no hope of Germany or Austria joining you. It is a matter now decided. You cannot delude yourselves now with the hope that Austria or Germany will take part in this contest. But what will be your fate if, by-and-by, it can be proved that England has been the cause of recommencing this war, contrary to the inclinations of the French Government and the French people? May it not by possibility lead to the very opposite of what we are all hoping from this union between the two countries? May it not lead to further estrangement? and then see in what a responsibility it lands you. If you are more opposed to coming to terms of peace than France is, does it not throw on you the responsibility of doing something very different from what you are now doing towards carrying on the war? Will it not, by-and-by, be found that your force is small, and the French force is great? I do not think this is the proper time to bring up the whole particulars, but I marked two observations on two particular occasions. The hon. Member for Inverness-shire (Mr. H. Baillie) stated that our forces are 40,000 short of the number voted in this House. The noble Lord (Lord J. Russell) stated last December that our forces were then 20,000 short of the number voted in this House. The hon. Member for Inverness-shire stated that our militia regiments are reduced to mere skeletons, and in Ireland and Scotland are almost disbanded, except the officers. But if this be true—if it be true that you still want 40,000 men to make up the number—may it not be found, by-and-by, that you are urging on this war in blind heedlessness, in the same way as everything has been done by this Government from the beginning, and that you have not looked three months before you to see what may be the consequences of the want of that foresight which the Government ought to have shown? I am speaking of the present moment, when the country is under a state of excitement. But those who have intelligence, and those who have studied the maps of the country, may readily understand and see how much has been made out of a little; and that there has been much said, within the last few days, which it will be found the results do not justify.

I have said that I set no limits to the power of France and England, provided they would put out that power, and exhibit their strength; but I am not quite [332] sure that you are in a better condition in the Crimea now than you were before this recent achievement at Kertch. I

once asked a Russian merchant what were the actual means of supply of food derived by Russia, and I did not learn that Kertch was at all relied upon for any great supply to the army in Sebastopol. I was assured that this was the fact; and if so, it may be accepted as a qualification of the great excitement that has been raised in consequence of our late achievements in the Sea of Azoff. A large holder of corn, deposited at Kertch, told me that the Russian Government had informed him that they could not be responsible for the safety of his corn. This was five months ago. Long before the Conferences at Vienna, he gave notice of this to his agents at Kertch, and also at other parts on the coast of the Sea of Azoff. I believe there has been a great deal of exaggeration about this little expedition to the Sea of Azoff; but if there has not been, then greater is the disgrace that attaches to those who had not executed it sooner. I am not sure that this expedition had any higher motive than that of a desire to do something which should gratify the people of this country: for the cry of the people always is, 'Do something.' But my opinion is, that, whenever any individual, whether he be a Minister of State, or a Commander-in-chief, does something merely because he is told by somebody else to do it, that that something, in nine cases out of ten, is wrong. I am not sure that even the expedition to Sebastopol itself had any higher motive than that of a wish to do something that should gratify the wishes of the people. But, at all events, I give it as my opinion, that, while your expedition in the Sea of Azoff has led to the destruction of a vast amount of private property, and while it will add no renown to your name, I believe it will have no better effect on the result of the war than your marauding expedition in the Gulf of Finland last year. I believe that the great sources of relief to the army in Sebastopol are Perekop and Simpheropol. Both those places are fortified as well as Sebastopol, and it is through them that supplies of food are obtained for the Russian army.

Well, then, about the difficulty of transporting food to the Russian army across the steppes to the Crimea, I was talking to a merchant of Odessa on that subject; and he said, that in time of peace thousands of carts and waggons, drawn by bullocks, were employed for conveying articles of commerce over these vast steppes to Odessa, Taganrog, and other ports on the Sea of Azoff; but that the war having suspended all that, the Russian Government would now avail itself of those same means of transportation for conveying supplies from Perekop and Simpheropol to Sebastopol. This has, in fact, been already done.

Now, I ask, is it not better for us that we should view these things in this light, than give ourselves up to the effervescence prevailing out of doors? Is it not better to look calmly at these things, and consider what it is that Russia can really do, than to yield up our feelings to a momentary, and, it may be, a doubtful triumph? But when I said that the power of England and of France united could hardly be resisted by any single power in Europe, or the world, I did not forget that there was one power, a single and a hidden power, by which the mightiest armies may be vanquished—pestilence and disease. I have read an extract from a report of Mr. Spencer, giving an account of a tour in the Crimea, and of the influence of the climate, which had sole reference to the summer season. I never heard of any one necessarily suffering in the winter season. On the contrary, my belief is, that, let a man be well fed, well clothed, and well sheltered, he may live anywhere; and there is no necessity that the constitutions of Englishmen should suffer more in winter in the Crimea than in England. But that is not the case in summer. The best authorities tell you that it is hardly possible for an Englishman in the Crimea, or a foreigner, unless he take every possible precaution, [333] to escape infection in the summer months of July, August, and September. You sin against the law of nature if you go out in the sun in the day, and you equally sin if you go out in the night dews. Such, again, is the effect of the climate, that if you partake of new corn, or of fruit in undue measure, these things will bring on intermittent fever. Now, these precautions our soldiers disregard, as they ever have disregarded, and therefore is it that I dread the months of July, August, and September, for our troops in the Crimea. Has all this been thought of by the Government? Does it not devolve on them to consider these things? Whatever may be the

fate of our army in the Crimea this summer, upon them, I say, and upon their shoulders, will rest the responsibility. If they should be fortunate—if pestilence and disease should happily not approach; but a deviation, as it were, in the succession of the climate should take place—then the honour and the glory, such as it may be, will undoubtedly be shared by them, and any successful enterprise of our army will redound to their repute. But if, on the other hand, your army should be destroyed by pestilence and disease, if there should be a repetition of the disasters of the last winter, then your power will be at an end; and be assured that, to effect the destruction of your power, there is nothing short of physical violence that may not happen to you. Nothing can happen but disgrace from the miserable pretences advanced in support of this war. When the Government was showing forth in magniloquent phrases the great objects of the war, well might the people be deluded; but now they know the state of things better, now they know that the war wholly depends upon so trifling a matter as that of allowing ingress and egress of foreign ships into and from the Black Sea. It is on such an infinitesimal point of difference that this war, involving so vast a sacrifice of life, and wealth, and human happiness, depends. Is there not, then, I would ask, something resting upon us as the House of Commons in this matter? Have not hon. Gentlemen noticed the state to which the argument has been brought? Have they not observed to what public opinion has been brought on this subject out of doors? No man seems to know his friend; no man seems to have confidence in public men. One serious difficulty in carrying on this war is the want of an open and frank declaration of opinion on the part of public reputations.

But there are other circumstances that ought to make us reflect. I allude not to the possibility of a bad harvest; but there are possible contingencies which may place this country in a most perilous condition, and that chiefly arising, as I have said, from the utter want of confidence in public men. But how has that want of confidence arisen? My belief is, that it is because public men have been wanting in self-respect. It is because they have too readily yielded up their better judgment to the momentary inspiration or dictation of others. What are we, the Members of this House, set apart for, but to study these high matters—to devote our thoughts to the consideration of questions involving the wellbeing of our countrymen, and to promote to the utmost of our capacity the prosperity of those whose interests are confided to us? It is true, the public out of doors have gone heartily with the Government in this war; but we all know that the public have entertained very erroneous notions as to what was the object of the war, and as to what would be its ultimate effect.

What was the tone of public opinion when the war broke out? Did it not exhibit the grossest arrogance and ignorance of the enemy we had to contend with? Did we—did the country—did the press, speak as if we were going 3,000 miles to invade an empire of 60,000,000 people? I rest my case entirely upon your infatuation in invading Russia with a land force. If you had confined yourselves to naval operations—if you had done that which I believe the House of Commons would have [334] done, if it had acted upon its own judgment—in what a different position you now would have been! There would have been none of this discontent; you would have sent out your ships, the greatest spectacle of a naval armament that ever left your shores; there would have been no misery, no disease, no want of discipline, no disasters there. Your ships rode triumphant upon every sea, and if they had not come back victorious, owing to the enemy keeping behind his fortifications, they would, at least, have presented no spectacle of abject misery and signal distress. It is your attempt to do too much, without knowing what you were about, which has brought this calamity upon you.

Much as I blame Lord Raglan for not making a road, and for mismanagement in carrying on the war, yet I contend that, if you send an army to invade Russia, you must prepare yourselves for inevitable disaster. You may repair that disaster, possibly. It may be so; but when you determine to invade an empire consisting of 60,000,000 of people 3,000 miles off, I say that the thing was undertaken in blind obedience to a cry out of doors, against and over

which the statesmen of this country ought to have exercised a counteracting influence and control.

You sent a land force 3,000 miles away to subdue your colonists in America. That force had a population of from 2,500,000 to 3,000,000 to contend with. It was miserably worsted. Mismanagement, no doubt, existed there; but, if there had been no mismanagement, how long, I ask, could that war have endured? We know the history of the invasion of Russia by Napoleon I. He invaded that empire supported by half a million of bayonets, and there was, at all events, this much logic and argument in his proposition, that he said, 'I will strike at the heart of the empire, and will take security for peace in the capital of Russia.' But you are not going to the heart of Russia, with all Europe at your back, as he had; for, with the exception of Spain, he had all Europe at his feet, and all her legions at his side. You know the result. You know the spirit of Russia then. Have you any reason to suppose that Russia now, with the stimulus of that example before her, will show a less stubborn resistance to you than she did to Napoleon I? My firm belief is, that she will not. My belief is, that you have entered upon a task the most arduous and difficult which this nation ever undertook, and that you will have to put forth more than twice the energy, you will have to send more than twice the men, and to spend more than twice the money in one year, than you have yet done, before you will succeed in accomplishing the object you have in view.

Ought we not, then, fairly to tell the people of this country that? Ought we not to check them, rather than to encourage their exaggerations? Suppose you receive unexpected accounts of disasters from the Crimea, of prostrations from cholera, from intermittent fever, or from the plague—for who can tell what may happen? Is it not wise, instead of cheering the Minister, when he tells us that the Conferences are at an end, to endeavour to subdue the spirit of the country—I do not say to subdue its spirit in any righteous cause—but to let the people know fully and frankly what they have before them?

I blame the Government for having behaved falsely and treacherously to the people, and I tell them that there will be a day of reckoning for them in this matter. What said the noble Lord the Member for Tiverton, in one of those declamatory harangues with which he occasionally favours the House? He said, 'The people of this country are our reserve force, and we will equip our army from that reserve.' I ask him what he is now doing with that reserve? The noble Lord the Member for London said, at the end of last year, 'We shall have 180,000 or 200,000 Englishmen under arms, and foreign levies to aid them.' Where are the 180,000 or 200,000 Englishmen? I say that there has been the same child's play now, up to the last [335] minute, that there has been from the commencement. All I ask of you is, that you will deal candidly with the public. I have noticed in history, that if ever the mass of the people have become cruel, and revengeful, and unreasoning in their violence to Governments, it is invariably because they have been betrayed and deceived by them. There is nothing by which you will so surely risk the loss of public favour, and entail a great public calamity when your influence is gone, as by attempting to conceal from the people of this country the whole amount of difficulties and dangers which are now impending over you.

It is in this spirit, and because I will not be responsible in the slightest degree for what may happen in this matter, that I wish to speak out on this occasion; and I warn the House of Commons, that there are no institutions of the land which may not be endangered from the reaction which may result from your over-sanguine confidence in what you are undertaking. I have seen a spirit out of doors which is preparing for sudden and strange freaks of revenge, under a sense of bitter mortification and disappointment; I have seen those who have been the first to clamour for war, after the earliest disasters of the campaign, meeting together to denounce those who are the highest in the land as the most responsible; and when I see what has been the line pursued, in the face of what I must believe to be superior knowledge—when I see the way in which, in high places, the passions of the people have been pandered



to, and momentary triumph sought at the risk of great future disaster—I must say that I think those who adopt such conduct deserve the retribution which I have spoken of.

There was a meeting recently held in Derby, which was reported in the London papers, and it was one of those meetings which were described as the beginning of an agitation which was to cover the land. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby was present; and what was the tone of that meeting? It was called, mind you, by the inhabitants of Derby, for the purpose of instructing their Members, and the meeting was held up as one which should be imitated throughout the country. It is good and wholesome for us, therefore, to hear what was said upon that occasion. I find the Rev. W. Griffiths speaking there after this fashion:—

For myself, I say, that whatever measures are proposed, if they are meant for the benefit of the few, and not to promote the interests of the many, I would say, Down with the coronets, if they are to ruin the nation! I have no objection to coronets, ribands, nor to the gewgaws which illumine certain illustrious houses—illustrious by courtesy—provided they will keep all the pleasure and injury of them to themselves; but if we are to be robbed, over-taxed, and have unjust and unequal laws, just because a few coroneted heads choose to have it so, then the time is come when the working men of Great Britain must look the aristocracy in the face, demand the why and the wherefore, and not be content with a shilly-shally answer. One word more. There will be more money wanted ere long—the young Prince will want a wife, and then he will want a marriage settlement. I say, let him get it from his father and mother, who have enough to keep them all. You must begin there. It is no use cutting off twigs, and letting huge branches remain. I, for one, think that one palace is enough for one Sovereign.'

A Mr. Parkinson seconded the resolution, saying that—

'It had been proved, to the satisfaction of the meeting, that they were governed by an aristocratic Government who were incompetent for their work; therefore it was the duty of every man to endeavour to destroy the system under which they had been so misruled.'

Now, I have been considered not to have dealt always very gently with the aristocracy of this country; but I should say to that rev. gentleman, from what I have noticed of these proceedings, that for whatever disasters may happen in this country, there is not one member of [336] the aristocracy, out of the Cabinet, whom I should consider responsible as an individual for these disasters. So far as I am concerned, I will never truckle so low to the popular spirit of the moment as to join in any cry which shall divert the mass of the people from what I believe should be their first thought and consideration, namely, how far they themselves are responsible for the evils which may fall upon the land, and how far they should begin at home before they commence to find fault with others. The first thing that multitudes of men do, when they fall into errors, is to seek for victims, and this ought to be a warning to those who have influence in the land not to stimulate the passions which we have lately seen prevailing in the country, unless they can see some tangible and satisfactory result to arise from the passions they rouse.

That is all my case. If the Russians were besieging Portsmouth, I should not talk about what was to be done; and if I could not work in the field, I would do so in the hospital. I should not then ask for any one to allay the excitement of the people; but I now repeat—and I have repeated it again and again—you have undertaken a war with an empire of 60,000,000 of people 3,000 miles away, and the people of this country, and those who guide them, do not fully appreciate the importance, the magnitude, and the danger of this undertaking; and that is why I have counselled moderation and caution, and why I have made the present long—and, I am afraid, somewhat tedious—appeal to the House.



**RUSSIAN WAR. III.**  
**MANCHESTER, MARCH 18, 1857.** ↩

[On March 3, 1857, the House of Commons affirmed, by a majority of 14 (263 to 249). Mr. Cobden's resolution on the conduct of the China war. This was treated by Lord Palmerston as a vote of want of confidence, and an appeal was made to the country. No time was lost in summoning a new Parliament, and no pains spared to inflame the public mind against those who had challenged Lord Palmerston's policy. The sitting Members in Manchester had been Mr. Bright and Mr. Milner Gibson. Their re-election was opposed by Sir John Potter and Mr. Turner, and was opposed successfully. As Mr. Bright was suffering from illness, Mr. Cobden advocated his cause before the Manchester electors, in the following Speech, which deals chiefly with the policy of Lord Palmerston in the Russian war.]

I APPEAR before you on this occasion as the humble representative of my friend, Mr. Bright, and in his name I thank you in the outset for the kind reception with which you have greeted the mention of his name, and I thank you also for the all but unanimous vote with which you have announced his candidature at this election.

Now, I appear before you on the present occasion under circumstances which I certainly never expected to encounter again. I have, on former occasions, found my name prominently associated with measures in the House of Commons and in the country, that have led to dissolutions of Parliament, and to the fall of Ministries. That was when I was connected with those movements in which our object was to cause dissolutions of Parliament and destructions of Ministries. For three times, I believe, Parliament has been dissolved, the fact arising out of questions with which my name was prominently associated. But I certainly never did expect to see again a dissolution with which I should be associated. Now, what are the circumstances under which this has arisen? You have heard something about the China war. I am not going into the details of that war again. I only want just to lay before you, in the briefest possible form, the circumstances in which the country has been placed with reference to that question. On the assembling of Parliament, we found ourselves engaged in two wars, —the one with an empire of 350,000,000 of people, with a territory about eight times as great as that of France, and about ten times the population; the other was with Persia, one of the most ancient empires of the world. Parliament and the people had had no voice in declaring these wars; troops were moving from India to Bushire, troops were moving from Ceylon to Hongkong, and war was going on at our expense, and you had no voice in declaring that war. On the assembling of Parliament, a demand was made from the Ministry for information respecting [338] the Persian war. The answer we got was, that it would be contrary (it is the stereotyped answer), that it would be prejudicial, to the interests of the country that any papers should be given referring to the origin of the Persian war. But I found on the table of the House of Commons all the papers having reference to the Chinese war. Now, it is a very rare thing indeed that we are so fortunate as to find such a record of what is going on in our name and behalf. But I found the papers all in order, and everything that could be had to give an account of the origin of the Chinese war. I read those papers, as I was in duty bound to do. The conclusion I came to I stated in my place in the House of Commons, and I am not going to repeat the arguments now. But what I want to ask here is, what I asked in London the other day, was it anything contrary to my duty as a Member of Parliament, and as a representative of the people, that I should read those papers, and express an opinion, and call for an opinion of the House with reference to proceedings which were involving this country in daily expense, and which might undoubtedly incur a vast expense, both of blood and treasure?

Well, I read the papers; and, coming to the conviction that the origin of this war was a blunder and a crime, I framed a resolution, which I showed to my right hon. Friend here, and asked him if he would like to second it; and, without consulting any other human being, I put that motion on the table of the House of Commons, and it lay there for a fortnight before my turn came for bringing on the motion. Singular to say—for it is an unusual thing—not one word of that resolution, nor one syllable, was altered to accommodate the mind of any Member of the House of Commons.

Well, I am told—and we hear it daily repeated in the columns of some of the London papers, whose audacity of assertions certainly sometimes astounds me even, though I am habituated to the perusal of the *Times* newspaper; but there is still every day the reiterated falsehood, as if the people had not yet had enough of it, that this was a motion brought forward in a factious spirit, and with a coalition of parties, in order, forsooth, that we might overturn the Government, and get possession of their places.

Well, now, there is a great question involved in this, which I think the people of this country ought to take very much to heart. Do you want the Members of the House of Commons to look after your rights, and watch the expenditure, and to guard you from getting into needless and expensive wars? ['Yes.'] Well, but you are not going the right way to work about it, if what I hear in your newspapers is going to be verified in the course of a fortnight in the election; for I am told that those Members who joined in that vigilant care of your interests, and voted according to the evidence before us on the question of that war, are all to be ostracised,—sent into private life,—and that you are going to send up there men—to do what? to look after your interests? No; to go and do the humble, dirty work of the Minister of the hour. In fact, that you are going to constitute Lord Palmerston the despotic ruler of this country. ['No, no.'] Well, but if he is not checked by Parliament,—if, the moment Parliament does check him, he dissolves Parliament, and, instead of sending up men who are independent enough to assert their and your rights, you send up mere creatures of his will, what is that but investing him with the powers of a despot! Ay, and let me tell you that it is a despotism of the clumsiest, most expensive, and at the same time most irresponsible kind on the face of the earth; because you surround the Minister with the sham appearance of a representative form of Government; you cannot get at him while he has got a Parliament beneath whose shield he can shelter himself; and if you do not do your duties in your elections in sending men up to the House of Commons who will vigilantly watch the Minister of the day, then, I say, you are in a worse plight, because [339] governed in a more irresponsible way, than if you were under the King of Prussia or the Emperor of the French.

But who is Lord Palmerston, that we are to invest him with this power? Who is he? ['A traitor.'] No, I will say nothing worse of him here than I have said to his face in Parliament; but, when I want to know what a man is, I ask, What has he done? There is no other test like that. That was Napoleon's question always, if anybody talked to him about somebody being a great man,—What has he done? Well, now, Lord Palmerston has been fifty years in Parliament—['Fifty-two']; fifty-two years in Parliament. Well he has belonged, I believe, to every Government excepting one during those fifty years. I remember the *Times* newspaper, which spent about fifteen years in trying to blacken his reputation, and is now polishing him up every day, once said, when it had said everything else that was gross, vile, and vituperative about him, that he had been 'boots' to every Administration for thirty years. Now I beg you to understand that this is the language of the *Times*, and not mine. But with what has his name been associated? ['Peterloo.'] Yes, Peterloo. I remember, that on this very spot of ground, when the people were cut down and trampled upon by the yeomanry cavalry, Lord Palmerston was one of the Government, and voted in favour of that outrage.

Well, but what has he done since?—because men may have been, in the early part of their career, by circumstances, like Sir Robert Peel, put into a certain groove, and hardly answerable for the course they were obliged to run. But what has he done since that he had been able to take his own choice? What does he propose now to do? He was a member of the Reform Ministry in 1831; he left his old party, and joined the Whigs as a Reformer. But was he one of those who put forward the cause of Reform, or was he there as a drag-chain? I have seen to-day a speech, which has been sent to me, delivered by Sir James Graham, at Carlisle. He says:—‘I and Lord John Russell are the only two Cabinet Ministers remaining alive who formed the Government which brought in the Reform Bill of 1831;’ and he says, ‘We had Lord Palmerston amongst us; but I very soon found out that he was not very much disposed for the work that we were engaged in.’ In December, 1853,—that is, little more than three years ago,—he belonged to the Ministry of Lord Aberdeen. Now, Lord Aberdeen was, I considered, a very liberal man; but we were all deluded with the idea that Lord Palmerston was the great champion of democracy, and Lord Aberdeen was always the friend of despotism;—I was not taken in by that, but a good many people were.

Well, but what did Lord Palmerston do in December, 1853, when Lord Aberdeen's Government was preparing a new Reform Bill, to be brought in in the session of 1854? Lord Palmerston left Lord Aberdeen's government because he objected to that modicum of Reform that was then proposed; that bill, bearing on its back the names of Lord John Russell and Sir James Graham—certainly not two very rash or democratic Reformers—that bill, which proposed to give a 10*l.* franchise to the counties, and a slightly reduced franchise to the boroughs, so slightly reduced that some of my friends thought it would rather operate as a restriction in some boroughs than an extension; that bill was too much for Lord Palmerston to swallow; and he left Lord Aberdeen's Cabinet avowedly because he objected to that bill. Well, what has he done since? What has he done this very session? Why, he has opposed everything that can bear the mere semblance of Reform. He voted against Locke King's motion for a 10*l.* county franchise, which formed part of the bill of 1854; he has opposed even the 40*s.* freehold franchise for Scotland, if you may believe the Lord-Advocate of Scotland (Mr. Moncreiff), who is in the Ministry, for he has gone down there and announced that.

Now, will you tell me on what ground I am to be called upon to surrender my [340] independence and freedom of thought and action to the will of a Ministry such as this? Why, what do you propose to get by such a process? It appears to me it is about the most audacious attempt upon your credulity that ever was practised in this country, to think of raising the cry at an election in favour of one man,—for there is no other cry attempted on the hustings,—and for that man to be the leader of the Liberal party, without having one Liberal tenet in his profession of faith.

When I read of men that I have hitherto considered to be earnest Reformers,—when I have read their speeches and addresses, in which they have said, ‘I am for the ballot; I am for the extension of the suffrage; I am for shortening Parliaments; I am against church-rates; and I will give my hearty support to Lord Palmerston's Government,’—my natural question is, ‘Are these men idiots, or are they dishonest? because, if you attempt to carry out a business in private life, you do not go to a man that you know is directly opposed, in his view, to what you wish to accomplish, and put yourself under his guidance. Lord Palmerston is not content with a mere passive resistance to what you desire as Reformers. He lends an active opposition,—he votes and speaks against every measure of Reform that is brought into the House of Commons. [Cheers.] Well, and what is it for? Because we are told that Lord Palmerston is a great friend of freedom abroad.

Well now, go and ask those men in this country who represent freedom abroad;—ask Kossuth. I will tell you what happened within my knowledge; it is no breach of confidence to say it. When that illustrious Hungarian was expected in England, after his imprisonment in Turkey, my lamented friend, Lord Dudley Stuart—whose devotion to the cause of these foreign refugees was as unbounded as it was sincere—went down to Southampton to meet Kossuth, and receive him on his arrival. Having to wait a day or two there, and being in the neighbourhood of Broadlands, where Lord Palmerston lives, he went and saw the noble Lord, and received from him a request to bring Kossuth over (on his arrival at Southampton) to Broadlands, to see him. I remember receiving a letter from Lord Dudley Stuart, announcing to me this piece of intelligence with the greatest glee. He was delighted at the opportunity of taking Kossuth over to see Lord Palmerston; and, as soon as he arrived, he announced to him the pleasing invitation. To his astonishment, he found Kossuth would not accept it. He would not go near Lord Palmerston; and I have got a letter from Lord Dudley Stuart, asking me to use all my influence with Kossuth to induce him to go and call upon Lord Palmerston. He would not do it; and my answer to Lord Dudley Stuart was this:—'You may depend upon it, Kossuth knows a great deal more about Lord Palmerston than you do.' I could not go into the particulars now, but they are all familiar to me.

Every transaction of Lord Palmerston's foreign policy is known to me; I defy any human being to show an instance where anybody on the face of the earth has been happier or freer in consequence of Lord Palmerston's foreign policy. He endorsed the invasion of Rome by the French. We have it in the blue-books. He was the first, in red-hot haste, to congratulate the present Emperor of the French after his usurpation, when the blood was still flowing in the streets of Paris. He refused to see an envoy sent from the Hungarians, because, he said, he could treat with nobody but the Austrian Government. He treated the Italians in the same way. Are these facts, or are they not? ['Yes, yes.'] Nobody denies them. Do you think, then, it is consistent with common sense that the man who has no love for liberty or progress at home should have any love of the kind to export to foreign countries? Do you not think that liberalism, like liberality, like progress, like charity, should begin at home?

Well, which other title does he present to our confidence, that the people of this country should be called upon by the [341] impudence of three or four metropolitan journals, who have reasons best known to themselves, which I hope will be exposed some day, to lie down upon their bellies in the dust before this man? What has he done? We are told that he carried the Russian war to a triumphant conclusion.

Now, I will tell you what he did in that war. Lord Palmerston was a member of the Government which declared the war. If he be the man of talent, with the powers of administration which we are told he has,—if he be a man of this towering genius, that we are all suddenly called upon to discover at the age of seventy-three,—was he not likely, at least, three or four years ago, to have had a share of that energy, so that he might have imprinted a portion of his policy upon the Government during the time he was one of them? He was responsible for every blunder, just as much as any member of the Government. And what is the Cabinet now? Why, a majority of the Cabinet now was the majority of the Cabinet then. Lord Palmerston was not called upon to make a new Cabinet in order to carry on the war; certain members of the Cabinet—a minority—seceded from it, and left the majority, of whom Lord Palmerston was at the head. That majority is quite as responsible for everything that occurred during the early progress of the war, as they can claim to be entitled to any merit for any improvement in the conduct of the war when that minority seceded. But did Lord Palmerston ever himself lend his word to this imposture that is practised in his name? No; to do him justice, his toadies practise the imposture, but he has told us, manfully and in a straightforward way, that he did not share in the delusion himself. For what has he done? When Lord Aberdeen seceded from the Government, Lord Palmerston told Sir James

Graham and the rest of the friends of Lord Aberdeen who remained in the Government, that he would carry on the Government and the war upon precisely the same principles that they had been carried on by Lord Aberdeen; that there should be no change in his foreign policy; and that he would only ask the same terms of peace as Lord Aberdeen would have been content with. That was not only mentioned privately in the course of their discussions with themselves, but it came out in the House of Commons. Did Lord Palmerston himself ever come before us to complain of anything that had been done in the early conduct of the war whilst he was a member of the Cabinet? No; on the contrary, he defended everything.

When Mr. Roebuck brought forward his motion for inquiring into the scenes going on before Sebastopol, to try and hunt out, if he could, the cause of the ruin and disaster that had befallen our army, did Lord Palmerston get up in his place in the House, and say, 'Here are admitted evils, I grant to the honourable and learned Gentleman, fair subjects for inquiry?' No; he stood by things as they were,—defended everything, and resisted an inquiry by the Committee. But, what is more, after the Committee was appointed, and had sat and inquired into the proceedings at Sebastopol, when Mr. Roebuck brought forward a motion in the House of Commons, consequent on the inquiry, did Lord Palmerston assist him? No; he voted against him again.

What has he done besides? After sending out a couple of men,—able and competent men, Sir John M'Neill and Colonel Tulloch,—and after they had brought home a report, certainly as able and, I believe, as conscientious as was ever made by public men,—what did Lord Palmerston do? Did he back up his own commissioners? No. He would have done, if it had been Smith, Jones, or Robinson that had been concerned; but they were Lords and Earls who were in question; and what did he do? He appointed a commission of military men to inquire into the conduct of the commissioners! And then, when public opinion rises to demand some improvement upon this state of things, what does he do? He insults these distinguished [342] men by sending them a present each of a thousand pounds, which they sent back again—just the amount that was paid some time ago to a policeman for having captured a celebrated political criminal.

Now, this is the sort of man that we are called upon all at once to fall down and worship! Why, I say the brazen image shall have no worship from me. But I want to ask these people that are here in Manchester, and I want you to put the question to them—I will first take Mr. Aspinall Turner. [Groans.] No, no, no; we will deal with him with reason, and not with clamour. I want to put something before you that you may probably have the opportunity of asking them. The great complaint against us on the part of these gentlemen is, that we are too independent of this Minister. Now, ask them this question: What would they have had us do in the case of that vote the other night, that was designed to do justice to Colonel Tulloch and Sir John M'Neill? I was in the House of Commons, waiting for the division, and certainly should have voted against the Government; but Lord Palmerston, seeing which way the wind blew, after having spoken against the motion, got up and said, 'I won't divide the House upon it.' Now, I want to know how Mr. Aspinall Turner would have voted on that occasion? Would he have considered it very factious if he had joined the Member for Devonshire, who sits on the other side of the House, in voting against the Government? Why, I see this Mr. Turner's name, as President of the Commercial Association, signed to a memorial, in which he states the whole of the facts I am stating, and says that Lord Palmerston has not only failed to do justice to these eminent officers who went out to make the inquiry, but has also given encouragement and promotion to the very men who are proved to have been culpable and neglectful. Now, I must say I think Mr. Aspinall Turner is looking very much like a 'conspirator' in this matter,—he is guilty of a 'coalition' with somebody to turn out a Minister. Well, what are we to do under these circumstances? Are we to follow this Minister, or to follow the dictates of our own judgments and consciences?

Now, I hear it said that we have been a thorn in the side of three Governments. We are told that three or four of us have been a thorn in the side of Lord Aberdeen, Lord John Russell, and now of Lord Palmerston. I can only say this,—if Manchester should send up the two gentlemen that are now candidates in opposition to my honourable and right honourable Friends, *they* wont be thorns in the side of any Government.

Well, but what do you want done in Parliament? Do you send up men to Parliament just to be told off into one lobby or the other, according as the whipper-in of the Treasury decides? I suppose you want your Members to do something better than follow the bidding of the Treasury whip. Do you think there is much danger now of your catching Members of Parliament likely to be too independent? I can assure you, you will find it just the contrary. And if the threats now held out should be carried into effect,—if you should, unhappily for yourselves, lose those two Members you have got, I will venture to say it will be long before you will have to complain that the new ones will be too independent when they get into Parliament. Why, it is the very thing of all others most difficult to find in London— independence. Only cast your memories back; how few men have we got permanently to join us in our attempt, even, to stand against a Government! Four or five, or six or eight, or ten. I could count them all on my ten fingers, who remained resolute and determined to maintain an independent course. And why? Because the temptations, blandishments, and seductions practised on Members of Parliament are very well known to those engaged in that House. Do you think I was not tempted, like everybody else? I have had my cards, my dinner cards, as large as that (exhibiting a half-sheet of paper), and from Lord Palmerston, too.

[343]

When I went up to Parliament in 1841, it would have been much easier and more pleasant to many minds, and a much more agreeable life, if I had at once fallen into the track, and, instead of instituting an independent resistance to Government when I chose, I had joined the governing class, and become one of their humble servants. But the very first day I went into Parliament, in 1841, when the lines of party were still visible, when there was a great gulf between the two great parties on the two sides of the House—when Sir Robert Peel had his 390 or 400 men, and Lord John Russell his 270 or 280 men—the very first time I got up and spoke as the Member for Stockport, I declared I came there to do something—to repeal the Corn-laws, and I would know neither Whig nor Tory until that work was done.

Well, now, suppose I had pursued another course—suppose I had allied myself to the Whig party, which was then the most Liberal, and which had then adopted what was considered to be an advanced position at that time, an 8s. fixed duty,—suppose I had joined that party, as I might have done, and depended upon them, and not upon an abstract principle, for the success of our agitation, do you think we should ever have got the total and immediate repeal? No; it would not have been possible; because we should have told Sir Robert Peel and the party opposite, ‘We are not going to take it from you at all; it is a party question—a Whig question, and we are going to take the repeal of the Corn-laws in no other way.’ But when Sir Robert Peel and the party opposite saw we were in earnest, and did not make a party question of our principle, he did the work for us, which the Whigs never could have done. Are we not to pursue the same course again? Am I, because I find Mr. Disraeli and Sir John Pakington coming round to principles I have been advocating—am I, at the moment which offers a fair chance of success to my opinion, to say, ‘No, I will not join you; that would be conspiracy—that would be a coalition?’

Well, now, what is it, after all, that the so-much-abused Manchester School wants? Why, they say we want to abolish all our standing armies and navies, and leave you, like so many Quakers, at the mercy of the whole world. Any man who has lived in public life, as I have, must know that it is quite useless to contradict any falsehood or calumny, because it comes



up again next day just as rife as ever. There is the *Times* newspaper always ready to repeat it, and the grosser the better. Have I not, in the House of Commons, advocated the expenditure of 10,000,000*l.* on our protection? and that is pretty nearly as much as the Americans spend for civil and military purposes and everything put together. It may be a question whether it will be 10,000,000*l.* or 15,000,000*l.* The Duke of Wellington managed to make a sum under 12,000,000*l.* do. But they tell us that I want to deprive you of your defences against your enemies. Why, what has been my argument for the last seven years on this question? You cannot have a reduction of taxation unless you have a reduction of your military and naval establishments; and you cannot have a reduction of your military and naval establishments if you allow a Minister to be constantly involving you in wars or in dangers of wars.

Well, now, what do I hear every night in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords? Lord Derby, Mr. Gladstone, and Mr. Disraeli have used almost the identical language which I have used seven or eight years ago. Here is my programme, 'Non-intervention;' here is my programme, 'Diminished expenditure in your armaments, and diminished taxation if you follow that policy.' But am I, when I see this policy, which seems to be advocated and very rapidly adopted by the whole Conservative party in the House of Commons, am I then immediately to turn from the course I took seven years [344] ago and say, 'If you offer to reduce the establishments 2,000,000*l.* a year, you only want to make a factious opposition to the Government?' I want such factious opposition.

Now, I want you to bear in mind, though you have got Free Trade, you are interested in getting something else, and you will find something else. I speak to young men, to young men in shops and warehouses, foremen in places of business, who want some day to have the chance of being masters. I want the operative who is qualifying himself to be a freeman, and who hopes some day to be a capitalist, to have the chance that he may carry out his views and see the career before him. This was the feeling I had seven or eight years ago, when we launched our assault upon the protective system. But there is a great deal more to do, if you will make this country a place to live in, and for your children to thrive in, and give a chance to every man, as I should like to see, of rising in the world, becoming the head of a family, and finding employment for his labour, and supply him with all the advantages of capital if he sets up to be a master. How is this to be done, but by widening the circle of business operations, and by diminishing the pressure of your taxation?

Now, what do we see in London? Twenty or thirty thousand unemployed workmen. Why are they unemployed? You don't find that the newspapers connect cause and effect. They are unemployed because capital is scarce; they are unemployed because money is worth 6 or 7 per cent. at the banks. Who will lay out his money in building houses, to pay him at the rate of 6, or 7, or 8 per cent., if he can get that percentage for the money he puts into the banks? Consequently there is no money being invested in buildings, because you have now such a high rate of interest. And why is there such a high rate of interest? Because the floating capital of this country has, during the last two or three years, been wasted in sudden and extraordinary expenses. But you don't see your newspapers, that were bawling for the war, honestly tell the people in London that the reason they are suffering want of employment is, that this floating capital, which is always a limited quantity in the country—the floating capital which sets all your fixed capital in motion—has been exhausted, wasted, by the course that has been pursued. It may have been necessary or not, I am not now going into that question; but, I say, let cause and effect be connected, don't let the people be deluded.

They tell these poor people in London they may emigrate; but I say it is downright quackery to talk of relieving the country of 20,000 or 30,000 people by means of emigration. Moreover, if we remain at peace, and keep our Ministry in order, during the next two or three years, there will not be enough builders and joiners for the work that will have to be done. It is downright quackery, and insulting your understanding, to say you must make people

emigrate, as a means of relieving you of such a large surplus population. It is all moonshine.

Now, I say, if you are to have a progressive development of your trade, you must pursue a policy favourable to it. You must enable your Government to reduce taxation, and especially that taxation which presses on the labouring and on the middle classes—I mean the taxation that is laid in an indirect form upon your articles of consumption. The more you remove these taxes, the more your trade will expand, the more your population may increase and flourish, and the happier will be the condition of the country.

But you have come now to a dead stand-still; and this is one of my great complaints against this Government. It is the most incompetent Government in matters of finance that we have had since that of Sir Robert Peel. Here you are, laying on increased taxes on your tea and sugar—here you are, at this moment, to gratify the people who have cried out against a 16*d.* income-tax, taking off 9*d.* from the tax. And it is [345] perfectly certain, as Mr. Gladstone says, that the Government have not the means before them to do it honestly; and next year, unless you have a reduction of expenditure, there must be an increase of taxation. I appeal to my right hon. Friend here (Mr. Gibson), who has looked into the matter as well as myself, whether it is not inevitable. And, in two years from that time, if you do not reduce your expenditure, you will have a deficit of something like 10,000,000*l.* But how to make it up? Your present Prime Minister, who lives from hand to mouth in his political career—who has never cared for the morrow so that he can keep on for today—he is pursuing a most ruinous course of finance; and, if you had called out for the whole 16*d.* being taken off, instead of the 9*d.* he would still have let it go, and left it to somebody else to find out how to make up the deficiency next year.

And not only that, but look at your Indian finances—Nobody looks at them; you have put his screen before your faces, so that you are hidden from India, and India is hidden from you. And so your Government sits down in London, and writes out to that country, in order to send one army to the Persian Gulf, and another to Hongkong; and that the Indian Treasury must pay for it, or the half of it. They have no voice in the matter out there. And how stand your Indian finances? Deficit on deficit every year—deficit last year, and the year before that—a constantly accumulating deficit. And what has been done to meet it? They tried for a loan some time ago, at 4½ per cent., but could not get the money. Then they have tried to realise it in India, at 5 per cent.; but could not get the money. And the last advices are, that you *cannot* get the money. But, as Sir Robert Peel told us in the House of Commons, on some occasion, you are as much responsible for the finances of India as you are for the finances in Downing Street; and, if you allow things to go on in this reckless way, by which you become embarrassed at home and embarrassed abroad, the time of reckoning will overtake you, as it does overtake all spendthrifts, and there will be an evil day for you and your children, sooner or later.

Now, is it to be considered unreasonable that we have joined Mr. Gladstone in his motions? I voted for his motion that there should be a reduction of the expenditure, and Mr. Disraeli also voted with him. Were we, then, to go into the other lobby, because we found Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli voting with us on that occasion? I believe they were right. I believe that they both took a most philosophical and able view of our finances; and what I want you to consider is, whether you think the men who take the independent course which I have suggested, whether you think they are men who ought to be denounced here, by interested and jealous individuals, because they have had the manliness to do their duty?

I come now, for a moment, to the conduct of my right hon. Friend here, and to the conduct of my honourable Friend whom I represent here on this occasion. I have lived with Mr. Bright in the most transparent intimacy of mind that two human beings ever enjoyed together. I don't believe there is a view, I don't believe there is a thought, I don't believe there

is one aspiration in the minds of either of us that the other is not acquainted with. I don't know that there is anything that I have sought to do which Mr. Bright would not do in my place, or anything that he aims at which I would not accomplish if I had the power. Knowing him, then, I stand here, in all humility, as his representative; for what I have long cherished in my friend Mr. Bright is this, that I have seen in him an ability and an eloquence to which I have had no pretensions, because I am not gifted with the natural eloquence with which he is endowed; and that I have had the fond consolation of hoping that Mr. Bright, being seven or eight years younger than myself, will be advocating principles—and advocating them successfully—when I shall no longer [346] be on the scene of duty. With those feelings, I naturally take the deepest interest in the decision of this election. I feel humiliated—I feel disgusted to see the daily personal attacks—the diatribes that are made against this man—with his health impaired for the moment,—his health impaired, too, in that organ which excites feelings of awe and of the utmost commiseration for him on the part of all right-minded men. Yes; whilst this man is not able to use those great intellectual powers with which God has gifted him—whilst their full activity is suspended for the day—the vermin of your Manchester press, the ghouls of the *Guardian*, are preying upon this splendid being, and trying to make a martyr of him in the midst of his sufferings!

Well, now, what are the motives with which these men are actuated? Are they public motives? Why don't they allege one public ground for their hostility? Where is the public ground—where is the one fact—what have they to allege against this man? No; it is vile, dirty, nasty, fireside jealousy.

I will deal very candidly with you, men of Manchester, in this respect. I say you have not the character, or the fame, or the destinies of John Bright in your hands; but I will tell you this, that your own character and reputation are at stake. Your character and reputation with the country, and with the world at large, are at stake in the conduct which you pursue on this occasion. One who has served you so faithfully and so assiduously—even to the partial destruction of his own health—who is no longer able to appear before you,—why, the manhood that is in you must all rebel against the cowardly assaults that are made upon him. But I believe the hostility is a personal one. I believe it is confined to a select few. They may, perhaps, make dupes of others; and, unless you be watchful, they may make dupes of some of you.

But what are the alleged faults of this man—what have you to say against him? I told you before that you must go to the House of Commons for his character—to either side of the House of Commons—and I will venture to say you will hear but one opinion of him from Whig, Tory, or Radical. I will tell you what I heard one of the oldest and most sagacious men in the House of Commons say: that he did not believe there was any man in the House, with the exception of Mr. Bright and Mr. Gladstone, who ever changed votes by their eloquence. Now, that is a great tribute to pay to men; because although we, many of us, may probably convince people by our arguments, we do not convert them and make them change their votes,—it requires logic and reasoning power; but it requires something else—it requires those transcendent powers of eloquence which your representatives possess.

Now, as to my friend here, who sits beside me (Mr. Gibson), he was not of my selection; he was selected in the parlour of my late revered friend, Sir Thomas Potter, and I was at the time not a very enthusiastic supporter of the right hon. Gentleman. He was brought here, and, as I always went with those good men who at that time took the lead—Sir Thomas Potter, Mr. Kershaw, Mr. Callender, and others—I joined them, and fought the battle, and we won it for them. But this I will say of him, that though he sometimes has an arch look, and sometimes seems as if he were almost quizzing you, and you fancy that there is a little twist of sarcasm about him in all he says and all he looks, yet this I will say of him, that there is an earnestness in his character which I every day more and more appreciate, and which I did not

when I first saw him—as many others may not, when they first see him—give him credit for.

Well, now, how has my right hon. Friend employed himself? He might have gone into office, and *was* in office. He is a man bred in fashionable life—he has not the same excuse that I have for keeping out of that sort of company. If he had allowed himself to be absorbed in the aristocratic circles of London—nobody can doubt, who sees him, that he would have been an ornament to those [347] circles. He might have led a very happy life there; and, being Member for Manchester, they would have been, I dare say, very proud of him. And then there would have been none of this opposition now set up against him. But he has taken an independent course. He has worked in favour of great questions—great questions affecting the interests of the people. There is one question which he carried—I will almost give him credit for carrying it single-handed—and that is the question of the newspaper stamp. He carried that, and the repeal of the advertisement duty; he carried them by his dexterity and ability in debate; by his exquisite tactics, by his knowledge of the forms of the House, and by accepting the assistance of hon. Gentlemen on the other side of the House. Now he has incurred the hostility—[cries of ‘The *Guardian*’]—ay, and not only of the *Guardian*; we have had black marks put opposite our names from more papers than the *Guardian*.

I remember the first time I spoke in public after returning home from a temporary absence on the Continent, in 1847. It was at a dinner party in London, at which I took the chair; and I took the opportunity of launching this question of the press, and saying that the newspaper press of England was not free, and that this was a thing which the Reformers of the country ought to set about—to emancipate it. Well, I got a most vicious article next day from the *Times* newspaper for that, and the *Times* has followed us both with a very ample store of venom ever since. But now, these are the very men, men like my right hon. Friend, who undertook these great questions, and braved the hostility of interested parties, that the rank and file of their constituents ought to support, and protect from the vengeance threatened against them.

I am told there is a complaint made of these gentlemen by my friend Mr. Alderman Neild, of whom I always wish to speak with respect, as an old friend of mine, and who thinks they do not pay sufficient attention to private bills in London. My opinion is that there is a good deal too much made of that. The fact is, the less you have to go to London for private bills the better. You want the bill carried in Parliament, the thing is done by the House of Commons; and, let me tell you, when you want a man who has influence in that House, to assist you in obtaining a bill, you must go to just such a man as my right hon. Friend, or Mr. Bright—men who have force in the House, who have the ability to make themselves felt when they speak in that House. I tell you that those men who are independent in that House, who have the power of speaking so as to command the attention of the House, will do more for you by what they say in half-a-dozen words, than an hour's talk will do for you from one of those toadies who are always known to be at the beck and call of the Government.

But I am told that this Manchester School, as it is called, do not pay sufficient attention to the interests of Manchester. Now, I think we have done as much for Manchester as anybody. Have you not got your daily newspapers now? But for my right hon. Friend you might have had to be content with news three days old. Have you not got an addition to your register of 4,000 names now? Who was it that got those 4,000 names added to your register by having the clause inserted in favour of the compound householders? It was Mr. Bright. No man of less energy or influence than he could have done it, because it is a thing repugnant to the governing class in the House of Commons to have any addition to the register at all. I ask those 4,000 men how they are going to vote? I don't say to those men, ‘You are not to exercise your vote, or your power, independent of Mr. Bright or anybody else;’ but this I say, ‘Shame upon you if, having got the franchise for yourselves by a man who advocates the extension of the franchise to others, you give the power vested in you to the hands of

somebody else, who [348] will refuse the franchise to those who have not got it.'

Well, but now, this Manchester School, and their getting the Corn-laws repealed, and Free Trade established, by which the trade of this country has pretty nearly doubled during the last twelve years—I say, who has benefited so much as Manchester by that? But if you come to your own local affairs—I tell these gentlemen who are setting themselves up, and swelling about as aldermen, and say we are people who have not attended to the interests of Manchester—I tell them they owe everything to us, even their dignity. If I were to take the watch out of the pocket of my friend in the chair there, and read the inscription upon it, it would show that it was given to him by a number of us, who associated together to get a charter of incorporation for Manchester.

And our friend here (Mr. G. Wilson), who, from the time he was a boy of eighteen years of age, and was working day and night as a secretary on Poulett Thompson's committee—who has worked on all the questions carried through the town of Manchester ever since, and gone through all the drudgery for it in getting the charter of incorporation; and during the constant labour of seven years, for the repeal of the Corn-laws; and who is working now—and, it seems, working too much, for these gentlemen;—this is the man, they say, who does nothing for Manchester—who does not look after the local affairs of Manchester.

Let me speak of my friend Mr. Alderman Neild—I shall not do so in any spirit of egotism now, because I may, without vanity, say that it does not at all add to my fame with regard to this transaction in Manchester; but it so happened that, on one unlucky day for the lord of the manor of this place, his steward summoned me, along with ten or twelve other gentlemen, to elect a boroughreeve and constables for Manchester. I was taken into some dingy, cobwebbed, murky hole, and sat down with those gentlemen to elect a boroughreeve and constables for Manchester. After we had finished our business we were entitled, I think, to a leaden ticket, for some soup or a dinner. I said immediately, 'Well, what in the world does all this mean? Can it be that Manchester'—for I was not an old inhabitant of the town—'is it that in this great town of Manchester we are still living under the feudal system? Does Sir Oswald Moseley, living up in Derbyshire, send his mandate down here, for us to come into this dingy hole to elect a government for Manchester, and then go and get a ticket for soup at his expense? Why, now,' I said, 'I will put an end to this thing.' And it so happened that just at that moment my friend, Mr. Neild, was trying to get some amendment to the Act of Parliament by which the affairs of the police were carried on in this borough. But my friend Mr. Neild went to work in that, as he went to work in everything—it was by a little bit of compromise and concession. He went to the party who were already in possession of the power of the town, and asked them to cooperate; and they got some unworthy people to come to their meeting and upset the benches, and make a great confusion, and the whole meeting was destroyed; and, in fact, Mr. Neild was very much discomfited. Well, I wrote to Mr. Neild, and, if he does me the honour to preserve anything that I write to him, he has the note now. I said, 'If you will do this thing in the way that I intend to do it, and you will join with me, I will undertake to say that we will get a charter of incorporation for Manchester.' Mr. Neild—who had tried, what is a common thing with these gentlemen, something that will please everybody, but pleases nobody—came to me, like an honest, excellent, true-hearted man, as he is, and he says, 'I have tried my way, and it does not answer; I will go with you; all I stipulate is, that you will not take any course but what is consistent with morality and honour, and I will join you in any way you choose in order to put an end to this [349] state of things.' We were three years at that work; and at one time he was 1,200*l.* out of pocket, and I was between 700*l.* and 800*l.* deficient, but we got the charter.

I ask these new-fledged aldermen—not the worthy and true-hearted men we see on this platform—I ask these men who are running about and saying that we will attend to nothing but the great national questions—I ask them, Are there in Manchester any men who have left

their impress upon the town of Manchester more than the four men who are stigmatised by these people as never paying any attention to local matters?

I am going to Huddersfield to-morrow. If my voice does not fail me, I should like to come back and have one more great meeting in this hall—but it must be on one condition, and that is, that the gentlemen here set to work. Our late friend, Sir Thomas Potter, if he had been living, would have been amongst us; and he never allowed a meeting to go off without his famous and memorable words, ‘Work, work, work.’ With these words, I wish to dismiss you.

I tell you, here is a combination, I call it a conspiracy—a foul conspiracy, to upset two of the ablest men in the House of Commons. One of them is absent, and therefore it is no flattery to say it of him, that, if the House of Commons had the power of returning three men to be Members of their body, I have not the least hesitation in saying that one of these men, if he was not in Parliament, would be John Bright. Now, he is well known to you, and my friend Mr. Gibson is known to you as a great worker in the good cause.

You are asked to dismiss these men without a cause. I tell you that it is you, and not they, who are upon your trials. You may dismiss them, but if you do you will never have them back again, for they will not be out of Parliament a month. And what will you have in the place of them? I will avoid personalities. I have only dealt with Lord Palmerston as a person because he has been put forward as a policy. He is the only policy put forward on which the elections are to turn. I am obliged to deal with the man as a policy.

But now, as to your two candidates. There is Mr. Lowe. See him, and hear him, before you choose him. You have had one specimen of ministerial oratory on this platform, and I want you to hear more of these ‘right honourable’ and ‘honourable’ members of the aristocracy. Let them come and talk to you, and you will then know better how to appreciate the men you have got. Hear Mr. Lowe. I have heard him, and I will say this—and in saying it I shall be borne out by any impartial man in the House of Commons—that, considering that he had some reputation for ability when he was at Oxford, and as a writer in the *Times*, he is the most conspicuous failure in the House of Commons. Then there is my friend Sir John Potter. I will say nothing upon this subject except this: I am sorry to see him in opposition to his old friends.

But this I say of the two candidates who are rivals for the representation of your city, that if you want to exchange your present talented Members—if you want to lose the proud distinction you have attained—send them; but if you want still to show yourself to the world as having two Members able to grapple with other men in that great arena of intellectual gladiatorship, the House of Commons,—if you want still to show to the world, as you have done already, that Manchester, at all events, is something, then keep your present Members. But, on the other hand, if you think you have had fame and distinction enough, and want to fall into utter insignificance, and to hear a shout of scorn and indignation at the result of your election, then return the two men you are asked to send in the place of your present representatives.

**AMERICAN WAR. I.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, APRIL 24, 1863.** [↪](#)

[The *Alexandra* was a three-masted wooden vessel, which was seized by the Commissioners of Customs at Liverpool, on the ground that it was being equipped contrary to the provisions of the Foreign Enlistment Act. The case which arose out of the seizure formed the subject of a trial in the Exchequer before Chief Baron Pollock, on June 22, and ended in a verdict for the defendants.]

THE legal points that have been discussed in connection with this question are, undoubtedly, of the greatest importance; but I apprehend that no one will expect that any conclusive result will arise from this passage of arms between Gentlemen learned in the law in this House upon a question which is, I believe, now pending before the Law Courts. When the hon. Member for Liverpool (Mr. Horsfall) gave notice of his motion, I had no idea he could have contemplated any such result, or that he could have wished this question to be confined to the mere technical aspect which has been sought to be given to it. I think a larger and more important question is before us. It is not merely the vessel (the *Alexandra*) now under consideration, that public report charges with being intended to commit a breach of the Statute Law. It is said there are many vessels now building with the same object in view, and I apprehend that this is a proper time in the interests of this country—in the interests of this country, and no other country—to offer a few remarks upon this subject. I expressly speak of the interests of this country, because we are constantly met by phrases such as, ‘You are consulting American interests;’—‘You are neglecting the honour of this country!’ I wish to consider British interests in my observations on the Foreign Enlistment Act, and I will consider no other interest; and I maintain, at the outset, there is no other country in the world that has a quarter—I say deliberately a quarter—of the interest in upholding the system of international law, of which the Foreign Enlistment Act is the basis.

Now, the hon. Member for Liverpool (Mr. Horsfall) has to-night—as was done by the hon. and learned Solicitor-General (Sir W. Atherton) on a former occasion—mixed up another question which has tended to bewilder and confuse the public mind here and out of doors, and the world over, as to two questions which are totally distinct. The hon. Member opposite has referred—and the greater part of his speech was made up of that subject—to the practice of buying and selling and exporting arms and munitions of war. I am sorry that topic was touched upon, both now and on a former occasion, when I was not present, though I have read the proceedings. There is no law in this country that prohibits the buying and selling or manufacturing or exporting arms and munitions of war. It has been truly said by the hon. and learned Member for Plymouth (Mr. Collier), and by the hon. and learned Gentleman the [351] Solicitor-General (Sir W. Atherton), that there is no country that has furnished such high authorities upon that subject as America itself. From the time of Jefferson, who, in that admirable passage read by the hon. Member for Plymouth, exhausted the whole argument in a few lines, down to the present time, every great authority in that country has clearly and distinctly laid down, that a Government is not responsible for the dealings of its subjects in the munitions of war. They carry on such a traffic at their own risk, and, if they attempt to run a blockade, the Government is not responsible, and their act never ought to be made the subject of diplomatic communication or complaint. I am astonished that Mr. Adams and Mr. Seward should have mixed that question up in their correspondence with that of equipments for war. I will not say I was astonished at Mr. Seward, because he writes so much, that he is in danger of writing on every subject, and on every side of a subject; but I am astonished that

Mr. Adams should have mixed this question up with what is really a vital question—that of furnishing and equipping ships of war. There is only one reason why I am not sorry Mr. Adams has touched upon that subject. He has alluded to large and systematic operations being carried on in this country for sending munitions of war to blockaded ports. That involves the risk of being seized by the cruisers of the Federal States; and, as the only mode of punishing those who violate the blockade is in the hands of those who are maintaining the blockade (and we know the blockade is violated systematically—we know there are joint-stock companies to do it)—as the only authority that can punish the guilty parties, by the confiscation of their property, is the Federal Government, through the Prize Courts; and as the only police that can seize them are the Federal cruisers, it is well the country should know what is going on; because, if in the crowd of steamers sent out now, for the first time, to carry on our commerce with the West Indies—though a few years ago we were obliged to pay 250,000*l.* a year for a line of steamers to carry our letters there—if, I say, in that crowd of steamers, one or two innocent vessels should be detained by the blockading squadron, I think Mr. Adams has so far done good in showing that their Government is entitled to some forbearance from us if those one or two innocent vessels should suffer with the guilty. I am not going into the question of the blockade now. I promise that I will deal with that question separately another time, and I shall be just as ready to meet your arguments on English grounds then as I am on the question now before us.

Now, coming to the real and only question before us—the infringement of our own Foreign Enlistment Act—what are the grounds upon which I desire to see the Government exercise the greatest vigilance in preventing the violation of that law? I say, first, it is because we, of all other countries, have the most at stake in seeing that law observed. How do I hope ever to see the Government supported—how do I hope to see public opinion sanction the vigilant observance of that law, but by making it clear to this House and to the country, that the Americans have a claim upon us for the due observance of that law, inasmuch as they have themselves at all times exercised a fair reciprocity towards us when we have had occasion to appeal to them, when we have been in their present position? I am glad to hear hon. Gentlemen who sit opposite say, ‘No, no.’ I like to hear an opponent say ‘No,’ if he will listen to me. And when he has listened, I challenge him, in all the records of our State papers, to show an instance, in our diplomatic correspondence, of a despatch having been written complaining of any unredressed grievance under the Foreign Enlistment Act of the United States. Now, what has been the conduct of the American Government with reference to this system of legislation? My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Plymouth stated truly, that all the legislation that has taken place in America upon the question [352] of foreign enlistment has been at the instance, and in behalf, I may say, of European Governments; and I will add, that in a majority of cases, it has been at the instance and for the benefit of England. I will take the first Act, passed in 1794. I am not going to dwell on historical subjects, or to repeat the familiar history of Mr. Genet, and his proceedings in 1793; but the passing of that Act so remarkably illustrates the good faith of the American people, that it cannot be passed over without notice. The United States had then been ten years an independent nation, owing its independence mainly to the assistance given by France. In the course of these ten years France had gone through a revolution; it had become a sister Republic; and it sent out an envoy to America, claiming assistance, and for the right of fitting out cruisers in American ports. It was against England, the old enemy of both, that it sought this advantage. What was the conduct of America under these circumstances, the most trying that could be imagined? Why, we know that it required all the moral power of Washington to enforce this law. Not the law of America, for in 1793 the United States had no enlistment law; but they put themselves under the common law of England, or what may be called international law, and they gave us all the protection which they now ask us to give them. In 1794, they passed a Foreign Enlistment Act, and at whose instance? I will not weary you with long extracts, or historical references of my own; I will give you what was said by an



English statesman, whose views will probably be heard with some respect on the other side. Mr. Canning, speaking of the passing of our Foreign Enlistment Bill, in 1819, said: —

'In 1794, this country complained of various breaches of neutrality committed on the part of citizens of the United States of America. What was the conduct of that nation in consequence? Did it resent the complaint as an infringement of its independence? Did it refuse to take such steps as would insure the immediate observance of neutrality? Neither. In 1794, immediately after the application from the British Government, the Legislature of the United States passed an Act, prohibiting, under heavy penalties, the engagement of American citizens in the armies of any belligerent Power.'

That was not merely an Act to prevent enlistment, it was a Foreign Enlistment Act, embracing our own provisions with reference to ships of war. That was the opinion of Mr. Canning.

I come now to the next case, in which the Americans carried out and enforced, in its entirety, the principle of neutrality, under the provisions of the Foreign Enlistment Act in the year 1818. At that time, the Spanish American Republics were in revolt against the mother country. We generally sympathise with everybody's rebels but our own. Mr. Canning and Lord Castlereagh brought into this House, in 1819, a Foreign Enlistment Bill, which was intended to make provision for the more faithful observance of our neutrality towards the Spanish colonies. This Bill met with great resistance from the Whig party; and, among others, it was opposed by Sir James Macintosh. I will read an extract from the speech of Lord Castlereagh, whom hon. Gentlemen opposite—even those below the gangway—will probably deem an authority. Lord Castlereagh, speaking on that Bill on the 13th of May, and using the mode of argument that would tell effectually with his Whig opponents, said: —

'It was a little too much in the hon. and learned Gentleman (Sir James Macintosh) to censure the Government of this country, as being hostile to the South Americans and partial to Spain, while we had delayed doing what another Government, which he would allow to be free and popular, had done long ago. He would ask him, had the United States done nothing to prevent their citizens from assisting the South Americans? They had enacted two laws on the subject, nearly of the same tendency as that now proposed.

Now, I beg to remind the House, that not only is it true, as my hon. and learned [353] Friend the Member for Plymouth says, that the American Government has passed its Foreign Enlistment Acts at the instance of European countries, but there is this remarkable fact also to be borne in mind, as proving the good faith of that Government and people, that they have passed those Acts in direct opposition to the sympathies and even to the supposed interests, of the country. In every one of the three cases to which I have to refer, they went against the national sympathies, and it required all the influence of the leading and authoritative politicians of the United States to carry the law against the popular feelings of the country. But now I come to the strongest case of all. I am going to bring as a witness a person who is present—the noble Lord (Palmerston) at the head of the Government. In 1837, as most of us are old enough to remember, a rebellion broke out in Canada, and when this House met in January, 1838, we were in a state of great apprehension with reference to the state of affairs on the North American Continent. Our apprehensions arose, not so much with respect to the rebellion in our own colonies, as on account of what was passing on the frontier of the United States. Great excitement prevailed among the border population, which sympathised strongly with the rebels; and the danger we felt was, that that state of things might lead to a collision with the United States. Soon after the meeting of the House, Sir Robert Inglis, interpreting the general anxiety of the country, rose and asked the noble Lord, who is now at the head of the Government, but who was then Foreign Minister, if he had any objection to state what

were at that moment the relations between Mr. Fox, our representative at Washington, and the Government of the United States. Lord Palmerston replied, that fortunately he was able to give exact information, as he had received a despatch from Mr. Fox the day before; from which I infer, that the noble Lord and Sir Robert Inglis had agreed beforehand that this important question was to be put. The noble Lord went on to describe the state of excitement and dangerous agitation prevailing on the frontiers of Canada; how the rebels had taken possession of a place called Navy Island; how they had flocked there, and been joined by citizens of the United States, and how arms had been furnished to them; and how there existed, in fact, a most dangerous state of excitement. The noble Lord further said, that the Governor of Canada, Sir Francis Head, had sent a despatch to Mr. Fox, at Washington, complaining of this most unfortunate and menacing state of affairs; and now I will read the continuance of the noble Lord's speech with reference to the conduct of the American Government on that occasion:—

Mr. Fox immediately communicated these facts to the President of the United States, and received in reply a most friendly communication. In the first instance, he had a verbal communication from Mr. Forsyth, the United States' Foreign Secretary, containing an expression of sentiments such as might be expected from the friendly spirit of the United States' Government, and the high sense of honour by which that country has been actuated in its dealings with foreign countries. On the 5th ult. Mr. Fox received a note from Mr. Forsyth, in which was a passage to this effect:—"That all the constitutional Powers vested in the Executive would be exercised to maintain the supremacy of those laws which had been passed to fulfil the obligations of the United States towards all nations which should unfortunately be engaged in foreign or domestic warfare." In addition to this assurance, that all the powers now vested in the central Government should be used to preserve neutrality, the President, on the 5th, sent down a special Message to Congress, stating, that though the laws as they stood were quite sufficient to punish an infraction of the neutrality, they were not sufficient to prevent it, and asking Congress to give the Executive further power for that purpose. Upon the receipt of this communication, a short discussion, in which many of the leading men, including Mr. Clay, Mr. Calhoun, and others of high character, participated, took place in Congress, and [354] without exception, all who spoke expressed sentiments of a most friendly disposition towards this country; stating a strong opinion that the laws should be enforced, and that if, as they stood, they were insufficient, stronger powers should be given to the Executive.'

Now, let us pause to do justice to those great men, Mr. Clay, Mr. Calhoun, and others, who brought their great influence to bear at a time of immense excitement and dangerous animosity, and who threw their temporary popularity to the wind, in order that they might—as every man of public influence ought to do—make themselves the depository of the influence which they possessed for their country's advantage. I am going to put an hypothetical case. Let us suppose, that instead of the friendly answer which the American Government returned, the President had replied to Mr. Fox in these terms: 'I hope the people and Government of the United States will believe that we are doing our best in every case to execute the law, but they must not imagine that any cry which may be raised will induce us to come down to Congress with a proposal to alter the law. If this cry is raised for the purpose of driving the President's Government to do something which may be contrary to the dignity of the country, in the way of altering our laws, for the purpose of pleasing another Government, then all I can say is, that such a course is not likely to accomplish its purpose.' Now, with the simple alteration of the words 'United Kingdom' for 'the United States,' 'this House' for 'Congress,' and 'Her Majesty's Government' for 'the President's Government,' we have exactly the language which was used by the noble Lord three weeks ago.

I wish now to draw your attention to what was done in consequence of that promise of the American Government. Why, notwithstanding that the Foreign Enlistment Act, as it stood, was much more stringent than ours, and gave greater powers than ours now does, they passed a supplementary Act for the year, which gave such powers to the Government that one would hardly believe that such arbitrary powers would have been given to the Government of the United States. I hear cries of 'Hear, hear!' of a rather doubtful tone from the other side; but let hon. Gentlemen remember that that Act was passed twenty-five years ago, and nobody then said that the Americans were fond of submitting to tyranny. By this temporary Act, which received the assent of the President on the 10th of March, 1838, it was enacted—

'That the several collectors, naval officers, surveyors, inspectors of customs, marshals and deputy-m Marshals of the United States, and every other officer who may be empowered for the purpose by the President of the United States, are hereby respectively authorised and required to seize and detain any vessel which may be provided or prepared for any military expedition or enterprise against the territories or dominions of any foreign Prince or Power,' &c.

It gives them power to seize a vessel without any proof—an absolute power to seize on suspicion, and detain any vessel for ten days, during which time they may gather evidence on the matter. If there was no proof the vessel was then to be released; but she was liable to be seized again if any new case should arise. To carry out this arbitrary and temporary Act, the whole powers of the militia and the volunteers of the country were placed at the disposal of these officers. That affords the third instance of the mode in which the American Government has legislated for the benefit of European States. But there is a fourth case, which affords another example, which occurred on the occasion of the Crimean war. On the breaking out of the war with Russia, in 1854, we sent a communication to the American Government, and a duplicate of it was sent from the French Government. We asked the American Government—

'In the spirit of just reciprocity to give orders that no privateer under Russian colours shall be equipped, or victualled, or admitted with its prizes in the ports of the United States, and also that the citizens [355] of the United States shall rigorously abstain from taking part in armaments of this nature, or in any other measure opposed to the duties of a strict neutrality.'

I will not now refer to the conduct pursued by the American Government in reference to the ship that was about half built for the Russian Government in America, and the building of which was suspended. I heard some person whisper, that the building of that vessel was suspended because the Russian Government could not find the money to finish it; but will any one believe that, when it is known that the Russian Government were at the time spending millions a week at Sebastopol? The vessel was not finished until three years after the war with Russia. There was another vessel, called the *Mauray*, which was suspected of being intended for the Russian Government, and was stopped under circumstances which showed a great deal more activity and vigilance than we have exhibited in the case of the *Alabama*. What I want to deduce from all these facts is this:—First, that the American Government have, from the very formation of their Union, shown a willingness to observe, maintain, and enforce a strict neutrality in reference to the wars which have frequently taken place amongst European States. Next, that they have done it under circumstances of the utmost difficulty. It is easy enough to maintain neutrality when you have no feeling the other way to contend with. They did it in spite of their sympathies, and in opposition to their wishes. There can be no doubt, that in the case of the Canadian rebellion, there was a strong feeling amongst the mass of the American people that a successful rebellion in Canada would have led to the annexation of Canada to the United States. There is no doubt that the strongest national yearnings were enlisted on the side of the Canadians; and I want to call the

attention of the House to the fact, that, in spite of these temptations to go wrong, the United States have uniformly gone right on this question. We may have had other grounds of complaint—I think, for instance, that in regard to our enlistments in America, they persisted in their resentment against us in a manner that partook of unfriendly severity, if not of direct hostility; but in the matter of their Foreign Enlistment Acts, I repeat again, and let no one answer me with a vague statement of what he has heard somewhere or other—I challenge any one to show me in all our diplomatic correspondence a despatch which complains of an unredressed grievance under those Acts.

I have mentioned these circumstances in the hope that they may become generally known, and in order that they may bring the sentiments of this House, and the public opinion of this country, to a temper which shall incline us to act by the United States as they have acted by us. If the motives which I have appealed to in this statement of facts will not have that effect, then I do not know that I ought to spend another minute in trying to bring any other motives to bear upon the minds of my countrymen. I do not intend to appeal to your fears, that would be out of the question; but I will not sit down without saying a word or two with reference to the interest we have in the question. If gratitude for the past observance of an honourable neutrality is not sufficient, let us look at what will be the consequence of pursuing another course. The hon. and learned Gentleman the Solicitor-General, in a speech from which I may not quote, as it was delivered in a previous debate this session, and which he has published as a pamphlet, laid it down, that we have only to deal with municipal law, and that the Foreign Enlistment Act was passed at our own will and pleasure, and that we may repeal it in like manner at our own pleasure. The Solicitor-General laid it down broadly, that the Foreign Enlistment Act was simply a measure of municipal law, which we might repeal at our own will and pleasure. Now, I join issue with the hon. and learned Gentleman, and I say we are bound as distinctly to the United States by the rules of honourable [356] reciprocity in this case as if treaty engagements existed. We have gone to the Americans, begging them not to allow their citizens to molest us; begging them not to allow privateers to be fitted out; and when it is clear that there has been no violation of their law, we are, I contend, bound to observe the same honourable neutrality. The hon. and learned Gentleman says, that if we choose to allow both parties to come and buy ships of war here, no infringement of our neutral position would, as a consequence, take place. That may be an abstract legal truth; but what must we say of a statesman who stands up in the House of Commons and gives expression to such a dictum as that, to be quoted hereafter in Washington? I am not going to discuss points of law with the hon. and learned Gentleman; that would be an act of presumption on my part; and we may possibly observe neutrality either by abstaining from assisting either party in the contest, or by rendering assistance to both. Is that, however, let me ask, a state of things which we ought to covet?

I should like to know from hon. Gentlemen opposite what would be our fate if any of those numerous wars in which we have been engaged, and to the recurrence of which we are liable, if this doctrine were carried fully into effect? If, for instance, the little dark cloud which threatened a rupture with Brazil, had burst upon our heads, America would, according to the theory of the hon. and learned Gentleman, be entitled not only to build ships for us, but might fit out vessels for the Brazilian Government, to cruise in the name of that Government and with the commission of the Brazilian Emperor, against our commerce. But I will not rest my argument merely on the ground that this is a thing which might possibly happen, if we were to adopt the line of policy to which the hon. and learned Gentleman has, as I think, so unwisely referred. Can we, I would ask, look for the maintenance of the law relative to foreign enlistment in America or elsewhere, unless we ourselves set the example of good faith? You have not only in America, but in France, a most stringent law on this subject. I wrote to a friend in France to ascertain what was the mode of proceeding there, in order to prevent vessels slipping from their ports, as the *Alabama* had done from ours; and I was told,

that they required no Foreign Enlistment Act for the purpose. By a penal code, which I believe all the nations of the Continent imitate more or less, any citizen of France, who, without the consent of the Government, commits an act of hostility against a Foreign Power, by which the country incurs the risk of war, is liable to transportation. The law further provides, that anybody who fits out a ship of war, or does any hostile act, owing to which an enemy inflicts reprisals on a French citizen, will likewise be held subject to the same penalty. This, you may say, is very severe; but then you want reciprocity with that country. The French do not ask you to pass a law in accordance with their model; but what both France and America will require is this—that you will, in the event of war, as far as lies in your power, prevent privateers from going out and preying upon their commerce. You may choose any way you please to do it; but surely you have too much common sense to imagine that you can induce America to abstain from such a system in the future, unless you observe the laws of a fair reciprocity in her regard.

Now, is there, let me ask, no way in which you can prevent ships of war from sailing from your ports, threatening, as they do, the commerce of a friendly country, all of them built in England, manned from England, armed and equipped from England, that were never intended for any destination, but are roaming the seas without any fixed goal, and marking their track by fire and devastation? That is the question to which you have to address yourselves; and, unless you are prepared to set your face against this system, the Foreign Enlistment Act will be, as the hon. and learned Member for Plymouth said, a dead letter; [357] and if it be made a dead letter here, most assuredly the same state of things will result elsewhere.

Who, then, I should like to know, has the most to lose by the adoption of this system? I will show, by giving some figures, which tell us how large a proportion of the property afloat on salt water belongs to British capitalists. The lowest estimate I have heard formed of the value of this property, as entered through the insurance offices in the City and other quarters, shows that we have upon an average 100,000,000*l.* to 120,000,000*l.* sterling worth of the property of British capitalists on the seas. Rest assured, no other country has 30,000,000*l.* worth, and that you have as much property at stake upon the ocean as all the rest of the world put together. You have, moreover, 10,000,000 people in these islands to feed upon food brought from foreign countries. You get three-fourths of the tea and four-fifths of the silk from China; more than one-half of the tallow and hemp from Russia; there is more cotton, more wheat, more Indian corn, brought to us than to any other country. You, who are so powerful here, and can set the world at defiance in your island home, are, the moment a war of reprisals is made on your commerce, the most vulnerable. The hon. Gentleman who says ‘No,’ does not understand the position of the commerce of England. But be that as it may, is there, I would ask, nothing we can do to show our good faith in this matter? Is it not derogatory that we should have any one in this country, and especially in this House, claiming to be educated and reflective, who would for a moment consent to put himself on the side of those who are committing those acts against the law of the country and its future welfare? I want public opinion to be ranged on the side of law in this as well as in every other matter. Is there any person who wishes to give his sanction to an offence against the law of the country? Every person engaged in the building of ships of war, under the circumstances to which I have referred, subjects himself to penal consequences—to fine and imprisonment. Is there any person who will encourage such a practice as that? Is there nothing we can do to show that we wish to put it down? The case of the *Alabama* is one that is, perhaps, clearer than the case of the *Florida*, or the *Japan*. The last-mentioned vessel was, however, one not only built here for the Confederate Government, but manned by Englishmen surreptitiously conveyed on board the ship. The *Alabama*, it was said, escaped from our port under the pretence of going on a trip of pleasure, and it was stated in one of the despatches that orders were issued to have the vessel stopped at Nassau. If she was to be stopped at Nassau, why

was she not stopped elsewhere? That vessel has been paying visits to our ports in other islands, and has been received with something like favour and consideration. There is a legal difficulty, I know, raised—that you cannot stop a vessel after her first voyage; but my answer is, that the *Alabama* has never made a voyage at all; she has been cruising about, and has no home. Why do you not forbid the reentry of those vessels into your ports, that left them, manned by a majority of English sailors, in violation of the Foreign Enlistment Act? Would any person have a right to complain of that? Proclaim the vessels that thus steal away from your ports outlaws, so far as your ports are concerned. If you were to do what I suggest, other countries would follow your example, and put an end to those clandestine proceedings by making them unprofitable.

It is our duty, in reference to the obligations of the past—it is our duty, in reference to the stake we have in future, to put an end to the present state of things. The whole system of the Foreign Enlistment Act is, I may add, only two hundred years old. The ancients did not know the meaning of the word ‘neutrality,’ as we know it at the present day. In the middle ages, people were hardly aware of such a thing as neutrality; the first Foreign Enlistment Act is hardly two hundred years old, and since that time that system of legislation has [358] grown up. It has been a code of legislation that has gradually grown up, and is now looked to by the nations to assist in keeping the peace, and preventing the catastrophe of a general war. Shall we be the first to roll back the tide of civilisation, and thus practically go back to barbarism and the middle ages, by virtually repealing this international code, by which we preserve the rights and interests of neutrality? I cannot but think that this House and the country, when they reflect on the facts of the case, will consider, that if they in any way lend their sanction to such a retrograde policy they would be unworthy of themselves, and would be guilty of a great crime against humanity.

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**AMERICAN WAR. II.**  
**ROCHDALE, NOVEMBER 24, 1863.** ↩

[At the general election of 1859, Mr. Cobden was returned for the borough of Rochdale, and sat for this town during the rest of his life. The following was one of his annual addresses to his constituents.]

It is to me, as your representative, a very happy and pleasant omen to find my arrival here greeted by so large an assemblage of my friends. It is not an unreasonable thing,—I think it is the least that can be expected from a Member of Parliament, that he should, once a year at least, meet his constituents face to face, to state to them his views upon the passing events of the day, and to hear from them in a public assembly like this what are their wishes and opinions with reference to his future conduct. Generally, when a Member makes his annual appearance, it is expected that he should have something to relate about the proceedings of the immediately preceding session of Parliament. Well, I should be very much at a loss for a text, if you confined me to the topics furnished by our proceedings during the last session. The best I can say of the present Parliament is, that it is drawing near to its end. It failed to perform any service for the country when it was in its prime, and therefore you will not expect any good from it in its decrepitude. The sooner it is returned to the country to undergo the renewal of the representative system, I think the better for the country, and the better for Parliament. Now, I think, when a new Parliament meets, it will have to be furnished with principles from the country. The great lack of the present Parliament is, that it is destitute of principle or purpose. Probably we, whom we will call the Free-traders of this country—we have a right to call ourselves Free-traders here, if we have anywhere—probably we are largely responsible for that state of things in Parliament. We have been, contrary to our professed principles, a kind of monopolists of the public arena for nearly the last quarter of a century. It will be twenty-five years next month since my friend here to my left (Mr. Bright), and so many around me, first joined together to commence that effort which has been alluded to by your Mayor, and which has ended now in the complete recognition of Free-trade principles. Now, during all that time, we may be said to have occupied pretty exclusively the attention of political parties and of statesmen. I found the field occupied by labourers who were advocating other principles. For instance, there were the advocates of parliamentary reform; there were the advocates of religious equality,—and by religious equality, I mean to deal, for instance, with that great and glaring abuse of the system of [360] religious equality—the Irish Church,—which Lord Brougham has denounced as the foulest abuse in any civilised country. Well, we elbowed out of the way these questions; we had a question in hand that would not bear delay—we were advocating a question of bread, and employment for the people. After having accomplished our object,—and this last session of Parliament has finished the work,—it had just languid force enough to carry the last remaining measures to complete the Free-trade system—helped a little by the extraneous and rather exceptional proceeding of a foreign treaty—but at last, this present Parliament has completed the work of Free Trade. By Free Trade, I mean that it has settled that great controversy as between Protection and Free Trade. At least, there protection ends to-day; but our children must carry on the work. There is still the question of direct and indirect taxation; there is still the question of a large reduction of expenditure in the Government. But the great controversy as between Protection and Free Trade is now settled, and I say the next Parliament will require to be endowed with new principles by the country when we have another general election.

Now, some people say that there is great apathy and indifference in the country. I don't think there is a want of interest in the country upon public affairs. I think there is a lively interest in the public proceedings of the whole world, and the public mind is very demonstrative. But what I observe is this, that the attention of the country seems to be rather given to the affairs of other nations than to our own. We are something as a nation as you would be in Rochdale as a borough, if your Town Council were pretty generally employed in discussing the affairs of Preston, Blackburn, or Manchester, instead of its own. And it is curious enough, that whilst we are devoting more than ever of our attention to foreign politics, we are still constantly professing the principle of non-intervention. We have non-intervention on our lips, but there is always a desire for a little intervention in the corner of our heart for some special object or other abroad. I don't charge this against any particular party or any Government. We have all our little pet projects of non-intervention. For instance, some would manage the affairs of the Americans; others would take in charge to regulate the affairs of Poland; others are interested in Italy; and so it is that, in spite of our professions of non-intervention, we are, in fact, I think, as far as my observation goes, interfering more than ever with the affairs of foreign countries. Some people say it is the telegram; they say that Reuter's telegram is the daily morning dram, and that it so stimulates the palate, and comes in contact with the brain—America with a great battle, or Poland, or somewhere else—that we have no taste for the simple element of which our domestic affairs are made up. Now, for instance, we have at the present moment a party in this country advocating an interference in the affairs of America; for when I say interference, I mean that party here who advocate either recognition, or something which means interference, if it means anything.

I have seen lately the report of two meetings of constituents in the west of England, one at Bristol and the other at Plymouth, in which Members, Liberal Members, representing popular constituencies, have been recommending that the Government should enter into arrangements with some foreign country of Europe, in order to recognise the Southern States of America, and put an end to that war. [A Voice: 'Very proper.'] And you will observe, that the idea which pervaded the public mind, at least which pervaded it in the two cases I allude to—the speakers and the audience—the idea was, that this affair in America was to be settled in a peculiar way, according to the dictates of these particular parties. Well, now, I think, from the beginning, that during this American war, this lamentable convulsion, from which you have suffered so much, I think that one of the great fundamental [361] errors in the conduct of statesmen, in the conduct of Governments, and in the conduct of a large portion of the influential classes in this country, has been, that they have made up their minds that union cannot be the issue of this civil war in America, and that there will be a separation between North and South. I told you when I was here last, when that spirit, if possible, was more rife than now, I told you that I did not myself believe that the war would issue in that way. I have stated that opinion since in the House of Commons; and I declare to you, that, looking at what is called in a cant phrase in London, 'society;' looking at society—and society, I must tell you, means the upper ten thousand, with whom Members of Parliament are liable to come in contact at the clubs and elsewhere in London; looking at what is called 'society'—looking at the ruling class, if we may use the phrase, that meet in the purlieu of London, nineteen-twentieths of them were firmly convinced from the first that the civil war in America could only end in separation. Now, how far that conviction—how far the wish was father to the thought, I will not pretend to say. I believe that the feeling has been a sincere one; and I believe it has also been founded on the belief that, looking at the vast extent of territory occupied by the insurgents in the civil war, it was impossible to subjugate it by any force that could be brought against them by the North.

But there has been, I must say, a most lamentable display of ignorance amongst those classes to which I refer, if you may judge by the conduct of the organs of the press, which may be considered the exponents of their views;—errors, for example, in the course of



mighty rivers, which those in England can bear no comparison to, but described in your leading organs in London as running one into the other, utterly regardless of the rights of geography. There are States in America of 1,500,000 inhabitants, where there are vast shipping ports for raw produce to be shipped into various parts of the world. In the interior of that country, in one city, I have seen a mile of steam-boats moored side by side, not lengthways; and those great cities and the great commerce they possess form part of the strength and resource of North America. Your ruling classes in this country know nothing of this; you don't find it in the books of Oxford and Cambridge, which the undergraduates are obliged to learn before they can pass their examination. It is in utter ignorance of these resources that this opinion has grown up. Accident, perhaps, more than anything else, has made me acquainted as well with the statistics and geography of that country as my own. I think no one in this vast assembly will ever live to see two separate nations within the confines of the present United States of America. I have never believed we should, and I believe it less than ever now. But I will tell you candidly, that if it was not for one cause, I should consider as hopeless and useless the attempt to subjugate the Southern States; and I will tell the parties upon whose views I have been commenting, that it is the object and purpose which they have that has rendered success by the Secessionists absolutely impossible. Indeed, if the moral and intellectual faculties of this country had not been misled upon that question, systematically misled, they would have been unanimous and of one opinion. We were told in the House of Commons by one, whom it was almost incredible to behold and think of saying so—who was once the great champion of democracy and of the rights and privileges of the unsophisticated millions,—we heard him say—I heard him say myself—that this civil war was originated because the South wished to establish Free-trade principles, and the North would not allow it. I have travelled—and it is for this that I am now going to mention, that I touch upon the subject at all—I travelled in the United States in 1859, the year before the fatal shot was fired at Fort Sumter, which has made such terrible reverberations since. I travelled in the United States—I visited Washington [362] during the session of the Congress, and wherever I go, and whenever I travel abroad, whether it be in France, America, Austria, or Russia, I at once become the centre of all those who form and who avow strong convictions and purposes in reference to Free-trade principles. Well, I confess to you what I confessed to my friends when I returned, that I felt disappointed, when I was at Washington in the spring of 1859, that there was so little interest felt on the Free-trade question. There was no party formed, no public agitation; there was no discussion whatever upon the subject of Free Trade and protection. The political field was wholly occupied by one question, and that question was Slavery.

Now, I will mention an illustrative fact, which I have not seen referred to. To my mind, it is conclusive on this subject. In December, 1860, whilst Congress was sitting, and when the country was in the agony of suspense, fearing the impending rupture amongst them, a committee of their body, comprising thirty-three members, being one representative from every State then in the Union,—that committee, called the Committee of Thirty-three, sat from December 11th, 1860, to January 14th, 1861. They were instructed by Congress to inquire into the perilous state of the Union, and try to devise some means by which the catastrophe of a secession could be averted. Here is a report of the proceedings in that committee [holding up a book in his hand]. I am afraid there is not another report in this country. I have reason to know so. There are forty pages. I have read every line. The members from the Southern States, the representatives of the Slave States, were invited by the representatives of the Free States to state candidly and frankly what were the terms they required, in order that they might continue peaceable in the Union; but in every page you see their propositions brought forward, and from beginning to end there is not one syllable said about tariff or taxation. From the beginning to end there is not a grievance alleged but that which was connected with the maintenance of slavery. There were propositions calling on the North to give increased security for the maintenance of that institution; they are invited to

extend the area of slavery; to make laws, by which fugitive slaves might be given up; they are pressed to make treaties with foreign Powers, by which foreign Powers might give up fugitive slaves; but, from beginning to end, no grievance is mentioned except connected with slavery,—it is slavery, slavery, slavery, from the beginning to the end. Is it not astonishing, in the face of facts like these, that any one should have the temerity, so little regard to decency and self-respect, as to get up in the House of Commons, and say that secession has been upon a question of Free Trade and Protection?

Well, this is a war to perpetuate and extend human slavery. It is a war not to defend slavery as it was left by their ancestors—I mean, a thing to be retained and to be apologised for,—it is a war to establish a slave empire,—a war in which slavery shall be made the cornerstone of the social system,—a war which shall be defended and justified on scriptural and on ethnological grounds. Well, I say, God pardon the men, who, in this year of grace 1863, should think that such a project as that could be crowned with success. Now, you know that I have, from the first, never believed it possible that the South should succeed; and I have founded that faith mainly upon moral instincts, which teach us to repudiate the very idea that anything so infamous should succeed. No; it is certain that in this world the virtues and the forces go together, and the vices and the weaknesses are inseparable. It is, therefore, that I felt certain that this project never could succeed. For how is it? There is a community with nearly half of its population slaves, and they were attempting to fight another community where every working man is a free man. It is as though Yorkshire and Lancashire were to enter into conflict, and it was understood that in the [363] case of one, all the labourers who did the muscular work of the country, whether in the field or in the factory, whether in the roads or in the domestic establishments—in the one case, you would have that bone and muscle, the sinew of the country, eliminated from the fighting population, and not only eliminated from the fighting population, but ready to take advantage of this war, either to run away or fight against you. How could we, so circumstanced, fighting against a neighbouring country, where every working man was fighting for his own—how could we have a chance, if our physical force was crippled, and we were devoid of all moral influences? That is the condition in which these two sections of the United States are now placed. In the one case, you have a condition in which labour is held honourable. Have we not heard it used as a reproach by some people, who fancy themselves in alliance with the aristocracy—some of our Ministers, who would lead us to suppose they are of the aristocratic order?

Now, we hear it used as an argument against the North, that their President, Mr. Lincoln, was a ‘rail-splitter.’ But what does that prove with regard to the United States, but that labour is held in honour in that country? And with such a conflict going on, and with such an example as I feel no doubt will follow, I cannot, if I speak of such a contest as that, say that it is a struggle for empire on the one side, and for independence on the other. I say it is an aristocratic rebellion against a democratic Government. That is the title I would give to it; and in all history, when you have had the aristocracy pitted against the people, in a hand-to-hand contest, the aristocracy have always gone down under the heavy blows of the democracy. When I speak this, let no one say I am indifferent to the process of misery and destitution, and ruin and bloodshed, now going on in that country. No. My indignation against the South is, that they fired the first shot, and made themselves responsible for this result. I take, probably, a stronger view than most people in this country, and certainly a stronger view than anybody in America, of the vast sacrifices of life, and of economical comfort and resources, which must follow to the North from this struggle. They are mistaken if they think they can carry on a civil war like this, drawing a million men from their productive industry, to engage merely in a process of destruction, and spending their two or three hundred millions sterling—I say they are mistaken and deluded if they think they can carry on a war like that without a terrible collapse, sooner or later, and I am sure that there will be a great prostration in every part of the community. But that being so, makes me still

more indignant and intolerant of the cause; but of the result I have no more doubt than I have on any subject that lies in the future.

And now I would ask you—why do some people wish that the United States should be cut up in two? They think it desirable that it should be weakened. Will that view bear discussion for a moment? I hold not. I am of the opinion which our statesmen held in the time of Canning, who thought it desirable for Europe that America should be strong; desirable that she should be strong, because it would thereby prevent European Powers from interfering in American affairs. That has been the case hitherto. That country has prospered. It has never come to interfere with European politics, and it has kept European Governments from interfering in other American States which have not been so prosperous or so orderly as the United States. And now see what has followed. See what has happened already from this disruption of the United States. You have France gone to Mexico; you have Spain gone to San Domingo. Why, there are horrors unutterable now going on in San Domingo, because Spain has gone and invaded that country with the view to re-conquest; and the French Government has embarked in a career in Mexico which I will only characterise as the greatest mistake committed by the monarch of that [364] country. This enterprise would never have been undertaken if the United States had not been in the difficulties of this civil war; and it is the least creditable part of those enterprises that they have been undertaken because America was weak. But it only required that the North should have been a little weaker, and then these silly people would have been going about for an interference in America, and then they would have carried out their project, and you would have had France and other Powers going over to America to meddle in that quarrel.

Now, is that desirable? Don't you think we have enough to do at home? Do you think, now, that Europe has so much wisdom to spare in the management of her affairs, that she can afford to cross the Atlantic to set the new world in order? If so, what is the meaning of the utterances which we have lately heard from Imperial lips, calling for a Congress of the Powers of Europe? And what for? To form a new pact for the European States, because the arrangement entered into at the Treaty of Vienna is, to use the Emperor's own words, torn all to tatters. Well, but that is not very consolatory for us. We fought for more than twenty years, we spent a thousand millions of treasure in that great war, and the only result we have to show is the settlement at the Treaty of Vienna;—and now we are told that it is all torn to tatters! Well, I say, that does not encourage us to enter upon a similar career again—at all events, it means this, that Europe has quite enough to do at home, without going, at the instigation of silly people, to interfere with the affairs of America. I would not be thought to say one word against the project of the Emperor of the French to hold a Congress. There is one passage in his address which prevents my treating it with unqualified opposition or indifference. For the first time a great potentate—the head of the most powerful military nation of Europe—has called a Congress, to devise, amongst other measures, the means of reducing those enormous standing armaments, which are the curse and the peril of Europe at this time. But this I would say, that if there should be a Congress, and this part of the programme—a diminution of armaments is made the primary and fundamental object of that Congress, I am afraid from past experience that it would probably only lead to an increase of the evil. For I remember the Congress in 1856, after the Crimean war, which war was to establish peace, and enable us to reduce our armaments. After that war, we had a Congress in Paris in 1856, and they arranged the peace of Europe.

Well, what has happened since? There are nearly a million more men trained to arms in the two services in Europe now than there were before the Crimean war, and England itself has 200,000 of these men, besides a gigantic scheme of fortifications such as the world never saw before in one project. One of the objects for which the Congress is to be called is to arrange the difficulties and troubles in certain European States. There is the case of Poland

particularly referred to. I am not unmindful of the claims of Poland, or of other countries struggling for what they consider their rights; that is, where they can show a programme of grievances such as I believe the Poles can do; but I have not much faith in the power of any one country to go and settle the affairs of another country upon anything like a permanent basis; and there is the ground on which I am such a strong advocate of the principle of non-intervention; it is because intervention must almost, by its very nature, fail in its object. There are two things we confound when we talk of intervention in foreign affairs. The intervention is easy enough, but the power to accomplish the object is another thing. You must take possession of a country, in order to impress your policy upon it; and that becomes a tyranny of another sort. But if you go to intervene in the affairs of Poland, with a view to rescue them from the attacks of Russia, I maintain that so far as England is concerned, you are attempting an [365] impossibility; and if you cannot do it by physical force, if you cannot do it by war, then I humbly submit that you are certain to do it more harm than good if you attempt to do it by diplomacy. Mark what has been done in Poland on this occasion. We have had three Powers, every one writing despatches stating that, unless certain measures are acceded to, Russia is threatened with the force of these united Powers. What has been the effect of that? You have made the whole Russian people united as against these foreign Powers. They might not have been so exasperated against their own people, but immediately foreigners step in, you have had the whole Russian people roused to a patriotic frenzy—not to oppose the Poles, but to oppose some outside Powers that are attempting to interfere with them. The consequence is, that the Poles, who have been encouraged to go on by the hope of foreign interference, have been placed in a position far more perilous to them than if you had never interfered at all. Some people will say, do you intend to leave these evils without a remedy? Well, I have faith in God, and I think there is a Divine Providence which will obviate this difficulty; and I don't think that Providence has given it into our hands to execute His behests in this world. I think, when injustice is done, whether in Poland or elsewhere, the very process of injustice is calculated, if left to itself, to promote its own cure; because injustice produces weakness—injustice produces injury to the parties who commit it.

But do you suppose that the Almighty has given to this country, or any other country, the power and the responsibility of regulating the affairs and remedying the evils of other countries? No. We have not set a sufficiently pure example to be entitled to claim that power. When I see that Russia is burning Polish villages, I am restrained from even reproaching them, because I am afraid they will point Japanwards, and scream in our ears the word 'Kagosima!' Now, that word Kagosima brings me to a subject upon which I wish to say one or two words. I see that my noble Friend, the Secretary of the Admiralty (Lord Clarence Paget), who always enters upon the defence of any naval abomination with so much cheerfulness, that he really seems to me to like the task; he has been speaking at a meeting of his constituents, and he alluded to the horrible massacre which took place in Japan, to which, amongst others, I called your attention; and he says it is quite wrong to suppose that our gallant officers ever contemplated to destroy that town of Kagosima, with its 150,000 of rich, prosperous, commercial people—they never intended it—it was quite an accident. Well, unfortunately, he cannot have read the despatch which appeared in the *Gazette*, addressed to his own department, the Admiralty, for it is stated in that despatch that the admiral had himself threatened the Japanese envoys who came on board his vessel the day before the bombardment of that city, that if they did not accede to the demands made upon them, he would next day burn their city. The threat was actually made, and the conflagration was only the carrying out of the threat. But there was another fact in connection with that affair for which I feel greatly ashamed and indignant. It is for the way in which it was managed—the stealthy, shabby, mean way in which it was managed—to make it appear that the Japanese were the aggressors in that affair. Lord Russell's instructions to Admiral Kuper were, that he might go and take this Japanese prince's ships of war, or he might shell his palace, or he might shell his forts. He does not tell him to do all these things; he was to go to demand

satisfaction, and, in case satisfaction were not given, he suggested to do certain things by way of reprisals, and one of the things he was ordered to do was to take these ships belonging to this prince. Well, the ships were moored—hid, as it were, concealed away—at some distance from the city, and steamers were sent by our admiral to seize these vessels, and they were not within miles of the fort which was firing on our ships. If [366] the admiral had contented himself with trying to seize these ships, which were three steamers of great value, which had been bought from Europeans—had he contented himself, according to his instructions, with trying to seize these steamers, and waited to see if this brought the prince to his senses, there would have been no conflagration. But how did he act? He lashes these steamers alongside his own steamers, and then with his whole fleet goes under the batteries of the Japanese, and waits for several hours; and when the Japanese fire on him, he says that the honour of the British flag required that he should at once commence to bombard the palace, because he had been attacked first.

Now I remember—I remember quite well, in the case of a very analogous proceeding—in the case of our last war with the Burmese, I wrote a digest of the Blue Book giving an account of that terrible war, and to which I gave the title of ‘How wars are got up in India’—I remember precisely the same manoeuvres were resorted to. Some of the ships of war belonging to the Burmese Government were seized by our naval officers from under their forts, and because they fired on these vessels in the act of carrying off their whole navy, it was said that they commenced the war, and the honour of the British flag required immediately the bombardment of the place. Let us suppose that a French fleet came off Portsmouth, and took three of our ships of war at Spithead, and lashed them alongside their steamers, and then came within range of our forts at Portsmouth; if the commander of these forts had not fired on these ships with all the available resources he had, he would assuredly have been hung up to his own flag-staff on the first occasion. Well, now, is it not deplorable that we English, directly we get east the Cape of Good Hope, lose our morality and our Christianity?—that we resort to all the meanness, and chicanery, and treachery with which we accuse those Oriental people of practising upon us? But we forget what De Tocqueville says in speaking of similar proceedings of ours in India. He says: ‘You ought not, as Englishmen and Christians, to lower yourselves to the level of that people. Remember, your sole title to be there at all is because you are supposed to be superior to them.’ Do you suppose these things can be done by us Englishmen with impunity—do you think there is no retributive justice that will mete out vengeance to us as a people if we continue to do this; and if there is no compunction on the part of this community?

There is a writer at Oxford University, one who writes bold truths in the most effective manner, who is doing it for the instruction of the next generation of statesmen—that is the Professor of History at Oxford. Mr. Goldwin Smith, treating of this very subject, says: ‘There is no example, I believe, in history, from that of imperial Rome down to that of imperial France, of a nation which has trampled out the rights of others, but that ultimately forfeited its own.’ Do you think those maxims, which we tolerate in the treatment of three, four, or five millions of people in the East—do you think that they will not turn back to curse us in our own daily lives, and in our own political organization? You have India; you have acquired India by conquest, and by means which no Englishman can look back upon with satisfaction. You hold India; your white faces are predominating and ruling in that country; and has it ever occurred to you at what cost you rule? We have lately had a report of the sanitary state of the army in India; why, if you take into account the losses we sustain in that country by fever, by debauchery, by ennui, and by climate; if you take into account the extra number of deaths and invalids in the army and civil service, in consequence of the climate, you are holding India at a cost—if I may be permitted to use the term—of a couple of battles of Waterloo every year. Is there not a tremendous responsibility accompanied with this, that you are to tolerate your lawless adventurers to penetrate [367] not only into China, but in Japan, in your name? The

history of all the proceedings in China at this time is as dishonourable to us as a nation as were the proceedings in Spain in the times of Cortes and Pizarro. When they fought, they did not commit greater atrocities than Englishmen have done in China. They have them mixing up themselves in this civil war and rebellion for the sake of loot, for the sake of plunder, entering towns, and undertaking to head these Chinese—aiding the Chinese Government—in storming these defenceless towns. They are so far off; their proceedings are done at so great a distance, that you don't feel them or see them, or know your responsibility; but they will find you out, and find out your children. I remember when in the House of Commons, I brought the conduct of our agents at Canton, who were opposing the Chinese authority—that is, the authority of the Chinese Government—I was met by the present Prime Minister with this argument: Why do you have such sympathy with this Chinese Government? Why, it is so detestable to government of life and property, and the people are so insecure, that you can buy a substitute for a few hundred dollars if you are ordered to be executed,—another Chinaman, who will go and be executed for you. So terrible is the Government, that they don't value life as they do in other countries. Now, what are they doing? I get up and oppose our assistance to the present Tartar Government, and am answered by the same Prime Minister, why you are defending the Taepings; they are such monsters of humanity, and so odious, and all the rest of the epithets are applied to them which were applied to the Chinese Government. Yet now you are supporting the Government against the rebels, when five or six years ago Lord Palmerston told you the Government was so odious, that life was not valued under it. How is it that our Government is found in alliance with the most odious Governments of the world? There is the Government of Turkey, which is our especial pet and protégé. There is the Government of China; we have lately been in interfering to help the Emperor of Morocco; and the Government of Austria, which is only a Government and an army, and not a nation, is also our pet and ally.

I will only say one word before I sit down, upon a subject which I hope to see the order of the day again. I am talking very much against my own principles upon these distant questions, but it is because they are made home questions and vital questions by the course pursued by other parties; but I want to see us called back to our own domestic affairs, and first and foremost amongst those affairs, I consider—notwithstanding the attempt to shelve—first and foremost, and that which lies at the bottom of all others, is a reform in the representation of the country. It has been a fashion of late to talk of an extension of the franchise as something not to be tolerated, because it is assumed that the manners of the people were not fitted to take a part in the Government; and they point to America and France, and other places, and they draw comparisons between this country and other countries. Now, I hope I shall not be considered revolutionary—because at my age I don't want any revolutions—they won't serve me, I am sure, or anybody that belongs to me. England may perhaps compare very favourably with most other countries, if you draw the line in society tolerably high—if you compare the condition of the rich and the upper classes of this country, or a considerable portion of the middle classes, with the same classes abroad. Well, I admit the comparison is very favourable indeed. I don't think a rich man—barring the climate, which is not very good—could be very much happier anywhere else than in England; but I have to say as follows to my opponents, who treat this question of the franchise as one that is likely to bring the masses of the people down from their present state to the level of other countries.

I have been a great traveller,—I have travelled in most civilised countries, and [368] I assert that the masses of the people of this country do not compare so favourably with the masses of other countries as I could wish. I find in other countries a greater number of people with property than there are in England. I don't know, perhaps, any country in the world where the masses of the people are so illiterate as in England. It is no use your talking of your army and navy, your exports and your imports; it is no use telling me you have a small

portion of your people exceedingly well off. I want to make the test in a comparison of the majority of the people against a majority in any other country. I say that with regard to some things in foreign countries we don't compare so favourably. The English peasantry has no parallel on the face of the earth. You have no other peasantry like that of England—you have no other country in which it is entirely divorced from the land. There is no other country of the world where you will not find men turning up the furrow in their own freehold. You won't find that in England. I don't want any revolution or agrarian outrages by which we should change all this. But this I find to be quite consistent with human nature, that wherever I go the condition of the people is very generally found to be pretty good in comparison to the power they have to take care of themselves. And if you have a class entirely divorced from political power, and there is another country where they possess it, the latter will be treated with more consideration, they will have greater advantages, they will be better educated, and have a better chance of having property than in a country where they are deprived of the advantage of political power. But we must remember this: we have been thirty years—it is more than thirty years since our Reform Bill was passed; and during that time great changes have taken place in other countries. Nearly all your colonies since that time have received representative institutions. They are much freer in Australia and New Zealand, and much freer in their representative system than we are in England; and thirty years ago they were entirely under the domination of our Colonial Office. Well, go on the Continent, you find there wide extension of political franchises all over the country. Italy, and Austria even, is stirring its dry bones; you have all Germany now more or less invested with popular sovereignty; and I say, that, with all our boasted maxims of superiority as a self-governing people, we don't maintain our relative rank in the world, for we are all obliged to acknowledge that we dare not entrust a considerable part of the population of this country with political power, for fear they should make a revolutionary and dangerous use of it. Besides, bear in mind, that both our political parties—both our aristocratic parties, have already pledged themselves to an extension of the franchise. The Queen has been made to recommend from her throne the extension of the franchise; and you have placed the governing classes in this country in the wrong for all future time, if they do not fulfil those promises, and adopt those recommendations. They are placed in the wrong, and some day or other they may be obliged to yield to violence and clamour what I think they ought in sound statesmanship to do tranquilly and voluntarily, and in proper season. If you exclude to the present extent the masses of the people from the franchise, you are always running the risk of that which a very sagacious old Conservative statesman once said in the House of Commons. He said, 'I am afraid we shall have an ugly rush some day.' Well, I want to avoid that 'ugly rush.' I would rather do the work tranquilly, and do it gradually.

Now, Gentlemen, all this will be done by people out of doors, and not by Parliament; and it would be folly for you to expect anybody in the House of Commons to take a single step in the direction of any reform until there is a great desire and disposition manifested for it out of doors. When that day comes, you will not want your champions in the House of Commons. You have one of them (Mr. Bright) here; you could not [369] have a better. He and I began work at the same time, but I had the misfortune to be seven or eight years older. Now, he has a good Reform Bill in him yet. But I am not sure that I shall live to be able to afford you much help in the matter.

Now, before I sit down, I will merely say, I congratulate you that the prospects and condition of this community are not so bad as they were last year, and I hope they may not be worse than they are now. The ordeal through which you have passed has been creditable to the employers and employed. Some men rise in the world by adversity: I think you have done so. You have shown you are able to bear yourselves manfully against a very cruel and sudden disaster. I do not think that what has occurred will be without its significance, even in a political point of view. I have heard in all directions that it is an unanswerable argument, so

far as you are concerned in Lancashire, that the conduct, the bearing, the manliness, the fortitude, the self-respect with which you have borne the ordeal through which you have passed, commend you to the favourable consideration of those who have the power to enlarge the political franchise of this country. I think that what you are going through will have another salutary consequence. It is a cruel suspense to which you are subjected, with cotton at 20*d.* or 2*s.* a pound instead of at 5*d.* or 6*d.* But be assured that it is working its own cure, and in a way to place the great industry of this country upon a much more secure foundation hereafter than it has been on before. The Cotton Supply Association in Manchester—I am not at all connected with it, and therefore I speak as an outsider, but one that has been looking on—has, I think, rendered a service to this district and to humanity, which probably it will be hardly possible to trace through future ages, in the diffusion of cottonseed throughout that portion of the world where cotton can be grown, and by making the natives acquainted with the use of the machinery necessary to clean it; and by that means, I have no doubt that, in addition to a supply of cotton that will sooner or later come from the valley of the Mississippi from African free labour—for I sincerely hope there will never be another cotton-seed planted in the ground, with a view to your future supply, by a slave in America—that from all those sources you are sure—morally certain—hereafter to be supplied with that essential article for your comfort and prosperity, to a larger extent, and on better terms, and on a more secure basis than ever you have enjoyed before.

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**CHINA WAR. HOUSE OF COMMONS, FEBRUARY 26, 1857.** ↩

[The words of the celebrated motion, whose introduction forms the subject of the following Speech, were:—'That this House has heard with concern of the conflicts which have occurred between the British and Chinese authorities on the Canton River; and, without expressing an opinion as to the extent to which the Government of China may have afforded this country cause of complaint respecting the non-fulfilment of the Treaty of 1842, this House considers that the papers which have been laid on the table fail to establish satisfactory grounds for the violent measures resorted to at Canton in the late affair of the *Arrow*, and that a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the state of our commercial relations with China.' The motion was carried, on March 3, by fourteen votes (263 to 249). Lord Palmerston dissolved Parliament, and gained a considerable accession to his followers by the expedient.]

WHEN I see to how large an extent the national conscience has been moved upon the question to which I am about to invite the attention of the House, judging from the manifestations of opinion given by those organs of opinion by which we learn what is passing in the minds of the people of this great nation, and believing, from all the indications which we can have, that there is a large amount of sympathy felt for the subject of my Resolution, I can only regret that the task which I have to perform has not fallen into abler hands.

But let me, therefore, stipulate at the outset that, whatever may be the decision of the House, it may be taken on the merits of the case, and that it shall not be allowed to suffer, to any degree, on account of its advocate. I beg distinctly to state that I have no personal or party object in view, and that I have no motive whatever but to arrive at a just decision on the important question which I am about to submit. Personally, I have every motive for avoiding to give pain to any one, and still more to visit with retribution the gentleman who now fills the situation of Plenipotentiary at Hongkong, who, except his conduct is endorsed and adopted by the Government, I hold to be entirely responsible for the proceedings which I am about to bring under your notice. Sir John Bowring is an acquaintance of mine, of twenty years' standing. I can have no vindictive feeling against him, and I have no desire for vengeance upon any person, I wish the Government had not adopted a hasty decision upon this subject, as we might then, without embarrassment, have come to a consideration of the case before us solely with the object of dealing with it on the principles of justice.

Now, to begin at the beginning, it appears that on the 8th of October last, a vessel called a *lorcha*—which is a name derived from the Portuguese settlement at Macao, on the mouth of the Canton River, opposite to that where Hongkong [371] lies, and which merely means that it is built after the European model, not that it is built in Europe—was boarded in the Canton River by Chinese officers. Twelve men were taken from it, on a charge which appears to be substantiated by the depositions of witnesses, that some of them had been concerned in an act of piracy. Twelve men were removed from, and two were left in charge of, the ship. Immediately upon the matter coming to the knowledge of Mr. Parkes, our Consul at Canton, he made a demand upon the Governor of Canton, claiming the return of these men, on the ground that, by the treaty between this country and China, any malfeasants found on board of a British vessel, and claimed by the Chinese authorities, should be demanded from the Consul, and not taken by the Chinese officers out of a British ship. The answer given to Mr. Parkes—and the whole of the question turns upon this point—was, that the ship was not a British but a Chinese ship. The matter was referred to Sir John Bowring at Hongkong, which is about six hours' steam passage from Canton. On the 10th, that is, two days after, nine of

these men were returned to Mr. Parkes. Three others, against whom grave suspicion existed, were retained, in order that their case might be further inquired into. And thus the matter remained, when Sir John Bowring determined that unless, within forty-eight hours, the whole of the men were returned in a formal and specified manner, and an apology offered for the act of the Chinese officers, and a pledge given that no such act should be committed in future, naval operations should be commenced against the Chinese. On the 22nd of October the whole of the men were returned; and a letter was sent, in which Yeh, the Chinese Governor of the province, stated that the ship was not a British ship, that the English had really no concern in it, but that he returned the men at the instance of the Consul. That letter was accompanied by a promise that, in future, great care should be taken that British ships should never be visited improperly by Chinese officers. On the 23rd—that that is to say, the day after—operations were commenced against the Barrier Forts on the Canton River. From the 23rd of October to the 13th of November, these naval and military operations were continuous. The Barrier Forts, the Bogue Forts, the Blenheim Forts, and the Dutch Folly Forts, and twenty-three Chinese junks, were all taken or destroyed. The suburbs of Canton were pulled, burnt, or battered down, that the ships might fire upon the walls of the town; and bear in mind that these suburbs contain a population entirely dependent upon the foreign trade, and were our only friends in the neighbourhood of that city. These operations continued until the 13th of November; the Governor's house in the city was shelled, and shells were thrown at a range of 2,000 yards that they might reach the quarter in which the various Government officers resided at the other side of the town. These things are set forth in the pathetic appeals made by the inhabitants, by repeated communications from the Governor, and by the statements of deputations, including some men of world-wide reputation, such as the Howquas and others engaged in trade. This was the state of things up to the date of the last advices.

I lay these things before the House as the basis for our investigation, not with the view of appealing to your humanity, not with the view of exciting your feelings, but that we may know that we are at war with China, and that great devastation and destruction of property have occurred. What I ask is, that we shall inquire who were the authors of this war, and why it was commenced? and that I ask, not in the interest of the Chinese, but for the defence of our own honour. I ask you to consider this case precisely as if you were dealing with a strong Power, instead of a weak one. I confess I have seen with humiliation the tendency in this country to pursue two courses of policy—one towards the strong, and the other towards the weak. Now, if I know anything of my countrymen, or anything of this House of [372] Commons, that is not the natural quality of Englishmen. It never was our ancient reputation. We have had the character of being sometimes a little arrogant, a little overbearing, and of having a tendency to pick a quarrel; but we never yet acquired the character of being bullies to the weak and cowards to the strong. Let us consider this case precisely as if we were dealing with America instead of China. We have a treaty with China, which, in our international relations with that country, puts us on a footing of perfect equality. It is not one of the old conventions, such as existed between Turkey and the other European States, in which certain concessions were made without binding clauses on both sides. Our treaty with China binds us to a reciprocal policy, just as our treaty with America does; and what I say is, let us, in our dealings with that country, observe towards them that justice which we observe towards the United States, or France, or Russia.

I ask, what are the grounds of this devastation and warfare which are now being carried on in the Canton River? Our Plenipotentiary in China alleges that a violation of our treaty rights has taken place in regard to this vessel, the *Arrow*. In the first place, I think that is a question which might have been referred home, before resorting to extreme measures. In the next place, I ask, what is the case, as a question of international law? I will take the opinion of one of the highest legal authorities of the country; for I should, after the statement which I heard made by Lord Lyndhurst in another place on Tuesday evening, think myself very

presumptuous if I were to detain you by any statement of my opinions. I heard Lord Lyndhurst declare that, with reference to this case of the *Arrow*, the Chinese Governor is right; and I heard him say that, in giving his opinion, he could not do better than use the very words used by the Chinese Governor—that this vessel, the *Arrow*, is not in any respect a British vessel.

But we have other grounds of testing the legality of this matter. When Mr. Parkes communicated the fact of this visit to the lorchas to Sir John Bowring, he received an answer; and what was that answer? Sir John Bowring, being then within six hours' steam from Canton, receives the letter written by Mr. Parkes on the 10th, and on the 11th he writes a letter, in which he says:—

'It appears, on examination, that the *Arrow* had no right to hoist the British flag; the licence to do so expired on the 27th of September, from which period she has not been entitled to protection. You will send back the register, to be delivered to the Colonial-office.'

And on the following day, when not called upon to refer to the subject, he says:—

'I will consider the re-granting the register of the *Arrow*, if applied for; but there can be no doubt that, after the expiry of the licence, protection could not be legally granted.'

Now, I might stop here. Here is the whole case. But what course did Sir John Bowring recommend Mr. Parkes to take under these circumstances? I ask you to consider the matter as though you were dealing with another Power. If you please, we will suppose that, instead of being at Hongkong dealing with Canton, we are at Washington dealing with Charleston. Not long ago, a law was passed in South Carolina which went very much against the most cherished predilections of this country, by requiring that when a coloured citizen of this country—as much an Englishman as you or I—arrived at Charleston, he should be taken out of the English ship, put into gaol, and kept in custody there until the ship was ready to sail. Now, if there could be one measure more calculated than another to wound our susceptibilities as a nation, it was that. What did our Consul at Charleston do? Did he send for Her Majesty's ships of war, and bombard the Governor's residence? No; he sent to Washington, and informed our Minister of the matter. The Minister went to the Secretary for [373] Foreign Affairs, and received an explanation, which amounted to nothing else than this, —'We are in a difficulty, and you must have patience with us.' And we had patience, and did not resort to force.

Now, had this case which we are considering occurred in America, what would have been the course of our Ambassador at Washington when he received the letter of our Consul at Charleston, saying that he had demanded reparation from the American authorities there? When he referred to the documents which he had in his archives, and found that, owing to the lapse of time, the instrument upon which the Consul had proceeded had become void, and therefore he had no legal standing-ground as against the American Government—which was precisely the case, as admitted in this instance, the licence having expired fourteen days before—he would have written back to the Consul, saying, 'You have been too precipitate. The captain of the ship, by neglecting to renew his licence, has placed himself in an illegal position. You have been very rash in demanding redress from the Governor of South Carolina. Make your apology as soon as you can, and get out of this business. What was the conduct of Sir John Bowring? After telling Mr. Parkes that the licence had expired, and that the *Arrow* had no right to hoist the British flag, he added, 'But the Chinese have no knowledge of its expiration.'

When I read that letter in the country, it was in the *Times* newspaper, I would not believe its fidelity, but sent to London for a copy of the *Gazette*, in order that I might read the document in the original. Always wishing to save the character of an absent man, and believing that that must have been penned in a moment of hallucination, I say that it is the most flagitious public document that I ever saw. The statement itself being published, reveals a state of mind which warrants one in saying, and compels one to say, that the statement is false; because there is an avowal of falsehood, and a disposition to profit by it. I have frequently complained of the number of public documents which are laid before us in a mutilated shape; I always regard with suspicion any letters which are headed 'Extract;' but what was the right hon. Gentleman about who had the revising of these documents? Why did he not leave out that part of the letter? For the credit of the country, and his own credit, I wish he had. At all events, let it be understood that, if we follow out the policy adopted by Sir John Bowring upon no better foundation than this, we take upon ourselves the responsibilities of his acts, and share the guilt of that statement.

Now, connected with this transaction there are questions as to whether, when the *Arrow* was boarded, she had her colours flying, and that her English master was on board. After what we have heard, I think all these questions secondary; but I am by no means satisfied that we stand any better in regard to them than in regard to that to which I have just referred. Hon. Gentlemen who have read the correspondence will have observed that in the first letter written on this subject by Consul Parkes, he says he has proof in his possession showing, beyond the possibility of doubt, that when the vessel was boarded there was a British captain on board, that he remonstrated against the acts of the Chinese, and that the British flag was also flying at the time. Now, the fact turns out afterwards that the captain, in his own declaration, states that he was not on board the vessel; that he was taking his breakfast with another captain in another vessel. That, however, I regard as altogether of secondary importance.

But there is another illegality in this matter. Here are two illegalities which you have to contend with. First, the clear doctrine of constitutional law, laid down by Lord Lyndhurst, that you cannot give rights to a Chinese shipowner, as against his own Government. An unlearned man like myself, and the Chinese Governor Yeh, seem instinctively [374] to have come to the same conclusion. I cannot, for the life of me, see how it is possible that we can invest ourselves with the power, at Hongkong, of annexing the whole Chinese mercantile marine,—of protecting it against its own Government, and absolving Chinese subjects from their natural allegiance. But, besides the illegality admitted by Sir John Bowring, there is another: Even admitting that the lorcha's register was all in order, and that the licence had been paid up, still it is declared authoritatively, and is beyond a doubt, that the Hongkong Government had no power to violate the statute laws of this country by giving any such licence. The Hongkong Legislature cannot act in contravention of the fundamental principle of our Navigation Act; and therefore the whole register and licence were mere waste paper, even if they were in order.

Thus you have a threefold illegality to struggle against. The noble Lord (Palmerston), I see, is taking a note. I wish him to answer one thing that was said by his colleague in another place. Lord Clarendon, alluding to this point, used a very fallacious argument. He said, a Hongkong register could not give imperial rights to a ship, but could give only British protection to a ship in China. That is the very place where we say it cannot give protection. It can give protection anywhere else but there. How can the proceedings of the Hongkong Government, irrespective of the Legislature of this country, have any force in China? It is only through the instrumentality of an Act of Parliament here that the Hongkong Legislature exists at all; and none of its acts are binding in China, or anywhere, in fact, without the confirmation of this country.

I do not wish to convert this into a legal debate, and it would be presumption in me to say another word on this part of the question. The Duke of Argyle, indeed, finding himself beaten on the law of the case, says, 'Do not argue this case on low, legal, and technical grounds. You must try it on broad, general grounds.' I leave it to other Members of this House to vindicate the legal profession, which lies at the foundation of all civilisation, from the unworthy aspersions thus inferentially cast upon it.

Assuming, then, that the whole thing was illegal on our part—and this cannot be denied, for no lawyer with a reputation at stake, and who is not on the Treasury-bench, will venture to assert a doctrine contrary to that laid down by Lord Lyndhurst—I pass to another branch of the question, with which I can more appropriately deal. It may be true, that although the Chinese did not violate the law, still they might have had the intention to insult us. It is alleged, that in boarding the *Arrow*, the Chinese authorities did it premeditatedly, in order to insult us. Having the law on their side, they yet might have enforced it with that view. I say that is quite a distinct issue;—but let us see what grounds there are for this assertion. In the first place, without travelling out of the question, I may remind you of the exceptional character of the trade carried on by European vessels on the coast of China. We all know that a great deal of irregular trade exists on that coast. Do you suppose it a very extraordinary thing that the Chinese authorities should board a vessel of European build, and carrying the British flag? In the correspondence relating to the registration of colonial vessels at Hongkong, Sir John Bowring gives a case in which two vessels entitled to bear our flag were seized by the Chinese authorities because they had cargoes of salt. Being seized under the Treaty, their contents were liable to confiscation; but the Chinese Government had no right to retain the vessels themselves. The Chinese having taken the vessels to empty them, having dismantled them, and having kept them too long, our agents made a demand for their return, and sent a ship-of-war's cutter to bring them away. This might have been all very regular; but it only leads to the inference that the Chinese have occasion [375] to visit our vessels without necessarily intending to insult us.

I hold in my hand a communication from an American gentleman, who left Canton on the 16th of last November, and was one of those who entered within the walls of that town in the rear of our forces. His name, which I am at liberty to mention, is Cook; he lives at Whampoa, where he has been for four years, holding the position of United States Marshal, and therefore having jurisdiction over the flag of his own country. In course of conversation, Mr Cook, in answer to my inquiries, stated many cases in which British ships, with the British flag, were engaged in smuggling transactions; and he mentioned one in particular, of so very glaring a nature, that I asked him to put it on paper, in order that I might read it publicly. I give this as an example of what has been going on in the neighbourhood of Canton, because it affords a valid plea for what the Chinese authorities have done in this case of the *lorcha*. Mr. Cook, in his letter, written to-day, says:—

'In answer to your query, whether I have any objections to the use of my name regarding our conversation on China matters, I say, most certainly not; and I will give you the facts in regard to the seizure of the *lorchas* as nearly as possible, from memory, having no data to refer to. During the summer of 1855, in June or July, there lay near our chop, which is close to Her Britannic Majesty's Vice-Consulate at Whampoa, from ten to fifteen *lorchas*, engaged in smuggling salt, and eight or ten of this number hoisted British flags during the day, the salt being discharged at night. The number of vessels was so large at that time, in consequence of the Mandarin boats having been sent above Canton to repulse the rebels. But the Government could not keep ignorant of so bold a matter long, and twelve or fifteen Mandarin boats, each containing upwards of sixty men, made their appearance early in the morning, and captured the whole fleet, five or six of which had British flags flying at the time, the Europeans (generally a captain) as well as the Chinese jumping overboard and swimming to the different vessels for safety, several of whom came on board of our vessel. The

Mandarin force took the captured fleet to Canton, and the parties having the right to fly the flag subsequently claimed their vessels, which were eventually returned, and the remainder retained by the Government. This is by no means an isolated case as regards the illegal use of the flag, and you have only to refer to the Hongkong papers to find plenty of cases where the right was questioned to grant the flag, as it had been done by the Hongkong authorities.'

In justice to Mr. Cook, I must say—and without this proviso he would, I am sure, feel that I had been guilty of a breach of faith—that he is as completely anti-Chinese as anybody I ever met. He wishes every success to every one who will go and attack the Chinese for the purpose of making them more American and more European in their notions, and he would not be supposed to say a word to save them from any horrors that you may inflict upon them. Yet he candidly tells me, 'You have chosen a quarrel which is the most unlucky that you could possibly have stumbled into, for' (he adds) 'you have not a leg to stand upon in the affair of the *Arrow*.' I confess I listened with some humiliation to what he said of the doings of ships carrying our flags; and when so much is asserted about our flag being insulted, I cannot help feeling that it is such transactions as these which dishonour and insult our flag. Mr. Cook, who, as the American Marshal, has control over the American flag, also said to me, in a very significant tone, 'I don't allow any such doings as these under our stars and stripes.'

In what position do we place the Chinese authorities by our licences? I will tell you, on the same authority. A Chinese goes to Hongkong, and by means of some mystification which they have adopted there—such as becoming the tenant of Crown lands, or becoming a partner with somebody else who is—for, you will observe, the Chinese are infinitely clever in matters of partnership, and are exceedingly prone to limited liability—a Chinese subject, I say, goes [376] to Hongkong, obtains an English ship, and then gets an Englishman for a captain. What sort of man is this captain? Why, any man with a round hat and a European coat on will do. He is put on board, and called the nominal captain. The ship is owned by a Chinese; but they keep this man on board, who is generally some loose fish—some stray person, or runaway apprentice; for in this case you have Mr. Kennedy and another witness both stating their ages at not above twenty-one. When we hear of young men of twenty-one being placed in positions of this sort, I think we may draw a very natural inference. In fact, they are, I am told, nearly always runaway apprentices or idle young seamen. They have plenty of grog to drink, and nothing else to do but to drink it, for they are not expected to take any share whatever in the working of the ship.

That is the process which is going on in the Chinese waters, and it is most dishonourable, I contend, to us as a nation, to permit it. One of the consequences which I should expect from the appointment of a Committee would be a strict inquiry into the trade carried on with China, and an endeavour to devise some scheme to put a stop to this disgraceful system of obtaining licences. Hon. Gentlemen will be able now to see, from the letter which I have read, the advantages of having one of these licences. A dozen smuggling vessels are seized; half of them, having a colonial register, are entitled to carry the British flag, because they have paid the licences and are registered. The Chinese authorities take out their cargoes, but are obliged to return the vessels. As to the other half of the vessels, they are seized and confiscated with their cargoes, and the smugglers also are kept. So that a smuggler who has a register can carry on his trade with nothing to fear, except the occasional loss of his cargo. This, then, is a reason why we ought to be tolerant to the Chinese, and not assume, as a matter of course, that they intended to insult us because they boarded this lorcha, even though the British flag might be flying at the time.

I must beg the House to remember who the correspondents were. On the one side, you have Consul Parkes, a gentleman of considerable ability, no doubt, and a good linguist (I believe some of us saw him not long ago, when he came over with the Siamese Treaty), but still a young man, without experience, and without having gone through the gradations of civil employment calculated to give him that moderation, prudence, and discretion which he may one day possess; and, on the other side, the Governor of a province which, according to Mr. Montgomery Martin's book, contains 20,000,000 inhabitants,—a Cabinet Minister, and one who has no doubt gone through all the grades of civil employment. Now, bear these facts in mind, and I ask any man who has read this correspondence, does it bear on the face of it the slightest intimation that the Chinese Governor wished to insult the British authority? Must it not be admitted—as was said by Lord Derby, in that brilliant and admirable speech of his—that, ‘on the one side, there were courtesy, forbearance, and temper, while on the other there were arrogance and presumption?’

The correspondence loses half its effect, if we do not bear in mind the dates and the circumstances under which it was written. While it was being carried on, every day witnessed the demolition of some fort, or the burning of some buildings; and yet here, on the 12th of November, a fortnight after his own house had been shelled and entered by a hostile force—(I have no doubt that the officers and men who performed their duty conducted themselves with all moderation, but I am informed that they were followed by a rabble, who destroyed a great deal of valuable property)—Commissioner Yeh writes to Sir John Bowring in this mild and conciliatory tone:—

'Again, the twelve men seized were all taken back by Hew, assistant magistrate of Nanhae, on the 22nd ult.; but Consul Parkes declined to receive either them or a despatch sent with them from me. The [377] letter under acknowledgment says that, had the authorities been accessible to the Consul, the affair might have been disposed of in a single interview. The assistant magistrate, Hew, was sent twice with the men to be surrendered; it is through him that (foreign) correspondence with me is always transmitted. Now, the assistant magistrate is a commissioned officer of the Chinese Empire. Heretofore any foreign business that has had to be transacted by deputy has been transacted by officers similarly deputed, and the present was a case of all others requiring common conference; but Consul Parkes had made up his mind not to consent to what was proposed. On a subsequent occasion, I sent Tseang, Prefect of Laychow-foo, to the foreign factories, to consider what steps should be taken; but the Consul now insisted on something more than (the rendition of) the men captured on board the lorcha. There being in all this no inaccessibility on the part of Chinese officials, what was there to make an immediate adjustment impracticable? Yet on the 23rd, 24th, and 25th ult., the different forts of the city were occupied or destroyed; and from the 27th ult. to the 5th inst. a cannonade was kept up, by which numberless dwelling-houses in the new and old city were consumed with considerable loss of life. I still forbore, remembering how many years you had been at peace with us; but the people were now gnashing their teeth with rage at the terrible suffering to which they had been subjected. Imagine it, that the simple fact being that a seizure was made by the Chinese Government of Chinese offenders, whom it was a duty to seize, it is pretended that the British ensign was hauled down; and this is followed up by a movement of troops and a cannonade to the infliction of terrible suffering on the people. I must beg your Excellency to pass an opinion on such a state of things.'

Does not this letter prove that the man who wrote it under such harrowing circumstances had, above all things, a desire to conciliate and smooth down the differences which existed? Nothing is more striking in this correspondence than the manner in which Commissioner Yeh constantly harps upon the same string—that the *Arrow* was not a British vessel. I have counted in the papers no less than eight letters in which that declaration is reiterated in different forms to Consul Parkes, to Sir John Bowring, to Admiral Seymour, and, I believe,

even to the American representative. There are instances in which his language is as terse, logical, and argumentative as if it had been Lord Lyndhurst himself who spoke. Here is an example—and I read this extract, because it is the very dictum laid down by Lord Lyndhurst the other night. Writing to Sir John Bowring on the 21st of October, Yeh says,—'The whole question amounts to this—a lorcha built by a Chinese purchased a British flag; that did not make her a British vessel.' I venture to say that Westminster Hall, with the Court of Chancery to boot, could not frame a decision more terse and more comprehensive than that. It is the whole law of the case. A Chinese, by buying a British flag, cannot make a Chinese vessel a British vessel. And it is a most remarkable thing, that during the whole of this discussion our authorities never once attempted to answer this argument. What is still more remarkable, Lord Cranworth talked a good deal about something else the other night, but he never attempted to answer it. I have no doubt we shall hear the Attorney-General talk a good deal about something else to-night. But I venture to say that we shall not hear any man, with a character to lose as a lawyer, much less a man who aspires one day to sit on the woolsack, declare in express language that the dictum of Commissioner Yeh is unsound in law. Here is another instance. Yeh writes to our Plenipotentiary on the 17th of November:—

'I have always understood foreign flags to be each one peculiar to a nation, they are never made so little of as even to be lent; how, then, could a foreign nation do anything so irregular as to sell its flag to China?'

Observe the acute reasoning of this man. He puts the question at once upon its real footing—'You have not made a Chinese vessel a British vessel; you have [378] only sold your flag to a Chinese vessel.' He then goes on:—

'This appears to your Excellency a proceeding in accordance with law; all I can say is, that I am not aware that foreign nations have any such law. As I have said before, therefore, had the flag belonged *bonâ fide* to a British merchant-vessel, it would have been proper to follow some other course than the one pursued; but the fact being, that a Chinese had fraudulently assumed the flag, why should Mr. Consul Parkes have put himself forward as his advocate? Simply because he wanted a pretext for making trouble.'

Upon my honour, I believe the whole matter is contained in these last words. I believe there was a preconceived design to pick a quarrel, and I very much suspect that there has been more or less encouragement forwarded from head quarters.

I might read numberless passages from the correspondence, but as the attention of hon. Gentlemen has already been called to them by the discussion which has occurred in another place, it is unnecessary for me to trouble the House with any lengthy quotations. I may say, however, that all the communications on the part of the Chinese authorities manifest a forbearance, a temper, and a desire to conciliate, which should put to the blush any man who asserts that they intended to insult the British representatives. I observe that in another place Lord Clarendon did not content himself with referring to recent transactions, but he said that for a long time past the Chinese Government and authorities have been encroaching upon the rights of foreigners, and have shown a disposition to infringe the Articles of the Treaty. I can only say, that if such conduct has been pursued by the Chinese authorities, it was the duty of her Majesty's Government to take earlier steps to check their proceedings. Why did the Government allow us to drift into a quarrel, in which our cause is bad, if for years sufficient grounds have existed for their interference? If, as Lord Clarendon tells us, these wrongs have been inflicted upon English, French, and Americans, why, in the name of common sense, did not that noble Lord, or the Prime Minister, or some one in authority, say to France and to the United States, 'We are joint parties to the Treaty with China; our rights are invaded; the terms of the Treaty are not fairly fulfilled; let us make joint representations on the subject at Pekin?'



That would have been a statesmanlike mode of proceeding; but why did the Government allow these infractions of the Treaty to go on until your representatives have stumbled into a quarrel, and commenced a war, for which, in the opinion of your best lawyers, there is no legal grounds? I deny that the assumption of Lord Clarendon is true. I say, that if you refer to the blue-books that have been laid upon the table since 1842, you will find most striking proofs that the Chinese authorities, in every part of the empire to which we have access, have manifested the most consistent and earnest desire to carry out the provisions of the Treaty.

I will make one remark with reference to the correspondence recently laid before us. Why was this blue-book laid upon the table on the very morning of the day on which Lord Derby was to call attention to the subject, and why was a paper presented in the name of the Sovereign caricatured by being termed 'Correspondence respecting Insults in China?' My experience in these matters almost tempts me to say that this blue-book was laid upon the table on that morning for the very purpose of mystifying us. Many hon. Members—plain, simple-minded country gentlemen—who have not so voracious an appetite for blue-books as I have, would say, 'Mercy on us! Here is a book of 225 pages, all about the insults we have suffered in China. It's high time that Lord Clarendon should interfere for the protection of British interests, and it's quite right to go to war on the subject, if necessary.' I have read the blue-book through; and what is it? It consists of garbled extracts from correspondence extending from the year 1842 to the year [379] 1856. What do these extracts relate to? A few street riots, a few village rows. An Englishman straying out of bounds to shoot, is hooted back by the peasants. An Englishman goes out shooting, shoots a boy and blinds him. The Consul awards the boy 200 dollars to buy a piece of land. That is put down as an 'insult in China.' When I commenced reading the book, I thought—'Here is the record (garbled, as I will afterwards show you) of all the disputes and misunderstandings we have had with China since we concluded the Treaty which gave us access to the five ports of that empire.'

Now, I will ask the House to turn their attention to the position occupied by this country during the same time with regard to the other great Powers of the civilized world. What have been your relations with the United States during that period? Three times you have been on the verge of war on the subjects of boundary disputes, enlistment disputes, and fishery disputes. I have seen a large fleet at Spithead reviewed by the Queen, well knowing at the time its significance—that it was meant to back the representations we were making to those who are our coreligionists, and, I may almost say, our countrymen. Then what has been our position with regard to France? Twice we have debated the measures to be adopted in order to guard against the possible descent of the French upon our shores. We have called out our militia, and we have increased our fleet, for fear of violent proceedings on the part of France. What have been the relations existing between England and Russia? Those Powers have engaged in the most gigantic duel ever fought; they have waged the most bloody and costly war—for the time of its duration—that ever occurred—a war in which four or five empires were involved. I may be told that China is now plunged into revolution; but within the last sixteen years, has not all Europe been plunged into revolution? Talk of insults to England! Were not all the English workmen in France driven from the railroads in that country? If such a thing happened in a country whose manners, habits, and religion are similar to our own, ought we not, in dealing with an empire to which we have so recently gained admission, and which has had so little contact with the Western world, to have exhibited more tolerance and moderation? Is it not an insult to this House to bring down such a blue-book as that upon the table, in order to make up a case for Lord Clarendon, on the ground that we have had constant reasons to complain of the breach of our Treaty with China? I have said I would show the House that the extracts contained in this book are not fairly given. Many of these extracts are collected from returns which were laid before the House long ago, and I will trouble the House with some extracts from the original papers.

Now, here is a letter from Sir John Davis, the British Plenipotentiary, addressed to Lord Palmerston, and dated 'Hongkong, Feb. 15, 1847,' which, if it be in the blue-book before us, I have not been able to find:—

'My Lord,—I deemed it right, on the approach of the Chinese year, when Canton is crowded with idle persons, to address the enclosed official despatch, on the and instant, to Captain Talbot, not that I have any expectation of the occurrence of acts of violence and disorder, if our own people will only behave with common abstinence.

'The following extract of a letter from Major-General D'Aguilar, now at Canton, will tend to corroborate all that Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane, myself, and the Consul, have had occasion to report upon this subject; and we have none of us any motives for seeking popularity by appealing to passion rather than reason:—

' "I have been a great deal on the river, and constantly in the streets about the factories, and extended some of my walks close to the city gates, and have never met with anything but courtesy and civility. I believe a great deal—I may say everything—depends upon ourselves, and that a kind manner and a bearing free from offence is the best security against all approach to violence and insult." '

Before I read a letter in a kindred [380] spirit from Admiral Cochrane, I may observe, that I have sometimes been accused of entertaining feelings hostile to the military and naval services. I have many excellent and brave friends in both services, and, although I am a friend to peace, yet in a case of veracity I would take the word of a soldier or a sailor rather than that of any one else. This letter is dated 'Her Majesty's ship *Agincourt*, Hongkong, Nov. 20, 1846:'—

'My dear Governor,—In pursuance of the intention I communicated to you, of visiting Canton for the purpose of seeing, before my departure for England, the changes that may have occurred in the four years that have elapsed since I was last there, as well as to ascertain how far any just cause existed for the apprehensions of the British merchants residing at Canton, or for a ship of war being constantly stationed off the factory gardens, to her imminent peril, were any real hostilities to take place, I went there from hence on Sunday and on Monday, landing in plain clothes accompanied by my flag-lieutenant and Captain M'Dougal. I walked for full six hours in in every part of the town where I thought it likely to meet a crowd, finding myself, without intending it, close to the dreaded city gate, within seven or eight doors of which I passed some time in a shop, making purchases, the doors surrounded as usual by lookers-on from the crowded street that leads to the gate, of whom not a single individual showed the slightest incivility. On the contrary, some in the most friendly and respectful manner examined the texture of my coat as well as my gloves, the latter being, as you know, a curiosity to them. In short, I sought every position where public feeling was likely to be exhibited, and blinked none; and I can positively declare that I, and those with me, passed through the streets with as much freedom and as little inconvenience as in any street in London, and met with precisely the same reception I have done at Shanghai or Ningpo, and if any circumstance had been required to confirm the opinion I have more than once expressed—namely, that the Chinese will never be the aggressors—the visit of Monday would fully do so; and if I required further proof of the bullying disposition of my own countrymen among foreigners in the first instance, and their unreasonable expectations as to anticipated protection afterwards, it will be found in what has already passed, and in the statements made to you by the Consul on the first recall of the *Nemesis*, and another by her commander on her arrival here, that, on being ordered down the river after lying three months without moving from the factory gardens, the merchants made loud complaints, and I expected to have heard that she had been followed by a petition for her return. If the merchants would believe that their best, and by far most efficient, protection is to be found in their own circumspect conduct in treating the people with urbanity and

goodwill, and avoiding rather than seeking sources of conflict, I feel persuaded that they will soon practically discover in these measures more persuasive advocates with the Chinese than in all the force I could bring against them.'

I do not know whether my right hon. Friend (Mr. Labouchere) can find that letter in the blue-book, but I have not been able to find it. The correspondence appears to me to have been culled to find some letters of a very different character.

I will only trouble the House with one other letter. It is a letter by Sir John Davis, written in 1846. You had riots at Canton afterwards, and great destruction of property. The letter is dated the 12th of November, 1846, and Sir John Davis, writing to Lord Palmerston, says:—

'I am not the first who has been compelled to remark, that it is more difficult to deal with our own countrymen at Canton than with the Chinese Government; and I offer the last proof of this in the fact, that it has cost me infinitely more trouble to make Mr. Compton pay a fine of 200 dollars, than to obtain compensation to our merchants of 46,000 dollars for losses which occurred partly from their own misconduct.'

I did not find that letter in the blue-book. Sir John Davis, also writing to Lord Palmerston, on the 26th of January, 1847, says:—

'I may add, that the subjects of every other civilised Government get on more quietly with the Chinese, and clamour less for protection than our own.'

Lord Clarendon gave great prominence to the case of the merchants.

[381] Now, it is probable that I am the only man who would say on this subject what I am about to say, without being misunderstood. No one will doubt my mercantile tendencies. All my sympathies are with the mercantile classes, and my public life has been passed in enlarging the sphere of their honourable and beneficial employment. Lord Clarendon called attention to the English merchants in China, and said, they were all in favour of the violent proceedings which have been carried on in Canton. In one of these papers—which I need not read to you—I find a communication on that subject, written in 1847, by Sir George Bonham, who says, there are a great many young men there, some of them engaged as junior partners and clerks at Canton, who have not a large stake at issue, and who are naturally eager to have access to the country, and to compel the Chinese to break down the barriers to their excursions; but that, on consulting the older and more experienced men, he did not find that they were in favour of hostile proceedings, although he admitted they were in a minority. I sympathise with the position of the English merchants at Canton. It is not a pleasant thing to live on the borders of a river, and not to have a distance of two miles for exercise. At all events it would not suit me, who am fond of exercise, and I should be most glad to see them in the course of being emancipated from that state of duress in which they are placed at Canton. One of my reasons for regretting that which is being done is, that it tends to retard indefinitely any such extension of the liberty of my countrymen. But while I say this, I cannot lose sight of the fact that there are a great many merchants in China who are engaged in a traffic of a very exceptional character, which is detrimental not merely to the health but to the morals, to the souls and bodies of the Chinese. That trade is founded on a certain degree of licence and lawlessness; it flourishes in times of disorders and commotion, and anything which plunges the East into anarchy and confusion, is promoting the interests of these merchants and serving their unholy gains. With those merchants I have no sympathy; but I am afraid that English merchants abroad do to some extent merit the reflections made by the gallant men whose letters I have read. And I doubt whether it is always for their benefit, as merchants, that they are placed in a position which enables them to summon to their aid an overwhelming force, to compel the authorities to yield to their demands. If hon. Gentlemen

opposite will not take offence at a reference to a bygone question, I should say, that there may be too much protection for British merchants as well as for British agriculture. It is a fact, that while our exports are going on increasing, they are passing more and more through the hands of foreigners, and not through the hands of Englishmen. I speak from ocular observation and personal experience when I say, that if you go to the Mediterranean, or the Levant, or to any of the ancient seats of commercial activity, you will find the English merchants, with all their probity and honour, which I maintain is on an equality with that of any other people, have been for some time in foreign countries declining in numbers. At Genoa, Venice, Leghorn, Trieste, Smyrna, Constantinople, you will find that the trade has passed out of the hands of British merchants, and into the hands of the Greeks, Swiss, or Germans, all belonging to countries that have no navy to protect them at all. This is the fact; and what is the inference? It may be that English merchants are not educated sufficiently in foreign languages; but it may be also that Englishmen carry with them their haughty and inflexible demeanour into their intercourse with the natives of other countries. The noble Lord inscribes '*Civis Romanus sum*' on our passports, which may be a very good thing to guard us in our footsteps. But '*Civis Romanus sum*' is not a very attractive motto to out over the door of our counting-houses abroad.

Now, without wishing to do more than [382] convey a friendly warning to a class with whom I have so great a sympathy, I may remark, that our merchants have at present a very large trade in China, in South America, and in India; and the same failings which have lost the footing of our merchants in the Mediterranean, may be also a disadvantage to us in China and elsewhere.

I come now to the consideration of the case of the Chinese merchants, as it is put forward by Lord Clarendon, and I will take the memorial of the East India and China Association of Liverpool. These gentlemen are telling our Foreign Minister what they wish him to do in China; and let hon. Gentlemen hear what these moderate gentlemen wish to see effected:—

'That a revision of the tariff of Customs duties should be made consistent with the spirit of the Treaty concluded by Sir Henry Pottinger—namely, an *ad valorem* duty of five per cent. on imports and exports.'

That is certainly a tariff which I should like to see applied to Liverpool. Let my Liverpool friends begin at home, and put themselves on the same platform with the Chinese. They then go on to say:—

'The British Government should insist on the right of opening to foreign trade any port on the coast of China, or on the banks of any navigable river, at any time they may think fit, and of placing Consuls at such ports; that our ships of war should have the free navigation of and access to all the rivers and ports of China.'

Let us by the way of illustration, and bringing the matter nearer home, suppose that this is a document which has come to us from Moscow, and that it is addressed not to China but to Turkey. Let us read it thus:—'The Russian Government should insist on the right of opening to foreign trade any port on the coast of Turkey, or on the banks of any navigable river, at any time they may think fit, and of placing Consuls at such ports; that Russian ships of war should have the free navigation of and access to all the ports and rivers of Turkey.' Can you imagine anything more stunning than the explosion that would take place at Liverpool if such a ukase as that was to come to us from Russia? As a friend, not an enemy, of these gentlemen, I must say that such language as that is to be reprobated. I say it is to be reprobated, because it tends to place us who sympathise with mercantile men at a great disadvantage as regards even the naval and military classes. Contrast the kind and

conciliatory language used by General D'Aguiar and Admiral Cochrane with the downright selfish violence and unreasoning injustice with which the Liverpool Association would treat an empire containing 300,000,000 people. I think I know more about the trade of China than these gentlemen, and I will venture to say, that there is not a great empire in the world where trade is so free. I only wish that we had, not five ports but, one port in France, Austria, or Russia, where we should have the same low tariff as we now have in China. There is not a country on the face of the earth where trade is carried on with greater facility than in China. There is no place where if you send a ship you can get her unloaded and loaded with greater despatch, where the port charges and other expenses are so moderate, or where you are more certain to find a cargo of the produce of the country. You will find that statement corroborated by the evidence of captains who have sailed to every quarter of the globe, and who have stated before a Committee of the House that there is no country in the world where trade can be carried on with greater facility than in China. Mr. Cook, the gentleman to whom I have already referred, confirmed it to me today. He said, 'I have known a ship of 1,500 tons coming into Whampoa, discharging her ballast, taking in her cargo, and sailing in five days.' He added, 'Can you beat that in Liverpool?' I am afraid not.

But what is it the Liverpool Association want? Do they think that by opening a dozen other ports they will [383] necessarily, by sheer violence, increase their trade? That was tried in the last war. We all remember the gloom which hung over this country in the summer of 1842. It was once remarked by Sir R. Peel, that the fine harvest of that year and the news of the Chinese Treaty saved England from the most fearful state of panic and distress. We all know that the report of the Treaty with China, when received here, raised the most extravagant expectations. Our friends in Lancashire threw up their caps, and said, 'In an empire of 300,000,000 people, and with free access to the northern ports, if every Chinaman buys a cotton nightcap, all our mills will be kept going.' What, then, have been the results to our exports? During the last three years, our exports to China have not averaged more than 1,250,000*l*. Before the war broke out, we had frequently years in which our manufactured exports amounted to as much as that. In fact, since 1842 we have not added to our exports in China at all, at least as far as our manufactures are concerned. We have increased our consumption of tea; but that is all.

I have here a letter, from the East India and China Association of London, signed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Mr. Gregson), and written in so different a spirit from that of the Liverpool Association, that I have not one word to say against it, except that my hon. Friend has too great dependence upon what can be done for him by force of arms in China. You will find it stated in that letter that—

'Our trade with China has become one of the greatest importance. The import at the time of the Treaty was, in 1842, 42,000,000 lbs. of tea; in 1856, 87,000,000 lbs.'

It is hardly fair to compare these years, because 1842 was a year of war, while 1856 was a year of large consumption. The statement in the letter with respect to silk is still more fallacious. It is this:—

'In 1842 (yearly average), 3,000 bales; in 1856, 56,000 bales.'

Well, that may be accounted for by the failure of the silk crops in France and other parts of Europe; and it is an illustration of the immense resources of China, that when you have a sudden demand for silk, owing to the failure of the crops in Europe, by sending silver you can get any supply you want from China, no matter how unexpected may be the demand. But it is not fair to put that as the normal state of our trade.

I have said that our imports have increased. Those imports have been paid largely by opium. It is said that our exports to India have also increased. True, our merchants may send their longcloths to India, and there exchange them for opium; that opium may go to China, and in return for it we may get silver back to India or to England. But I apprehend that if the land in India were not employed in growing poppies, it would be employed in growing something else, enabling the natives to buy the longcloths of England, and that if the Chinese were not spending large sums upon opium, they, too, would buy something else. That question, however, I shall not go into; it is a very large one, and would be apt to excite angry passions. What I wish to say is, when the Liverpool merchants ask you to compel China to admit them to all her rivers, accompanied by ships of war, and to allow them to set up their shops wherever they please, do not, upon their authority, be deluded into the belief that the war in 1842 has increased our trade with China, and that a new war is likely to be followed by similar results. I venture to predict that the hostilities in which we are now engaged with China will diminish, not increase, our exports.

Having trespassed so long upon the attention of the House, I shall allude to only one other point—the claim of foreigners for admission to Canton. I have been careful to word my motion with a salvo upon that question. I am of opinion, whatever doubts may be entertained by others, that when the Treaty was signed in 1842, it was contemplated that foreigners should have as free access to [384] Canton as to Shanghai or any other of the open ports. But a controversy has been carried on on that subject between our officials at Hongkong and the authorities at Canton. In the papers will be found despatches, not only from Mr. Bonham, but from the noble Lord now at the head of the Government, in which the very best possible grounds are urged why our authorities at Hongkong should not persist in trying to gain admission for English merchants to Canton. It is stated, and I think in good faith, that the population of Canton, and, in fact, the population of that province of which Canton is the capital, is fierce and ungovernable; and they have hostile feelings towards the English; and that, if our merchants were admitted into Canton, the greater contact would only lead to greater ill-will. I believe that apprehension is well founded. Whether it arises from the fierce and lawless disposition of the Chinese, or from their past intercourse with the East India Company—which, we all know, yielded much for a little temporary peace—or whether it appertains to their southern clime, for in all countries the southern region is inhabited by the more fierce and turbulent part of the population—I know not; but certain it is that these Cantonese entertain feelings of the most hostile kind towards the foreigners, and I believe it was in good faith that it was urged by the Chinese Commissioner, by our own Plenipotentiary, and by Lord Palmerston himself, that it was not desirable to press further the question of admission into Canton.

But let our merchants bear in mind, that what we are now fighting for is not the admission of foreigners into Canton. The *sine qua non* of Sir John Bowring, who certainly, I believe with Lord Derby, has a monomania about getting into Canton, is that the foreign authorities, not the foreign merchants, should be allowed to enter that city. I will ask the House, is it worth while fighting for this, that Sir John Bowring should have the right to go into Canton in one costume or another, especially when the Governor was ready to meet him half way out of the town? I have always thought, that if a person of state and dignity left his own palace to meet another half way, it was a greater compliment than staying and making the reception at home. I cannot understand what we are fighting for, and why Sir John Bowring should think himself degraded by an interview with Governor Yeh at Howqua's packing-house. This is a topic worth nothing but a laugh.

But is this admission to Canton, for which we are fighting, of any use? Canton is a walled city, occupied by a native population, with streets eight feet wide. Would any Englishman ever dream of living in such a place? Does an Englishman live in the Turkish quarters of

Constantinople? No; the habits and religion of the two races separate them. What would be the advantage to English residents in that part of China to admission into Canton? If they had free access into the country, and could take a ride or a walk for exercise, that would be a benefit to them; but the population in the neighbourhood is turbulent and insubordinate, and our countrymen are not likely to receive good treatment there; and if the privilege were conceded, nobody would ever go into the city except to stare about him, or to make an observation for his note-book. I apprehend that what the Cantonese authorities say is true—that the population is so turbulent, that Englishmen could not expect very good treatment.

But if admission to Canton were desirable, is this the time for pressing it? The blue-book teems with reasons against such an idea. What do the inhabitants of Canton say in their address? They say:—

'The late affair of the lorcha was a trifle; it was no case for deep-seated animosity, as a great offence that could not be forgotten; yet you have suddenly taken up arms, and for several days you have been firing shell, until you have burned dwellings and destroyed people in untold numbers. It cannot be either told how many old people, infants, and females have left their homes [385] in affliction. If your countrymen have not seen this, they have surely heard, have they not, that such is the case? What offence has been committed by the people of Canton that such a calamity should befall them? Again, it is come to our knowledge that you are insisting on official receptions within the city. This is doubtless with a view to amicable relations; but, when your only proceeding is to open a fire upon us which destroys the people, supposing that you were to obtain admission into the city, still the sons, brothers, and kindred of the people, whom you have burned out and killed, will be ready to lay down their lives to be avenged on your countrymen, nor will the authorities be able to prevent them.'

There is great good sense in that; and one of Governor Yeh's letters might have been penned by the Duke of Wellington—it is so sententious. I allude to that in which Governor Yeh, in answer to Sir John Bowring, who asked for admission to Canton, stated that he could not go out of his palace on account of the people, who were complaining of the proceedings of the English. He says, 'If I went into the town, I do not know how I should ever get out again;' meaning that the people would so crowd upon him with their complaints. On the same subject, Governor Yeh wrote to Sir John Bowring:—

'In a letter from his Excellency Admiral Seymour, received some days ago, he says, that the present proposition is in no way connected with those of former years; that his demand is simply for the admission of the foreign representatives. The proposition made before was objected to by the entire population of Canton; the people affected by the present proposition are the same Canton people; the city is the same Canton city; it is not another and separate Canton city. How can it be said that there is no connection whatever between the two propositions? But more than this, the Canton people are very fierce and violent, differing in temper from the inhabitants of other provinces; admission into the city was refused you in 1849 by the people of Canton; and the people of Canton of the present day are the people of Canton of the year 1849; and there is this additional difficulty in mooted the question of admitting British subjects into the city now, namely, that the strong feeling against your Excellency's countrymen having been aggravated by the terrible suffering to which the people have been subjected without a cause, they are even more averse to the concession than they were before.'

That is perfectly natural, and should have put an end to the mooted of the question at the time. It is important that hon. Gentlemen should address themselves to this point, on which there is much misconception out of doors—namely, do the Chinese authorities act in good faith when they tell you that they cannot with convenience or safety carry out that clause of the Treaty which provides for the admission of the English into Canton? I believe that they

act in good faith, and the facts, I think, prove it. A previous Governor of Canton wrote to his Emperor with quaintness, but much truth,—'The inhabitants of Canton who are anxious to fight are many, but those who are conversant with justice are few.' I think that this may also be said of the merchants of Liverpool, whose memorial I have read. The papers already before Parliament are full of proofs of the kind. There is a communication from Sir George Bonham, stating that when a number of our merchants removed to Foo-Chow-foo they took with them their native servants from Canton; but these were found to be so pugnacious that the inhabitants of the province of Fokien, in which Foo-Chow-foo is situated, begged that they (the Cantonese) might all be sent away. But, under any circumstances, I do not think that our admission to the city of Canton would be of a farthing's use. There are thousands of inhabitants outside the walls, in the suburbs which have been destroyed, and these are the shopkeepers and brokers. It is with them that we do business, and, if we had free access into the city, we should still have to do our business outside. Therefore, we have no grievance against the Chinese for not opening Canton.

But, supposing everything I have said on this subject could be contradicted and [386] invalidated, I have only to ask, whether it is right that, with respect to a country with which we have Treaty alliances, our representative should be allowed to declare war, and carry on war, without sanction from this country? That is a question which I intend scarcely to touch upon, because others will be able to deal with it better; but it is apparent, on the face of these papers, that the very difficulty into which we have fallen was foreseen, and that our authorities on the spot have been warned against the very acts they have committed. It is not merely that they have acted against general principles, which it is the interest of all nations to regard; but Sir John Bowring has acted positively contrary to his instructions in regard to the employment of troops. There are letters from Lords Malmesbury and Granville, and particularly one from Earl Grey, which one can read and understand; and these letters gave peremptory directions, that on no account aggressive measures should be resorted to without recourse to England. You have, therefore, to deal with your representative abroad, who not only has violated a sound principle of international law, but has gone against express injunctions. I perceive a great change in the tone of the correspondence between Sir John Bowring and Lord Clarendon, and that which passed between him and other Ministers with whom he had to deal. When Lord Clarendon came into office, there seemed to be some slackening of the rein, leading to the inference that the check previously held over our representative was withdrawn, and that we were 'drifting' into a war with China, as we had into the late war, from the want of a firm hand on the part of persons in authority. Recollecting the instructions of Earl Grey, and looking into the correspondence that has taken place, I cannot help surmising that something must have occurred to lead our Plenipotentiary to suppose, that if we got into a conflict with the Chinese on the question of entering Canton, it would not be unfavourably regarded at home. The manner, then, in which we have been dragged into war, and the position of difficulty in which we have been placed, are much to be deplored. But, looking to the future, I think that you must confess that you find yourselves in a very difficult position. What are you going to do? You have destroyed the whole of the suburbs of the town of Canton; you have destroyed the modern residences of the merchants down to the river's edge; you have destroyed several hundred yards of streets in the old town; that is to say, the busy places of commerce. Right and left, houses have perished, or been burnt up by incendiaries, pillaged by rebels, or bombarded in order that freer range may be given to our guns. I have spoken to some of those who have come from China since this affair began, and they assure me that capitalists will desert Canton, and that the town will never be able to recover its business. They have deserted Canton because they felt too insecure to carry on their business, and it is supposed that that feeling will be lasting. The general impression is, that capital will depart from Canton, and receive employment in other ports. You have, therefore, destroyed that very port on which your commerce depended. It is surely not that for which you are carrying on war.



And what is to be your position for the future? You have entered into a war which cannot be defended. Sir John Bowring did not tell Commissioner Yeh that this was not a legal ship; but our debates are published to the world. Lord Lyndhurst is an authority in America and France as well as here. What will they think of us when they read that the noble and learned Lord has declared the quarrel to be founded, on our part, on a triple illegality, and that we cannot really urge a single fact in defence of our conduct? We had a very good case before, if we had chosen to insist upon it; but the noble Lord at the head of the Government has given up the claim for admission into Canton. You might have gone to Peking and said, 'Fulfil the [387] Treaty of 1842, open the gates of Canton as you promised to do.' But Lord Clarendon says that this quarrel has nothing whatever to do with that. No; it was necessary that that ground should be abandoned, because, bad as this case is, the present Government could rely upon no other defence than this about the *Arrow*, inasmuch as the question about entering would get up an old controversy, to which other nations were not parties. They were, therefore, obliged to raise a quarrel in which they expected other nations would join. But do you suppose that France and America will join with you now, and join in making common cause with you on the ground of this *Arrow*? I speak advisedly when I say, that I believe the American Government will not approve the course that has been taken. I believe they will not join in these violent proceedings. There are some people who know the French Government better than I do; but is it likely, when you have so bad, so wretched, and so dirty a case as this of the *Arrow*, that any one will take share in it on your side? You must give up your case some time or other; and when so proper a time as this to declare that you do not approve these miserable proceedings, which have been carried on in your name unwarrantably by your subordinate representatives?

But may not this war, if it should go on, lead to complications with other Powers? May it not lead to complications with America? I see in these papers that the American merchants immediately protested against it. An American house at Canton has publicly protested against this war, as having been commenced without notice, and have declared that they will therefore hold England responsible for any damage that may be done to their property. Well, what do you propose for the future? Part of the wall of Canton was battered down in the expectation that the Governor would yield. But he has not yielded, although you have bombarded the city itself, and thrown shells into it. What, then, do you propose to do? You have done everything short of burning the town—if, indeed, that has not been commenced. If you do that, you will raise a cry of horror from every civilised people. I see by the Indian papers that the *Friend of India*, which is always a great advocate of annexation, tells Sir John Bowring to play the part of another Clive, and to enter upon a career of conquest, and to annex China as we have annexed India. Are you sure that extensive territorial acquisitions in China would be acquiesced in by other Powers? The United States of America are only half the distance from China that you are. They have a great Pacific as well as an Atlantic empire. I am not sure that America would acquiesce in your making an India of China. Does anybody who knows anything about China believe that you could annex it? It is an empire of 300,000,000 people. How are you to govern them? Nobody that has ever thought upon the subject would dream of your being able to do so.

Then what do you propose to do? I say, undo what you have done. The wisest course which you could adopt would be to repudiate the acts of your representative, who has acted without authority and without instructions. That would be a statesmanlike and prudent course. Disavow the acts of your representatives in this miserable affair of the *Arrow*; but try, at the same time, to get those facilities of international intercourse in that great country which your merchants so much desire, and which your representations will in all probability enable you to obtain. America and France would lend you a joint influence in making such representations, which you never can hope to have while you are fighting on behalf of this affair of the *Arrow*.

But I have said enough with regard to my view upon the subject; I leave the matter in the hands of the House. I hope we shall not hear it said in this House—as it has been in another place—that these are barbarous people, and that you must deal with them by force. I tell you, that if you attempt to deal thus with [388] them, it will be a difficult matter, and one, too, that will be costly to the people of this country. You will be disappointed, and deservedly so, if relying upon the supposition that you will be able to coerce the Chinese Government by force—you will be disappointed if you think that you will be repaid by increased commerce for the employment of violence. If you make the attempt, you will be disappointed again, as you have been disappointed before. And are these people so barbarous that we should attempt to coerce them by force into granting what we wish? Here is an empire in which is the only relic of the oldest civilisation of the world—one which 2,700 years ago, according to some authorities, had a system of primary education—which had its system of logic before the time of Aristotle, and its code of morals before that of Socrates. Here is a country which has had its uninterrupted traditions and histories for so long a period—that supplied silks and other articles of luxury to the Romans 2,000 years ago! They are the very soul of commerce in the East. You find them carrying on their industry in foreign countries with that assiduity and laboriousness which characterise the Scotch and the Swiss. You find them not as barbarians at home, where they cultivate all the arts and sciences, and where they have carried all, except one, to a point of perfection but little below our own—but that one is war. You have there a people who have carried agriculture to such a state as to become horticulture, and whose great cities rival in population those of the Western world. There must be something in such a people deserving of respect. If, in speaking of them, we stigmatise them as barbarians, and threaten them with force because we say they are inaccessible to reason, it must be because we do not understand them; because their ways are not our ways, nor our ways theirs. Is not so venerable an empire as that deserving of some sympathy—at least of some justice—at the hands of conservative England? To the representatives of the people in this House I commend this question, with full confidence that they will do justice to that people.

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# FOREIGN POLICY.

[389]

## FOREIGN POLICY. I. HOUSE OF COMMONS, JUNE 12, 1849.↩

[In the year 1849, the revolutionary or reforming spirit, which had agitated Europe for a year before, was either repressed by violence, or had grown languid by reaction, Among the events, however, which excited the feelings of the English people strongly, was the armed intervention of Russia in the affairs of Hungary, and in support of the despotism of Austria. There is little doubt that the indignation which was roused in England at this act of the Emperor Nicholas, gave strength, a few years subsequently, to the feeling which prompted the Crimean War. Mr. Cobden on both occasions pleaded for the adoption of a principle of non-intervention. On the present, his motion, which ran, 'That an humble address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that she will be graciously pleased to direct her Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to enter into communications with Foreign Powers, inviting them to concur in Treaties, binding the respective parties, in the event of any future misunderstanding, which cannot be arranged by amicable negotiation, to refer the matter in dispute to the decision of arbitrators,' was rejected by moving the previous question. Majority, 97 (176-79).]

I DO not remember rising to address the House on any occasion when I felt more desirous to be indulged with its attention; because, representing as I do a very numerous body out of this House, who take a deep interest in the question, I feel regret on their account, as well as for the cause I have in hand, that there should be so much misapprehension in the House in reference to the motion I am about to make. What has just fallen from the hon. Member for Bucks (Mr. Disraeli) is a proof of this misconception; for he would not have presumed to sneer at a motion before it was made, unless he had conceived that there was something so unreasonable and preposterous about it, that it ought to be condemned before it was heard. I have heard that hon. Gentleman indulge in a sneer before, on many occasions; but they have been *ex post facto* sneers. I have never until now heard him sneer at a matter by anticipation. He has grounded that sneer on an observation drawn forth by a subject which was calculated above all others to move the milk of human kindness in our bosoms. How it was possible for an hon. Member, in reference to the answer returned by the American President to Lady Franklin's letter, to indulge in a sneer of that kind, I cannot understand; unless it be that the hon. Gentleman is incapable of anything but sneering. I accept those acts of the American and Russian Governments as proofs that we live in altered times. As the right hon. Member for the University of Oxford (Mr. W.E. Gladstone) has well observed; at no former period of the world's history has there been an instance of foreign Governments sending out, at their expense, to seek for scientific adventurers, unconnected with their own community. Accepting this as a proof that we live in different times from those that are past, [390] I think there is nothing unreasonable in our seeking to take another step towards consolidating the peace of nations, and securing us against the recurrence of the greatest calamity that can afflict mankind.

I stand here the humble representative of two distinct bodies, both of some importance in the community. In the first place, I represent on this occasion, and for this specific motion alone, that influential body of Christians who repudiate war in any case, whether offensive or defensive; I also represent that numerous portion of the middle classes of this country, with the great bulk of the working classes, who have an abhorrence of war, greater than at any former period of our history, and who desire that we should take some new precautions, and,

if possible, obtain some guarantees, against the recurrence of war in future. Those two classes have found in the motion which I am about to submit a common ground—and I rejoice at it—on which they can unite without compromising their principles, on one side or the other. It is not necessary that any one in this House, or out of it, who accedes to this motion, should be of opinion that we are not justified, under any circumstances, in resorting to war, even in self-defence. It is only necessary that you should be agreed that war is a great calamity, which it is desirable we should avoid if possible. If you feel that the plan proposed is calculated to attain the object sought, you may vote for it without compromising yourselves on the extreme principle of defensive war. I assume that every one in this House would only sanction war, in case it was imperatively demanded on our part, in defence of our honour, or our just interests. I take it that every one here would repudiate war, unless it were called for by such motives. I assume, moreover, that there is not a man in this House who would not repudiate war, if those objects—the just interests and honour of the country—could be preserved by any other means. My object is to see if we cannot devise some better method than war for attaining those ends; and my plan is, simply and solely, that we should resort to that mode of settling disputes in communities, which individuals resort to in private life. I only want you to go one step farther, to carry out in another instance the principle which you recognise in other cases—that the intercourse between communities is nothing more than the intercourse of individuals in the aggregate. I want to know why there may not be an agreement between this country and France, or between this country and America, by which the nations should respectively bind themselves, in case of any misunderstanding arising which could not be settled by mutual representation or diplomacy, to refer the dispute to the decision of arbitrators. By arbitrators I do not mean necessarily crowned heads, or neutral states; though we have examples where disputes have been referred to crowned heads, and where their arbitrament has been eminently successful. There is a case where the United States and France referred a dispute to England; a case in which England and the United States referred a dispute to Russia; one in which the United States and Mexico referred a question to Prussia, and one in which the United States and England referred a case to the King of the Netherlands. These cases were all eminently successful. If one failed in its immediate object, there is no instance in which a war has followed after such a reference. But I do not confine myself to the plan of referring disputes to neutral Powers. I see the difficulty of two independent states, like England and France, doing so, as one might prefer a republic for the arbitrator, and the other a monarchy. I should prefer to see these disputes referred to individuals, whether designated commissioners, or plenipotentiaries, or arbitrators, appointed from one country to meet men appointed from another country to inquire into the matter and decide upon it; or, if they cannot do so, to have the power of calling in an umpire, as is done in all arbitrations. I propose that these individuals should have absolute [391] power to dispose of the question submitted to them.

I want to show that I am practical on this occasion, and, therefore, I will cite some cases in which this method of arranging difficulties has already been resorted to. In 1794 we had a Treaty with America, for the settlement of certain British claims on the American Government. Those claims were referred to four commissioners, two appointed on each side, with the proviso that they should elect unanimously, an arbitrator; in case they should not agree in the choice of an arbitrator, it was provided that the representatives of each country should put the names of certain arbitrators into an urn, one to be drawn out by lot; and this arbitrator and the four commissioners decided by a majority all the cases brought before them. Again, in the Treaty of 1814 with the United States, provision was made for settling most important matters, precisely in the way I now propose. Provision was made for settling the boundary between the United States and Canada, for some thousands of miles; also for defining the right to certain islands lying on the coast; and for settling the boundary between Maine and New Brunswick. The plan was this: each country named a commissioner; the commissioners were to endeavour to agree on these disputed points; and the matters on

which they could not agree were referred to some neutral state. All the matters referred to them—and most important they were—were arranged by mutual conference and mutual concessions, except the question of the Maine boundary, which was accordingly referred to the king of the Netherlands. Afterwards, exception was taken to his decision by the United States; the matter remained open till the time of Lord Ashburton's mission; and it was finally settled by him. But in no case has any such reference ever been followed by war. In 1818 there was a Convention with America, for settling the claims made by that country for captured negroes during the war. It was agreed to refer that matter to the Emperor of Russia; and he decided in favour of the principle of compensation. He was then appealed to by both the Governments to define a mode by which this compensation should be adjudged; and his plan was this: he said, 'Let each party name a commissioner and an arbitrator; let the commissioners meet, and, if they can agree, well and good; if not, let the names of the arbitrators be put into an urn, and one drawn out by lot; and that arbitrator and the two commissioners shall decide the question by a majority.' This method was adopted, and compensation to the extent of 1,200,000 dollars was given, without any difficulty. Hence, it appears that what I propose is no novelty, no innovation; it has been practised, and practised with success; I only want you to carry the principle a little farther, and resort to it, in anticipation, as a mode of arranging all quarrels.

For this reason, I propose an address to the Crown, praying that Her Majesty will instruct her Foreign Secretary to propose to foreign Powers to enter into treaties, providing that, in case of any future misunderstanding, which cannot be settled by amicable negotiation, an arbitration, such as I have described, shall be resorted to. There is no difficulty in fixing the means of arbitration, and providing the details; for arbitration is so much used in private life, and is, indeed, made parts of so many statutes and Acts of Parliament, that there is no difficulty whatever in carrying out the plan, provided you are agreed as to the policy of doing so. Now, I shall be met with this objection—I have heard it already—and I know there are Members of this House who purpose to vote against the motion on this ground: they say, 'What is the use of a treaty of this sort, between France and England, for instance; the parties would not observe the treaty; it would be a piece of waste paper; they would go to war, as before, in spite of any treaty.' It would be a sufficient answer to this objection to say, 'What is the use of any treaty? What is the use of the Foreign Office? What is the use of your diplomacy?' You might [392] shut up the one and cashier the other. I maintain, that a treaty binding two countries to refer their disputes to arbitration, is just as likely to be observed as any other treaty. Nay, I question very much whether it is not more likely to be observed; because, I think there is no object which other countries will be less likely to seek than that of having a war with a country so powerful as England. Therefore, if any provision were made by which you might honourably avoid a war, that provision would be as gladly sought by your opponents as by yourselves. But I deny that, as a rule, treaties are violated; as a rule, they are respected and observed. I do not find that wars, generally, arise out of the violation of any specific treaty—they more commonly arise out of accidental collisions; and, as a rule, treaties are observed by powerful States against the weak, just as well as by weak States against the powerful. I, therefore, see no difficulty specially applying to a treaty of this kind, greater than exists with other treaties. There would be this advantage, at all events, in having a treaty binding another country to refer all disputes to arbitration. If that country did not fulfil its engagement, it would enter into war with the brand of infamy stamped upon its banners. It could not proclaim to the world that it was engaged in a just and necessary war. On the contrary, all the world would point to that nation as violating a treaty, by going to war with a country with whom they had engaged to enter into arbitration. I anticipate another objection which I have heard made: they say, 'You cannot entrust the great interests of England to individuals or commissioners.' That difficulty springs out of the assumption, that the quarrels with foreign countries are about questions involving the whole existence of the empire. On the contrary, whenever these quarrels take place, it is generally upon the most

minute and absurd pretexts—so trivial that it is almost impossible, on looking back for the last hundred years, to tell precisely what any war was about. I heard the other day of a boy going to see a model of the battle of Waterloo, and when he asked what the battle was about, neither the old soldier who had charge of the exhibition, nor any one in the room, could answer the question. I may quote the remark made the other night by the noble Lord (J. Russell) at the head of the Government—that the last two wars were unnecessary—in which I quite agree with him.

But, to return to the point whether or not commissioners might be entrusted with the grave matters which form the subjects of dispute between nations, I would draw the attention of the House to the fact, that already you do virtually entrust these matters to individuals. Treaties of peace, made after war, are entrusted to individuals to negotiate and carry out. Take the case of Lord Castlereagh, representing the British power at the Congress of Vienna. He had full power to bind this country to the Treaty of Vienna. When, on the 20th of March, 1815, Mr. Whitbread brought on the subject of the Treaty, with the view of censuring his conduct and that of the Government, Lord Castlereagh distinctly told the House, ‘I did not wait for instructions at Vienna; I never allowed the machine of the Congress to stand still for want of my concurrence on important matters; I took upon myself the responsibility of acting; and if the interests and honour of England have been sacrificed, I stand here alone responsible.’ I want to know, whether as good men as Lord Castlereagh could not be found to settle these matters before, as after, a twenty years' war? Why not depute to a plenipotentiary the same powers before a conflict as you give him after? For these matters can only be settled by empowering individuals to act for you; and let the Government instruct them as they will, a discretionary power, after all, must be left, when they are to bind the country towards other States. Take the case of Lord Ashburton, settling the Maine boundary question in America. [393] He had the power to bind this country to anything he set his hand to. No doubt he had his instructions from the Government, but he presents his credentials to the American Government, and is received by them as authorised to bind this country to anything he agrees to do. All I want is, that this should be done before, and not after, engaging in a war—done to avert the war, rather than to make up the difference after the parties are exhausted by the conflict.

Probably I shall be told that there are signs of a pacific tendency on the part of the Government and the country; it will be said that we are carrying out a pacific policy, and that there is no necessity for passing any resolution to impose on the Government the obligation of giving us this guarantee. But I do not see that this is in process of being done. I do not see any proof, in the last five or six years, that the Government has been increasing in its confidence of peace being preserved, or gaining security for its preservation. In the last ten years we have increased our armed forces by 60,000; in the army, navy, and ordnance, the expenditure has been augmented sixty to seventy per cent. From 1836, down to last year, there is no proof of the Government having any confidence in the duration of peace, or possessing increased security against war. I think the inference is quite the contrary. In the committees on which I have been sitting, I have seen an amount of preparation for war which has astounded me; and I dare say other honourable Gentlemen would share my alarm at the state of things. But I confess, when I have looked into what we are doing in the way of provision of warlike stores, means of aggression, and preparations for defence against some foreign enemy, I have been astonished at the warlike expenditure that is going on. What will honourable Gentlemen think when they know that we have 170,000 barrels of gunpowder in store? Besides that, we have sixty-five millions of ball-cartridges made up ready for use. (Hear, hear, and a laugh, from the Protectionist benches.) The public will not laugh when they read what I say. They will not join the honourable Members for counties opposite in laughing at this statement. We have 50,000 pieces of cannon in store, besides those afloat, and in arsenals, and garrisons, and batteries. There are 5,000,000 of cannon-balls and shells

in the stores, and 1,200,000 sand-bags, ready for use whenever they are needed. There is a provision equal to three or four years' consumption of these articles in the height of the French war. You have, in barrelled gunpowder alone, a supply equal to nearly three years' consumption of that article in the height of the French war, and equal to fifteen years' consumption at the present rate, to say nothing of the sixty-five millions of ball-cartridges. Does this look as if the Government thought we had made any great way in the preservation of peace? Is it the part of a country, assured of peace, to make all this provision against war? You have spent, in the last five or six years, on an average, twice as much in fortifications, in steam-basins, in docks, in barracks, in means of aggressive and defensive warfare, as at any period since the peace; and my hon. Friend the Member for Montrose (Mr. Hume), who has looked much longer and deeper into those subjects than I have, believes it is more than was spent in the same time for those objects during the war. Since 1836 you have doubled the expenditure of the ordnance department. It is in that department that the great increase takes place; because, in the progress of mechanical invention, and the improvements made in the science of projectiles, it is found that the artillery and engineer corps are the arms of the service on which the fate of battles mainly depends.

So, again, in the case of steam-basins. A great discovery came to the aid of civilisation—the discovery of Fulton—which he and others probably hoped would be made contributory to the unalloyed improvement and happiness of mankind. What has been the effect in our case? We commenced the construction [394] of a steam-navy. I do not say whether it was necessary or not, but I want you to try and make it in some degree unnecessary in future. The Government continued to increase the steam-navy, until we had as much money spent in steam vessels of war as we had invested in our merchant-steamers. I made this statement last year; I repeat it advisedly, as capable of the strictest proof. It was then received with incredulity and surprise by the right hon. the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir C. Wood); some facts which I showed him afterwards rather staggered him, and I am now prepared to prove that when I stated the fact last year, it was strictly true that we had invested in steam-vessels of war a larger amount than the whole cost of our mercantile steam marine; that we had expended far more in steam-basins and docks for repair of those vessels than was invested in the private docks and yards, for building and repairing private steamers.

What are we to deduce from these facts? That instead of making the progress of civilisation subservient to the welfare of mankind—instead of making the arts of civilisation available for increasing the enjoyments of life—you are constantly bringing these improvements in science to bear upon the deadly contrivances of war, and thus are making the arts of peace and the discoveries of science contribute to the barbarism of the age. But will anybody presume to answer me by the declaration that we want no further guarantee for the preservation of peace? Will any one tell me that I am not strictly justified and warranted in trying, at all events, to bring to bear the opinion of this House, of the country, and of the civilised world, upon some better mode of preserving peace than that which imposes upon us almost all the burdens which war formerly used to entail? We are now spending every year on our armaments more than we spent annually, in the seven years' war, in the middle of the last century. Therefore, far from being deterred by sneers, I join most heartily and contentedly with those worthy men out of the House, who are inspired by higher motives than I can hope to bring to bear on this occasion, and which I could not probably so rightly urge as I do those which come within your province; I join most heartily in sharing the odium, the ridicule, the calumny, and the derision, which some are attempting to cast upon those advocates of peace and of reduced armaments.

But I wish to know where this system is to end. I have sat on the army, navy, and ordnance committees, and I see no limit to the increase of our armaments under the existing system. Unless you can adopt some such plan as I propose, unless you can approach foreign

countries in a conciliatory spirit, and offer to them some kind of assurance that you do not wish to attack them, and receive the assurance that you are not going to be assailed by them, I see no necessary or logical end to the increase of our establishments. For the progress of scientific knowledge will lead to a constant increase of expenditure. There is no limit but the limit of taxation, and that, I believe, you have nearly reached. I shall probably be told that my plan would not suit all cases. I think it would suit all cases a great deal better than the plan which is now resorted to. At all events, arbitration is more rational, just, and humane than the resort to the sword. In the one case, you make men what they are never allowed to be in private life—the judge in their own case; you make them judge, jury, and executioner. In the other case, you refer the dispute to impartial individuals, selected for their intelligence and general capabilities. In any case, and under any circumstances, I do not see why my plan should not have the advantage over that now adopted. If I am opposed by supposititious cases, and told that my plan would not apply to such, I take my stand upon past experience, and will show you numerous instances where it would have applied. Nay, I am prepared to show that all the unavoidable quarrels we have had during the last twenty-years—I mean those which could not have been avoided by [395] any conduct on the part of our Government—all these might have been more fitly settled by arbitration than in any other way; and I will appeal to the right hon. Gentlemen on both sides of this House, who have filled the highest offices of Government, when such disputes have arisen, whether they would not have felt relieved from harassing responsibilities, had they had this principle of arbitration to rely on, in these cases.

Take the case of 1837, when a dispute arose with Russia, about the confiscation of a ship in the Black Sea, called the *Vixen*. The noble Lord, the Member for Tiverton, was then Foreign Secretary. He knows very well that this vessel was sent to the Black Sea by a certain party, with a particular object; the thing was entirely got up. I was in Constantinople at the time, and knew the whole history of it. That vessel was freighted and sent to the coast of Circassia, for the very purpose of embroiling us with Russia; and immediately she was seized, there was a party in this country ready to raise an excitement against the noble Lord, for submitting to the arrogant spoliation of the Russian Government. Had we then had an arbitration treaty with Russia, would not that have been the best possible resource for the noble Lord in that case, and have enabled him to escape the party attacks made upon him in this country? That question, which, after all, did not involve an amount of property exceeding 2,000*l.* or 3,000*l.*, might have been settled by a petty jury of twelve honest tradesmen, quite as well as by the noble Lord at the Foreign Office.

Will any one, for a moment, tell me that the disputes about the boundary between Maine and New Brunswick, and the misunderstanding respecting Oregon, might not have been settled by arbitration? I prefer the appointment of commissioners to that of crowned heads—because I would have men who are most competent to judge of the subject in dispute. For instance, this was a geographical question: why should not the two ablest geographers of this country have met those of the United States, assuming them otherwise qualified by moral character and general attainments, and have been authorised to call in an umpire, if necessary? Supposing the case to have been left to the decision of such an umpire as Baron Humboldt, for example; would he not have decided far more correctly than any war would be likely to do? I know that the Oregon question caused the liveliest apprehensions to those who were engaged on both sides, in this dispute, in 1846. I am aware that Mr. M'Lane, the American Minister, felt the greatest solicitude, and manifested the deepest anxiety on the arrival of every packet, and I know how anxious he was that the right hon. Gentleman (Sir R. Peel) should remain in office till the question was settled. I know what he felt, and what every Minister in a similar position must feel, on such occasions. The great difficulty was lest party spirit and popular excitement should arise on either side of the water, to hinder and perplex the efforts of those who were interested in its settlement. It is to remove that



difficulty in future—to prevent the interposition of bad passions and popular prejudices in these disputes—that I desire to have provision made, beforehand, for the settlement of any quarrel that may arise by arbitration.

There was another case, in 1841, the danger from which was, in my mind, the most imminent of all—I mean the case of Mr. M'Leod, who had been taken and imprisoned by the State of New York, and tried for his life, for having, as he himself avowed, taken part in the burning of the *Caroline*, in which an American citizen lost his life. Our Government claimed to have this question decided between the general Government of the United States and themselves. But the Government of the United States said that they had not the power to remove the case out of the New York Court, and that they could not prevent the State of New York proceeding in the matter. We all know [396] the excitement which took place on that occasion. There was great irritation in America, and great excitement in this country. Now, if Mr. M'Leod had been executed, what would the consequence have been in this country? Why, the old cry of our honour being involved would have been raised. [An hon. Member: 'Certainly.'] An hon. Member says, 'Certainly.' But what means would you take to vindicate your honour? You would go to war, and, for the one life that had been taken away, you would sacrifice the lives of thousands, nay, perhaps, tens of thousands. But would all this sacrifice of human life restore the life of the man on whose account you were fighting? Would it not be much wiser if, instead of resorting to war,—which is nothing but wholesale murder, if war can be avoided,—you had recourse to arbitration, by which, indeed, you could as little restore the individual to life, as by the employment of all your military forces, but by which you might obtain a provision for his widow and family, and which, be it remarked, is no part of the object of those who engage in wars?

Now, there is another case, upon which I call the right hon. Gentleman opposite (Sir R. Peel) as a witness into court—the case of Mr. Pritchard, a missionary, and the consul of this country at Tahiti, who had been put under arrest by the French admiral. When this news first arrived in this country, from a distance of 12,000 or 14,000 miles, the press, both here and in France, sounded the tocsin, and national prejudices and hatreds were invoked on both sides. The French Minister, M. Guizot, was told that he was going to succumb to the dictation of England; and in this country, it was said that the honour of England was sacrificed to the insolence of France. The right hon. Gentleman (Sir R. Peel), then at the head of affairs, rose in his place in this House, and declared that the insult offered was one of the grossest outrages ever committed, and was inflicted in the grossest manner. That added to the difficulty of dealing with the question in the proper manner. M. Guizot and Lord Aberdeen also complained of the conduct of the press of both countries, which exasperated the national animosity on that occasion, and rendered it more difficult to settle the question amicably. I now ask the right hon. Gentleman, if he would not have felt consoled and happy, in 1844, if a treaty of arbitration had existed between this country and France, by which this miserable and trumpety question might have been at once withdrawn from the arena of national controversy, and placed under the adjudication of a commission set apart for that purpose?

I may be told that none of these instances had led to or terminated in war. That is true. But they led to an enormous amount of expenditure; and, what is worse, to lasting hate between nations. I have no hesitation in saying that these disputes have cost this country 30,000,000*l.* sterling. They not only led to expenditure in preparation for war at the time, but they occasioned a permanent increase in your establishments, as I have shown you on a former occasion, and you are now paying every year for the increase of these establishments which was then made.

Now, I would ask, in the face of these facts, where is the argument you can use against the reasonable proposition which I now put forward? I may be told that, even if you make treaties of this kind, you cannot enforce the award. I admit it. I am no party to the plan which

some advocate—no doubt with the best intentions—of having a Congress of nations, with a code of laws—a supreme court of appeal, with an army to support its decisions. I am no party to any such plan. I believe it might lead to more armed interference than takes place at present. The hon. Gentleman opposite, who is to move an amendment to my motion (Mr. Urquhart), has evidently mistaken my object. The hon. Gentleman is exceedingly attentive in tacking on amendments to other persons' motions. My [397] justification for alluding to him, on the present occasion, is, that he has founded his amendment on a misapprehension of what my motion is. He has evidently conceived the idea that I have a grand project for putting the whole world under some court of justice. I have no such plan in view at all; and, therefore, neither the hon. Gentleman, nor any other person, will answer my arguments, if he has prepared a speech assuming that I contemplate anything of the kind. I have no plan for compelling the fulfilment of treaties of arbitration. I have no idea of enforcing treaties in any other way than that now resorted to. I do not, myself, advocate an appeal to arms; but that which follows the violation of a treaty, under the present system, may follow the violation of a treaty of arbitration, if adopted. What I say, however, is, if you make a treaty with another country, binding it to refer any dispute to arbitration, and if that country violates that treaty, when the dispute arises, then you will place it in a worse position before the world—you will place it in so infamous a position, that I doubt if any country would enter into war on such bad grounds as that country must occupy.

I may be told that this is not the time to bring forward such a motion. I never knew a good motion brought forward in a bad season. But it may be said, that the time is badly chosen, because there are wars on the Continent now. I quite disagree to that. Is there anything in those wars so inviting, that we should hesitate before we take precautions against their recurrence? I should have thought, on the contrary, that what is taking place on the Continent is the very reason why we should take every precaution now. There were none of these wars, with the exception of that between Schleswig and Denmark, to which international treaties would apply; because they are all either civil wars, or wars of insurrection, and rebellion. This war between Schleswig and Denmark was an instance of the very insignificant means by which you could produce widespread mischief in this commercial age. Is there a case where the principle of arbitration, in the persons of first-rate historians or jurists, could be adopted with more advantage than in the case of Schleswig and Denmark? It is difficult to see how the dispute is ever to be settled by going to war, for one party being stronger by land, and the other by sea, there may be no end of the conflict. But see what mischief this dispute has occasioned to others. The blockade of the Elbe, the great artery of the north of Europe, has shut out their supplies, not from Schleswig, but from Germany. It has interrupted the commerce of not merely a small Danish province, but the whole world. The people of Schleswig, who have comparatively no manufactures, are not punished, but your fellow-citizens in Manchester, your miners in North-umberland, and the wine-growers of the Gironde are punished. Mischief is done all over the world by this petty quarrel, which could be more properly settled by arbitration than by any other means. Let not people turn this matter into ridicule by saying that I want to make arbitration treaties with everybody—even Bornean pirates. Hon. Gentlemen may create a laugh by coupling together a Bornean pirate and a member of the Society of Friends. But I do not want to make treaties with Bornean pirates or the inhabitants of Timbuctoo. I shall be quite satisfied, as a beginning, if I see the noble Lord, or any one filling his place, trying to negotiate an arbitration treaty with the United States, or with France. But I should like to bind ourselves to the same principle with the weakest and smallest States. I should be as willing to see it done with Tuscany, Belgium, or Holland, as with France or America, because I am anxious to prove to the world that we are prepared to submit our misunderstandings, in all cases, to a purer and more just arbitrament than that of brute force. Whilst I do not agree with those who are in favour of a Congress of nations, I do think that if the larger and more civilised Powers were to enter into treaties of this kind, their decisions would become precedents, [398] and

you would in this way, in the course of time, establish a kind of common law amongst nations, which would save the time and trouble of arbitration in each individual case.

I do not anticipate any sudden or great change in the character of mankind, nor do I expect a complete extinction of those passions which form part of our nature. But I do not think there is anything very irrational in expecting that nations may see that the present system of settling disputes is barbarous, demoralising, and unjust; that it wars against the best interests of society, and that it ought to give place to a mode more consonant with the dictates of reason and humanity. I do not see anything in the present state of European society to prevent us from discussing this matter, and hoping that it may be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. I have abstained from dwelling on those topics which may excite the feelings of hon. Gentlemen opposite. I have not entered into the horrors of war, or the manifold evils to which it gives rise. I will, on the present occasion, content myself with the description of it by Jeremy Bentham, who calls it 'mischief on the largest scale.' I will leave these topics, and that mode of handling the question, to others who may discuss the matter, either here or elsewhere. I have stated clearly, explicitly, and in a matter-of-fact manner, what my object is, in order that it may not be misunderstood. I have shown examples in which this plan has been adopted. All I want is, that we should enter into mutual engagements with other countries, binding ourselves and them, in all future cases of dispute which cannot be otherwise arranged, to refer the matter to arbitration. No possible harm can arise from the failure of my plan. The worst that can be said of it is, that it will not effect its object—that of averting war. We shall then remain in that unsatisfactory state in which we now find ourselves. I put it to any person having a desire to avert war, whether, when he sees that the adoption of this plan can do no harm, it is not just and wise to try whether it may not effect good. As it is likely to have that effect in the opinion of nearly 200,000 petitioners to this House—as that is the opinion declared by 150 public meetings in this country—as it is the opinion expressed by members of several town councils who calmly discussed this matter in their large boroughs—as it is the opinion of so many of your reflecting and intelligent fellow-citizens—will you refuse to them, under the circumstances I have stated, this, the only mode that has been propounded, of affording a guarantee against war, which we all equally deprecate?

**FOREIGN POLICY. II.**  
**LONDON, OCTOBER 8, 1849.** [↪](#)

[The Austrian Government had in the autumn of 1849 advertised in the London papers for subscriptions to a loan of 71,000,000 florins (7,100,000*l.*). The loan was rendered necessary in consequence of the condition in which the Austrian finances had been placed by the Hungarian revolt, and the measures adopted to put it down. Mr. Cobden called public attention to the facts, and at a meeting at the London Tavern made the following Speech on this resolution: —'That the Government of Austria, having proposed to raise a loan in foreign countries, capitalists and men of business are thereby invited to investigate the financial position of the said Government, and the probability of its repaying the loan thus proposed to be contracted; and that it is the opinion of this meeting that no valid security is tendered, or can be offered, in the present state of the Austrian Government, which would justify prudent men in taking any part of the said loan.']

It has been my privilege to address my fellow-countrymen probably as often, and in as great a variety of places, as any man now living; but I will say, with unfeigned confidence, that there never was an occasion when I stood before my countrymen on more solid and firm grounds of justice, of humanity, and of sound political economy, than I do at this moment. Objections have been taken to the course I have pursued in this matter, on the ground that I am not adhering to sound principles of political economy. I suppose it was thought that this was the most vulnerable point on which one who had said so much on the subject of Free Trade could be assailed. I will begin, then, with that which the enemy considers his strong ground of attack; and I say, that as I have gone through the length and breadth of this country, with Adam Smith in my hand, to advocate the principles of Free Trade, so I can stand here, supported by the same great authority, to denounce—not merely for its inherent waste of national wealth, not only because it anticipates income and consumes capital, but also on the ground of injustice to posterity, in entailing upon the heirs of this generation a debt which it has no right to call upon them to pay—the loans we have this day met to consider. But, whilst I come here to denounce as unjust, to expose as wasteful, and to demonstrate to be impolitic, the system of lending money for the purposes for which Austria comes to borrow, I confine myself to this. I do not purpose to recommend that we should go to Parliament for a law to prohibit men from lending money, if it be their wish to do so. All I say is, that I come here to try, in a humble way, to do that which I have done for Free Trade—to popularise to the people of this country, and of the Continent, those arguments with which Adam Smith, David Hume, [400] Ricardo, and every man who has written on this subject, have demonstrated the funding system to be injurious to mankind, and unjust in principle. I come here to try to show to our fellow-countrymen, that they will act upon a wrong principle, and do injury to society, by lending the proceeds of their hard and industrious labour to the Austrian Government, to be expended in that bottomless gulf of waste—armies and standing armaments. I come here to show the impolicy, on general principles, of taking such a course. But in this particular instance I am not going to confine myself to the general principle. I appeal to every individual who thinks of lending money to the Austrian Government, to pause before he does so; because he is going to intrust his money to a Power that has thrice committed an act of bankruptcy. [An observation was here made by an individual which led to cries of 'Turn him out,' and some confusion ensued.] Mr. Cobden proceeded:—Turn nobody out. If he be a man who has subscribed to this loan, he can only have paid ten per cent. as a deposit, and, if you will only keep him here, before I have done I will satisfy him that it will be for his interest to forfeit the deposit. I will satisfy him that it will be to his interest to forfeit his ten per cent.

and to pay no more.

But to resume. I say that the Austrian Government has three times committed acts of bankruptcy, under circumstances of great and scandalous injustice, for, while personal interests—Imperial interests—have been well taken care of, the general public—the subscribers to the loans—have been basely sacrificed. Now, what has been the progress of Austrian finance since the great war? When the Austrian Government come to us to borrow money, the least they can do is, through their agents, Messrs. Hope and Co., to give us a *bonâ fide*, detailed, and candid debtor and creditor statement of their accounts; but we have no such statement from that Government. In the absence of such a detailed and official statement, then, we are bound to have recourse to the best private authorities we can find. I will take a work of standard reputation, which was published in 1840, under the title of ‘Austria and its Future,’ a work well known to be from the pen of Baron Andrian, who, last year, ably filled the office of Ambassador from the Central German Power to the British Court, and a work of standard authority on such matters. After a precisely detailed statement of all the various shuffling manœuvres—borrowing, loaning, lotteries, and every possible device—with which the Austrian Government had been mystifying its finance for twenty-five years—from 1815 to 1840—the author sums up by saying that, from 1815 down to 1840, a period of profound peace, the Austrian Government has doubled its debt in nominal value, but quadrupled its debt in real amount, and has increased the interest for which it is liable tenfold. The same work was republished, in 1846, by the same author, with an additional volume; and the author tells us that, at that time, not one word had been said to disprove his statements respecting Austrian finance. He adds, that since the period when his book was first published, 8,000,000*l.* more have been added to the national debt of Austria; and it therefore comes to this—that from 1815 to 1847 the Austrian Government, during a period of profound peace, without a foreign war on its hands during the whole of that time, has gone on, every year, spending more than its income, and constantly adding to the amount of its national debt. Then, in 1848, whilst Austria had from 300,000 to 400,000 men under arms—the produce of all this wasteful expenditure—came that revolutionary epidemic, which passed over the Continent, and the Government of Austria fell like a house of cards, notwithstanding the bayonets by which it was supported, and, from that time to this, the Austrian empire has been in a state of complete anarchy and disorder. Vienna, Pesth, Venice, Milan, Prague—every capital of the empire but Inspruck—have been bombarded [401] by the forces of the Austrian Government, or have been in a state of siege; we have seen the Bank suspending specie payments, the Government prohibiting the exportation of the precious metals, to prevent the foreign creditor from being honestly paid his due; and during all this anarchy and confusion, both political and financial, the Austrian Government has expended, at least, double the amount of its annual income. I should be afraid to state what I have heard persons of good authority say is the amount of the floating debt, now standing over, in the Austrian empire; but I am within the mark when I say, that there is at least 20,000,000*l.* sterling held over in Austria as the result of the last eighteen months' social, political, and financial anarchy. And it is to enable the Austrian Government to redeem a part of that enormous floating debt that they now have the audacity—for I cannot call it by any other name—to come before the people of Western Europe, and ask the honest Dutchman, the industrious Englishman, the painstaking, saving Swiss, or Frenchman—they do not care who it is—out of their hard earnings, to lend them money—that is, to throw it into a bottomless pit of waste and extravagance.

Now, I ask you, if an individual has committed acts of bankruptcy three times, is he not very likely to commit such an act again, if it answers his purpose? Well, the Austrian Government has every motive to declare itself bankrupt again, because it is utterly impossible that, in any other way, they can recover from their financial embarrassment. They never can pay their debt. They may now borrow 7,000,000*l.* sterling, as a means of paying

off a fraction of the debt they have already incurred, and that 7,000,000*l.* they are asking for on rather humiliating terms; but I warn all men, whether in this country or abroad, that this is only the beginning of borrowing, on the part of the Austrian Government. If their finances are to be retrieved by borrowing, this is but a drop in the ocean to what they must borrow afterwards; and you must bear in mind, that they who lend their money first will be swamped and sacrificed to those who lend afterwards, and with whom the Government will have to submit to harder bargains. When I state these facts, I do not mention them for the information of Messrs. Hope and Co., or any other large banking company, in London, Amsterdam, Antwerp, or Vienna. I perfectly understand, though not a farthing of this Austrian loan should be repaid—though the Government shall never redeem a farthing of it—that it may still be a very profitable thing to those agents and bankers, who raise the money through their connections and customers. I hold in my hand the advertisement put forth by the Austrian Government in our papers, and this is my justification for coming here to-day. We have not met to talk over Austrian finances and affairs, to uncover their sore places, and to tell all these hard truths, without having been invited to it. Here is an advertisement, put into our papers, at the expense, I suppose, of the Austrian Government, inviting everybody to subscribe to the loan. The advertisers are so accommodating, that, in order that nobody may be excluded, they say that bonds will be issued for sums as low as 100 florins, or 10*l.* It is said that the pith of a lady's letter is to be found in the postscript, and I entreat the attention of all persons, whether here, in Holland, or in Germany—(for I am not merely speaking to a few of my countrymen in this room, but what I say will be read in Holland, in Germany, and in France)—to the last line of this advertisement. It runs thus:—'Any subscriber to a higher amount than 25,000 florins, that is, 2,500*l.*, or any person who collects subscriptions to an amount surpassing that sum, will receive a commission of  $\frac{1}{4}$  per cent. on the amount of the payments made.' Now, I ask you, if any shopkeeper or huckster in London put an advertisement outside his window,—'Anybody who brings a customer to my shop, who may purchase 5*s* worth of potatoes or vegetables, shall have a commission of 2*d.* on [402] that amount,' would you not pass by on the other side, and take especial care to have no dealings at his shop? Would you not naturally say to yourselves, 'If that man sold a good article, if he was true to his word in his dealings, if he never cheated anybody, if he had not committed foul acts of bankruptcy, or, probably, of robbery, he would not be under the necessity of offering bribes to obtain customers?'

I wish you, and those small capitalists who are invited to put their 10*l.* into this raffle, where there are no prizes, to bear in mind, that we do not think that our meeting will convert any of those bankers, or agents, or brokers, whether in Amsterdam or Vienna, who have been called on to find out unwary people, and get them to subscribe their 25,000 florins. We never expected to convert them, or to meet them on this platform. We expect that all those organs of the press, which are under the influence of these parties,—and they are not a few,—we expect that they will not meet what I now say by argument, but they will do what they are bid to do and to say, and will abuse me well. [Here a person exclaimed that 'there were 10,000 people outside, who wanted to get in.'] Mr. Cobden continued:—I am glad to hear that there are so many assembled outside, but they must be content with reading in the newspapers to-morrow what we are now saying. It is to those small capitalists, of whom I was speaking,—the unwary, the incautious, and the uninformed class,—that I wish to speak the voice of warning; and, if they will listen to me, I will give them the opportunity of testing the opinion of the great capitalists, with respect to this loan. Messrs. Hope and Co., of Amsterdam, the agents for the loan, have offered it on such terms as, if carried out, would pay 5*l.* 14*s.* per cent. interest. Now, I would advise some canny Dutchman to go to the counting-house of Messrs. Hope and Co., and say this to them,—'You have offered to me to take part in a loan, by which I shall get 5*l.* 14*s.* interest per cent.; that is, nearly twice as much interest as we get in Amsterdam, in an ordinary way; I should be content with 4 per cent. interest, if it were secure; I propose to take 1,000*l.* of your loan; and I will be content to receive 4 per cent.

interest and give you the remaining 1*l.* 14*s.*, if you will endorse my bond, as a guarantee for the payment.' No, no; the firm are not likely to be caught in that way, you may depend upon it. I was talking the other day to a gentleman in Lombard-street—one of the most experienced, sagacious, and able men in that quarter, which is not renowned for gullible people—and I asked him for his opinion upon this loan. Bear in mind, he is a man more consulted by the Government, and Committees of the House of Commons, on such matters, than any one else on the east of Temple-bar. He replied, 'I do not believe that 200,000*l.* will be raised in all Lombard-street, and certainly not one shilling's worth will be taken to hold.' No, the capitalists will not take it to hold. If they subscribe, they will take the scrip at 10 per cent. deposit, in the hope of transferring it, at a premium, to some one, who will lose his money, not being so well informed of the valueless character of the security. It is on that class that the loss will fall. I knew myself, many years ago, when resident in the City, a man who worked as a porter, on weekly wages—his family and himself being reduced to that state that they had no other earthly dependence—and yet, that man had Spanish bonds, to the nominal amount of more than 2,000*l.* in his pocket, which he had purchased when in better circumstances. They were not worth more than waste paper; but I never heard that the great houses that contracted that loan were ruined by it. No, it passed through their hands, and came into the hands of poor men, like this porter, who had no experience and knowledge in such matters; and it is to protect such poor men that I now utter the voice of warning.

Now, I ask, when it is known that every word I say is strictly within moderation, and the bounds of truth,—when [403] there is not a man in Lombard-street but would endorse every word I utter as to the valueless character of this loan,—is it not something hateful, humiliating, and disgusting, that we have leading organs of the press which lend their influence, not to throw a shield over the unwary and innocent, but to serve the purpose of those who have cunning and ability to protect themselves? They do not come out—that is why I blame them—in their leading articles, and tell the people, with the authority of their own pen, that Austria is trustworthy—that this loan is a good investment. No; they do not do anything of the kind; but they do their work in the best way they can,—by *inuendo*, by indirect influence, and by trying all they can to traduce the men who come forward and tell the truth in this matter. When I take up a public question of this sort, and find, instead of my arguments being refuted, that I am personally attacked, I consider it the triumph of my cause. But the fact is, that these are not the only parties that look with disfavour on this meeting to-day. I have no hesitation in saying that there is not a Government in Europe that is not frowning upon this meeting. It is not merely Austria that disapproves of the meeting. I do not believe that our Government likes it. I say so much, because I see that the organs of the press, especially under the influence of the Government, and one, in particular, established as the advocate, *par excellence*, of the sound principles of political economy, enounced by Adam Smith, are forward in condemning this meeting. I consider this as the germ of a great movement, which will lay bare the pretensions of every Government that comes before the world for a loan; and will show the bankrupt state—if it be bankrupt—of the exchequer of their country; and will hold up to execration the objects for which men attempt to obtain such loans.

I consider this almost as much a Russian as an Austrian loan. I do not separate the two countries. You remember when I spoke before, in this place, strongly on the subject of the Russian finances. I come here now to repeat every word I then uttered. I claim no great merit for myself in presuming to understand more properly the state of Russian finances than many others. It is from accident that I have had opportunities—and few men, probably not six men in England, have had my opportunities—of investigating and ascertaining, upon the best and safest authority, on the spot, where alone you can properly understand the matter, what actually is the state of the resources of Russia; and I say, again, that the Russian Government, in the matter of finance, is nothing more nor less than a gigantic imposture. There are men in

Western Europe who know what I say to be true, and yet lend themselves to spread an opposite delusion. You have seen in the newspapers, that the Government of Russia have taken 2,000,000*l.* of this Austrian loan, and that the Russian Government was going to subscribe to the Pope's loan, and going to lend the Archduke of Tuscany a round sum. This is systematically done. These paragraphs are put into the papers by men employed by that cunning Government, to throw dust in the eyes of people. That Government last year spent more than its income, and this year its deficit is enormous. Russia has not paid the expenses of the Hungarian campaign; it has made forced contributions, taking the taxes in advance, in the territories through which the troops moved, and has given Treasury receipts; and at this moment the Russian Government has no alternative but to increase its paper money, and begin an act of bankruptcy again, or to come to Western Europe for a loan. When she comes here, let her well understand that we will be here also.

It is not on mere economical grounds, or on grounds of self-interest alone, that I oppose these loans; I come here to oppose the very principle on which they are founded. What is this money wanted for? Austria, with her barbarous consort, has been engaged in a cruel and remorseless war; and the Austrian [404] Government comes now, and stretches forth its bloodstained hand to honest Dutchmen and Englishmen, and asks them to furnish the price of the devastation which has been committed. For there is little difference whether the money subscribed to this loan be furnished a little before or after. The money has been raised for the war by forced contributions and compulsory loans, for which Treasury receipts have been given, in the confident expectation that this loan would be raised to pay them off. I consider that this is on principle most unjust and indefensible. Happily, by the ordinance of Divine Providence, war is in its nature self-destroying; and if a country engaged in hostilities were left to itself, war must have a speedy termination. But this system of foreign loans for warlike purposes, by which England, Holland, Germany, and France are invited to pay for the arms, clothing, and food of the belligerents, is a system calculated almost to perpetuate the horrors of war; and they who lend money for these purposes are destitute of any one excuse, by which men try to justify to their own consciences the resort to the sword. They cannot plead patriotism, self-defence, or even anger, or the lust of military glory. No; but they sit down coolly to calculate the chances to themselves of profit or loss, in a game in which the lives of human beings are at stake. They have not even the pleasure—the savage and brutal gratification, which ancient and pagan people had, when they paid for a seat in the amphitheatre, to witness the bloody combats of gladiators in the arena.

I wish, in conclusion, that it should be borne in mind by capitalists everywhere, that these are times when it behoves them to remember that property has its duties as well as its rights: I exhort the friends of peace, and advocates of disarmament, throughout the civilised world, to exert themselves to spread a sounder morality on this question of war loans, and to impress upon the capitalists of the world, that they who forget their duties are running the risk of endangering their rights.

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**FOREIGN POLICY. III.**  
**LONDON, JANUARY 18, 1850.** ↩

[The Russian Government was attempting, at the beginning of the year 1850, to negotiate a loan, ostensibly for the construction of a railway from St. Petersburg to Moscow. There was reason to believe that the true object of this financial operation was to cover the deficit occasioned in the Russian finances by its armed intervention in Hungary. A meeting was called at the London Tavern to protest against this loan, and Mr. Cobden moved the first resolution at the meeting in the following words:—"That the Government of Russia having proposed to raise in this country a loan of five millions and a half, professedly for the purpose of completing a railroad from St. Petersburg to Moscow, but really to replenish the Imperial exchequer, exhausted by the expenses of the war in Hungary, this meeting is of opinion that to lend money to the Emperor of Russia for such an object would virtually be to sanction the deeds of violence and blood committed by him in Hungary, and to furnish him with the temptation and the means for carrying on future schemes of aggression and conquest.']

I CONGRATULATE the Peace Society and the friends of peace in this country, that the Emperor of Russia has been obliged—unconsciously been obliged, as we must as a matter of courtesy suppose—to affix his name to a document which is not true, in order to obtain a loan of five and a half millions in this country. I say that that document which has been signed by the Emperor of Russia contains an untruth. I know it to be untrue, and it is known to everybody in St. Petersburg to be untrue. But I accept the untruth as the highest tribute that could possibly be paid to the moral power of the Peace party in this country.

I was saying that the pretence put forth by the Emperor of Russia, that he requires this money to complete the railroad from Moscow to St. Petersburg, is unfounded in truth. I was at St. Petersburg about two years ago, and at that time the rolling stock of that railway was furnished. They had then one hundred locomotives; and I travelled on a portion of the line by means of one of them. They had one thousand waggons and carriages; and I was told all the iron was upon the ground and paid for, but that some part of the embankments remained unfinished; and looking at the martial tendencies of the Emperor of Russia, I do not think it likely that those embankments will be completed for ten years to come, at least; for judging from his conduct hitherto, we must expect that he will continue to spend his money as fast as he gets it, like a great overgrown colossal baby, on his soldiers rather than on those substantial improvements which alone can add to the civilisation, the power, and the happiness of his country.

But why do I argue this point? Nobody believes that the money is wanted by Russia for the railroads. I take it that everybody assumes to the contrary. But I will convict the Russian Government [406] of falsehood in this respect from their own ukase. They say they want the money within six months. Whoever heard of five and a half millions being required for making a railroad in six months? Some of you here, unhappily, no doubt, have had some experience in railway calls, but did you ever know them come from any one board of directors so thick and fast as they are to come from the Emperor of Russia? 20*l.* two days after allotment, 10*l.* on the 15th of February, 10*l.* on the 15th of March, 10*l.* on the 15th of April, 10*l.* on the 15th of May, and 10*l.* on the 15th of June, and the remainder on the 15th of July next! Why, here are railway calls for one railway alone at the rate of nearly one million a month, and that in a country where, up to the month of March, no work can be done in the way of forming embankments, and consequently this money is wanted for the purpose of being expended in excavating and embanking in the months of April, May, June, and July. I

really pity the mendicant Czar who is obliged to come to us with such a story. Is it not humiliating? And then, after putting forward this pretence that the money is wanted for a railroad, after beginning his imperial ukase by saying what was not the truth—I must in courtesy presume that he did not know that it was not the truth—he winds up at last (as though doubting whether or not he would be believed) in the fifth paragraph by promising that the account of the sums derived from this loan shall be kept as the former loans raised for this same railroad were kept—distinct from all other items of the State revenue and expenditure. He wants here to open the door if possible even wide enough for the most scrupulous Quaker to subscribe to his loan. He tells you not only that the money is not wanted for war or for paying soldiers, but that it is entirely for the construction of the railroad, and as a proof that it is so, he says he will give separate accounts of the manner in which it is expended. If he does so, all I can say is, that it is what he never did before.

I have been subjected to the reiterated charge that I am not consistent with my own principles, the principles of Free Trade, when I come here to denounce this loan, and people have asked—'Why won't you let us lend our money in the dearest market, and borrow in the cheapest? Why not have free trade in money as well as in everything else?' I have no objection to people investing their money, if they like to do so, but I claim the right, as a free man in a free country, to meet my fellow-citizens in public assembly like the present, to try and warn the unwary against being deceived by those agents and moneymongers in the city of London who will endeavour to palm off their bad securities on us if they can. If they can succeed in spite of our warning, and I am not going to coerce them or to dictate to them, we shall have done our duty in giving this warning in time; and those who do not follow our advice now will, perhaps, by-and-by, wish they had done so. That, however, is their business, not mine.

It is asked of me this morning by a leading journal, whether I oppose this loan on the ground of its immorality or on the ground of its being unsafe? I say I oppose it on both grounds; for, in my opinion, whatever is immoral is unsafe. But, apart altogether from these grounds of its inherent immorality and insecurity, I stand here as a citizen of this country and as a citizen of the world, to denounce the whole character of this transaction as injurious to the best interests of society. I will take first the politico-economical view of the question, because it is supposed that on this question I am particularly weak in that direction. Now, I take my stand on one of the strongest grounds in stating that Adam Smith and other great authorities on political economy are opposed to the very principle of such loans. What is this money wanted for? It is to be wasted. It is to go to defray the expense of maintaining standing armies, or to pay the expenses of the atrocious war in Hungary. Then [407] what does it amount to? It is so much capital abstracted from England and handed over to another country to be wasted; it alienates from the labouring population of this country a part of the means by which it is employed, and by which it is to live. I say that every loan advanced to a foreign Power to be expended in armaments, or for carrying on war with other countries, is as much money wasted and destroyed for all the purposes of reproduction as if it were carried out into the middle of the Atlantic and there sunk in the sea. And I make no distinction whether the interest be paid or not—for if it be paid by the Emperor of Russia, it is not paid out of the proceeds of the capital lent—it is not paid by the capital itself being invested in reproductive employment—but it is extorted from the labour, the industry, and the wretchedness of his people, who have to pay the interest of that capital which has not only not been employed in reproductive labour, or even thrown into the ocean, but far worse, in obstructing industry, in devastating fair and fruitful lands, and in suppressing freedom. I say, then, I stand here as a political economist to denounce every transaction such as this as injurious to every class of the community, from the highest to the lowest, because it stops employment, impedes industry, and withdraws from us the very sources of profitable labour. Therefore, I say, it must injure every one more or less, from the Government itself down to

the humblest mechanic or farm labourer who depends on his weekly wages for his subsistence. But I stand here also to denounce this loan as a politician, as a member of society, and as a taxpayer. For what is the object of this loan? It is to enable the Emperor of Russia to maintain an enormous standing army; and what is the consequence? Why, that every other country in Europe is obliged to keep up an enormous armament also. What say the statesmen of France? They say, 'We are obliged to keep 500,000 armed men because Russia keeps 800,000;' and we are here in England accustomed to cite the hostile position of Russia, as a reason why we keep our enormous fleet. I should not be surprised if, in the very next session, when I bring forward a motion asking to reduce our armaments, you find, what I have before found, this very example of the Russian fleet cited as a reason why we cannot reduce our navy.

What has been very recently the attitude and position of Russia as regards this country? Have we not had our fleet—a fleet maintained in the Mediterranean at an enormous expense, by you the taxpayers of this country—have we not had it sailing to the Dardanelles; and have we not had constant talk of a collision between Russia and this country on the subject of Turkey? Why, it is the acknowledged and traditional policy of this country—I do not say a word as to the wisdom of that policy—that we are to defend Turkey against all comers, and to maintain, at all hazards, the integrity of that empire against the aggressions of foreign Powers. When we speak of foreign Powers, we mean only Russia; and it is the common talk with every one who knows anything of Continental affairs, that in the spring Russia means to attack Turkey in her Danubian provinces, in which case the taxpayers of this country may be called upon to equip fleets, which Russia will combat with the means borrowed from yourselves.

We read in the history of Holland, that on one occasion when a Dutch town was besieged, its merchants sold sulphur to the enemy with which to make gunpowder to fire on themselves. When we read this we look on the Dutch as a mercenary people, who had no idea of patriotism or national dignity; yet what shall we say of England, if we have to record that, in the year 1850, there were found men in London ready to endorse the desperate wickedness of Russia by lending her money to continue the career of violence she has hitherto maintained? I oppose this loan then on grounds totally apart from the abstract [408] principles of morality or any consideration as to the nature of the security offered. I, as a politician, a citizen, and a taxpayer, have, in common with you all, a right to protest against transactions of this kind whencesoever they come, or by whomsoever contracted. But I denounce also the morality of this loan. We have latterly had a strange doctrine, half hinted, half expressed, but not very confidently broached, that you must not question what a man does with his money; that you must only inquire how much per cent. is to be obtained, and that if the interest be five instead of four per cent. that is quite sufficient to sanctify the transaction. That is the doctrine I hear put forth in the name of my fellow-citizens. If it be really their doctrine, I can only say that the Emperor of Russia has given them credit for a much higher standard of morality than they possess. He was afraid to avow his real objects. He was obliged by his council to tell a fib, by asking the citizens of London to lend him money for railway purposes, instead of war. He did not know his men, he took too high an estimate of their morality, for they now propose unblushingly to lend him money, simply because he proposes to give them five per cent. interest instead of four.

Now, what is this money wanted for? Simply and solely to make up the arrears caused by the exhaustion of the Hungarian war. I am not in the habit of boasting at public meetings of what I may have done on former occasions, but if I were a boaster I should exult that the assertions I made on this spot in June last, and which have been subjected to so much sarcasm from foes and friends—I should, I say, feel some exultation that this poverty-stricken Czar has been obliged to come forward and verify every word I then said. What has

become of the two millions we are told the Emperor had subscribed to the Austrian loan? What has become of the 500,000*l.* he was going to advance to the Pope, or the half-million he was going to bestow in his generosity on the Grand Duke of Tuscany? Oh, he ought to pay his scribes well in Western Europe, who have told so many lies for him. He ought to pay them well, seeing that they have been subjected to this full refutation of all they have said on his behalf at the hands of the Czar himself. If I had been employed to write up the wealth, power, and riches of a man who six months after was obliged to come before the citizens of London and sign his name to such a humiliating document as this imperial ukase, I should expect to be exceedingly well paid for the loss of character I had sustained.

Well, I stand here to repeat the very words I uttered twice on this platform at times when few would believe me. I say that the Russian Government in matters of finance has been for years—successfully, until now the bubble has burst—the most gigantic imposture in Europe. I use the words, as I do every word I say at a public meeting, advisedly. I have used them before, and, after due investigation, I come here to repeat them. I say that this money is wanted for the purpose of sustaining the ambition, the sanguinary brutality of a despot, who has all the tastes of Peter the Great, and all the lust of conquest of Louis XIV., without the genius of the one or the wealth of the other; and who would apply these principles to a great part of Europe, forgetting that this is the nineteenth instead of the seventeenth century; while utterly wanting, not merely the ability which would enable him to play such a part in history, but even the pecuniary means of enjoying the taste he possesses.

What are the real objects of the loan? To make up deficiencies, to pay debts incurred by the Emperor of Russia while inflicting the most wanton injuries on Hungary. I said before that the expenses of that war were not paid, and now I will tell you how it was carried on. The army was moved from the interior, not at the expense of the military chest, for, as I told you, that chest was empty, and could not afford the means for transporting the Russian guards from St. Petersburg to the confines of Hungary. The [409] way the Emperor managed it was this:—He sent out orders to all the landowners and farmers on the line of march, commanding them to deposit at certain points indicated supplies of provisions and forage for the army. When the troops arrived, these provisions were taken possession of by the commissariat, and receipts were given, which receipts were to be received as cash in payment of taxes. So that when the taxes became due, and these receipts were handed in instead of money, it was found that the resources of the country had been all anticipated. The Government, then, has not the necessary means of carrying on its affairs. It is said that three millions sterling of these Treasury notes have been issued, accompanied by a ukase avowing that they had been issued on account of the expenses of the Hungarian war. You will thus see that these supplies have been just so much provisions borrowed from the agriculturists of the country through which the army passed, and that the Government hopes to raise the money to pay for them by coming to England for a loan. And I say that this money, now about to be raised by way of loan, is just as much issued for cutting the throats of unoffending men in Hungary, devastating their villages, and outraging their women, as if it had been lent before a single soldier had begun his march. I say in this case, as I said in the case of Austria, that it makes no difference whether the money be lent a little before or a little after. The operations were based on the expectation of a loan from England, temporary expedients were used pending the realisation of that loan, and therefore, the English capitalists who advance their money will really be the abettors of the crimes and the cruelty of these Continental despots.

Such are the purposes, and not railways, for which this money is wanted; and are we to be told that because the loan will pay five per cent. we are not to inquire into the purposes for which it is raised? I can only say, that if a man has a right to make the most he can of his money without any inquiry as to the means, there was a very worthy man used harshly the other day at the Old Bailey, by being sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment and hard

labour for only being the landlord of some infamous house out of which he realised a profit of twenty per cent. It is quite certain that this man may console himself in his confinement by thinking that his conduct was quite consistent with the new code of morality lately introduced into the City. But I do not reckon much on moral restraints. I think more may be done by appealing to motives of self-interest, and showing the risk there is in subscribing to these loans. Who would go and lend money to an irresponsible despot who never publishes any account of his income or expenditure? I was looking through the *Almanach de Gotha*, thinking I might find in it some traces of the income and expenditure of Russia. There was something more or less on that subject respecting every other state, but when I came to Russia I found these expressions: 'We are sorry to be altogether without information as to the revenue or expenditure of Russia.' Now, that is the investment which is considered good in the city of London, simply because the borrower is a thousand miles off. How would a man, whose affairs were in such a state, but living in England, be received if he attempted to borrow money? How would you like it in the case of railways? At present, although you have six-monthly meetings, auditors, secretaries, and the most complete surveillance, yet, by a strange inconsistency, one of the parties most diligent in abetting the Emperor of Russia is as anxiously abetting a Government audit to look after the affairs of the railways. That is my first objection. We do not know what security we are to have for this money, which we know is wasted in unproductive employment. The next objection I make to this investment is, that you are lending money to a sovereign who founds his throne on the most combustible elements in all Europe. It is not irrelevant [410] to the subject, if a sovereign comes here publicly to solicit money from the citizens of London, to say a word as to the prospects of his empire. The Emperor of Russia is the only sovereign in the world who rules over white slaves—twenty millions of serfs, who are bought and sold with the land. Do you think that a safe state of society in the present age? The ideas and principles of freedom have been marching from west to east for centuries, and slavery and serfdom have disappeared before the spirit of the age, until progress was arrested on the confines of Russia. Do you think it will long stop there in these days of the steam-boat, the railway, and the telegraph? On the contrary, you must expect that the serfs of Russia, being men, will prefer freedom to slavery; and that, being ten to one of their masters, they will do in Russia as they have done in every other country in Europe, sooner or later assert their freedom.

What security do you think you will have when the conflagration takes place in Russia, as it most probably will before many years have passed away?—because there never has been a case in which the emancipation of the serfs on a large scale was effected except through the agency of a revolution. What do you expect for your loan in the event of a revolution in Russia? What will the people of Russia say of the men who lent their money to enable the Emperor to maintain his tyranny over his serfs? I say they will. repudiate the debt. And, mind you, this custom of lending money by more refined states to barbarous Governments is a great means of perpetuating their tyranny. It gives them the power of governing in a way which they could not attempt if depending on their own people for the supplies. Go back to your own history—to the time of the Plantagenets, when England obtained her liberties step by step. How? Through the necessities and embarrassments of her kings. One got a loan for one franchise, another redeemed his jewels with another. That was the way in which the people of this country wrung liberty from their sovereigns, time after time, through their necessities; but if our ancient kings could have gone to the more solvent states of Italy, or the merchants of Venice, who stood towards England then pretty much as England stands towards Russia now, and could have borrowed five millions independently of their people, when, think you, would the liberties of the people of England have been secured? Where would have been the liberties of England under such circumstances? And do you not think these things will pervade the minds of the masses in the east of Europe? Will they not ask you by what right you lend your money to any irresponsible despot, to enable him to perpetuate their slavery? What answer can you give them? Why, we got five per cent. for our

money!

But there is another difficulty which I wish those who lend money to the Russian Government to bear in mind. We may not be strong enough in this room, although we represent pretty much public opinion out of it; we may not be strong enough, by this expression of opinion, to prevent people lending their money to Russia; but let them well understand that we, the taxpayers of England, who are no parties to the loan, will be no parties to the collection of their debts. Hitherto, there has been a sort of vague notion that if Governments fail in paying their debts to the English creditors, the powers of our Government may be brought to bear to enforce payment. There has been some correspondence between parties so interested and Lord Palmerston, and the noble Lord, although declining to interfere, yet reserved to himself the power of interfering if he thought proper. Now, I tell those who lend their money to the Russian Government, with an idea that they can make our Government the collector of their debts, that we have sufficient power to prevent them making our foreign Minister a bumbailiff. I warn those who lend their money to these bankrupt Governments, whether [411] in Europe or elsewhere, that we have the power—we, the taxpayers of this country—to prevent our Government sending, at the instance of these loan-mongers, ships of war or even diplomatists to demand their money. On the contrary, I believe from my heart, that if the time should come—and most assuredly many in this room will live to see it, when not one farthing of this Russian loan will be paid—I believe that the enlightened opinion of this country will exult in the loss of the money, not from ill-will to the unfortunate people who hold the bonds, but from a belief that it is a righteous retribution, and that it will operate as a warning to prevent similar transactions in future. Are not these important points for consideration? Will any one deny that we have the power of preventing the Government putting the taxpayers to expense in collecting these loans? Will it not make an important change in the prospects of these loan-mongers, when it is known to the world that the taxpayers of England separate themselves altogether from the speculators in such matters?

There is another uncertainty which I wish to point out to the holders of these loans. Nobody can deny that there is a change of opinion on the whole subject of these foreign loans; nobody can deny that we have put their promoters on the defensive, and that on the grounds of political economy, expediency, and justice, they are gradually losing ground in public opinion. That is the work of six months. We have only begun our work. But is it not very clear, that as this opinion goes on gathering strength, and as the raising of loans becomes more difficult in this country, it will diminish the chances of the payment of the interest of loans already effected? Let it be once known that there will be no more loans, and we shall soon have repudiation all over the world. Since the peace of 1815, the Governments of Europe have borrowed more money than they have paid interest to their creditors. That is to say, the kind and agreeable British public have been lending money out of one pocket, and receiving it back in interest in the other. But let them once see that there is no more chance of getting your cash, and you will see that a very slight chance remains of your dividends. But I do not come here with the idea of warning any of those capitalists who take this loan as agents, or the speculators who write for it. We all understand how that is done now. A certain house engages—I'll let you behind the scenes a little. A certain house undertakes to be the contractor. As soon as the contractor has settled his terms—and they do not always tell you the whole of the terms—he sends out circulars to his friends; that is, those speculators whose names he has in his books, and who are accustomed to put down their names for a certain amount of these loans. These brokers, bankers, and speculators are all invited to put down their names as subscribers to the loan. They send in their names for 50,000*l.*, 30,000*l.*, or 20,000*l.* And why? Because they expect to be able to redistribute these sums to their customers, their clients, and their acquaintances, at a profit—not with the view of holding the stock themselves. I venture to say, that not five per cent. of the loan which will be subscribed

for up to Monday next will be taken by parties who really intend to hold it as a permanent investment.

I came down this morning from the west end of the town in an omnibus, sitting opposite to a gentleman. As we were riding along he looked out of the window and saw a placard with the words, 'Great meeting on the Russian loan.' He said to me, 'Mr. Cobden is going to have a meeting, I believe.' 'Yes,' I said, 'I believe he is.' 'It's very odd,' he observed, 'that he should presume to dictate to capitalists as to how they should lay out their money.' 'Well,' I said, 'if he attempts to dictate, it is rather hard. But I suppose he allows you to do as you like.' 'But,' said he, 'he holds public meetings to denounce this loan; yet I should not wonder if he would be very glad himself to [412] have 20,000*l.* of it.' I said, 'Have you taken any yourself?' He replied, 'I have—50,000*l.*, and I intend to pay it all up.' I then said to him, 'Would you like to leave that property to your children?' 'No,' he said, 'I don't intend to keep it more than two years at the outside, and I hope to get a couple per cent. profit upon it.'

Now it is with that view that that gentleman is going to pay up his calls—that is, if he thinks of doing so. That is not the ordinary case; they generally pay up one call, and then sell the stock at any profit which they can get upon it; and the loss of holding these securities—I said it before, and I repeat it now—the loss falls upon individuals who were totally unconnected with the taking of the loan—tradesmen retired from business, widows and orphans, trustees and others who invest money in what they regard as a permanent security, in order to obtain the interest upon it. Well, now, I declare most solemnly, after looking into this subject of Russia, as I have done for the last eighteen years, that I would not give 25*l.* per cent. for the Russian Five per Cent. Stock, which is being dealt in to-day by the bulls and bears at 107—I would not take 100*l.* worth of it at that price for permanent investment, and with the view of leaving it as a part of the dependence of my children. We do not profess to come here to advise those brokers and capitalists who originally take these loans; we know that they always make money, even when other people lose. I ask you to go back to the loans which have been contracted—for instance, by the house of Messrs. Baring and Co. I ask you to inquire for yourselves how some of the loans which have been taken by that house have turned out in relation to the interests of those who have ultimately become the depositories of the bonds. The contractors did not perhaps lose by them; but I get letters daily from persons who have had Spanish bonds, Guatemala bonds, Portuguese bonds, and the rest, describing the sorrowings and sufferings which they have experienced as the result of having been entrapped into purchasing such bonds.

I say, then, that in coming here to denounce this transaction, we do so in the interest of the unwary; we do so to guard against these transactions, men who have not had the same opportunity as some of us have had of investigating this matter. And if we can by this means place an obstacle in the way of these warlike and despotic sovereigns, when they are coming to raise money from the civilised industry of this country, in order that it may be expended in barbarous waste in Russia and other countries, I say that we shall have done society good service. I ask only for just so much confidence in what I say as I am entitled to in consequence of what I asserted before with regard to the state of the Russian finances. Take nothing for granted in reference to Russia. Systematic fraud and deception, and lying and misrepresentation, are the policy of the Government of that country. A great part of the very money which is now about to be loaned in this country will, I have no doubt, be spent in espionage in Constantinople—in bribing employeés and functionaries there, and in bribing a portion of the press in Germany and in France. [Cheers, and loud cries of the '*Times*,' followed by hissing.] We cannot believe that any of the press of England would be bribed. [Laughter, and renewed cries of the '*Times*,' amidst which were heard the words '*Morning Post*!'] To be sure, some of our newspapers have been doing the work of despotism rather heartily. And now they seem disposed to play the part of vampires or ghouls. They are worse

than vampires and ghouls. How shall we describe those indescribable monsters who, when their foes have fallen, when they are gone into exile, when they are separated from their wives and children, when they are starving in the streets,—brought down to the begging of their bread in the midst of winter,—how, I ask, shall we describe the wretches who are then base enough to traduce the character of such men? I spoke of ghouls and vampires. They prey upon the corpse of the [413] material body: we have had no monster as yet which lived by destroying the character of a fallen foe.

Now, Gentlemen, this money will be spent, I say, in bribing the Continental press—in paying for an insurrection in Paris, no matter whether it be a red republican or a legitimist insurrection, so that it causes confusion and violence—ay, in paying somebody to create confusion in this room, if they durst. Talk of red republicanism being anarchical! There is nothing in the world so anarchical as the despotism of St. Petersburg. Let it not be concluded, from what I say of the Russian Government, that we have here fallen into the great delusion which prevails in this country on the subject of the character of the Russian people. I have had before to correct some misapprehensions with regard to the finances and resources of Russia. There is nothing in reference to which there is so almost universal a misapprehension as exists with regard to the character of the great mass of the Russian people. In the first place, we have them represented to us as a collection of barbarous and discontented hordes, who are anxious to quit their country, and to pour, like an avalanche, on Western Europe. There is no greater delusion in the world than the supposition that the population of Russia have any desire to leave their native land. There is not a people in the world who are prouder of their country than are the Russians of theirs. There is not a people in the world who are less disposed to cross their frontiers to commit an act of depredation or spoliation, much less who would leave their country to become permanent settlers in another land. I speak now of the national character. Nor are the Russians a warlike people. There is no greater delusion than the supposition that we have to deal with the Russians as a warlike people. Why, the army is so unpopular, that when the Russian peasant is torn from his village by the conscription, there is a procession in the village, of which the priest is the leader, which resembles a funeral ceremony. When I was at St. Petersburg, an English merchant described to me a striking scene, in order to illustrate the repugnance of the Russian people to enter the army. He said that he entered a street in St. Petersburg where a surgeon was examining the conscripts, in order to ascertain whether or not they were fit for the service. Some conscripts had entered a house. They were there denuded and examined, in order that it might be seen whether they were fit to be admitted into the army. One of the men was declared to be unfit for the service; and so great was his excitement, that in the frenzy of his delirium and joy, he actually rushed from the house into the street in the state of nudity in which he had been examined. Well, now, I say the character of the Russian people is a gentle character. They have a great regard for human life. They are, indeed, as slaves, addicted to slavish vices; they lie, they pilfer, and they are too apt to get drunk, or at least to indulge in the use of intoxicating liquors. But great crimes—the crimes of murder and violence—are rare in Russia; and I wish it to be distinctly understood, that in dealing with the Emperor Nicholas we will not allow it to be said that we stand here to menace or affront a population of sixty millions of people.

But what will be the grievance of this people as against you? It is you who enable the Government to maintain its enormous army; it is you who enable the Emperor to keep up a navy for which he drags twenty or thirty thousand of his vassals from their villages, placing them for six months in the year in barracks in order that they may, for three summer months, sail on board his ships in the Baltic and the Black Sea, to the great amusement of British and American sailors. The Russians have even a greater horror of the sea service than they have of the land service. They are dragged from their villages to be put into ships of war, and imprisoned in barracks at Cronstadt, and all because you lend the Emperor of Russia money



to enable him to do this. Once withdraw these loans, and from that moment the [414] whole policy of the Emperor of Russia, as well as of the Emperor of Austria, will be changed. Russia would no longer be able to menace Turkey—Russia would no longer be able to send its army into Hungary—Russia would no longer be able to hire these spies and journals in Western Europe; and the Emperor, not having the means of coercion placed in his hands by foreign aid, would be obliged to conciliate his people, in order to govern them securely.

I would, in conclusion, exhort those who may read what I am saying, to consider well before they invest one farthing of their money in a security based upon the life of an individual like this, one who does not belong to a long-lived family, and whose son may be utterly unfitted to cope with the difficulties which await him, when the present Czar dies. In thus lending your money, you place it upon a volcano. You may rise any morning and find that the vast empire has been torn asunder, that a spirit of violence and insubordination is spreading throughout its serf population. Come it will—it may come on any day. This boasted Emperor of Russia, of whose energy and talents we hear so much, is doing the most likely thing which a man could do to precipitate and render inevitable such a convulsion as I speak of. Instead of conciliating the nobles, he is holding them with the tight hand of despotism—he is pretending to give emancipation to the serfs only to disappoint their hopes; and, instead of employing the energies and resources of the empire in preparing for the greatest evil which could hang over any country, namely, that which arises from the possession of twenty millions of serfs, he is increasing his expenditure, embarrassing his finances, enlarging his army and navy, trying to keep the whole of Europe in a state of perturbation. and making enemies to himself of every civilised people on the face of the earth.

I ask all who may read what I say not to be daunted by what they are told is said in the City, by the statement that everybody is laughing at them—that everybody is laughing at Mr. Cobden's letter. They said that everybody was laughing at my letter about the Austrian loan. We were told then, in reference to the Austrian loan, as we are told now with regard to the Russian, that it was all taken before we met. Well, now, I was calculating this morning, before I came here, what is the present state of the account of those who took the Austrian loan. I am very happy to say that that loan has remained principally in the hands of the first subscribers; that it is the great bankers, the great brokers, the great speculators who had been really caught in this case; and for that very reason, and no other, you will never hear of another Austrian loan. Now, what is the present state of the account of those speculators? I find, by a very short calculation which I made this morning, that at the present rate on the Exchange, they have had a loss on that loan up to this day of 145,000*l*. So I think the laugh is on the other side of the face—and it is only the beginning of the laugh. We ask, therefore, everybody who has a conscience which is proof against one per cent.—on the ground of morality, on the ground of political economy, on political grounds, and on the ground of personal safety and security, we ask every one to ponder when he reads what has been said to-day—we ask all to do their utmost to discredit this most nefarious attempt on their credulity and their pockets.

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**FOREIGN POLICY. IV.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, JUNE 28, 1850.** ↩

[On June 24, Mr. Roebuck made the following motion:—' That the principles which have hitherto regulated the Foreign Policy of Her Majesty's Government are such as were required to preserve untarnished the honour and dignity of this country, and at all times best calculated to maintain peace between this country and the various nations of the world.' The motion was carried by 46. (310 to 246.) The motion was in answer to a censure on Lord Palmerston's Administration carried on Lord Stanley's (the late Lord Derby's) motion in the House of Lords. The occasion of the censure was the support given by Lord Palmerston to one Pacifico, a Jew, who claimed to be a British subject, and pretended to have suffered great losses in a riot at Athens.]

It was my wish to have done to-night, what I have frequently done before—to have given a silent vote; finding, as I do, that nearly all the arguments on both sides have been stated by other Members much better than I could state them; but I have been referred to, in common with several other Gentlemen on this side of the House, as likely to take a course different from our neighbours on this occasion, and I therefore think it necessary to say a few words.

First, I am anxious that, so far as I am concerned, the question should be put on its legitimate issue, and that it may not be still suggested that I am here for the purpose of indulging in a personal opposition; I trust that, at all events, I may be exempted from any such charge. In the next place, I wish it to be understood, so far as I am concerned, that there is nothing in this case which involves any plot, conspiracy, or cabal of any kind whatever. The hon. Member for Sheffield (Mr. Roebuck) is the author of this motion; do you accuse him of being in any plot, conspiracy, or cabal? He has taken the initiative in the matter, and those who participate in the discussion merely comment upon the resolution so submitted to them by the hon. and learned Member. Lastly, I hope I may be exempted, at all events, from the sweeping charge made against Members who do not support this motion—that they are in the interest of despotism all over the world.

I have heard from several Gentlemen around me, some of whom I do not think extremely democratic, whom I have by no means found always supporting extreme Liberalism, very considerable intolerance towards those who do not take the same view with themselves in relation to the Government on this occasion. I will ask those Gentlemen, do they think me an ally of Russia or of Austria? Do they think I have shown less sympathy for the Hungarians or Italians than they have,—that I have less cosmopolitan sympathies than they? If, then, they admit me to be as liberal as [416] themselves, surely they may allow me the freedom of taking the view my conscience dictates in a matter which has nothing on earth to do with constitutionalism or despotism.

As I understand it, the first thing before us is the conduct of our Government in Greece, though the hon. Member for Sheffield has widened that question, by the wording of his resolution, so as to cover the whole foreign policy of our Government. But as to the conduct of our Government in Greece, why, if this subject had been set before us in February, or even in March, within a few weeks after we had heard that fifteen British vessels of war had assembled in the Bay of Salamis to blockade the coast of a friendly Power, there would scarcely have been any difficulty in approaching the subject in a calm and dispassionate way, apart from all the extraneous matter with which it has been now encumbered. Really, when those who oppose this motion are offhand charged with plot, conspiracy, and cabal, I am tempted to ask whether there has not been some little plot, conspiracy, and cabal to get up an

artificial excitement in the country on the subject. Yes, I have seen placards and circulars; I am not speaking without knowledge. However, the question is, what was the conduct of our Government in relation to the affairs of Greece? I have not brought my blue books down with me, and I shall not read a single line to you; but as there is much mystification on the subject, and as I wish to deal fairly with all, I will state the case in a few words, so that no one may take exception to it.

In the first place, Mr. Finlay, a Scotch gentleman, settles in Greece twenty years ago, taking up his residence at Athens, not as a merchant, not to promote British commerce in that quarter of the world, but as a denizen of Greece. He purchases land in Athens and the neighbourhood; I have seen the land, and I saw the much-discussed palace, just as it was rising from this land. Land was bought on speculation, not only in Athens but in the neighbourhood. Mr. Finlay thus became interested in the prosperity of Athens. The court of Greece and its Government were at this time established at Nauplia; it was desired by the proprietors and inhabitants of Athens that the Government should resume its ancient and classic seat, by removing to Athens. The landed proprietors of Athens, deeply interested in again making it the metropolis of Greece, instead of allowing it to remain what it was, little better than a village of huts, all signed an engagement with the commune or municipality of Athens to furnish land for erecting public buildings upon, the price fixed being equivalent to about  $3\frac{1}{4}d.$  to  $3\frac{1}{2}d.$  per square yard. I do not intend to go through all the correspondence on the subject of Mr. Finlay's claim; I merely want to bring the matter to the point on which you must all agree. Mr. Finlay was one of more than one hundred persons who thus sold land to the Greek Government; that is admitted by all parties in the correspondence. Among these proprietors who sold their land for palaces and public buildings were several foreigners, and among these foreigners were two whom Sir E. Lyons, in his first letter to Lord Aberdeen, speaks of as fellow-sufferers with Mr. Finlay—Mr. Hill, the agent of the Episcopalian Society of America, and the Russian Consul-General.

These are facts that nobody denies. I do not desire to go into any controversy, but simply to draw the attention of the House and of the country to the fact, that all the other proprietors of these lands, without exception, agreed to the terms, and accepted the terms, that were offered by the commissioners appointed by the municipality for that purpose. ['No,'] Does the hon. and learned Member for Southampton, with his blue-book before him, mean to say that the fact is not stated in that blue-book as I have given it? ['No,' from Mr. Cockburn.] Why, it is stated there expressly. ['No,'] Will the hon. and learned Member tell me that Mr. Hill and the Russian Consul-General accepted the money, or that they did not stand in [417] the same position with Mr. Finlay? I know Mr. Hill; it is an honour to any one to be acquainted with him; for, as it is well stated by Sir E. Lyons, in that first letter of his to which I have referred, there is no one to whom the rising generation of Greeks is more indebted than to Mr. Hill and his family. Mr. Finlay refused to take the money which the bulk of the other proprietors accepted; a long controversy ensued, and the result was the approach of our ships of war to the Bay of Salamis. I have not stated anything so far that any one can deny.

Now we come to M. Pacifico. M. Pacifico had his house outrageously attacked; that no one can deny; he sends in his bill to the Government, and, with that bill in our hands, our ships of war enter the Piræus. I blushed with indignation when I read the inventory of M. Pacifico. It is no matter of surprise that hon. Members have deprecated any allusion to the details of that bill, as if the whole of this question was not a question of details. ['No, no,'] Why, with the exception of the apology required for the insult to Fantome, all the rest is a matter of money. ['No, no,'] I beg pardon; I say all the rest is a matter of money, and your exclamations only show how you are acting in this case upon blind passion and party spirit. M. Pacifico sends in his bill to the Government; he charges for a bedstead 150*l.*, he charges for the sheets 30*l.*, he charges for the pillow-case 10*l.*, for two coverlids 25*l.* This inventory

is so deeply disgraceful to all concerned in it, that, first, you tried to evade the question, by saying the case was not one for *nisi prius* details, and then you turned round, and said that Pacifico brought all this furniture to Athens, to sell it to the King of Greece. But if we go into the bill for the personal apparel, the every-day working apparel of M. Pacifico and his family, we find there just the same sort of thing; it is all in unison with the 150*l.* bedstead. Why, there is a gold watch with appendages put down at 50*l.* for one of the items. When I first read the account, I thought the whole thing was a mistake, and that in writing out the bill, pounds sterling had been put down instead of drachmas, for I am pretty sure that in every case drachmas instead of pounds would have much more nearly represented the real value of the articles.

Next comes the case of the six Ionian boats at Salcina, and their demand for 235*l.*—for I will not enter into details; then the case of the four Ionians, who charged the Greek authorities with having outraged them, and thumbscrewed them, and taken their boats, two to Patras, and two to Pyrgos. The Greek authorities controvert the statement of our Consul upon this subject, and the correspondence altogether puzzles us as to who is right and who wrong; but the noble Lord, nothing doubting, settles the matter in a few lines, by ordering that the four complainants shall be paid 20*l.* each by the Greek Government.

Then comes the Fantome case. A British ship of war is lying off Patras; a boat goes on shore at nine o'clock at night, when it is dark; the coxswain lands a midshipman, not at the usual place of disembarkation, but on the beach; the midshipman goes to see his father, a boy preceding him with a lantern; on his return he is taken into custody by two officials and conveyed to the station, in default of giving a satisfactory account of himself; the Greeks, bear you in mind, not speaking one word of English, nor the Englishman one word of Greek. Now, suppose a Frenchman landing in the same way from abroad, by night, near Brighton, not at the ordinary landing-place but on the beach, and observed by preventive officers, neither party understanding one word of the other's language, and mutual explanation being consequently impossible. Why, the blockademen would at once put the landing party down for a French smuggler, and would take him into custody and convey him to the station where, an interpreter being procured, the explanation deficient would be supplied, and the arrested person be dismissed with all proper apology. This [418] was precisely what was done to the midshipman. As soon as an interpreter was found, and it was ascertained who the Englishman was, he was at once liberated, and respectfully conveyed to his ship.

There you have the statement of all our grievances against Greece. ['No, no.'] I will not go into the merits of them; say the Greeks were wrong, or we were wrong, just as you please; but admit they were wrong, and what I want to know is, whether the wrong was not one that might have been readily settled by other means than by sending fifteen ships of war into the Bay of Salamis? I know I take a very vulgar, mercenary view of the matter, but I repeat my question,—Was there no other way to settle the question than by this immense array of force? It is quite evident that the only reason why this entire matter was not settled before, was the bad spirit that existed between our representative and the Government of Greece. I do not speak disparagingly of Sir Edmund Lyons; any other functionary under the same circumstances could scarcely have been so long there, any more than at Madrid or elsewhere, without getting mixed up with the local politics in the same way that Sir E. Lyons was. That was the origin and reason why it was found that for six or nine months there were no letters addressed by the noble Lord to Sir E. Lyons, and why there had been no adjustment of these petty differences until it was necessary to send fifteen ships of war to Athens.

Now, is there not something wrong at the bottom of this? Is there not something that requires to be mended? Is it worth while to have an Ambassador there with 5,000*l.* a year embroiling you with the Government, and begetting bad blood and animosity? Why, I would rather have no one but a Consul there, whose duty it should be to look after your commerce,

and who should be told, 'Never go to Athens at all, for, if you mix yourself up with political matters, somebody else shall be appointed in your place.' If you would do this, you would avoid the absurdity of having to employ fifteen vessels of war to collect a debt of 6,000*l*. But everybody said that something else was meant besides obtaining redress for injuries to British subjects in Greece. I believe there was something in the background that I have not heard. It is said that the noble Viscount intended this demonstration at Athens as a menace to Russia. But I say, how does this answer its purpose as a demonstration against Russia? The moment the Court of Russia hear of the demonstration, I find that they send a remonstrance against the Government of this country—a remonstrance couched in language I never expected to hear from a semi-barbarous country like Russia to this: read, I ask you, the extraordinary language used by Count Nesselrode to Lord Palmerston, and then read the answer of the latter, and see how different is the tone adopted by him to a country which is powerful compared with what he makes use of to one that is weak.

Well, then, I ask again, what was the advantage of this demonstration, when the only result of it is a hectoring epistle from Count Nesselrode, to which the noble Viscount sent a very meek and lamb-like reply? The reason why I abhor the policy of injustice and aggression—for I call it injustice and aggression to send ships of war against a weak country to enforce demands which might have been amicably settled—is, that you place yourselves in such a position that you are obliged to submit to language like this from the Russian Court. And why are you obliged to submit to it? Because you are weak, and weak only on account of committing an injustice, and of being conscious of having done so; for otherwise, so far from this country being in a condition to be bullied by Russia, such are the advantages you possess in the knowledge and use of mechanical science and in the advanced state of the arts over Russia, that if you behaved with dignity to small states, she would not venture even to look at you, [419] far less to use such language towards you.

I have asked, why was not this affair settled by other means than by ships of war? I now come to a part of the policy and conduct of the Foreign Office altogether irreconcilable with the notions of those hon. Gentlemen who did me the honour, to the number of eighty, of voting for my motion in favour of international arbitration. It is quite clear, it is said, that the noble Viscount did not resort to arbitration. My charge against him is, that he did resort to arbitration after having made use, in the first place, of fifteen ships of war. No sooner was the demonstration known, than an envoy arrives from France with tenders of mediation. And now, I must say, I have read with feelings nearly akin to contempt for diplomacy, the accounts of what took place between the noble Lord at the head of the Foreign Office and M. Drouyn de Lhuys—I have read the French accounts and the accounts in the blue-books, and must confess I have felt the most sovereign contempt for diplomacy. M. Drouyn de Lhuys came over in the most loyal spirit, as I believe, to offer to settle this beggarly affair of a few thousand pounds with Greece. He told the noble Lord frankly, as a proof of his sincerity, and he has repeated it in a letter to Lord Normanby, that it would be useful to the French Government to be allowed to settle it, or, to use a common American phrase, that it would give them 'political capital' in France. How did the noble Lord receive the approaches of M. Drouyn de Lhuys? Was it in the way any man of business, accustomed to the management of affairs, would have done? Did he say, 'We are much obliged to you; this affair of a few thousands has been a long time standing over,—take it and settle it, and we shall be very much obliged to the Government of France?' Would not that have been the rational and reasonable way of meeting him? Instead of this, what does the noble Viscount say? He higgles with M. Drouyn de Lhuys over the different words to be used,—over 'good offices,' 'mediation,' and 'arbitration.' I declare that both in French and English it fairly puzzles one to make anything out of it; but it appears, by the accounts, that the noble Lord insists he won't take 'arbitration'—it must be 'good offices.' M. Drouyn de Lhuys, in the French account of what took place, given by him to General Lahitte, describes himself to have

entreated the noble Lord to extend a little the powers of the negotiators—to yield to an arbitration, and not to go determinedly on in the affair. But no; the noble Viscount was determined to have what he demanded; and all he would require of France was to persuade Greece to give what he asked. Baron Gros went out to Athens crippled by these conditions, but he set to work at once with Mr. Wyse. I think it is evident Baron Gros had the most earnest desire to settle the matter. Indeed, his character as a diplomatist was largely involved in his success in arranging it, and he went to work evidently disposed to surmount every possible difficulty; but when he came to the case of Pacifico, and heard from all he conversed with in Athens the real facts of the case—when, to use a vulgar phrase, he found it out, and discovered it was an atrocious attempt at swindling, he could not swallow it. What was going on at the very same time in London? At this very same moment commence the ‘good offices’ between the noble Lord and M. Drouyn de Lhuys. So he has two negotiations going, one at Athens and the other at London, and all to settle this paltry affair of a few thousand pounds. It ended as might be expected—a little delay on the part of a courier, some mistake or delay in not putting a letter into the letter-bag in time for the night's post, and the whole affair was broken off in London before they in Athens could know what was doing. The negotiations were thrown aside—our ships were ordered to do their worst—Greece submitted—and you got your money. What follows? The French Government, irritated by your conduct, withdraws its Minister,— [420] and now comes the quarrel I have with the noble Lord—now comes my case against him for not accepting arbitration in the first instance. Actually, after your ships of war had extorted the money from Greece, and a large part of it was already placed in bank, the noble Viscount consented, in the most humiliating way,—for I consider the communications received from Lord Normanby most humiliating,—to accept what he had before refused, and you have now returned to this state, that by France withdrawing its ambassador you are obliged to do away all you have done by means of your fifteen ships of war. And you have agreed to substitute the Convention of London for the terms you obtained by your fleet at Athens. Yes; have you not agreed to give up the money lodged in the Bank for payment? What do you call that? Your ships of war extort money from Greece; the French Government tells you, ‘Give that money back; you must take the terms of the Convention of London.’ We yield, and so the matter ends. But it is not yet ended.

And here is my complaint against the noble Lord. It seems as if the system at the Foreign Office is calculated to breed and perpetuate quarrels. First, you submit to rebuke from Russia, and next you are humiliated before France—the two countries, some of our very knowing people say, we intended to terrify by our demonstration against Greece; but the question is not yet settled. There are three arbitrators appointed to settle the question of Pacifico's claim against the Court of Athens. As my hon. Friends near me, who voted for my motion, will see, they have been obliged to resort to my plan of arbitration, and the matter, after all the display of force, is still left open, and requires three arbitrators to decide it. I cannot imagine a more complete triumph of the principle I advocated last year than the details of this proceeding. Why, here are hon. Gentlemen behind me groaning. I am not surprised at it, for they really must be groaning at the thought of their own inconsistency. For what are we called on to vote?—that this matter has been most ably, justly, and dexterously managed. But I do not think it is finished at all; for, independently of three arbitrators and of ‘their good offices,’ mind you, there is a very ominous little legacy left to us in the despatch of Lord Normanby in the probability of Greece quarrelling with us again. For my own part, seeing the unfortunate result of ‘good offices,’ I should not wonder if we had another quarrel with France for the exercise of her ‘good offices’ also. But it is said that there is, beside, some cause of quarrel with Russia, on account of vessels seized in the Levant and in the Greek ports, and M. Brunow has fairly given us notice he may have reclamations to make for the value of the property which fell into our hands, and for the loss we occasioned, and I should not be surprised if you had another blue-book very soon, containing correspondence with respect to seizures by the Russians; and all this has arisen because the Foreign Office would not submit

this pettifogging business to arbitration. France would have been proud to be your arbitrator; you refused her. Then came the Convention, and at last comes an arbitration on the whole matter; only you submit on the most humiliating terms to conditions you had before refused.

Now, let us take in two sums what the actual result has been, so far as we have gone, in obtaining what we demanded. Our whole claim on the Greek Government was 33,000*l.* The whole amount we have actually received is 6,400*l.*; so that, as we stand at present, we appear before the nations of the world as having made a demand for 33,000*l.*, and as having, up to the present moment, received only 6,400*l.*; and that will show, in the face of the world, what the extent of your injustice was in comparison with the justice of your claims. And, looking to the claims of M. Pacifico, and to the opinions of Baron Gros respecting them, I declare to you most solemnly my firm belief is, [421] that if the people of England understood the merits of this question, and if they had read, as I have done, the contents of the blue-books and of the inventory,—such is the opinion I have of the generosity and justice of my countrymen, that, in spite of the galvanic effort to make this a party question, they would be so disgusted, that they would raise a subscription to pay back the Greek Government the money it has given you. In the next place, beside a vote of approbation on account of this Greek affair, we are asked to identify ourselves with the general foreign policy of the Government since their accession to office.

Now, I say I should be the most inconsistent being on the face of the earth if I gave such a vote. Not many years ago, I had to denounce, at a public meeting I called in Manchester, the conduct of the noble Lord in the case of Syria; and I remember afterwards denouncing his proceedings in Portugal also. I moved in this House for a return of any vessels of war belonging to us, which were at the time lying in the Tagus, in reference to that business. I protested, too, at a public meeting, and before a most enthusiastic audience, on the noble Lord's conduct in the affairs of Sicily; and I am now called on to vote my approbation of the proceedings of the Foreign Office during the existence of the present Administration. Why, I say if I did so, and gave that vote, I think my mouth ought to be closed on any questions of economy, entrenchment, or possibility of reducing our establishments for ever, because I am quite sure, if this system is to continue, and if you are to send fifteen ships of war to collect debts of 6,400*l.*, you not only cannot reduce your establishments, but you have not establishments, enough. There has been a great deal said during the debate about foreign intervention, but this is a principle which I thought was acknowledged and admitted by all parties. Hon. Gentlemen on the other side of the House have never, since the time of the Reform Bill, thought of anything so absurd as obtaining popularity by the peculiar characteristic of being the interferers in the affairs of other countries. I cannot say there is as much wisdom on this side of the House, for there seems to me a disposition here to take merit to the party, because it has for its principle to interfere in the affairs of other nations. That was not the doctrine of Lord Grey. I remember the speech of the noble Lord in 1830. Nothing electrified the country more than that exposition of his principles. He spoke of the wars of Mr. Pitt and of his successors—of the 800,000,000*l.* of expenditure incurred in those wars; and he pledged himself to the country that peace, non-intervention, and retrenchment, should be the watchwords of the Whig party.

I ask the country fairly to decide whether the tone and language of the speakers on this side of the House, on this night, and in the course of this debate, have been in harmony and unison with that sentiment of Lord Grey? Why, what has been the language of the hon. and learned Member for Southampton (Mr. Cockburn), and for which he has been cheered to the echo? One-half of the Treasury benches were left empty, while hon. Members ran one after another, tumbling over each other in their haste to shake hands with the hon. and learned Member. Well, what did the hon. and learned Member say? I pass over his sneer against the men of peace and men of cotton, because we must allow gentlemen of the long robe some

latitude, and allow them to forget the arena in which they are displaying their powers; but what would Lord Grey have said to the doctrine of the hon. and learned Gentleman, that we have no prospect of peace with the countries of Europe till they have adopted constitutional Governments? What sort of constitutional Governments? Is it our own? Why, even if they came so far as this, and suppose they adopt our form of Government, might not hon. Members in the Assembly at Washington get up and say, 'We will have no peace till we make the world republican?' The hon. and learned Gentleman seems to have set out [422] with the doctrine, that we ought to interfere with the forms of Government of the nations of Europe, and, judging from the noble Lord's speech, I must say he appears to be no unwilling pupil in that school of policy. If the House of Commons votes its approbation of such sentiments, and the noble Lord acts on them, I think the Foreign Office will have undertaken the reform and constitutionalizing of every country on the face of the earth. But do you think the people of this country, when they get cool, will see the wisdom of carrying out such a course? I claim for myself as much sympathy for foreigners struggling for liberty as any one in this House; but it is not true, as the hon. and learned Member for Sheffield (Mr. Roebuck) said, that I ever attended a public meeting, and said I was in favour of going to war, and that I made an exception from my general principles in favour of Hungary.

I am glad the hon. and learned Gentleman has stated this, and that I misunderstood him, as it may prevent my being misunderstood in future. I never in public advocated interference with the Government of foreign countries, even in cases where my feelings were most strongly interested in anything relating to their domestic affairs or concerns. When I see that principle violated by others, as in the case of the Russian invasion of Hungary, and when I see a portion of the press of this civilised nation hounding on that semi-barbarous empire, then, believing that this is almost the only country where there is a free platform, and where it cannot be corrupted, as a portion of the press may have been, I shall denounce it, as I denounced the Government of Russia, and, as I stated at the same time, I was ready to denounce our own Government also. But it is a matter of very small importance what my individual opinion may be, when you come to the question, whether the Government of this country shall become the propagandist of their opinions in foreign countries. I maintain this Government has no right to communicate except through the Government of other countries; and that, whether it be a republic, a despotism, or a monarchy, I hold it has no right to interfere with any other form of Government. Mark the effect of your own principle, if you take the opposite ground. If you recognise the principle of intervention in your Government, you must tolerate it in other nations also. With what face could you get up and denounce the Emperor of Russia for invading Hungary, after the doctrine advocated by the hon. and learned Member (Mr. Cockburn) to-night had been adopted by this country? I say, if you want to benefit nations who are struggling for their freedom, establish as one of the maxims of international law the principle of non-intervention. If you want to give a guarantee for peace, and, as I believe, the surest guarantee for progress and freedom, lay down this principle, and act on it, that no foreign State has a right by force to interfere with the domestic concerns of another State, even to confer a benefit on it, with its own consent. What will you say respecting the conduct of the noble Lord in the case of Switzerland? He joined there in an intervention, though the great majority of the Protestant cantons protested against it, and does the very thing he is seeking to prevent.

But I come back to my principle. Do you want to benefit the Hungarians and Italians? I think I know more of them than most people in this country. I sympathised with them during their manly struggles for freedom, and I have admired and respected them not less in their hour of adversity. I will tell you the sentiments of the leading men of the Hungarians. I have seen them all, and I must say that, much as I admired them during their noble struggle, what I have seen of them in adversity has entitled them, in my belief, to still greater respect, for I never saw men—except Englishmen, to whom they bear in many respects a close



resemblance—bear adversity with such manly fortitude and dignified self-respect. They have avoided all expressions of sympathy from public [423] meetings, and, loathing the idea of being dependent on the charity of others, have sought, by emigration to America and elsewhere, an opportunity of subsisting by the labour of their own hands. These men say, —'We don't ask you to help us, or to come to our assistance. Establish such a principle as shall provide we shall not be interfered with by others.' And what do the Italians say? They don't want the English to interfere with them, or to help them. 'Leave us to ourselves,' they say. 'Establish the principle that we shall not be interfered with by foreigners.'

I will answer the hon. and learned Gentleman's cheer. He seems to ask, How will you keep out Austria from Italy, and Russia from Hungary? I will give him an illustration of what I mean. Does he remember when Kossuth took refuge in Turkey, and that Austria and the Emperor of Russia demanded him back? I beg him to understand that this illustrious refugee was not saved by any intervention of the Foreign Secretary. Has it not been admitted that the Emperor of Russia gave up his claim before the courier arrived from England? What was it, then, that liberated them? It was the universal outbreak of public opinion and public indignation in Western Europe. And why had public opinion this power? Because this demand for the extradition of political offenders was a violation of the law of nations, which declares that persons who have committed political offences in one State shall find a sanctuary in another, and ought not to be delivered up. If our Government were always to act upon this principle of non-intervention, we should see the law of nations declaring itself as clearly against the invasion of a foreign country as it has spoken out against the extradition of political refugees. Let us begin, and set the example to other nations of this non-intervention. I have no doubt that our example and protest would exercise some influence upon the Governments of Austria and Russia; but what possible moral influence can this country have with those States when the Government goes abroad to interfere with the domestic affairs of other countries.

It is said, however, that the noble Lord (Palmerston) goes abroad as the champion of liberalism and constitutionalism. But I cannot fall into this delusion. I cannot trace the battle that we are taught to believe is going on under the noble Viscount's policy between liberalism and despotism abroad. I do not think that the noble Lord is more democratic than his colleagues, or than the right hon. Gentleman opposite (Sir R. Peel). I believe the noble Lord is of an active turn of mind—that he likes these protocols and conventions, and that the smaller the subject, the better it suits his taste. I do not find that the noble Lord has taken up any great question of constitutional freedom abroad. Did he ever protest against the invasion of Hungary by Russia? He made a speech against Austria, I remember, on that occasion; but he did not breathe a syllable against Russia. The only allusion he made to Russia was in the nature of an apology, uttered in a sense that seemed to justify the part taken by Russia rather than otherwise. Then it is said, that in Italy the noble Lord endeavours to establish constitutional government and representative institutions. The noble Lord told Lord Minto to go to Italy, not, as he himself declared, to recommend Parliaments or representative assemblies, but merely to advise the Government to adopt administrative reforms. But that was not what the Italian people wanted. They wanted security for their liberties by constitutional reforms, and the adoption of a representative system; and that was what the noble Lord did not recommend should be given to them. I believe the progress of freedom depends more upon the maintenance of peace, the spread of commerce, and the diffusion of education, than upon the labours of Cabinets or Foreign-offices. And if you can prevent those perturbations which have recently taken place abroad in consequence of your foreign policy, and if you will leave other nations in [424] greater tranquillity, those ideas of freedom will continue to progress, and you need not trouble yourselves about them.

On this side of the House, some persons have been menaced with very terrible consequences, and with the adverse opinion of the public, if they do not vote for this resolution. I can only say, that I, like many other hon. Members, sit commonly here and in committee-rooms of this House for twelve hours in the course of the day. Allow two or three hours a-day for the transaction of necessary business at home, and that is not play, but hard work. But why should we sit in this House and undergo this labour, unless to advocate those opinions and convictions which we believe to be true and just? If I have one conviction stronger than another, it is one upon which I made a first public exhibition of myself in print. The principle which I defend is assailed in this motion, and upon it, for fifteen years, my opinion has been again and again recorded. I have never seen reason to change that opinion, but, on the contrary, everything confirms me in my conviction of its truth. If I remain in this seat, I will try to promote the progress of these opinions; and I hope to see the day when the intercourse of nations will exhibit the same changes as those which have taken place in the intercourse of individuals. In private life, we no longer find it necessary to carry arms about us for our protection, as did our forefathers. We have discontinued the practice of duelling, and something should be done to carry the same spirit into the intercourse of nations. In domestic life, physical correction is giving way to moral influence. In schools and in lunatic asylums this principle is successfully adopted, and even the training of the lower animals is found to be better done by means of suasion. Cannot you adopt something of this in the intercourse of nations? Whoever brings forward such measures shall have my support; and if it should happen, as the hon. Member (Mr. Bernal Osborne) has threatened me, that the consequences of my vote will be the loss of my seat in this House, then I say that, next to the satisfaction of having contributed to the advance of one's convictions, is, in my opinion, the satisfaction of having sacrificed something for them.

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**FOREIGN POLICY. V.**  
**ROCHDALE, JUNE 26, 1861.** ↩

[The following Speech was made by Mr. Cobden before his constituents,  
after the French Commercial Treaty had been negotiated.]

I APPEAR here in conformity with a time-honoured practice in your borough, which has led your representative annually to come and give an account of his stewardship to you—to afford you an opportunity of conferring with him, and questioning him on any topic relating to his public duty and the interests of his constituency. That custom, I think, was justifiable in your case by the independent and honourable course which you have always followed in the election of your Liberal representatives to Parliament. But I appear here to-night under rather peculiar circumstances; for I have no account to give of my stewardship in Parliament, having been occupied for nearly eighteen months abroad, partly in prosecuting a public duty, and partly in quest of health. I have been, as your worthy Mayor (Mr. J. H. Moore) has stated, engaged in arranging a commercial treaty with France. I have been, as you are aware, honoured with the confidence of our Sovereign, and, aided by colleagues whose services in the matter I would not for a moment appropriate to myself, I have been endeavouring to make such arrangements as shall lead two great countries, peculiarly designed by Providence to confer mutual benefits upon each other, but who, owing to the folly and perhaps wickedness of man, have been for centuries rather seeking to injure and destroy each other, to enter upon new relations. I have been seeking to form arrangements by which these two countries shall be united together in mutual bonds of dependence, and, I hope, of future peace.

It has been truly said by the Mayor, that France has been hitherto as a nation attached to those principles of commercial restriction which we in England have but lately released ourselves from, but which have cost us thirty years of pretty continuous labour, and the services of three or four most eminent statesmen, in order to bring us to our present state of comparative freedom of commerce. The French, on the contrary, have taken hardly a single step in this direction; and it was left for the present Emperor—and he alone had the power—to accomplish that object, and to his Minister of Commerce, who for the last eighteen months has scarcely given himself twenty-four hours of leisure—it was left for them to accomplish in France, in the course of a couple of years, what has taken us in England at least thirty years to effect. I mention this, because I wish—and I have a reason for it, which I will state in a moment—I wish it to be [426] borne in mind what has been the magnitude of the task which the French Government has had to accomplish on this occasion. They had to confront powerful influences which were at the moment entirely unbroken, and they had to attack the whole body of monopoly in France; whereas, if you recollect, in this country our statesmen began by sapping and mining, and by throwing over the smaller interests, in order that they might form a coalition of them against the greater monopolies. Everything has had to be done in France during the last eighteen months. Much remains to be done, I hope much will be accomplished in a short time. I wish you to understand distinctly the magnitude of the task which the French Government has had to accomplish, because thereupon hangs a tale and an argument upon which I shall have a word to say in a moment. There is a peculiarity in the condition of French industry which gives the fair prospect of a reasonable anticipation of a mutual and beneficial intercourse between these two countries. It is a very singular fact that France, which, by its social organisations and by its political maxims, is perhaps one of the most democratic nations in the world—that this people are almost exclusively employed in the manufacture of articles of great luxury and taste, adapted almost exclusively for the

consumption of the aristocratic and the rich, whereas England, on the contrary, the most aristocratic people in the world, is almost wholly employed in the manufacture of those articles which conduce to the comfort and the benefit of the great masses of the community. You have here, therefore, two peoples, who, by their distinct geniuses, are admirably suited for a mutual exchange of the products of their industry, and I argue very much, as your Mayor has intimated, in favour of the great advantages which the masses of the French people will derive from the Treaty which has been lately arranged with that country.

The French people—I am speaking of the working people—are, in comparison with the English people, a badly-clothed population. Any one who has travelled in the winter-time from Calais to Dover, cannot fail to have observed the contrast between those blue round frocks which the Frenchmen wear, and the more comfortable, because warmer, woollen and worsted garments which the English workmen at that season of the year possess. It reminds me—the condition of the French population in their clothing now—somewhat of the condition in which this population of England was placed, with regard to food, five-and-twenty years ago, before the Corn-laws were touched. At that time, our population was a badly-fed people,—living, too many of them, upon roots; there were some six or eight million quarters less of corn consumed than ought to have been consumed in this country, and which has been annually consumed since the people were permitted to obtain it. Just as Free Trade has enabled this people to be better fed, so will it enable the French population to buy better clothing, and by precisely the same process by which we have arrived at this result in England; partly because there will be a considerable importation into France of your plain and coarse manufactures, and partly because of the stimulus that will be given to the manufactures of the French themselves—just as your increased supply of corn in this country has come, partly from the importation of the produce of foreign countries, and partly by the important advantages which competition has afforded to your own agriculturists. And we, on one side, will obtain, and have obtained, great benefits from this change. The change on our side is our merit; the change on the other side is the merit of the French Government. What, I confess, as an Englishman, I have been led in this important duty most to consider, is how this matter has benefited you, not by what it will allow you to export, but by what it will allow you to import. This is the way by which I seek to benefit a population, by allowing more of the good things to come in from abroad.

[427]

Upon the imports are based the late measures of our Government; and I give the credit for the putting this great final coping-stone upon the edifice of Free trade—I mean so far as the abolition of all protective duties goes—I give the merit to the present Government, and their great Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gladstone). They have abolished the last remaining protective duties in our Tariff. Now, mark what the advantage of this will be to us as a mercantile people—an advantage which has not been sufficiently appreciated, I venture to observe. By removing every duty upon all articles of foreign manufacture, we have made England a free port for manufactured goods, just as we had made it a free port for corn and for raw materials. The consequence is, that all articles of foreign manufacture may be brought to England without let or hindrance. We find a large consumption for them here; and foreigners and colonists coming from Australia, and Canada, and America, may find in our warehouses, not merely all our produce which they want, but Swiss, and German, and French produce, which they may buy here without visiting the Continent to purchase there. This, I consider, is to us, as a mercantile people, an immense advantage, which will be by-and-by fully appreciated, the importance of which, I think, has not yet been altogether anticipated; but, besides this, we are going to import commodities from France which have been hitherto prohibited, and which will not only be to their advantage, but to ours. Take, for instance, the article of wine. We all know that for a century or more, owing to an absurd Treaty which was

made with Portugal, this country put a prohibitive duty upon French wines, and the consequence has been that the taste of this country has been perverted, and that which is the best article of its kind in the world has been almost a stranger in this land.

Well, besides the preferential duty which has included French wines, we have laid on such an enormous amount of duty that nothing but wines of the very strongest character, the effect of which could be suddenly felt in the head, were ever thought worth purchasing. When a man had to pay *6d.* or *9d.* for a glass of wine containing a few thimblefuls, he wanted something which would affect his head for his money; he would not buy the fine, natural, and comparatively weak wines of France, though every other country in the world but England has regarded French wines as the best wines in the world. The English taste has been adulterated, and our people, or those who could afford it, have preferred the narcotic and inflammatory mixture which is called port, or even sherry. A friend of mine lately had the curiosity to look into our national ballads, with the view of finding out and making a collection of drinking songs. He told me he found that all the songs were in honour of French wines—champagne, Burgundy, Bordeaux—and they were all old songs, written at the time when our ancestors used and preferred French wine; and that since they were not allowed to obtain those wines, songs in favour of wine have ceased. He drew this conclusion:—That when the people drunk French wines they became merry and sang; but when they took to port and sherry it made them stupid, and they went to sleep.

I don't know that I should like to go so far as a lamented friend of mine, a former Mayor of Bordeaux, who happened to be travelling in England, and paid us a visit in Manchester to a dinner; and when his health had been drunk, he said—'Gentlemen, when I travel I have but one test of civilisation everywhere. I ask, Do the people consume claret?' That is, the wine of Bordeaux. I don't go quite so far as that, but I do say, in whatever point of view you regard it, whether it is as a beneficial exchange with France, enabling you to exchange the products of your industry with the greatest and richest people on the Continent, whether it be in the interests of temperance, or whether it be in the interests of health, it is desirable that the [428] taste of England should have at least the opportunity of going back to that natural channel which our forefathers followed when they had, as we now have, access to French wines at a moderate duty, or at the same duty as on other wines. I am not so sanguine as to expect that a great trade is to grow up between France and England, suddenly, to-morrow, or next year. It will require time; but the door has been opened honestly, with all sincerity; and I have no doubt, after we have had a sufficient time to correct those errors into which our forefathers fell, that this work, like every other in which we have been engaged where restrictions have been removed, will be found favourable to the best interests of this country and of France.

Now, I confess that the work on which I have been engaged would have but small interest for me, if it had not conduced to something different and higher than the mere increase of the beverage of the people of this country. The object which I have sought, and which those who know me will know right well, has been not merely to promote the physical well-being of these two peoples—though that in itself is an object worthy of all care—but my aim and hope have been to promote such a change as shall lead to a better moral and political tone between the two nations. And this brings me to the point to which I said I would refer. Your worthy Mayor has alluded to the immense preparations now making by the Governments of these two countries for warlike operations. Those preparations, so far as the navies of the two countries are concerned, are undoubtedly—nay, avowedly—with the view to mutual attack or defence from those two countries alone. Well, now, we are not ignorant of the fact that the French Government and the French Emperor have been made responsible for this increase in our naval armaments. It is upon that point I want to say a word or two to you as my constituents, and I address myself to this subject with you, because it is one that is peculiarly germane to my first meeting with this constituency after a meeting which you held some

eighteen months ago, in which you refused to establish a rifle corps in this town. At the time when that meeting was held I was in Paris, and read the proceedings with considerable interest. It was the only meeting I saw, during a peculiar fervour and violence of agitation in this country, at which such a resolution was arrived at; and, without passing judgment upon the question of volunteers in general—upon which I reserve myself, for I don't know whether I shall have time to say anything on the subject—all I wish to say is this, that, as far as my experience goes, and it has not been small, as you may suppose, in France, as far as the decision of this town was come to on the ground that there was no danger from France which warranted such a preparation, I come here to tell you, in my judgment, you acted with perfect propriety.

Now, I have spoken of the difficulties and the obstacles which the French Government had to encounter in the work in which they had been engaged for the last eighteen months—the total subversion of their commercial system. I ask you, as I ask every reasonable man, is there no presumptive evidence calculated to make you pause before you believe as probable or true what certain Admirals—one of them, I am sorry to say, now no more—say as to the French Government and the French meditating to attack or invade this country, when you find that Government engaged in this most difficult task, the subversion of their commercial system, by throwing open the markets of that country to the manufactures of England, and opening the markets of England to the productions of France? I say, is there not something in this fact to make you pause before you believe on the mere *ipse dixit* of some not over-wise Admiral, who has never given one fact to prove what he says, that it is the design of the French Emperor to come and invade your shores without cause of quarrel or without grievance assigned? But I don't ask [429] you to rely upon probabilities of things in this matter. I speak to you of facts—facts which have come within my own knowledge—facts which I, perhaps, better than any man in the world, have had the opportunity of knowing and investigating. It is alleged that the French have been for some time making formidable preparations in their naval armaments.

Well, the first question I ask with regard to that is—What has been the proportion of money spent in France upon their naval armaments, and what has been the proportion spent in England for a similar purpose? There has been always between England and France, by a sort of tacit agreement, I may call it, a certain proportion or relation in the amounts expended in their respective armaments. If you take the navies of the two countries for the last century, you will find that, when in a normal state of peace, the French have had a navy little more than half the size of that of England. If you take the expenditure, you will find that the French naval armament has, during all that period, by a sort of tacit arrangement—as I have said—spent rather more than the half of what England has spent upon her navy. Well, then, I will take the ten years that preceded 1858 inclusive. I find that the expenditure of the French has been rather more than the half of what England has spent. I have taken the expenditure up to 1858 only for this reason—that if you take the French estimates you will not arrive at the actual expenditure. I admit that would not be a fair criterion of the amount of money spent in this manner; because they bring forward the estimates for the year, and afterwards there are supplementary votes, which increase the amount. But if you wait for two years, until the definitive balances and records of the French finances have passed through their audit offices, and have been published in what is called 'Les Règlements Définitifs du Budget,' then you have as reliable an account as any in the world. I have heard of no political party—and you know that in France party feeling is as bitter, or even more bitter, than in this country—I have never heard any foreigner even, but who would admit, without scruple or observation, that when these definitive budgets are published, they have a creditable and reliable account of their expenditure. I have waited, and I see that down to the last accounts, published up to the year 1858, the French, for ten years previously—during the whole of the reign of this Emperor, and before his accession—have expended little more than half of what has been

expended in England.

Well, but in England we have ships of war 20 per cent. cheaper than in France; we have steam-engines 30 per cent. cheaper; we have coals 40 per cent., and we have stores 20 or 30 per cent. cheaper. How is it, then, I ask, if France has expended little more than half what we have in these ten years—how is it, that in the year 1859 you suddenly hear, as though it were an explosion, that France is coming to invade us, and has made undue preparations in her naval armaments; and that we must not be content with nearly doubling our expenditure, and with a large expenditure on our standing forces, but must call upon the people of this country to arm and enrol themselves as volunteers? There must be a reason for this state of things. I speak always with too much respect for the great masses of my countrymen, even when I am confronting what I believe to be their delusions, to think of passing over this subject without offering the best explanation I can to satisfy and assure the public mind upon this question. I believe I can answer the question by stating that there may be facts connected with our navy which will give some colour to these outcries of alarm. The facts are these: The affairs of our Admiralty are most deplorably mismanaged. That will not be denied by any one now that is acquainted with what is going on at head-quarters. We had a Commission sitting last year, under the Queen's sign manual, to inquire into the management of our dockyards. Men of business [430] placed upon that Commission made a tour of the dockyards and arsenals. They examined them. And what do you think was their report? The substance of it is in a dozen lines, and I will read them to you:—

'The Royal Commission appointed last year reports that the control and management of the dockyards are inefficient from the following causes:—First, from the inefficiency of the constitution of the Board of Admiralty; secondly, from the defective organisation of the subordinate departments; thirdly, from the want of a well-defined responsibility; fourthly, from the absence of any means, both now and in times past, of effectually checking expenditure from a want of accurate accounts.'

Now mark; just endeavour as men of business to carry with the full meaning of this verdict by supposing it to apply to a private house of business. First, the constitution of the Board of Admiralty is defective, that is, of the body, the head of the governing body—that means, the masters—don't know their business, and are not properly appointed. Then we have the defective organisation of the subordinate departments—that means, the foremen don't know their business. Then the want of clear and well-defined accounts—that means, that the masters, or those who call themselves masters, if you go and ask them why such a thing is not done, they will tell you that they are not responsible. And then, the fourth defect is that they don't keep reliable accounts, and therefore they don't know how the concern is carried on.

That is the judgment passed upon our Admiralty by a Commission under the Queen's sign-manual issued last year; but at the present moment there is a Committee sitting in the House of Commons, inquiring again into the affairs of the Admiralty, examining the same witnesses and others, and trying to find out the evils of this mal-administration. Well, I have said that the French Government during the ten years ending with 1858, spent a little more than one-half what we spent upon their navy. Then comes the question, what has become of all this money? How have these people managed to waste the enormous sums they have taken and wrung from the pockets of the tax-oppressed people? I will give you one little item from my honourable Friend, who is now the Secretary of the Admiralty, Lord Clarence Paget. Speaking in the spring of 1859—I could give you the exact date—he attacked those who were then in office; and he came into office a few months afterwards in the same capacity. Now, he stated in Parliament, that he had gone carefully over the accounts for the eleven years previous to 1859, and he found five millions sterling voted for the construction

of ships of war which could not be accounted for. Now don't let me be misunderstood. Neither Lord Clarence Paget nor myself mean to imply that this money is stolen. The persons we criticise are honourable men as far as personal honour goes. I mean that they are certainly not the men to put the money into their own pockets. I will account for it in other ways, and I am here to account for it to you. The money has been wasted by making things which were useless. When the heads are irresponsible, when the foremen are ignorant, and when there are no accounts that can be relied upon, you may be satisfied how the business must be carried on. I will give you an instance of it, and it will explain this matter. It will explain the whole mystery of what we have in hand. About the year 1850 it was seen and admitted by the naval authorities in both countries that, in consequence of the application of steam for the propelling of ships, the old sailing vessels of the line could no longer be relied upon in case of war. Both France and England at that time came to the conclusion that in future line-of-battle ships must have screw propellers put in them. What was the course pursued by France? France has one Minister of Marine—not a Board, like ours, consisting of gentlemen upon whom it would puzzle even a detective police officer to fix any responsibility. The Emperor and the Minister of Marine are in concert; and they say, [431] as wooden sailing line-of-battle ships will be useless in future, we must cease building them; and they have ceased building them. In England, we went on building line-of-battle ships for sails, and have been building them ever since. The French took their old vessels—their existing vessels—and put screw steam-engines into them, and adapted them for the purposes of war. In England, we went on building and converting, and managing to build new vessels, as fast as we converted the old ones; and the consequence was that France, only having to buy steam-engines to put into their wooden vessels (whilst we were building vessels and buying steamengines), had got her work done in less time, and at less expense, than we have. When it came in view almost immediately afterwards that, in consequence of this proceeding, the French appeared to have at one moment—according to the statement of one of our Admiralty—nearly as many line-of-battle ships with screws as we had, we heard a cry that the French wanted to steal a march upon us, because she had nearly as many steam line-of-battle vessels as we. We never took stock of our line-of-battle steam and sailing vessels combined. If we had, we should have found that we had at that time as many more line-of-battle ships as we had in 1850. That is one of the ways in which this vast sum of money has been uselessly spent.

I will now come to five years later. During the war in the Crimea, it was found that these iron-cased vessels for gun-boats served the purpose admirably of protecting ships of war from those shells and combustible missiles which were the latest inventions for the purposes of war. Immediately that was discovered, the Emperor orders two frigates to be built and covered with iron. We knew what was going on, and the English Admiralty reported upon it. They were in no great hurry in constructing the *Gloire*. The keel of that vessel was laid down in the summer of 1858, and she was not completed with her armour on till the autumn of 1860. What does our Admiralty do in the mean time? We had one Admiralty after another; and as they succeed each other, you see them go down to Shoeburyness or Portsmouth for the purpose of trying experiments—first inviting Mr. Whitworth to see if he could manufacture a gun sufficiently powerful to send a rifled solid bullet through these iron plates; and at another time calling on Sir William Armstrong to do the same. In this way they continue to amuse themselves. In the mean time, the Minister of Marine and the Emperor said, ‘What we want is something to protect us against the hollow shells which fall very much like hail on our wooden ships.’ It is against these detonating shells that we wish to protect ourselves, and the French Government went on to complete these two vessels of war with iron armour. But there was no reason why these iron vessels should have been launched before ours. We voted the money; we have more iron, and more workmen capable of constructing such vessels, if the Admiralty had chosen to employ them. But there is no responsibility, no one who knows his business, and nothing was done. Then, because the French had their iron ship completed sooner than ours, a cry was raised that the Emperor was coming to invade us.



Now, I have examined this question, and, having taken the pains to inform myself upon it, I have no hesitation in saying that the idea of the French Government ever contemplating rivalling us in our naval force, still less of invading us—I say it from my conscience—I believe is as great a hoax and delusion upon this generation as anything we read of in history since the time of Titus Oates, and indeed, as bad as anything Titus Oates ever said. I have given you the judgment of this Royal Commission upon the Admiralty. Now I will read a few words uttered by Mr. Gladstone in the House of Commons, last year, upon the nature—upon the character—of our administration generally of public works:—

He had no hesitation in saying that these [432] and other circumstances of a like kind were entirely owing to the lamentable and deplorable state of our whole arrangements with regard to the management of our public works. Vacillation, uncertainty, costliness, extravagance, and all the conflicting vices that could be enumerated were united in our present system. There was a total want of authority to direct and guide when anything was to be done; they had to go from department to department, from the House of Commons to a Committee, from a Committee to a Commission, and from a Commission to a Committee again; so that years passed away, the public were disappointed, and the money of the country was wasted. He believed that such were the evils of the system, that nothing short of a revolutionary reform would ever be sufficient to rectify it.'

Mr. Gladstone was then speaking with reference to the administration of the Public Works in connection with the building of the British Museum. But the greatest of your national manufactures is the navy. Your dockyards are the great Government manufactories; it is there, with their ships and machinery, that the largest amount of your money is spent, and the greatest waste takes place. And, bad as is the Board of Public Works, I believe it is the unanimous opinion of public men of all parties, except the half-dozen who have been in the Admiralty, or the half-dozen now in it, that of all the public departments, that which is the worst managed, the most irresponsible, and where the greatest waste prevails, is the Admiralty.

Now, I do not think it out of place or out of time to talk to you upon this subject—upon this fallacy, with reference to the designs and doings of the French Government and of the French Emperor in particular; for upon that fallacy is based a claim upon the pockets which must be counted by millions sterling per annum. But I speak to you also in the character of your representative, who was placed in a responsible and delicate position with reference to this very question. I was in Paris at the time that all these meetings were convoked to form these rifle corps. I was there with the known object of endeavouring to promote a treaty of commerce between the two countries. I was first in the midst of the negotiations for the basis of the treaty, when there was the greatest excitement, and the greatest anxiety, and the greatest agitation in this country, for the purpose of getting up public demonstrations in favour of the rifle corps, avowedly to protect this country against France. The language held in this country—I can hardly trust myself to characterise it. I remember an account of a meeting in Somersetshire—I don't know that it could have taken place in a more appropriate county—there was a farmer speaking upon this subject, and somebody cried out to him—he was speaking of invasion by the French Emperors—'Suppose they come, what will you charge them for your corn?' And his answer was, 'They shall pay for it with their blood!' This was the language, and it is only a sample. It was going on through the country at a time when, I repeat it, not one act had ever been done by the French Government to warrant the supposition of any hostile feeling being meditated towards us, and at the very time when the French Government was about to enter upon a complete revolution in their commercial policy; which, if the French Emperor had such a design as to make an attack upon this country, would have convicted him of the most absolute folly—I was going to say madness—because at the same time that he was disturbing the commercial interests, and setting the

ironmasters, the cotton-spinners, and all the great capitalists against him, he was said to be meditating just such an attack upon this country as would have required the support of those very interests to gain his ends. Nay, more, looking at him as an intelligent being—and that is his great characteristic, for he is a remarkably intelligent man—looking at him as an intelligent man, what must we say of his conduct in proposing at the same time to adopt a policy which would knit the two countries [433] in the bonds of commercial dependence in such a way that it would have been difficult to have caused a rupture between them—for war tears asunder most of those sensitive fibres which constitute the body politic when it rends these mutual ties of commercial intercourse—what shall we say of a man who, though arming a few ships, was suspected of contemplating a piratical attack on this country? But supposing that might have been possible; I tell you candidly, that before I took a step in reference to this treaty, I satisfied myself upon these facts, which I am now narrating; and I tell you more, and I would tell to the French Government as I now tell to you, that if I found one fact to justify what had been stated here at that time in public meetings—if I found that the French Government had done anything to disturb that relation which has existed pretty nearly for a century in the proportions of the French and English navies—I should have suspected some sinister design on the part of the French Government, and should have considered myself a traitor to my country if I had allowed the Government of that country, on proof of any sinister intentions, to have made use of me to mislead or hoodwink England by leading me to suppose that my instrumentality was being used for the promotion of commercial intercourse, when I had grounds to believe they were entering upon a policy of war.

I have said that down to the year 1858 inclusive we have the finance accounts, showing what has been the expenditure of France compared with our own upon our navy. As we have not the audited accounts for 1859 and 1860—and I am not going to trust to estimates—I will not speak of the expenditure for these two years. But I can give you another proof that during last year, at the very time we were raising this cry of invasion, and charging the French Government with making undue and unprecedented preparations for an invasion of our shores—that we had last year, and during the whole of last year, a larger naval force, in proportion to that of France, than I have ever known in any normal natural time of peace within the last century. I will not speak of money, but of men. When you take the number of men voted and employed in the navy, you have the clue to all the other expenses of the navy; that is never attempted to be denied by any one who understands anything of these matters. During 1860, the French Government had voted 30,400 men and boys for their navy; and in the same year we had 84,000 men and boys voted for our navy. I will take what I know upon authority, and which will not be disputed by anybody. I will assume that the French navy possessed 34,000 men and boys last year. I will throw in, also, a statement which gives 3,600 more than they actually had, and then taking these 34,000 against our 84,000, it is as near as possible five to two on our part; that instead of half, or a little more than half, which has been the normal state of things, England last year, at the time of all this hubbub, at the time when you were invited to shoulder your muskets to protect your shores, your proportion of armaments by sea was greater than it has been in almost any time of peace that I can find in my researches. I know they tell us that the French have got a number of men in their mercantile marine who are all inscribed on the maritime inscription of France, and that such inscription gives the Government the power to press those men into their service; and you must consider that. Now, I say, take all the able-bodied seamen the French have in their mercantile marine, and add them to the men in the imperial navy, and it will not bring them up to the number we have in our royal navy. I am not one to advocate the reducing of our navy in any degree below that proportion to the French navy which the exigencies of our service require; and, mind what I say, here is just what the French Government would admit as freely as you would. England has four times, at least, the amount of mercantile tonnage to protect at sea that France has, and that surely gives us a legitimate pretension to have [434] a

larger navy than France. Besides, this country is an island; we cannot communicate with any part of the world except by sea. France, on the other hand, has a frontier upon land, by which she can communicate with the whole world. We have, I think, unfortunately for ourselves, about a hundred times the amount of territory beyond the seas to protect, as colonies and dependencies, that France has. France has also twice or three times as large an army as England has. All these things give us a right to have a navy somewhat in the proportion to the French navy which we find to have existed if we look back over the past century. Nobody has disputed it. I would be the last person who would ever advocate any undue change in this proportion. On the contrary—I have said it in the House of Commons, and I repeat it to you—if the French Government showed a sinister design to increase their navy to an equality with ours; then, after every explanation to prevent such an absurd waste, I should vote 100 millions sterling rather than allow that navy to be increased to a level with ours—because I should say that any attempt of that sort without any legitimate grounds, would argue some sinister designs upon this country.

I wish, therefore, not to be misinterpreted or misrepresented in what I say. What does the French Government say, in answer to these charges about their designs to invade us? It is curious to remark how they treat them. The French Government do not go and take stock of their navy, and insist that theirs is a small navy in proportion to ours; that would be an amount of forbearance and transparent modesty on the part of the Government towards their own people such as we do not expect in this country. The French Government pocket what we say as to their navy, and only answer, in their public speeches and their *Moniteur Officiel*, ‘Gentlemen, we spend little more than half what you do upon our navy; and if we have a navy so powerful that you are afraid of our invading you, we must make a great deal better use of our money than you.’

I have dwelt, perhaps, not needlessly long on this subject. It lies at the bottom of more than many simpleminded men understand. But now I leave that question, and I come to ask, how is this to be altered? How is this peaceable reform, amounting to something almost revolutionary, of which Mr. Gladstone speaks—how is it to be accomplished? Why, I tell you candidly it cannot be accomplished by Parliament. If it cannot be accomplished by people out of doors, it won't be accomplished at all. And this brings me to a subject on which I hope to deal when I meet you again expressly for its consideration; but it brings me to a question with regard to the present constitution of our Parliament and our parties. We are brought to a dead lock. I appeal to my friend Mr. Bright, and my friend Mr. Bazley, and to Sir Charles Douglas, and other Members of Parliament, who, I understand, are present, and I say we are brought to a dead lock in the House of Commons. We can do nothing. There is one party in this year, and the other party in the next year, and neither party is inclined to do anything, because they expect next year they may go out and the other party may come in, and so the ‘outs’ and ‘ins’ agree that nothing shall be done. Take the strongest party in the House of Commons, and the chief of that party, if he were to say that an orange shall be on the table in that position, and if the other party were to say that the orange should be there, no one would have power to prevent it. And so you see we are wasting our time and the public time in the House. I speak somewhat disinterestedly, for these reforms are not likely to lead to any very active occupation on my part; but I tell you, who are younger than myself, who wish to make your country worthy of her antecedents, you who are the pith and marrow of the rising generation—I tell you candidly that out of doors—I don't mean the non-electors merely, but I address the electors whose [435] handiwork has brought about this dead lock—that unless they address themselves, by some decided and effective movement out of doors, to the remedying of these evils, your Parliamentary system, and the administration of your dockyards and public works, will be brought into a position which will be a scandal to the representative institutions which you have inherited from your fathers.

When I last had the honour of addressing you here, I spoke upon the subject of reform in Parliament. I had come back from America. I had been two years out of Parliament. I did not know much of what was going on there. I remember when coming to the meeting I spoke to my friend Mr. Bright, who said that in the House of Commons they were about to propose a moderate extension of the franchise, and that he hoped the question would be settled. I thought so too. But if I read the debates in Parliament aright when I was far away, it appears that the question is anything but settled. It seemed to me that parties when in office made a profession of faith for reform in Parliament, and that when they got into Opposition they forgot their pledges; and it seemed to me that then the voting and speaking were directly in opposition to their former professions. We have a Government coming in on this very Reform question, and we have a minister abandoning the question. I don't blame him so much for having actually postponed the question for a year, until he could get the census; I blame him more for the manner in which it was postponed than for the act itself. But now you have the census. You have the returns, at least a portion of them—the great outlines of the census for 1861. They present a battery, an arsenal of facts which ought to be laid hold of by those who really wish to occupy themselves with the future destinies of their country, and ought to be made a ground of agitation—a movement for a complete and thorough reform of our representative system. I don't speak now of merely the extension of the franchise. If you do not get this redistribution of electoral power, you cannot get on. Observe the facts brought out by the census. You have certain counties where your great cities and manufacturing industries are carried on. You see, there, people are growing in wealth and population. You see others, as Lincoln, Cambridge, Suffolk, Buckingham, Dorsetshire, and Wiltshire, counties which are either retrograding in numbers or absolutely stagnant. But when you go into the House of Commons, you find these stagnant agricultural counties, and equally stagnant small agricultural boroughs, twenty or thirty of which have absolutely declined in population during the last ten years—you find the country governed, if it is governed at all, by the representatives of those stagnant counties and decaying rural villages. I cannot say it is governed, because I tell you our Parliamentary system has come to a negation. But if you are to give a fresh impetus to any measures of amelioration in the House of Commons, it must be by giving a new basis to political parties, by making that representation a reality which is now a fiction. Until you place the political parties and Government of this country upon the basis of reality, instead of a fiction, you will continue to have that scandalous waste of our time and resources which you see going on.

I will assume that you have a redistribution of electoral power, so that it is allotted in something like a fair measure to the wealth and population of the country. Well, the first Parliament that was elected—if you had that reform—the first Parliament elected would have a Government, in all probability, which would see for its party, if not for its persons, the chance of a five, or seven, or ten years' lease of power. It would have an Opposition; but that Opposition would not be expected to come in power the day, or week, or year after. Then that party would abandon all these questions of Parliamentary Reform. You would have a Government there, and a party there known to be sent up to effect a reformed state of things, and administer [436] the state of things better than in that fashion so eloquently described by Mr. Gladstone. You would, on the other hand, have an Opposition which would not expect to come into office in the next year, but which might hope, by good behaviour, and by doing something to merit the confidence of the country, to come in in the course of a few years, as was the case under the late Sir R. Peel. Thus, it might hope to grow up into a majority of the House of Commons, and possess power. These parties would then be obliged to fall back upon something tangible, solid, and useful to the country. You would place public men, like ourselves here on the platform, in the House of Commons, who go there, I humbly conceive, rather to promote objects which we believe to be beneficial to the country, than with the hope of partaking in the emoluments and honours of official life. You would give us the consciousness of being there to fight some battle, and achieve some object worthy of the

energies of men. Oh! I look back with regret sometimes, and feel ashamed of the House of Commons, when I think of the years when I first entered that assembly, when there was a great line of demarcation between two great parties, when there was something at stake and worthy of the intellect, and worth growing older and greyer to accomplish! What is there now to satisfy the ambition of any public man? I have given an outline of the subject, and it will be for younger men in the country, if the country is to prosper, to carry out the details.

Before I sit down, I must say one word which affects our minds and spirits, and which meets us in our daily occupations—I refer to what is passing beyond the Atlantic. My friend, Mr. Bright, and myself, have been called ‘the two Members for the United States.’ We have admired their principles of non-intervention, and of economy in administration, and we have seen within the last two years the practical application of those principles in the affairs of Europe. I will not allude to the lamentable strife in America, further than to say, that I hope the principle of non-intervention will still be practised, notwithstanding the embarkation of two or three thousand soldiers for Canada. Let not our American friends consider this act done suspiciously, or to annoy: it is only in keeping with the system pursued at the Horse Guards, whenever a quarrel is going on.

I have been written to, and requested to allude to the principles of co-operation which are now being tried in this neighbourhood. I am always glad to see anything done—and I think our capitalists here will see their own interest in taking the same view of the question—that tends to bridge over and close up the great gulf which has hitherto separated the two classes of capitalists and labourers. I want both classes to understand the difficulties of their position. I want the labourers to see that capital is nothing but hoarded labour, and that labour is nothing but the seed of capital—that for either to thrive both must prosper; that they cannot do one without the other; and if I said a word at this time, when there are dark clouds on the horizon, I would say it rather in a spirit of caution than in a spirit of incitement. I would advise the labouring men to remember for a moment, when they are seeking to invest their hardearned earnings, and to consider whether there is a safe prospect of obtaining the raw material upon which to apply their machinery at a moderate price, or whether there may not be other circumstances calculated to throw the industry of this country into temporary disorder. For my own part, I confess I take for the future a sanguine view of the prospects of this region, and of Lancashire in general. I think it is possible the present difficulties in America may cause some temporary inconvenience to, and even derangement of, our industry, but I see good in the future coming out of the present state of things I think it will draw attention in all parts of the world, where the raw material of our industry can be produced, to the production [437] of that raw material, and that in future we shall be less dependent upon one region for its supply than we have been. I have long ago come to this conclusion, that humanly speaking, in an industrious and intelligent population like this, it is hardly possible that you can have, for a long time, any great obstacle to that prosperity which does, and which ought to, attend upon hard and persevering labour and ingenuity, such as is manifested in this district. I am, and always have been, very sorry that the most extensive, the most ingenious, and the most useful industry that ever existed on this earth, should have been dependent almost exclusively for the supply of the raw material upon an institution—the institution of slavery—which we must all regard as a very unsafe foundation, and, in fact, to the permanence of which we none of us can, as honest men, wish God-speed.

Gentlemen, I have finished what I had to say. You will hear, and I dare say have heard, a great deal about the reaction which is going on. You will hear it said that everybody is turning Conservative. I think we have been the most Conservative. I think that myself, and my friend Mr. Bright, and many I see about me, who have voted for twenty years for what have been considered very revolutionary measures, have been the great Conservatives of our own age. To those men who say we are losing ground, and the Conservatives are gaining, I

ask, What do you mean by Conservatives? What are they? Do they mean the men who would have prevented the repeal of the Corn-laws, or, if they could, would restore them? Do they mean the men who opposed the emancipation of the press, and who, if they could, would re-enact its shackles? If the Conservatives are men who seek for progress, I say we are those men. If they are the men who are stagnant and retrograde, we say experience has taught us that those are the greatest destructives the body politic can contain. I am, therefore, not afraid of the progress, the liberty, and the prosperity of our industry in this country. All I can say is —inform yourselves upon the relations this country bears towards France and other countries. Don't let yourselves be bamboozled and terrified into panic to the neglect of your own domestic duties. Look to the present state of all political parties. Deal with the representation in Parliament, with the view to accomplish such a change as will enable your representative institutions to work, and to continue for you that prosperity which has been growing for so long a time, since the enactment of the Reform Bill.

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**FOREIGN POLICY. VI.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, AUGUST 1, 1862.**↩

In the very few remarks with which I shall trouble the House, it is not my intention to be the humble imitator of the able and eloquent men who, in this and the other House of Parliament, were formerly accustomed, at the close of our Parliamentary labours, to review the measures of the Session. No doubt there would be a good reason for my not following their example this evening, because I think there will be an absence of any measures to criticise. It is not my intention on this occasion to speak as a Member of any party, or as representing other Members in this House. But I may say, that I know in what I have to state, that I am the exponent of the opinions of many Members of this House, both present and absent; and, though I do not wish to assume the character of a political leader in any form, still, if I had yielded to some of the representations made to me, I should have made some such statement as I am about to make very much earlier in the Session. I repeat, that I do not profess here to be a party leader, and have never in this House cared much for party politics, for I have generally had something to do outside of party; but I am of opinion, that in a free representative community the affairs of public life must be conducted by party. A party is a necessary organisation of public opinion. If a party represents a large amount of public opinion, then the party fills an honourable post, and commands the confidence of its fellow-countrymen; but if a party has no principles, it has been called a faction;—I would call it a nuisance. If a party violates its professed principles, then I think that party should be called an imposture. These are hard words, yet they are precisely the measures which, sooner or later, will be meted out to parties by public opinion; and, late as it now is, it may be well if we, who represent both the majority and minority in this House, should view our position, in order to see how we shall be able to bear the inquest when the day comes, as it will come, for our conduct and our character to be brought into judgment.

Now, with regard to the majority, which I suppose we on this side of the House may call ourselves, I shall take the liberty of reminding the House what have in former times been our professed principles. My hon. Friend evidently is in a doleful key, and does not seem to anticipate much gratification or renown from this investigation. In his case, however, I would make an exception; for, if I were called upon to make such a selection, he is the man I would fix upon as having been at all times, in season and out of season, true and faithful to his principles. What have been the professed principles of the so-called Liberal party? Economy, Non-intervention, Reform. Now, I ask my hon. [439] Friend—and it is almost a pity we cannot talk this matter over in private—if we were to show ourselves on some great fête-day, as ancient guilds and companies used to show themselves, with their banners and insignia floating in the air, and if we were to parade ourselves, with our chief at our head, with a flag bearing the motto, ‘Economy, Retrenchment, and Reform!’ whether we should not cause considerable hilarity? Of these three ancient mottoes of our party, I am inclined to attach the first consideration to the principle of Economy, because the other two may be said to have for their object to attain that end.

Now, how has our party fulfilled its pledges on the principle of Economy? Do my hon. Friends know to what extent they have sinned against the true faith in this respect? Are they aware that this so-called Liberal party, the representatives of Economy, are supporting by far the most extravagant Government which has ever been known in time of peace; that we have signalised ourselves as a party in power by a higher rate of expenditure than has ever been known, except in time of war? I don't mean merely that we have spent more money, because it might have happened that we had grown so much more numerous, and so much richer by

lapse of years, that the proportionate amount of the burden on each individual was not greater; but not only have we as a party spent more money absolutely, but we have been more extravagant relatively to the means and numbers of the people. I have a short return here, which throws some light on the subject. I was so struck with it, that I took a copy. It is a return moved for by the hon. Baronet opposite, who has taken so much interest in financial questions (Sir H. Willoughby), and it is called a 'Return of the Taxation per Head,' and it gives you the amount paid by each individual of the population at four different periods extending over thirty years. In 1830, the taxation per head was 2*l.* 4*s.* 11*d.*; in 1840, it was 1*l.* 18*s.* 2*d.*;—you had just realised then the benefits of the Reform Bill;—in 1850, it was 2*l.* 1*s.* 5*d.*; and in 1860, it was 2*l.* 8*s.* 1*d.*; so that in this year, during the existence of the present Government, and while this party was in power, the amount of taxation per head was larger than had been known for thirty years, or, indeed, in any year of peace. Not only have we spent more money per head, but our own Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has taken considerable pains to investigate the point, and bring it clearly to our full appreciation, told us, not long ago, that the taxation of the country had increased faster than its wealth, between 1843 and 1859. He told us that our expenditure had increased at a more than duplicate ratio to the increase of the wealth of the country. That is the statement of our own Chancellor of the Exchequer; so that this so-called party of Economy has been the most extravagant Government which has been known by the present generation.

Now, there is another illustration of this which I wish to bring home to my hon. Friends. How has this money been spent—on what has it been spent? I will give you an illustration of the increase that has taken place during the last four years. I will compare it—I am sorry to have to do it; but we must have the whole truth out and make a clean breast of it—with the expenditure of the hon. Gentleman opposite. I find that in the Estimates for 1862-3, given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget for this year—the army, the militia, navy, fortifications, and packet service—(this last item was included in the Estimates of the right hon. Gentleman opposite, so I give it here to make the comparison fair)—were put down at 29,916,000*l.* In the Estimates for 1858-9, laid before the House by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Buckinghamshire when he was in office, these same items amounted to 21,610,000*l.*, or 8,360,000*l.* less than our Estimates for this year. It is certainly wonderful how my hon. Friends can cry 'Hear, hear!' with so [440] cheerful a voice. In these Estimates, I have included the 1,200,000*l.* which has been voted for fortifications this year. It is a convenient thing for noble Lords and right hon. Gentlemen to pass the money voted for these fortifications out of sight, because it does not appear in the regular Estimates; but if we are spending 1,200,000*l.* this year for fortifications, it is clear that that is so much taken from the available resources of the country, and it must fairly come into the expenditure of the year in order to make a comparison. In these four years we have increased the Estimates for these services above those of the party preceding us in office by 8,300,000*l.*—more than at the rate of 2,000,000*l.* a year. How has that arisen? On what ground can it be that we have increased these warlike Estimates by 8,000,000*l.* in these last four years—years of most profound, of most growing and increasing peace, so far as the tendency of affairs between this and neighbouring countries is concerned?

This brings me necessarily to refer to the noble Lord at the head of the Government. One or two of my friends said to me before I began to speak, 'I hope you won't be personal,' and I have had a warning to keep my temper. I will promise to be exceedingly good-tempered, and not to be personal more than I am obliged. But the noble Lord in this matter represents himself a policy. I don't mean to absolve other parties who are with him from their responsibility in joining him. I don't mean to say that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not fairly responsible for the Estimates he brings forward. He may have his motives. He will give and take, probably, and agree to spend more money in one direction one year, if he can get some concessions next year. There must be compromises, no doubt, when fifteen men are



working together. But, so far as the *primum mobile* of this expenditure is concerned, I cannot leave the noble Lord out of the question. He himself will not allow me to let him alone, because he is always first and foremost when anything of this sort is to be proposed or defended. I have no hesitation in saying—and don't let my hon. Friends think I am going to be personal—that I put the whole of this increased expenditure down to the credit of the noble Lord. I don't excuse those who allow him to spend and waste the money of the country, but he is the *primum mobile*. I tell him now—for it is the best thing to be plain and open, and I say it to his face, for I don't want to go down into the country and say it behind his back—that he has been first and foremost in all the extravagant expenditure of the last twenty years. I have sometimes sat down and tried to settle in my own mind what amount of money the noble Lord has cost this country.

From 1840, dating from that Syrian business which first occasioned a permanent rise in our Estimates—by the way in which, in conjunction with the late Admiral Napier, he constantly stimulated and worried Sir Robert Peel to increased expenditure—taking into account his Chinese wars, his Affghan, his Persian war; his expeditions here, there, and everywhere; his fortification scheme—which I suppose we must now accept with all its consequences of increased military expenditure—the least I can put down the noble Lord to have cost us is 100,000,000*l.* sterling. Now, with all his merits, I think he is very dear at the price. But how has the noble Lord managed to get this expenditure increased from the Budget of the right hon. Gentleman opposite in 1858 to the Budget of my right hon. Friend below by 8,300,000*l.*? It has been by a constant and systematic agitation in this country. He has been the greatest agitator I know in favour of expensive establishments. It has always been, either in this House, or at a Lord Mayor's feast, or at a school meeting, or a rifle corps meeting, or a mediæval ceremony, such as the installation of a Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports at Dover, a cry of danger and invasion from France. It is a very curious and extraordinary thing. The noble Lord and his friends came into office on two grounds—that they [441] would give us a better Reform Bill than hon. Gentlemen opposite, and that they were the party which could always keep us on friendly terms with France. It has ended in their kicking Reform out of existence altogether, and we have had nothing but a cry of invasion from France ever since. This policy of the noble Lord has had two consequences. And when I speak of the noble Lord's policy, I believe he is perfectly sincere, for the longer I live the more I believe in men's sincerity. I believe they often deceive themselves, and often go wrong from culpable ignorance. The noble Lord shall not hear me impute motives, and least of all will I charge him with wilfully and knowingly misrepresenting facts; but the noble Lord's 'idea'—he talked of the 'monomania' of my hon. friend the Member for Liskeard in opposing his scheme—of the relations between France and England, and the constant agitation he has kept up, have had these two effects.

Now, this is a course which, in the first place, prevents the people of this country from attending to their own affairs, and precludes them from looking narrowly to the observance of a policy of economy in our expenditure. I do not mean to say the noble Lord intended that this should be the case, but there is a passage in a curious work which I have had brought to my recollection, and which is so completely illustrative of the position which the noble Lord occupies in relation to this question, that I cannot refrain from reading it. The passage to which I allude applies immediately and directly to the point under our notice, and although I do not suppose the noble Lord has been plotting and acting in the sense which it describes to attain his ends, yet, by a singular accident, his line of conduct is most whimsically and amusingly portrayed by Archbishop Whately in a treatise entitled, 'Historical Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte,' which contains the extract which I am about to record. The work is well known; it was written thirty years ago, and with the view of refuting sceptics by showing that very good arguments might be advanced to prove that no such man as Napoleon Bonaparte had ever existed. This is the passage:—

'Now it must be admitted that Bonaparte was a political bugbear, most convenient to any Administration:—"If you do not adopt our measures, and reject those of our opponents, Bonaparte will be sure to prevail over you; if you do not submit to the Government, at least under *our* administration, this formidable enemy will take advantage of your insubordination to conquer and enslave you. Pay your taxes cheerfully, or the tremendous Bonaparte will take all from you." Bonaparte, in short, was the burden of every song: his terrible name was the charm which always succeeded in unloosing the purse-strings of the nation.'

Now comes a very apt illustration of the course pursued by the noble Lord:—

'And let us not be too sure, safe as we now think ourselves, that some occasion may not occur for again producing on the stage so useful a personage; it is not merely to naughty children in the nursery that the threat of being "given to Bonaparte" has proved effectual.'

That extract seems to me to completely represent the unconscious state of the noble Lord; and I should like to know what other ground there is for his popularity with the country—for he is said to be a popular Minister. When I come, for instance, to ask a question about the introduction of a particular measure in this House, the answer I receive sometimes is, 'Nothing can be done while the noble Lord is at the head of the Government;' but assuming that he is as popular as he is said to be, I cannot imagine any other ground for that popularity than that he is supposed to be the vigilant guardian of the national safety. Now, you see, Archbishop Whately is quite correct; there are a good many 'naughty children' behind the Treasury-bench. The noble Lord has been protecting us against danger to the extent of 8,000,000*l.* sterling, and the reasons given for his policy, though not satisfactory to me, are, it seems, very satisfactory to himself and those around him.

[442]

But the noble Lord's fantasy has done more than spend our money and put reform out of the nation's head; it has also prevented an investigation, full and comprehensive, of the management going on in both branches of our public services, especially in the navy. The noble Lord told us that France was going to surpass us in naval power; that she was first building one vessel and then another. All the while, however, it seems to me, the country was not made alive to the mismanagement and waste going on in our dockyards, which might have been sufficiently accounted for without referring it to any aggressive designs on the part of France. We have had lately placed in our hands a very valuable pamphlet on this subject, written by Mr. Scott Russell, than whom there can be no better judge of the nature of ship-building, and the comparative merits of different kinds of vessels. He tells us that we have during the last thirty years spent 30,000,000*l.* in our dockyards for labour and material in the construction of a class of ships which are now totally useless, there being in our possession only two sea-going vessels which can be said to be really effective. He adds, that he called the attention of the Government to the subject seven years ago; yet there has been no investigation with respect to it, because this House and the public were diverted with the cry of a French invasion.

Now, a series of articles have appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, written by M. Xavier Raymond, which I would recommend the noble Lord to read. The writer is, perhaps, one of the most competent authorities on the subject of the English and French navies whom, perhaps, you could find. He enters very much into detail with respect to it, and I hold in my hand an extract from one of his articles which I think very appropriate to the point to which I am referring: it is as follows:—

'The British Admiralty are always wanting in foresight; they do not even know what is going on at their very door. France had seven years previously abandoned the construction of sailing vessels, when in 1851 the House of Commons forced a similar policy on the Admiralty. Four years had elapsed since the French Government had determined not to lay down another screw line-of-battle ship, when all of a sudden, though somewhat late, the British Admiralty, discovering that we had nearly as many vessels as themselves, decided upon what the Queen's Speech in 1859 called the reconstruction of the Navy. The moment was, most assuredly, most admirably chosen, seeing that it was notorious to the whole world, that from the year 1855 France had not constructed a screw ship of the line, and that for a year the iron-clad *La Gloire* was visible under her shed at Toulon. Again, it has been necessary to wait till 1861, another seven years, before the Admiralty, conquered again by the House of Commons, renounced the construction of screw ships of the line. If this be not waste and improvidence, where on earth are they to be found?'

Now, that is the judgment pronounced by an eminent writer thoroughly conversant with the question with which he deals, and it is simply a repetition of what has been said by my hon. Friends the Member for Sunderland, the Member for Glasgow, the Member for Finsbury, and other hon. Gentlemen in this House. Yet, notwithstanding all this, nothing has been done to remedy the evils in our dockyards, of which complaint was made, while the country was constantly amused and stunned with the cry of French ambition and French invasion. I shall make only one other quotation from the writer in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, whose name I have mentioned, but I would again entreat the noble Lord to read the whole of his articles during the recess. M. Xavier Raymond says:—

'Whenever the British Admiralty fall into some fresh scrape, when they find themselves left behind by the superior management in the French dockyards, in order to extricate themselves from their dilemma they resort to an expedient which has never failed them, but which is little calculated to promote mutual goodwill between the two countries. It is an exhibition, certainly, of great cleverness, but cleverness of a very [443] odious nature. Instead of candidly admitting their own shortcomings, they raise the charge of ambition against France, accuse her of plots and conspiracies, and agitate the country with groundless alarms of invasion; and while thus obtaining the millions of money necessary to repair their blunders, we have, at the same time, the speeches of Lord Palmerston enunciating the singular theory, that to perpetuate the friendship of those two great nations it is necessary to push to the extreme limits the unproductive expenditure on their armaments.'

This, it appears to me, is a very serious question. I do not believe the country or the House is at all aware of its full and extensive bearing on the circumstance, that we are at present without a fleet.

I shall now, with the permission of the House, read an extract from an American paper, to show what is thought on the subject on the other side of the Atlantic. This is a passage from an article in a late number of the *New York Evening Post*, in which the writer says:—

'But it may be urged that the French and English fleets would open the ports of the South in spite of our resistance. The answer to this is, that the experience of our civil war has taught us to despise such fleets as the French and English Governments have now on foot, so far as attacks on our seaport towns are concerned. It has taught us to resist them by vessels sheathed in massive plates of iron, mighty engines encased in mail, too heavy for deep-sea navigation, but well adapted to harbour defence, and of power sufficient to crush in pieces and send to the bottom, with their crews, the wooden ships on which England has hitherto prided herself. With these engines we might sink the transport ships bringing the European armies, as soon as they appeared in our waters.'

Now, there is not, I think, an intelligent naval man who will not endorse that doctrine. Admiral Denman, in a pamphlet which has probably been placed in the hands of other hon. Members as well as my own, observes:—

'And, again, with respect to the invulnerable ships in which France has taken and kept the lead, it is equally agreed on all hands, that a fleet built of wood must be certainly destroyed in a conflict with iron-plated ships. A French author scarcely overstates the case when he compares an iron-plated ship among ships of wood to a lion among a flock of sheep.'

[Cheers.] I hear distinguished naval men cheering the sentiment, and therefore I conclude it is unquestioned. If that be so, what becomes of the responsibility of the Government? I see before me one of the greatest merchants in England. Suppose he, or some great wholesale dealer, employs a clerk to manage a large department of his business, as is constantly done, and finds some fine spring morning that department crammed with goods of a perfectly unsaleable character; suppose, moreover, this clerk or superintendent had ample opportunity of knowing what description of goods would be wanting in the market, do you think his employer would allow him to escape without a reprimand under the circumstances, especially if he were to run up to him and say, 'Oh, we are quite out of the market. Mr. So-and-So has got suitable goods; we have no chance against him?' Yet this is a parallel to the course which has been pursued by the Government. The Admiralty knew they were without a fleet capable of meeting modern vessels, but instead of coming down to the House, and being filled with remorse at their remissness in the discharge of their duties, they actually bully us, as the noble Lord has repeatedly done. When the noble Lord has said, 'We are very inferior to France,' he thinks he has shown quite sufficient ground for asking for 10,000,000*l.* or 15,000,000*l.* more in the Estimates, without giving any explanation of the 30,000,000*l.* which have already been squandered.

The present Government, not confining itself to the money wasted on our armaments, for which we are partly responsible, is laying the ground for future expenses, the magnitude of which no one can know. And here I must warn my hon. Friends round me, that, unless [444] they detach themselves from this policy, they will, as a party, rot out of existence with such a load of odium, that a Liberal party will never be tolerated, and will stink in the nostrils of the people ever afterwards. Look at the vast expenditure for fortifications. Does anybody doubt that that is entirely the work of the noble Lord? Anybody who has sat and seen the votes upon those Estimates must be convinced that the expenditure on fortifications is solely, individually, and personally the act of the noble Lord. It is the price which we pay for—I suppose I may call it—his obstinacy. But we are very much mistaken if we suppose that the expense of those fortifications will end when the bricks and mortar are done with. During the first debate on the subject, I put under the gallery an artillery officer, well known in this House, who filled the highest posts and a front rank in the war in the Crimea. The next day, on returning to the country, he wrote me a letter, in which he said in substance,—'I heard the debate the whole evening, and I cannot see any motive for this fortification scheme, but this. It is not to protect us against a foreign enemy, because, if an enemy landed, these fortifications would be an inconvenience and a danger to us. I can make nothing out of them but this,—they are to be a future excuse for keeping 30,000 more men in the country than in time of peace.' I believe that was also the opinion expressed by a gallant officer opposite. All this is done by the Liberal party. That is what we shall have to be responsible for. Why, our very children will shrink from the imputation of having had fathers belonging to so foolish, so extravagant, and so profligate a body.

Take, again, this affair of China. Hon. Members will recollect what was stated by the right hon. Gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he brought forward his Budget, or, if they do not, I will refresh their memories by reading a short extract. The right hon.

Gentleman, in his Budget speech on the 3rd of April, 1862, after having put the charge for China at 7,554,000*l.*, adds this remark, 'which I trust will be the end, strictly speaking, of the charge for the China war.' We have since that gone headlong into an intervention in that country, the ultimate dimensions of which no one can foretell. It is entirely taken from our control, and what I hear in all directions is, that we shall have China upon our hands just as we have India. The *North China Herald*, published at Shanghai, tells us so in plain language:

'We again warn our countrymen whose good fortune it is to dwell in marble halls in their own native sea-girt island, not to fancy we can pause in this work of redemption. ... The end may not be very far off; and if any of our readers seek to inquire of us what that end will be, we openly reply, nothing short of the occupation of this rich province by Great Britain. We have no hope of the Imperialists.'

When I saw the vote of the House upon that subject—when I saw that the majority which supported the noble Lord included a great number of the other side of the House, led by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for the University of Cambridge, I could not help exclaiming, 'Where is the Conservatism of this land?' I do not know a more rash or a more reckless proceeding. It is a matter of course for the noble Lord at the head of the Government; but why should Conservatives lend themselves to such proceedings? Do we not see that in this and every other country public opinion from time to time turns round and judges not parties but the governing classes of the State? The time may arrive, as it does once in every twenty or thirty years, when power is thrown into the hands of the great masses of the people, and who can tell that the people will not judge the governing classes by these proceedings? Here is a country to which your exports for the last seven years have not averaged more than 3 per cent., and for that infinitesimal fraction of business you are meddling with the affairs of 400,000,000 of people! You are going [445] into a country eight times as large as that of France, which is in a state of complete revolution, not merely with one rebellion, because your blue-books tell you there are other rebellions besides the Taepings, which the Imperial Government is quite unable to put down. We have got into this entirely because the noble Lord happens to be at the head of affairs. This is one of the evils arising out of the idiosyncrasy of the noble Lord for this kind of intervention, or what, in vulgar phraseology, I might call 'filibustering.' The noble Lord has such a predilection for this kind of sensation policy, that let an admiral or a general commit any act of violence, and he is sure to be backed up by the noble Lord. He acts on that assumption, and he acts wisely, and gets promoted. Let him send home a bulletin of any outrageous act, and I will engage that the noble Lord will back him. In this case of China, the instructions of Earl Russell were most explicit against interfering at all. Your commanders had instructions not to interfere; but when they began these raids and excursions, they knew the noble Lord would back them, and the House, in an incautious moment, and owing very much to the illogical step of the right hon. Member for Cambridge, for whom I have a great respect, and aided by Members opposite, committed us to these rash proceedings.

Who can tell what is the state of our finances at this moment? My right hon. Friend, at the opening of the Session, drew the lines very close. I remember he produced a sensation when he came out with his Budget—'Expenditure, 70,000,000*l.*; income, 70,000,000*l.*; surplus, 150,000*l.*' I believe it was considered very close shaving. But has he got that 150,000*l.* surplus? He was obliged to assume that the troops in China would come back. They have not come back. It is stated in a report of a committee, that the Estimates are deranged by that proceeding. Our representatives ordered the troops to go to Shanghai, and there they have remained. They have not come home, and that will more than take away the surplus, which I believe lost a little bit in hops and beer licences. Looking to the state of the revenue—looking to what must happen in the next winter—looking to what must happen to affect our prospects

—is it not a most rash and lamentable dilemma into which we have rushed under the leadership of the noble Lord in this affair of China? I do not say that I exonerate his colleagues. But when I am dealing with an army, I like to take the General. When I am dealing with a party, and the chief is near me, I speak to him.

Then, again, the exhibition in Canada is just on a par with it. When my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham spoke on that subject, I intended to come and speak too, but in the early spring I was denied the use of my voice. I will say a word or two upon it now. I know that country well. I have been along the frontier from St. Lawrence to Lake Michigan. I know both sides. I know the population. I have been there more than once. That, again, was a sensation policy, on a par with the sensation articles of the New York papers. In November, the noble Lord hears that a vessel has been stopped by an American cruiser. He heard before the middle of December, by the American Minister, that that act was without the instructions or the cognisance of the American Government, and he had full reason to believe that the whole thing would be explained and satisfactorily arranged. Then I will give gentlemen their own way, and say the noble Lord had not full reason to believe that the whole thing would be satisfactorily arranged. It makes no difference in what I am about to state. The frontier of Canada is hermetically closed by ice and snow till the month of March. The noble Lord hurried over 8,000 or 10,000 troops to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and many, to my knowledge, are there still, and have not reached Canada at all. The noble Lord sent supplies and sledges, which all the horses in Canada could not have drawn, but must have been put on [446] the sledges of the country, so that the sooner they were burnt the better. All these hasty, rash proceedings were done before the noble Lord would wait to hear what the answer was from the American Government. If he had waited until the first week in January, he would still have had three months to send out reinforcements before operations on the lakes and rivers which divide Canada from America were possible. Our troops were not wanted in Canada in the depth of winter; they might as well have been at home. To spend a million of money in that way—money which would have solaced the hearts and homes of the famishing people in Lancashire—was a wanton waste of public treasure. It was part of the policy of the noble Lord, which has always been a ‘sensation’ policy, the object being to govern the country by constantly diverting its attention from home affairs to matters abroad.

Such are the grounds upon which I think we, as a party, have no reason to congratulate ourselves upon the close of the present Session. But I want to say a word upon the relation of parties in this House. I say the state of parties in this House—speaking logically, for I do not wish to give offence—is not an honest state of things. The reason is, that the noble Lord is not governing the country with the assistance of his own party. I have no hesitation in telling the noble Lord, that if the party opposite had at any time during the last six weeks or two months brought forward a motion of want of confidence in the Government, there would have been found Members on this side in sufficient numbers to give them an opportunity of carrying that motion. Why have the party opposite not taken that course? I will tell my whole mind to hon. Gentlemen opposite now. I have spoken plainly to my own party; often before I have taken the liberty to speak as plainly to the party opposite, and they have never treated me the worse for it. I will tell them why they do not propose a vote of want of confidence in the noble Lord. It is because large numbers of them have greater confidence in him than they have in their own chief. What said the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Cambridge University (Mr. Walpole) on that occasion when he refused to stand to his guns in the premeditated attack on the Government? The right hon. Gentleman said—I will merely give the substance—the right hon. Gentleman said, that Lord Derby, his friend, had stated publicly and privately to his party, that he did not wish to displace the noble Lord. Have hon. Gentlemen opposite sufficiently appreciated the full bearing of that? What becomes of government by party? To whom is the noble Lord responsible if he is to carry on his Government with the assistance of hon. Gentlemen opposite? I have no hesitation in saying,

that the party on the other side are in power without the responsibilities of office. Do you think the country will allow such a state of things to last? I know there are many hon. Gentlemen opposite who have confidence in the noble Lord, because they think he is—I will not say as good a Conservative as any of them, for I regard myself as one of the most conservative politicians of my age—but as good a Tory as any of them. If the noble Lord is not responsible to us as a party, but if hon. Gentlemen opposite keep him in, and enable him to carry measures against the wishes of a considerable section of those who sit on this side, he is and must be a sort of despot as long as that state of things lasts. But do you imagine it will last after it becomes known to the country? It is unnecessary to mince the matter. We meet on equal terms in the library and committee-rooms, and we hear in all directions that the noble Lord pleases many hon. Gentlemen opposite better than their own chief. That is the truth; and the reason is, that he has a greater dislike to reform, and spends more money, than the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Bucks.

But don't you think that game is nearly played out? The noble Lord has affected to play a popular part, and he has had what the French call a [447] *claqueur* in the press, who has done his work very well. Let us try the noble Lord as a Liberal Minister by his acts. How does the noble Lord treat his own party on questions in which many of them take a great and conscientious interest? Take, for instance, the question of the Ballot. I am not going to argue the right or wrong of that question. I look upon it as far more a moral than a political question, and I believe the Conservatives are under as great a delusion about the Ballot as they were about the Corn-laws. If we had the Ballot for five years, they would be as loth to give it up as we should be. Wherever I have seen it in operation, it has thrown an air of morality over the process of voting. There has been an absence of violence, there has been no riot, no drunkenness, no noisy music the whole proceeding has been as quiet and orderly as going to church. How, then, does the noble Lord treat the question of the Ballot? Whenever it is brought on, does he not ostentatiously get up and place himself in the front rank of its opponents, ridiculing and throwing contumely upon the Ballot and those who advocate it? Then there is the question of Church-rates. How has it fared under the leadership of the noble Lord? Seven years ago, we were in a triumphant majority on the Church-rate question. Mark how our majority has dwindled down under the auspices of the noble Lord. First, it came to a tie, when the question had to be decided by the casting-vote of the Speaker, and then there was a majority of one against us. If, when we had a large majority against the Church-rates, we had had a leader such as the party on this side ought to insist on having, that leader would have taken up the question, and have dealt with it in a becoming manner. Take, again, such questions as the Burials Bill, the Marriage Affinity Bill, and the Grammar School Bill. All those measures, in which many hon. Gentlemen on this side take a deep interest, and which touch the consciences of religious bodies returning Liberal Members, are going back under the leadership of the noble Lord. Why is that? It is because the noble Lord is known to be not very much in earnest about any of these things. The consequence is, that the conduct of the whole party becomes slack, and the principles advocated by the party lose ground. What has been the course of the noble Lord in the case of the Poaching Bill? I think hon. Gentlemen opposite had better not press that measure. I cannot sit here until three o'clock in the morning to vote against them, but I would urge them to take the advice of the Nestor of their party, and to drop the Bill. But what is the conduct of the noble Lord on that subject? The Home Secretary opposes the Bill, moving many amendments, and he gives very good reasons for doing so. There have been innumerable divisions by day and night, but have you ever found the noble Lord voting against the Bill? No; he has given one vote, I believe, to help the Bill to be introduced, but he has not given a single vote against it. Why? Because he knows exactly how to please hon. Gentlemen opposite. He says in effect, 'I do not act along with these low people around me; I sit here, but I am doing your work for you.' I take another question,—the Thames Embankment. I think there never was so audacious an attempt made to sacrifice the interests of the many to the foolish and blind convenience of the few. How did

the noble Lord act in that matter? He wanted delay, spoke about what might be done at some future time, but he did not vote for putting an end to the monstrous assumption at once.

How does all this operate? It operates in two ways to serve the party opposite. In the first place, hon. Gentlemen opposite have their own way in everything; and, in the next place, the Liberal party is being destroyed for the future. The longer we sit here and allow ourselves to be treated with contumely through the questions in which we take an interest, the weaker we shall become, and the oftener we shall be defeated by our [448] opponents on the other side. All this comes entirely from the character and conduct of the noble Lord. I have never taken much part in personal politics or change of parties, but I have considered what alternative we have before us. The game is played out; it can't be repeated next spring. I have had communications from hon. Gentlemen which assure me that cannot be repeated. There are many Members gone, as well as many present, who have too much self-respect to allow such a state of things to continue. I may be asked to face the alternative always put by those who sit behind the Treasury-benches—'Would you like to see the Conservatives in power?' Well, I answer that by saying, rather than continue as we are, I would rather see myself in opposition. Let the Liberal party be in opposition, and then you will have the opportunity of uniting and making your influence felt, because you will have popular support, inasmuch as you will be acting up to your principles; but you are only being demoralised while you allow a Session to expire as this has done. I am not creating this state of things; I am only anticipating by a very few days what would explode in the country whenever Members went before their constituents. Such a state of things, I repeat, cannot be allowed to go on. When I came into this House in 1841, I went into opposition, Sir Robert Peel having then a majority of ninety votes. The five years we then passed in opposition were employed in laying the foundations of a public policy and in moulding public opinion to principles which have been in the ascendant ever since, and which have been identified with an augmentation in the prosperity and wealth of the country more than any other measures which were ever passed before. That was the work of the Opposition; and I believe the same work would go on now, if we sat on the benches opposite. I have no hesitation in saying, if you compare the noble Lord with the right hon. Member for Buckinghamshire, the right hon. Gentleman would be quite as desirable for the Liberal party to sit on that (the Treasury) bench as the noble Viscount. Let us be in opposition. But if we go on as we have been, where shall we find ourselves in a short time? Where will be our principles, where our party? Look at the Irish Members. I see with great regret what is going on in Ireland. I am afraid I shall by-and-by find myself in alliance with the Orangemen, and we may reach that lowest step of degradation, of going to a general election with the cry of 'No Popery!' There is no amount of reaction we may not apprehend, if this state of things goes on. Some seem to think that this state of things is attributable to a Conservative reaction in the country. I believe with the noble Lord the Member for Lynn (Stanley), that it is a delusion to talk of reaction. Whoever may be in power, we cannot go on for two successive Sessions with such an Administration as we have had this Session. Therefore,—facing even that worst alternative, that we have no one to lead us, I say, let us get into opposition, and we shall find ourselves rallied to our principles.

I have spoken thus freely because I thought there was a necessity for it. What I have said (if there be in the words I have used any force of truth and logic) will have influence; if not, the words I have spoken will fall as wind. But, whatever happens, I know I speak in an assembly where there is a spirit of frankness, liberty, and manliness to hear and judge what I have said. I thank the House for the kindness with which they have listened to me.



**FOREIGN POLICY. VII.**  
**MANCHESTER, OCTOBER 25, 1862.**↩

[The following Speech was delivered before the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. It is well known that at the conclusion of the Crimean war, an attempt was made by general congress of the great Powers to put down privateering. The American Government agreed to the suggestion, provided the Powers assented to the rule, that unarmed vessels should be no longer liable to capture. But public opinion was not ripe for such a change. After the peace of Paris, however, negotiations having the same end were entered upon again, and Lord Palmerston became quite willing to adopt this reform in international law. But for some reason, which it is not difficult to guess at, President Buchanan's Government dropped these negotiations during the year 1860.]

It is now very nearly twenty-four years ago—on the 20th of December, 1838—that this Chamber met, and after a discussion of two days, which attracted the attention of the whole kingdom, put forth to the world its manifesto in favour of the total repeal of the Corn-laws, and the abolition of all protective duties on manufactured goods. To that proceeding, more than anything else that occurred, may be attributed the struggle which endured so long, which ended in the complete triumph of Free-trade principles in this country, and which will ultimately extend its influence throughout the world. We met then under circumstances of great peril and disaster, in consequence of a failure in the harvest, which inflicted much suffering upon the whole nation. We meet now under circumstances somewhat different, but when I am afraid a still greater calamity threatens your particular district, arising out of the operation of the American commercial blockade. We met, in 1838, to discuss a remedy against famine in the repeal of the Corn-laws; we now meet to devise a remedy for present ills in the consideration of the question of Maritime Laws and Belligerent Rights.

It is deplorable that we are never roused to the consideration of grave errors in legislation until we are suffering under the evils which they entail. It would be well if it were otherwise; but it is useless to quarrel with the constitution of man. We are not mere abstractions; and if the visitation of a calamity such as that which has now befallen us has the effect of leading us to devise a remedy against its recurrence, perhaps that is as much as we have a right to expect from human wisdom and forethought. There are two points of resemblance between the old protective system and that code of maritime law which we are assembled to consider. Both had their origin in barbarous and ignorant ages, and both are so unsuited to the present times, that, if they are once touched in any part, they will crumble to pieces under the hands of the reformer. Upon that account, we ought to be thankful that, in the [450] negotiation of the Treaty of Paris, in 1856, the Plenipotentiaries—I do not know why, for they were not urged at the time to deal with the subject—ventured upon an alteration in the system of international maritime law. You are aware that, at the close of the Crimean war, the Plenipotentiaries, meeting in Congress at Paris, made a most important change in maritime law, as affecting belligerents and neutrals. They decided, that in future, neutral property at sea, during a time of war, should be respected when in an enemy's ship, and that enemy's property should be respected when under a neutral flag; and they also decided that privateering should in future be abolished. These propositions, after being accepted by almost every country in Europe, with the exception, I believe, of Spain, were sent to America, with a request for the adhesion of the American Government. That Government gave in their adhesion to that part of the Declaration which affirmed the rights of neutrals, claiming to have been the first to proclaim those rights; but they also stated, that they preferred to carry out the resolution, which exempted private property from capture by privateers at sea, a little further; and to declare

that such property should be exempted from seizure, whether by privateers or by armed Government ships. Now, if this counter-proposal had never been made, I contend that, after the change had been introduced affirming the rights and privileges of neutrals, it would have been the interest of England to follow out the principle to the extent proposed by America. I say so, because an attempt has been made to evade the question by making it appear that the proposal is an American one, and that we are asked to take it at second-hand. But, I repeat, after the Congress of Paris had affirmed the rights and privileges of neutrals, Englishmen had, above all other people in the world, an interest in extending the Declaration so as to include the exemption of private property from capture by armed Government vessels. It has been said that the Americans were not sincere in their proposals, and that their object in submitting a counter-proposition was to evade the fair consideration and acceptance of the Declaration as a whole. Now, it is probably not generally known that the very proposal which the American Government have submitted within the last five years was made by them in the first Treaty with England, after the Declaration of Independence, eighty years ago. It had its origin with that great man, Dr. Franklin, who carried into his diplomacy, as into his philosophy, a high and genial principle of philanthropy. In the *Autobiographical Memoirs of Thomas Jefferson*, I find the following passage:—

'During the negotiations for peace with the British Commissioner, David Hartley (at the close of the War of Independence), our Commissioners proposed, on the suggestion of Dr. Franklin, to insert an article, exempting from capture, by the public or private armed ships of either belligerent, all merchant-vessels and their cargoes employed merely in carrying on the commerce between nations. It was refused by England, and unwisely, in my opinion. For, in the case of a war with us, their superior commerce places them infinitely more at hazard on the ocean than ours; and as hawks abound in proportion to game, so our privateers would swarm in proportion to the wealth exposed to their prize, while theirs would be few for want of subjects of capture.'

It is not my intention to dwell further upon the question respecting the exemption of private property from capture at sea by armed Government ships. That question has been dealt with in two addresses, issuing from this Chamber and the Chamber of Liverpool, and those addresses, published about two years ago, practically exhaust the subject, leaving me nothing to say upon it. But, as I have already said, the whole system of maritime law, when once touched, crumbles to pieces. When I heard of the intention of the hon. Member for Liverpool to bring before the House the subject of the exemption of private property [451] from capture at sea, I immediately observed that he was mooted a question so intimately connected with that of commercial blockades, that the two could not be kept apart. Mr. Horsfall, who submitted his motion with considerable ability, was disinclined to embrace in his proposal any allusion to the system of commercial blockades; but my experience in the discussion of public affairs teaches me that it is vain to attempt to conceal any part of your subject when it has to go before the public and to be discussed with intelligent adversaries. If there is any part that you intend to leave out, and your opponents see that you consider it a weak point, they are sure to lay hold of it and to press it against you. So it turned out in the debate on Mr. Horsfall's motion. He was told, of course, that if you exempt private property from capture at sea during war, you must also consent to give up the system of commercial blockades. There is no doubt about it. To exempt a cargo of goods from capture when it happens to be on the ocean, but to say that it may be captured when it gets within three miles of a port—or, in other words, to declare that a cargo may be perfectly free to roam the sea, when once out of harbour, but may be captured, if caught, before it gets three miles from land—is to propose that which cannot be practically carried into effect in negotiations or treaties with other countries. In addition, therefore, to the question of the exemption of private property, you have to consider the larger question of commercial blockades. I say it is the larger question, because the capture of private property at sea affects, necessarily, only the

merchants and ship-owners of the countries which choose to go to war; whereas a commercial blockade affects neutrals as well, and the mischief is not confined to the merchants and ship-owners, but is extended to the whole manufacturing population; it may involve the loss of subsistence, and even of health and life, to multitudes of people, and may throw the whole social system into disorder. It will thus be seen that the question of commercial blockades is one of greater importance to England than that of the capture of private property at sea—which was the principal reason why I ventured to seek an opportunity of speaking to you to-day.

In discussing the subject of commercial blockades, I must again refer to what has taken place in our relations with America. The American Government were the first to perceive, after they had proposed to Europe to exempt private property from capture at sea, that the proposal involved the question of commercial blockades. It is no merit on the part of the United States that they have been the first to view the question in the light in which it affects neutrals, nor is it a proof of their disinterestedness. I do not mention the fact to their praise or blame. They have been the great neutral Power among nations; they came into existence and acquired an immense trade, while holding themselves aloof from European politics, always acting upon the maxim, from the time of Washington, that they should remain outside the 'balance of power,' and everything that could entangle them in European quarrels. Hence it happened that, whenever a war occurred in Europe, it was their commerce, as the commerce of neutrals, which suffered most. They have not shared the enjoyment of the fight, but they have always borne the brunt of the enforcement of the maritime laws affecting neutrals, and therefore they have naturally from the first sought to protect their own legitimate and honest interests by pressing the rights of neutrals in all their negotiations on the subject of international maritime law. It is a curious circumstance, though I wish to guard myself against being supposed to attach undue importance to it, that on the breaking out of the war in Italy, in 1859, between France and Austria, the American Government sent to all their representatives in Europe a despatch on the subject of international maritime law, in which they, for the first time, broached in a practical form to the European Governments [452] the idea of abolishing altogether the system of commercial blockades. That, I say, is a remarkable circumstance, when viewed in the light of subsequent events; because there is no doubt that if, in 1859, the English Government, followed as it would have been by the other Governments of Europe, had accepted cordially and eagerly, as it was our interest to have accepted it, the proposal or suggestion of the American Government, it would have been possible to avoid all that is now happening in Lancashire; and trade, as far as cotton is concerned, would have been free between Liverpool and New Orleans. For you will bear in mind, that, though it may be said that the war in America is but a rebellion or a civil war, the European Powers recognise the blockade of the Southern ports only as the act of a belligerent. It has been distinctly intimated to the United States Government that we do not recognise their municipal right in the matter; and if they were to proclaim, for example, that Charleston was not to be traded with, and did not keep a sufficient force of ships there, we should go on trading with the port just as if nothing had occurred. It is only upon condition that the blockade shall be effectively maintained, as between belligerents, that the European Powers recognise it at all. Hence, there can be no doubt, that if the proposal of the American Government in 1859 had been cordially accepted by England, it would have been welcomed by the rest of Europe, and have prevented the existing state of things in this district—a circumstance which shows the extraordinary and sudden mutations to which the relations of the various human families are exposed. There can be no doubt that in that case the American Government would have been obliged to carry on the war with the Southern States without imposing a commercial blockade; or, if they had attempted to establish such a blockade, in violation of their international engagements, they would have involved themselves in hostilities with the rest of the world—a policy which, of course, no rational Government would ever dream of entering upon. I mention this as a fact which gives great significance to

our meeting, and great opportuneness to the discussion of this question; but I do not insist upon it in the way of blame to any one. Diplomatic arrangements, especially when they involve a novelty, are never made in such a way, unless when an amateur diplomatist interferes, as to warrant us to hope that in a year or two so great a change—indeed, a revolution in international maritime law—as the one proposed by the American Government, could have been accomplished. I mention the circumstance, not by way of blame to any one for the past, but to draw a most serious inference from it for the future.

We are now suffering from the operation of a commercial blockade—suffering in a way which could not be matched by any other calamity conceivable in the course of nature, or the revolutions of men. I cannot conceive anything that could have befallen Lancashire so calamitous, so unmanageable, so utterly beyond the power of remedy or the possibility of being guarded against, as that which has happened in the case of the present commercial blockade. You have been trading fifty or sixty years with a region of the earth which, during the whole of that time, has been constantly increasing its production of raw fibre for your use. You have been increasing your investments of capital, training skilled workmen, preparing in every way for the manufacture of that raw material. The cotton was intended for you, not for the people by whom it was grown. You have been making provision for its use, and now all at once this great stream, which has been constantly enlarging for a period of more than half a century, is shut off, and you are deprived of the means on which you have been calculating for the employment and subsistence of your people. Nothing but a commercial blockade could have produced such a sudden and calamitous reverse. It has never been expected. We have had, indeed, our apprehensions of danger, [453] from the fact of our deriving our cotton from one particular country; we have speculated as to the possibility of sterility falling upon a territory so limited in space; and we have also speculated upon the possibility of a negro insurrection, that might destroy that social system upon which we have always regretted that this vast industry is based; but, if you reflect for a moment, you will find that, in the nature of things, neither of those events would have been likely to happen, if left to the operation of natural laws, with the suddenness of the calamity which has now befallen us. The slaves might have become free men; but, generally speaking, when slaves are emancipated, as in the case of the West India Islands, if no foreign element is introduced, the transition from slavery to a state of freedom is accomplished with comparatively little concussion or violence; and it is not likely that from such an event so great and sudden a privation of the raw material of our industry would have arisen. We might have had some perturbation for a few years, lessening production and diminishing your supplies to some extent—a deficiency which would probably have been made up by the rest of the world, which would have been looking on at an event that might have been calculated to impair the powers of that region in the production of cotton. Now, on the contrary, with the 4,000,000 bales of cotton which may exist in the Southern States at Christmas, and with the prevailing uncertainty as to the result of the war, no remedial measure can be applied, inasmuch as people feel a natural disinclination to invest their capital in the production of that article, when the market is threatened with so great a disturbing cause as the sudden release of a vast quantity of cotton in America. Again, as I have said, we might have had to fear sterility in the Southern States of America. We have had blights that have struck particular vegetables. We have had the potato blight, the vine disease, and the mulberry disease, and we have had these visitations of Providence in the form of epidemics—vegetable choleras, as they might be called. It is possible that there might have been some such accidental cause to diminish, for a few years, the production of cotton in America, although hitherto cotton has been singularly exempted from these vicissitudes of nature; but all that might have been guarded against, just as you find you can get silk in China to supplement a failure in France or Italy. Here, on the contrary, is a case which cannot be dealt with; it is unmanageable; it is so grave, so alarming, and presents itself to those who speculate upon what may be the state of things six months hence in such a hideous aspect, that it is apt to beget thoughts of some violent remedy. It is

desirable in that frame of mind that we should bear in recollection the facts I have mentioned—viz. that the system of warfare from which we are now suffering so severely is one that we are the chief means of maintaining, in opposition, I believe, to the opinion of the whole mercantile, and indeed civilised world.

With these preliminary remarks, I shall read one short extract from the despatch which, as I have told you, was written on the breaking out of the Italian war by Mr. Cass, then Foreign Minister to the United States Government, and sent to the representatives of the American Government in Europe. An attempt was made in the House of Commons to induce the Government to print and lay that despatch on the table, but the request was refused, on, I think, very insufficient grounds. We have had presented to us lately a large volume of American despatches, which have passed between the Government of Washington and their representatives in all parts of the world, about most of which we have not much concern, and some of which have been rather maliciously printed, because in one case—the case of the Minister at St. Petersburg—the despatch is not creditable to the writer; but the despatch which I hold in my hand, which does refer to an important question deeply affecting our interests, the Government have refused to publish. I [454] have obtained a copy from Washington, where it may be had for a very small sum, and I find that it enters into the subject of international maritime law generally. Apprehending that the war in Italy might extend to other Powers, the American Government, by the hand of Mr. Cass, lay down their views in the following language:—

'The blockade of an enemy's coast, in order to prevent all intercourse with neutrals, even for the most peaceful purpose, is a claim which gains no additional strength by an investigation into the foundation on which it rests, and the evils which have accompanied its exercise call for an efficient remedy. The investment of a place by sea and land, with a view to its reduction, preventing it from receiving supplies of men and material necessary for its defence, is a legitimate mode of prosecuting hostilities, which cannot be objected to so long as war is recognised as an arbiter of national disputes. But the blockade of a coast, or of commercial positions along it, without any regard to ulterior military operations, and with the real design of carrying on a war against trade, and from its very nature against the trade of peaceful and friendly Powers, instead of a war against armed men, is a proceeding which it is difficult to reconcile with reason or the opinions of modern times. To watch every creek, and river, and harbour upon an ocean frontier, in order to seize and confiscate every vessel with its cargo attempting to enter or go out without any direct effect upon the true objects of war, is a mode of conducting hostilities which would find few advocates, if now first presented for consideration.'

That despatch, dated June 27, 1859, was brought under the notice of the House of Commons on the 18th of February, 1861. I was not present at the time, being in Algiers; but questions were put in the House as to the purport of the despatch, and Lord Russell, who was then, as now, Foreign Minister, alluded to the fact of the American Minister in London having read the despatch to him. Lord Russell, in describing the contents of the despatch, which he did very accurately, also, unfortunately for our present position, took occasion to give the reasons why he had entirely objected to the proposals of Mr. Cass. He maintained that it was for our interest that commercial blockades should be maintained, adding that he could not entertain a proposal for putting an end to them; and that it was necessary, as a great maritime Power, that we should preserve for ourselves the same belligerent right. That doctrine, coming from the Foreign Office within the last three years and a half, seems to me to have an important bearing, or ought to have an important bearing, upon our attitude at the present time. In the first place, if the system of commercial blockades be maintained, as our Government insists it should be maintained, as a sort of strategical means of defending ourselves—if we are to submit to it because it is necessary for our national defence and honour—then it becomes a serious question whether the particular interests that are from

time to time to become the victims of a system over which they have no control, against which they can make no provision, and to which they can apply no remedy, ought not to be considered as fairly entitled to exemption from the whole burden and cost of such a plan of national defence, just as you would indemnify the outskirts of a town for the demolition of houses, with a view to defence against the power of an investing foe. I know no remedy which the parties immediately suffering can apply to such a state of things as this, if you maintain the system of commercial blockades. But I say, if it is necessary for the maintenance of the national honour to adhere to that system, that the cost ought to be borne by the nation at large, and not by any particular section. That will become a serious question if we go on, as we seem likely to do, in this particular district, suffering from the consequences of this system. But it affects our position in another way, which we can't too carefully bear in mind. Some people say that we must recognise the South, in order to get our cotton. But recognising the South would do nothing towards obtaining the cotton. [455] On the contrary, once recognise the South, and then there is no longer a question of any kind as to the right of the North to blockade its ports. The only question then would be whether the blockade was effective. But what, I fear, is in the hearts of those who are almost bewildered with the calamitous prospect which they think they see before them, is that the recognition of the independence of the South should be followed by some effort to obtain the cotton—in other words, that England and France, or other countries, should go there and obtain the cotton against the will of the party blockading the coast. Well, my own opinion is that, after the statement I have made, after the facts which are on record; if we, when we began to suffer from the application of our doctrines to our own case, were, in the teeth not merely of international law, but of the law of which we are ourselves the chief promoters and maintainers, to resort to violence to procure the cotton, there is no amount of suffering which the American people,—every man and woman of them, supposing them to be the same as their fathers on this side of the water are,—would not endure to resist what in such a case would be regarded as an unmitigated outrage.

But now I will deal with this question generally on its own merits. Is it our interest, the interest of the English nation, to maintain and perpetuate the system of commercial blockades? The particular suggestion of Mr. Cass is this—that in the origin of blockades it was never intended to blockade a whole coast, or to shut out the export and import of articles not contraband of war. Is there, then, any ground for supposing that this country has an interest in maintaining that system by which those blockades are extended to all commercial ports? Mr. Cass argues that it was never intended to be so extended, and he gives cogent facts and reasons in support of his assertion that, in its origin, a blockade meant the investing of fortified places, and their investment by sea and land at the same time. The American Foreign Minister does not object to that; he does not object to your investing their arsenals; he does not say that Portsmouth and Plymouth are not to be liable to investment, but his argument is that the peaceful ports of commerce ought not to be shut up in time of war. And I ask again, what interest have we as a nation in opposing that principle? Why, I think it is easy to show that we, of all people in the world, have the most interest in establishing it. And bear in mind, that I am now arguing this matter only as it affects our interests. I do not come here as a humanitarian or philanthropist, asking my countrymen to give up a system which is advantageous to them, out of homage to the genius of the age, or because we are reaching a millennium; but I ask it because, as an Englishman and as a public man, I have not and never have had any other criterion to guide me, nor any other standard by which to form my opinion, but the interests, the honest interests, of my country, which I believe, with God's blessing, are the interests of all mankind. Understand that I don't beg the question, but I challenge discussion upon its merits, and in the way in which I am now prepared to treat it. Let us ask ourselves with what country it can be advantageous for England to maintain the system of commercial blockades, supposing we were at war with that country.

There are only three nations with which England could possibly have a maritime war of serious dimensions—viz., France, Russia, and the United States. Take France. Why, since the discovery of the locomotive and the rail, merchandise intended for the interior of France, which now under ordinary circumstances goes by way of Marseilles, Havre, and other ports, could find a way to enter by Rotterdam, Hamburg, and very soon also, as the lines of rail are completed, by the ports of Italy and even of Spain, and with little addition to its cost; certainly without such an addition as would form an insuperable bar to the French people obtaining and enjoying foreign [456] commodities. Practically, therefore, a blockade—as an instrument of warfare with France—has lost its force by the introduction of the locomotive and the rail.

Now take Russia. There is no doubt that in regard to that country, from which we import so heavily of raw materials, the principle of commercial blockade might still be applied with considerable force, especially to its southern ports in the Black Sea. Therefore, I ask, if you were at war with Russia, would it be the interest of England to enforce the system of commercial blockade as a means of coercing that country, and putting an end to hostilities? That question is answered by what was done during the Crimean war. That war was declared in March, 1854. France and England had both had deficient harvests, and in France, especially, there was a dearth of food. What was the course then pursued by those countries? Did they instantly avail themselves of the power of blockading the southern ports of Russia? No; though the war was declared in March, 1854, it was not until March, 1855, that the blockade of the commercial ports of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azoff was declared. We purposely left those ports open for a twelvemonth, in order that England and France might get grain from them; and England obtained more than half a million quarters of corn from them to feed our people, while we were at the same time carrying on the destructive operations of the siege of Sebastopol. That is a practical instance in our own day, in which we applied the principle advocated by Mr. Cass, viz., that of besieging a military arsenal, and carrying on simultaneously a peaceful intercourse with the enemy's commercial ports. But how was it in the northern ports of Russia? Bear in mind that of all the exports from Russia, consisting chiefly of raw materials—hemp, flax, linseed, tallow, and grain, England takes far more than one half—in the case of some articles she takes even as much as 70 and 80 per cent. Well, if we were at war with Russia, should we enforce a blockade upon her northern ports? Again, we have an illustration of that in the last war. We professed, it is true, to blockade Cronstadt to prevent the export of raw materials, such as flax and hemp, by sea to England. By that means we merely diverted that traffic through Prussia; and in one year, 1855, we brought from Prussia tallow to the amount of upwards of 1,500,000*l.* sterling, while in previous years the amount had not been 2,000*l.* Well, but the Government knew that those articles were coming from the ports of Prussia in the Baltic, and we had a debate on the subject raised in the House of Commons, where a motion was made in regard to this contraband trade, as it was called, in Russian produce. I suppose that some merchants, anticipating that blockade, had entered into large speculations in Manilla hemp and Indian seeds, and they perhaps thought that they would be cheated of their gains, if Russian commodities were allowed to come into this country in that indirect way. The consequence was, that a vigorous appeal was made to the House, and by deputations to the Government, with a view to stop that contraband trade. The Government were challenged, and were in effect told—'If you will not put down the trade thus carried on under your noses—if you do not enforce some test of origin—you had better abolish the system of blockade altogether, because you are only tempting to their ruin those merchants who have gone to Manilla for hemp.' It was about to go very hard with this Prussian trade, when there appeared another party in the field. The Dundee Chamber of Commerce, taking the alarm, met and sent a memorial to the Government, stating that they viewed with apprehension this attempt to keep out Russian hemp—that the district of Forfar, around Dundee, could not exist without that raw material, and earnestly begging the Government, therefore, to offer no impediment to its

importation. All this while we were at war with Russia, and paying for an enormous fleet to blockade her [457] ports. The result was that nothing was done, and, as I understand, one or two of the houses connected with the Manilla hemp trade were ruined in consequence.

Turn now to the third case. Suppose we were at war with America. Does anybody believe that, if we had been at war with her last year, we should have gone and blockaded the Southern ports, and prevented cotton from coming into Lancashire? [Cheers and laughter.] Well, but that is the theory upon which Lord Russell acts. And my case is this—that, assuming a theory which we are very careful not to carry out ourselves, we give to the rest of the world the opportunity of carrying it out practically and very severely against us. Nobody supposes that if we were at war with the United States, we should blockade their ports. I will tell you what we should do. We should have a blockading squadron there, and prize-money would flow in great abundance; but you would never attempt hermetically to seal up that territory. The cotton would come out, the rate of insurance would rise, and thus you would get your raw material, but at an increased price. In 1812 and 1813 we were at war with the United States. We then imported a considerable amount of cotton from the Southern States, although it did not, I believe, amount to one-tenth of the present quantity. But at that time the very same incidents occurred in the House of Commons which I have narrated in connection with the more recent case of the Russian war. There was a party in the City of London interested in Brazilian and Indian cotton, just as in 1855 there might have been gentlemen in Bristol interested in Manilla and Indian hemp, and these speculators prompted their Members to move in the House for the absolute exclusion of American cotton. Motions were made to that effect, and Lord Castlereagh, then the leader of the House of Commons, was much embarrassed on the question: indeed, I am not sure whether he was not once placed in a minority upon it. These speculators pressed the Government, saying, ‘You know that this cotton is coming, and yet you take no steps to prevent it; you capture a few cargoes, your seamen get their prize-money, but still this American produce enters England.’ But, again, there came another party into the field. There were petitions from Manchester, Glasgow, Stockport, and the neighbouring towns, praying the Government to do nothing to exclude American cotton; and the consequence was that nothing was done. American cotton, at a time when the quantity we imported was so small, and when our dependence upon it was so much less than it is now, was allowed to come in, and the blockade was practically inoperative. Recollect that half, at least, of all the exports from America come in ordinary times to this country. But our imports from America do not consist solely of cotton. It would be bad enough to keep out the cotton, to stop your spindles, and throw your work-people out of employment. But that is not all. You get an article even more important than your cotton from America—your food. In the last session of Parliament, an hon. Member, himself an extensive miller and corn-dealer, moved for a return of the quantity of grain and flour for human food imported into this country from September of last year to June in the present year. His object was to show what would have been the effect on the supplies of food brought to this kingdom if the apprehension of war, in relation to the *Trent* affair, had unhappily been realised. Well, his estimate was, that the food imported from America between September of last year and June of this year was equal to the sustenance of between 3,000,000 and 4,000,000 of people for a whole twelvemonth, and his remark to me was—I quote his own words—that if that food had not been brought from America, all the money in Lombard-street could not have purchased it elsewhere, because elsewhere it did not exist. Well, I would ask whether, in the case of a war with America, anybody would seriously contemplate our enforcing a blockade in order to keep out those commodities? [458] Nobody dreams that we should. And yet we are maintaining a system which hands over to other States, whenever they choose to go to war, the power of starving our people, or depriving them of the raw material of their industry, merely because our antiquated statesmen, who live and dream in the period of 200 or 300 years ago, don't understand the wants and circumstances of the present age.



I hold in my hand two pamphlets, both attributed, and, I believe, truly, to the pen of functionaries employed in the Board of Trade. They both take the largest and most common-sense and liberal views of this question, thereby adding another proof to that afforded in the case of the Corn-laws, that there has always existed in the atmosphere of that department something conducive to the most enlightened and advanced appreciation of our commercial policy. From one of those pamphlets I will read an extract, in which are mentioned the very names of some of the old authorities on international law, which Lord Russell has been quoting in his despatches to America within the last few months. The writer says:—

'The days of Vattel, Grotius, Puffendorf, and Bynkershoek, are not our days; their doctrines, however applicable to those times, are unfit for these. They may have been suited for an era of war; they are unsuited to an epoch of peace. They advanced doctrines which in their day it was perhaps possible to maintain in some degree; but the condition on which their views were framed are changed, and it would now be as easy to revive the dead creed of Protection as to rule the relations between neutrals and belligerents by the antiquated laws of Oléron, the *Costumbres Maritimas* of Barcelona, or the once famed *Consolato del Mare*. It would be as easy to revert in medicine to the doctrines of Galen, and to accept the crude dogmas of Theophilus as the base of modern arts, as to define and govern our international relations by authorities whose dicta have ceased to be in harmony with the feelings of the present time.'

Yet, Gentlemen, it is upon these dogmas that you will continue to be governed, unless you bring some of your practical sense to bear upon the antiquated prepossessions of those who are at the head of affairs. It was so before. We had to fight the battle for Free Trade, in time of peace, with our own governing class; and you will have to fight the battle again for Free Trade, in time of war, with the same class, as the only way of obtaining such a change in maritime law as will put it in harmony with the spirit and the exigencies of our age. Still, we come back to this vague response, 'Oh! but if you injure yourselves by the system of commercial blockade, you may injure your enemy a great deal more.' I want to know, in the wide range of the world, what conceivable injury you can do to any people that will equal the mischief which must be inflicted upon this region of Lancashire if the present state of things continues for another six months. For, recollect, that if you blockade the commercial ports of a foreign Power, like America or Russia, you merely prevent them from receiving comparative luxuries into their ports—your manufactured goods, colonial produce, and the like. People can live tolerably well, as they have lived, without these things. But if you inflict a commercial blockade that stops the exports from, as well as the imports into, those countries, while you are only depriving your enemy of comparative luxuries, you are depriving yourselves both of the raw material of the industry by which your people live, and also of the very food necessary for their subsistence. I have thought much upon this subject, and I can conceive of no case in which, while carrying on war with other Powers, you could inflict upon them the same amount of injury as you would inflict upon yourselves by an effective system of blockade; and if the blockade is not to be effective, the whole thing falls to the ground as a mere mischievous delusion. But make it effective, and I repeat, there is no great country with which you could be at war, without inflicting fourfold the [459] injury upon yourselves that you could inflict upon your enemy. Is that a right way to strengthen a belligerent Power—to impair its revenue by curtailing its commerce, to deprive its people of the raw material of their industry, and at the same time to starve them by shutting out their food, thus reducing their physical condition, at the very moment when you want their robust arms and muscular vigour to fight their country's battles? I say, on the contrary, that it is in times of war, above all others, that you ought to have the freest access to the ports of those foreign countries on which you are dependent for your raw materials and your food. I can understand a great manufacturing country like this maintaining a large fleet for the purpose of keeping its doors open for the supply of that food and those raw materials; but by what

perversity of reasoning can any statesman be brought to think that it can ever be our interest to employ our fleet to prevent those indispensable commodities from reaching our shores?

There is another point which I do not remember ever seeing discussed, but which is one of very great importance. We should seek to establish it as a principle in the intercourse of nations, that they should not resort to the prohibition of exports as a belligerent act. When I was engaged in arranging the Treaty of Commerce with France, we put in a clause which in its effect interdicted the right of prohibiting the exportation of coal. Now, according to my idea, if our diplomacy is to be carried out in the common-sense interest of these vast communities, we should seek by every means in our power, in the case of war, to prevent belligerent States from stopping the export of articles necessary for the sustenance or the employment of mankind. With the general spread of Free-trade principles—by which I mean nothing but the principle of the division of labour carried over the whole world—one part of the earth must become more and more dependent upon another for the supply of its material and its food. Instead of, as formerly, one county sending its produce to another county, or one nation sending its raw material to another nation, we shall be in the way of having whole continents engaged in raising the raw material required for the manufacturing communities of another hemisphere. It is our interest to prevent, as far as possible, the sudden interruption of such a state of dependence; and, therefore, I would suggest it as a most desirable thing to be done in all cases by our Government, as the ruling and guiding principle of their policy, that they should seek in their negotiations of treaties to bind the parties respectively, not, as a belligerent act, to prevent the exportation of anything, unless we except certain munitions of war, or armaments. I don't think the Government should interfere to prevent the merchant from exporting any article, even if it can be made available for warlike purposes. The Government has nothing to do with mercantile operations; it ought not to undertake the surveillance of commerce at all. Of course it should not allow an enemy to come here and fit out ships or armaments to be used in fighting against us. But I mean, that for all articles of legitimate commerce, there ought to be, as far as possible, freedom in time of war. To what I am urging it may be said, 'But you won't get people to observe these international obligations, even if they are entered into.' That remark was made in the House of Commons by a Minister, who, I think, ought not to have uttered such a prediction. Why are any international obligations undertaken unless they are to be observed? We have this guarantee, that the international rules I am now advocating will be respected; that they are not contemplated to be merely an article in a Treaty between any two Powers, but to be fundamental laws regulating the intercourse of nations, and having the assent of the majority of, if not all, the maritime Powers in the world. Let us suppose two countries to be at war, and that one of them has [460] entered into an engagement not to stop the exportation of grain. Well, we will assume the temptation to be so great, that, thinking it can starve its opponent, it would wish to stop this exportation in spite of the Treaty. Why, that would bring down on them instantly the animosity, indeed the hostility, of all the other Powers who were parties to the system. The nation which has been a party to a general system of international law, becomes an outlaw to all nations, if it breaks its engagement towards any one. And in the case on which I am laying great stress—viz. that of commercial blockade, and the prevention of any stoppage of exports in time of war—I don't rely on the honour of the individual nation making it for observing the law; I rely on its being her interest to keep it, because if she were at war with us, and were to break the law, she would not break it as against us alone, but as against the whole world.

I won't attempt to cover the whole ground over which this question would lead me—I mean the question of the reform of international law, with the view of bringing it into harmony with the present state of things. But this I would say, as a guiding rule of our policy, that as we have adopted Free Trade as our principle in time of peace, so ought we to make trade as free as possible also in time of war. Let that be your object; and whenever you find a

restriction upon legitimate commerce, whether in war or in peace, be assured that its removal will do more good to England than it can do to any other country on the globe; and for this simple reason—that we have double the commerce of any other country. Then let this manufacturing district, as it has done before, make its voice heard in order that the enlightened principles which are now finally triumphant in time of peace shall also be applied, as far as they possibly can be, in time of war. I have said—and, after all, this is the practical question—that I don't see how the agitation of this matter can be of any service at this moment in securing a supply of cotton from America, by getting rid of the unfortunate state of things which now exists there. But this I will add, that if there were at the head of the Federal Government men of the grasp of mind of a Franklin, a Jefferson, an Adams, or a Washington, I can imagine that they would seek to acquire for their country the glory and the lasting fame of inaugurating, even at the present moment, their own principles—for they are their own principles—of the exemption from blockade of the peaceful ports of a whole continental coast. That would reflect great credit on the men engaged in it, while it would also place on a high moral elevation the nation which achieved it. I can imagine that men of the calibre of those I have named, in the circumstances in which they stand, seeing, and being anxious to prevent, the immense and unmerited evil inflicted not only on the capitalists, but on the labourers not merely of England but throughout the civilised world, and seeing, likewise, national safety in such a course, should desire, if practicable—and on its practicability I offer no opinion—to put an end to this state of things in the interests of humanity. But in making that suggestive and hypothetical remark, which I do without wishing for a moment to imply blame or reproach, this I will say, that the only way in which Europe can approach that question with the United States is on the ground of principle which I have laid down, and not by violating the blockade with the view of obtaining their cotton because we now want it, while still retaining that fanciful advantage of applying the principle of blockade to other Powers at some future time. The only possible ground on which Europe can expect from the American Government a disposition to endeavour to remove this great evil, is by the European Powers engaging for the future to adopt the American principle of exempting all commercial ports from blockade, and confining blockades merely to arsenals and fortified places. I know something of the disposition of [461] foreign Governments in both hemispheres, and I tell you again that England has been the great obstacle to such a benignant change of policy as I have indicated. We are, perhaps, not to be blamed for this; we have but followed in one direction, as America has followed in another, the instincts of national self-interest. For nearly a century, England has believed that she has had an interest in maintaining to the utmost degree the rights of belligerents, just as America has believed, and rightly so, that she had an interest in maintaining the rights of neutrals. But the circumstances are now changed. We profess the principle of non-intervention. We no longer intend, I hope, to fight the battles of every one on the Continent, and to make war like a game of ninepins, setting up and knocking down dynasties, as chance or passion may dictate. We avow the principle of non-intervention, which means neutrality, and we have, therefore, made ourselves the great neutral Power of the world. Two great wars have been carried on within the last ten years. One was the war in Italy between France and Austria, and the other is the still more gigantic war in America. During both, England has remained neutral. Our business, therefore, is to shape our policy according to the light of modern events, and I am convinced, that if we look at the matter calmly and impartially, we shall find that our interests are the same as those of the weakest Power in Christendom, seeing that in adopting Free Trade we have renounced the principle of force and coercion.

Allow me to say, in conclusion, that this question is one that ought to engage the serious attention of gentlemen in this district. Where are the young men who have come into active life since the time when their fathers entered upon the great struggle for Free Trade? What are their thoughts upon this subject? They have inherited an enviable state of prosperity from their fathers. For fifteen years there has hardly been a serious check to business—scarcely a

necessity for an anxious day or night on the part of the great body of our manufacturing and trading population. But let not the young men of this district think that the possession of such advantages can be enjoyed without exertion, watchfulness, and a due sense of patriotic duty. We must not stand still, or imagine that we can remain stereotyped, like the Chinese; for, if we ever cease to progress, be assured we shall commence to decline. I would, therefore, exhort the young men, with their great responsibilities and great resources, to take this matter seriously to heart. Something is due, not only to themselves and to those who have gone before them, but likewise to the working population around them, who will expect an effort to be made, if not to put an end to the present state of things, at least to prevent the recurrence of such calamities in future.

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**FOREIGN POLICY. VIII.**  
**ROCHDALE, OCTOBER 29, 1862** ↩

[At a public meeting in Rochdale, Mr. Cobden was asked to move the following resolution in favour of Parliamentary and Financial Reform:—'That this meeting views with dismay the enormous public expenditure of the country, which unnecessarily increases the burdens of the people, is subversive of their best interests, and perilous to Constitutional Government. This meeting is also of opinion that a comprehensive measure of Parliamentary Reform, which would secure a more faithful representation of the people, is absolutely essential; and remembering the pledges with regard to Financial and Parliamentary Reform, given by the present Ministry prior to their accession to power, calls upon them to carry out those pledges, or retire from office.' But before he referred to the resolution, he called attention to the relations between Great Britain and the United States.]

BEFORE I address myself to the general subject involved in the resolution which is now before you, I will, with your permission, say a few words upon that subject which is most near to my feelings, as it must be to every one connected with this borough,—I allude to the present state of distress in this district. I should like, if I could, to state something that might contribute towards making the cause of your sufferings better understood, and which might clear up any impressions that may exist with regard to the position or the attitude of this district amongst our fellow-countrymen in other parts of the kingdom. I should like to say a word or two with reference, not only to our own interest in this disaster, but also upon the responsibility and duty arising out of it, which, I think, fall upon all parts of the kingdom.

You are suffering much in the same manner as you would be if England were engaged in a foreign war, and this country were placed in a state of blockade to prevent the ingress of cotton for your mills. That would be a state of things which would be regarded by the whole kingdom as an affair which concerned the whole community. All England, the United Kingdom, would come to your rescue; any necessary amount of expenditure would be incurred in order to rescue you from the danger that assailed you, and to compensate you, indemnify you for the injuries you might have sustained. Well, there is very little difference in principle between such a case and that in which you are now really involved. You are suffering, not from a blockade of Lancashire, you are suffering from a blockade of the Southern ports of the United States; both arise out of a state of war; both arise out of a principle recognised in the conduct of war; and as our Government and this country are assenting parties to such a principle of warfare, and as it is an evil arising out [463] of the war which you cannot provide against, which you cannot remove, and for which you are not responsible,—I say it must involve the same consequences, that your sufferings must be shared, and your case relieved by the efforts of the whole of this community—I mean the whole of the United Kingdom. This principle has been to some extent recognised by the course which has been pursued to a certain extent in other parts of the kingdom. There have been efforts made, and a considerable amount of sympathy manifested, to relieve the distress of this district. I do not measure the amount of assistance to be rendered to you by what has been done: I only say the principle is recognised, and efforts made in all parts of the kingdom to support and cheer you in your sufferings and distress. If I could only say one word which would tend to remove that misapprehension which parties might have in other and distant parts of the country, in their efforts of humanity, in looking at your case, I should think my time very well employed on the present occasion. There is no doubt there is much apprehension, particularly in the southern portions of the kingdom, with regard to the state of

matters here. I am not surprised at this, because I, who was born in the south, and was an emigrant in this region, and again returned to the south, perhaps may be better acquainted than many of you with the ignorance that prevails in the south of England, and even in London, with reference to the state of society in this district.

Now, an attempt has been made to throw blame upon large numbers of parties who are visited by the great calamity in which you are involved. I would not say one word in defence of the capitalists of Lancashire, because they are very well able to defend themselves, were it not that this misapprehension with regard to their conduct had a tendency to check the sympathy and slacken the charity of our fellow-countrymen elsewhere. I am not going to undertake the defence of this class; but an untrue accusation has been made against that class. Men of all classes have their good and bad individuals; fortunately for the world, the good predominate everywhere. But, with reference to the particular fact with which I wish to deal, I may say there seems to be a general forgetfulness, on the part of those bringing these accusations against the capitalists, that the calamity has fallen both upon the capitalists and the working classes, and if it continues long enough, that it will ruin them both. I will illustrate what I have to say by taking the position of a millowner spinning cotton, and this comparison will be best understood by our fellow-countrymen in the south of England. A millowner who spins cotton is somewhat similar to a flour miller who grinds wheat.

Now, let us suppose a calamity occurred, by which all the wheat millers of the south of England were deprived of the raw material for their mills—that is, wheat—that the mills everywhere had to be shut up; but suppose, in addition, that these mills were liable to be rated for the relief of the poor, and that the cottages generally owned by the millers, where the workpeople lived, were to pay rent, and were to contribute to the poor-rates. Suppose, simultaneously with such a calamity as that, we had received a cry from this part of the country that these corn millers, whose trade was paralysed, ought, in addition, to keep the workpeople who had been thrown out of work. That would be about as reasonable as much that I have read of the accusations brought against owners of mills in this region. I came last week from Scotland by way of Carlisle, Kendal, Lancaster, Preston, Bolton, to Manchester, and I came through a country where there was a succession—I may say a forest—of smokeless chimneys. Why, for all purposes of productive value, the machinery in these mills might just as well have been in the primitive form of iron, in which they were before they were extracted from the mines. They were utterly valueless as property. And we must bear in mind that, though some [464] millowners are rich in floating capital as well as in fixed capital, yet a great bulk of those who own cotton mills in this county are not rich in floating capital. They are rich in bricks, mortar, and machinery, when they can get cotton to make their looms productive.

Now, take your own borough, and what is its position at the present moment? I have got some authentic facts since I have come into Rochdale—facts applicable to the Rochdale relief district. That district contains ninety-five cotton mills employing 14,071 persons; of these there are out of work 10,793, and the remaining 3,278 are not averaging more than two days a week of work. The relief committee are assisting weekly 10,041, who receive no aid from rates; the guardians are relieving weekly 10,000, making a total of 20,041. The number of the destitute is daily increasing. Bear in mind, I am not speaking to you here, so much as I am speaking to my fellow-countrymen elsewhere, who are less acquainted than I could wish them to be with the actual state of this district; and in speaking thus I am speaking in the interests of you, the working men here present, and your families. Now, bear in mind that for all this destitution the whole of the manufacturing capital in this region is liable to be rated. It is not generally known elsewhere that, if the millowner closes his mill, provided that mill be full of machinery, it is still liable to be rated for the relief of the poor. The consequence is that the millowner first loses the whole amount of the interest in his capital, and the depreciation

of the capital in suspense. Say his mill is worth 20,000*l.* and that is a moderate estimate for the average of mills—that is closed, and he immediately loses at the rate of 2,000*l.* a year, by the loss of interest and depreciation. But, generally, the mill also has a number of cottages attached to it, in which the work-people live. These cottages must cease to pay rent when the workpeople cease to receive wages, but the cottages also continue to be rated to the poor. Take, then, the amount which the millowner, with that small mill worth 20,000*l.*,—at least the average mill of 20,000*l.*; take the loss which he is suffering by the loss of interest and depreciation; take also the amount which he is liable to pay for his poor-rate, which may be 5,000*l.* or 6,000*l.* a year; and that millowner, without going to a central committee in Manchester to put down his name for 100*l.* or 500*l.*, is inevitably, by the very nature of his position, incurring a greater loss by this distress than by any amount contributed by the richest nobleman of this land towards the fund.

It has been said that the millowners and capitalists have not gone to some central meeting, and put down their names for 1,000*l.*, along with some of the bankers and merchants or great landowners who have none of these risks and charges attending their property which I have described. But these millowners and manufacturers are generally scattered and dispersed throughout the country; they have their obligations at their own doors, and they have the apprehension of a very long continuance of this distress which is upon them. I have heard some sagacious men say, since I have been in Manchester,—I hope they have taken a too gloomy view of the situation,—but I have heard some of the longest-headed men with whom I have talked since I have last visited Manchester, say, that they don't believe there will be any more prosperity for the cotton trade for five years to come. I repeat, that I hope they take a too gloomy view of the case; but recollect that, as all is uncertain in the future, and as this fixed property, which constitutes the great wealth of your manufacturers and spinners—this great fixed property in mills and machinery—remains there, always to be rated to the poor, and must be rated to the end, as long as the owner has one shilling of floating capital to pay towards the rates, why, the manufacturer and spinner may well pause and say, 'We welcome you, noble lords and gentlemen from a distance, who throw in your mite in the relief of this great calamity; but, [465] do what you will, and be as bountiful as you please to be'—(and I am sure they will be; the country will never fail you)—'yet still the loss and the suffering and distress to this land must be greater to the millowners and manufacturers than to any other class.' I know that I am speaking, here, in the presence of a great majority of working men; and they will not deny the truth of what I say. You have had your own co-operative mills here, and there is intelligence sufficient amongst the operatives of this town to know that in every word I have said I have been speaking the simple truth. But I will not confine myself to the capitalist class. See what the operative is sure to suffer, and the working man is sure to suffer, by this calamity. Take, as an illustration, what is happening at this moment in Rochdale. Again I take the Rochdale relief district, and, from the best information I can get—and I have no doubt it is accurate—I find that the weekly loss by wages, in this district alone, cannot be less than 6,000*l.* or 6,500*l.* a week. So that the working class of Rochdale alone, at this moment—and you are only at the beginning of your distress—are losing from their income at the rate of upwards of 300,000*l.* a year. I have seen it stated that the relief afforded is about 600*l.* a week. My esteemed friend behind me, Mr. A. H. Heywood, the treasurer of the relief fund, tells me that the contribution which has been made from that fund to the distressed poor of this district is about 600*l.* a week; and, I am told, that the board of guardians are distributing at the same time 800*l.* a week of relief to the poor—I won't call them paupers, because we won't allow them to be called that name;—they are the distressed, or they are the blockaded.

Well, now, 600*l.* a week doled out by the relief committee, and 800*l.* given by the board of guardians, make the total relief to be 1,400*l.* a week. Already it is estimated that the working classes of this district have lost 6,500*l.* a week in wages, and they are getting relief

at the rate of 1,400*l.* a week, so that the working classes of this town are receiving from both those sources—the volunteer relief committee and the board of guardians—only about one-fourth of the income which they can earn by the honest industry of their hands in ordinary times. Great praise has been given to the working class of this district for the fine, the magnanimous, the heroic fortitude which they have displayed on this occasion. Well, I sometimes think that there is something rather invidious in the way in which this compliment is paid to you by some parties. It seems as if they had always been assuming that you are a set of savages, without reason or a sense of justice, and that, whatever befell you, your first impulse was to go and destroy something or somebody in revenge. They must have a very curious idea of the people of this district. It reminds me of an anecdote that I remember:—When the late Dr. Dalton, the eminent philosopher, was presented to King William IV., his Majesty received him with this remark: ‘Well, doctor—well, doctor—are you all quiet at Manchester now?’—the idea in his Majesty’s head being that in Manchester and the neighbourhood the normal state was one of insurrection or violence. Well, but at least the conduct of this district, of its working population, will stand out all the more honourably before the country when it is known under what circumstances you have borne yourselves so manfully as you have. Where is there another class of the community,—I join my right hon. Friend Mr. Gladstone heartily in saying that—I am a south countryman, and therefore I shall not share in any praise I give you in this district,—but I don’t believe there is any other part of the country where the same number of men would have borne so courageously and manfully the same amount of privation. But still, don’t let us make it mere empty compliment—because the people of this country do not care a button for compliments. There is something wanted, and I have no doubt that something more will be had. This is a gigantic evil which has fallen upon this district from no fault [466] of its own, which could not have been foreseen or provided against; and, therefore, the consequences of this great calamity must be borne by the whole country. If they can be borne by voluntary aid from all parts of the kingdom, well; if not, they must be helped by Imperial aid in another form.

But I think, if it is known and fairly understood in all parts of the kingdom what the state of things is, and that a great effort is required, greater than any that has yet been made, I believe that the philanthropy and the generosity of this country will not be found wanting. I would suggest that a systematic plan should be adopted of calling county meetings everywhere by the lord-lieutenants. I have known county meetings called before on much slighter grounds of necessity than this. It is said that there is to be a subscription raised in all the churches. I have no doubt that a large sum will be raised in that way. But it requires that the country should know the necessities of the case, and that the public feeling should not be chilled or distorted by base appeals to their prejudices and their passions. Oh, there is a class of writers in this country,—God knows who they are, who support the vendors of such base commodities; but there is a class of writers in this country who seem to worship success, and to find no pleasure so great as to jump upon anybody, or any class, that they think is down for the moment, and to trample it still lower in the mire. For myself, I have no doubt whatever that all classes in this country will do their duty. I have heard since I have been in Lancashire of heroic acts of benevolence performed not only by men, but by women, who have shown a bright example in their districts in the devotion they have evinced to relieve the distress of those immediately around them. I have no doubt that the amount of generosity and charity that is going on in private far transcends that which is known to the public, and that the best friends of the poor are very often the poor themselves. I have not the least doubt, I say, that this district will do its duty, and that when this cloud passes away—as I hope it may before a distant day—I have no doubt that there will be a record of bright and generous acts—I won’t say such as is creditable exclusively to this community—but such as will reflect honour upon our common humanity.



Now, gentlemen, coupled with this question is another upon which I must say a few words. We are placed in this tremendous embarrassment in consequence of the civil war that is going on in America. Don't expect me to be going to venture upon ground which other politicians have trodden, with, I think, doubtful success or advantage to themselves—don't think that I am going to predict what is going to happen in America, or that I am going to set myself up as a judge of the Americans. What I wish to do is to say a few words to throw light upon our relations, as a nation, with the American people. I have no doubt whatever that, if I had been an American, I should have been true to my peace principles, and that I should have been amongst, perhaps, a very small number who had voted against, or raised my protest, in some shape or other, against this civil war in America. There is nothing, in the course of this war, that reconciles me to the brutality and the havoc of such a mode of settling human disputes. But the question we have to ask ourselves is this, what is the position which, as a nation, we ought to take with reference to the Americans in this dispute? That is the question which concerns us. It is no use our arguing as to what is the origin of the war, or any use whatever to advise these disputants. From the moment the first shot is fired, or the first blow is struck, in a dispute, then farewell to all reason and argument; you might as well attempt to reason with mad dogs as with men when they have begun to spill each other's blood in mortal combat. I was so convinced of the fact during the Crimean war, which, you know, I opposed, I was so convinced of the utter uselessness [467] of raising one's voice in opposition to war when it has once begun, that I made up my mind that as long as I was in political life, should a war again break out between England and a great Power, I would never open my mouth upon the subject from the time the first gun was fired until the peace was made, because, when a war is once commenced, it will only be by the exhaustion of one party that a termination will be arrived at. If you look back at our history, what did eloquence, in the persons of Chatham or Burke, do to prevent a war with our first American colonies? What did eloquence, in the persons of Fox and his friends, do to prevent the French revolution, or bring it to a close? And there was a man who at the commencement of the Crimean war, in terms of eloquence, in power, and pathos, and argument equal—in terms, I believe, fit to compare with anything that fell from the lips of Chatham and Burke—I mean your distinguished townsman, my friend Mr. Bright—and what was his success? Why, they burnt him in effigy for his pains.

Well, if we are here powerless as politicians to check a war at home, how useless and unavailing must it be for me to presume to affect in the slightest degree the results of the contest in America! I may say I regret this dreadful and sanguinary war; we all regret it; but to attempt to scold them for fighting, to attempt to argue the case with either, and to reach them with any arguments, while they are standing in mortal combat, a million of them standing in arms and fighting to the death; to think that, by any arguments here, we are to influence or be heard by the combatants engaged on the other side of the Atlantic, is utterly vain. I have travelled twice through almost every free State in America. I know most of the principals engaged in this dreadful contest on both sides. I have kept myself pretty well informed of all that is going on in that country; and yet, though I think I ought to be as well informed on this subject as most of my countrymen—Cabinet Ministers included;—yet, if you were to ask me how this contest is to end, I confess I should find myself totally at a loss to offer an opinion worth the slightest attention on the part of my hearers. But this I will say: If I were put to the torture, and compelled to offer a guess, I should not make the guess which Mr. Gladstone and Earl Russell have made on this subject. I don't believe that, if the war in America is to be brought to a termination, it will be brought to an end by the separation of the South and North. There are great motives at work amongst the large majority of the people in America, which seem to me to drive them to this dreadful contest rather than see their country broken into two. Now, I don't speak of it as having a great interest in it myself. I speak as to a fact. It may seem Utopian; but I don't feel sympathy for a great nation, or for those who desire the greatness of a people by the vast extension of empire. What I like to see

is the growth, development, and elevation of the individual man. But we have had great empires at all times—Syria, Persia, and the rest. What trace have they left of the individual man? Nebuchadnezzar, and the countless millions under his sway,—there is no more trace of them than of herds of buffaloes, or flocks of sheep. But look at your little States; look at Greece, with its small territories, some not larger than an English county? Italy, over some of whose States a man on horseback could ride in a day,—they have left traces of individual man, where civilisation has flourished, and humanity been elevated. It may appear Utopian, but we can never expect the individual elevated until a practical and better code of moral law prevails among nations, and until the small States obtain justice at the hands of the great.

But leaving these matters: What are the facts of the present day—what appears to be the paramount instinct amongst the races of men? Certainly not a desire to separate, but a desire to agglomerate, to bring together in greater [468] concentration the different races speaking the same language, and professing the same religion. What do you see going on in Italy,—what stirs now the heart of Germany—that moves Hungary? Is it not wishing to get together? I find in the nations of Europe no instinct pervading the mass of mankind which may lead them to a separation from each other; but that there is a powerful movement all through Europe for the agglomeration of races. But is it not very odd that statesmen here who have a profound sympathy for the movement in Italy in favour of unity, cannot at least appreciate a statesman in looking upon the probabilities and the chances of a civil contest—cannot also duly appreciate the force of that motive in the present contest in America? Three-fourths of the white population are contending against disunion; they are following the instinct which is impelling the Italians, the Germans, and other populations of Europe; and I have no doubt that one great and dominant motive in the minds of three-fourths of the white people in America is this:—They are afraid, if they become disunited, they will be treated as Italy has been treated when she was disunited—that a foreigner will come and set his intrusive foot upon it, and play off one against another to their degradation, and probably subjection. Without pretending to offer an opinion myself, these are powerful motives, and, if they are operating as they appear to operate, it may lead to a much more protracted contest than has been predicted by some of our statesmen.

But the business we really have here as Englishmen is not to speculate upon what the Americans will do, for they will act totally independent of us. Give them your sympathy as a whole; say, ‘Here is a most lamentable calamity that has befallen a great nation in its pride.’ Give them your sympathy. Lament over a great misfortune, but don't attempt to scold and worry them, or dictate to them, or even to predict for them what will happen. But what is our duty towards them in this matter? Well, now, we have talked of strict neutrality. But I wish our statesmen, and particularly our cabinet Ministers, would enforce upon their own tongues a little of that principle of non-intervention which they profess to apply to their diplomacy. We are told very frequently at public meetings that we must recognise the South. Well, but that recognition of the South is always coupled with another object—it is, to obtain the cotton that you want, because, if it was not for the distress brought upon us by the civil war in America, I don't think humanity would induce us to interfere any more than it does in wars going on in other parts of the world.

But, now, let us try to dispel this floating fallacy which is industriously spread over the land,—probably by interested parties. Your recognition of the South would not give you cotton. The recognition of the South, in the minds of parties who use that term, is coupled with something more. There is an idea of going and interfering by force to put an end to that contest, in order that the cotton may be set free. If I were President Lincoln, and found myself rather in difficulty on account of the pressure of taxation, and on account of the discord of parties in the Federal ranks, and if I wanted to see the whole population united as one man, and ready to make me a despot; if I could choose that post, and not only unite every

man but every woman in my support,—then I could wish nothing better than that England or France, or both together, should come and attempt to interfere by force in this quarrel. You read now of the elections going on in America. And I look to those elections with the greatest interest, as the only indications to guide me in forming a judgment of the future. You see it stated that in these elections there is some disunion of party. But let the foreigners attempt to interfere in that quarrel, and all old lines of demarcation are effaced for ever. You will have one united population joining together to repel that intrusion. It was so in France, in their great revolutionary war. What begat [469] the union there? What caused the Reign of Terror? What was it that ruined every man who breathed a syllable of dissent from the despotic and bloody Government enthroned in Paris—what was it but the cry of alarm that ‘the foreigner is invading us,’ and the feeling that these were the betrayers of the country, because they were the friends of the foreigner? But your interference would not obtain cotton. Your interference would have, in the present state of armaments, very little effect upon the combatants there. If people were generally better acquainted with the geography of that country and the state of its population, they would see how much we are apt to exaggerate even our power to interfere to produce any result in that contest. The policy to be pursued by the North will be decided by the elections in the great Western States: I mean the great grain-growing region of the Mississippi valley. If the States of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota—if those States determine to carry on this war—if they say, ‘We will never make peace and give up the mouth of the Mississippi, which drains our 10,000 miles of navigable waters into the Gulf of Mexico; we will never make peace while that river is in the hands of a foreign Power!’—why, all the Powers of Europe cannot reach that ‘far West’ to coerce it. It is 1,000 miles inland across the Rocky Mountains, or 1,000 miles up the Mississippi, with all its windings, before you get to that vast region—that region which is rich beyond all the rest of the world besides, peopled by ten or twelve millions of souls, doubling in numbers every few years. It is that region which will be the depository in future of the wealth and numbers of that great Continent; and whatever the decision of that region is, New York, and New England, and Pennsylvania will agree with that decision.

Therefore, watch what the determination of that people is; and if they determine to carry on the war, whatever the hideous proportions of that war may be, and however it may affect your interests, be assured that it is idle to talk—idle as the talk of children—as if it were possible for England to pretend, if it would, to carry on hostilities in the West. And, for my part, I think the language which is used sometimes in certain quarters with regard to the power of this country to go and impose its will upon the population in America, is something almost savouring of the ludicrous. When America had but 2,500,000 people, we found it impossible to enforce our will upon that population; but the progress and tendency of modern armaments are such, that where you have to deal with a rich and civilised people, having the same mechanical appliances as you have, and where that people number fifteen or twenty millions, it is next to impossible for any force to be transported across the Atlantic able to coerce that people. I should wish, therefore, that idea of force—and oh! Englishmen have a terrible tendency to think they can resort to force—should be abandoned on this occasion. The case is utterly unmanageable by force, and interference could only do harm. What good would it do to the population of this country? You would not get your cotton; but if you could, what price would you pay for it? I know something of the way in which money is voted in the House of Commons for warlike armaments, even in time of peace, and I have seen what was done during a year and a half of war. I will venture to say, that it would be cheaper to keep all the population engaged in the cotton manufacture—ay, to keep them upon turtle, champagne, and venison—than to send to America to obtain cotton by force of arms. That would involve you in a war, and six months of that war would cost more money than would be required to maintain this population comfortably for ten years.

No, gentlemen; what we should endeavour to do, as the result of this war, is to put an end to that system of warfare which brings this calamity home to our [470] doors, by making such alterations in the maritime law of nations which affects the rights of belligerents and neutrals, as will render it impossible, in the future, for innocent non-combatants and neutrals here to be made to suffer, as they now do, almost as much as those who are carrying on the war there. Well, if you can, out of this great disaster, make such a reform as will prevent the recurrence of such another, it is, perhaps, all that you can do in the matter. I won't enter into that subject now, because I have entered at some length into it elsewhere, and I shall have to deal with it again in the House of Commons. All I wish to say is this—that it is in the power of England to adopt such a system of maritime law, with the ready assent of all the other Powers, as will prevent the possibility of such a state of things being brought upon us in future. And I will say this, that I doubt the wisdom—I certainly doubt the prudence—of a great body of industrious people allowing themselves to continually live in dependence upon foreign Powers for the supply of food and raw material, knowing that a system of warfare exists by which, at any moment, without notice, without any help on their part or means of prevention, they are liable to have the raw material or the food withdrawn from them—cut off from them suddenly—without any power to resist or hinder it.

Now, that is the only good that I can see that we can do for ourselves in this matter. Yes; there is one other good thing that we might do. We have seen a great country, in the very height of its power, feeling itself almost exempt from the ordinary calamities of older nations,—we have seen that country suddenly prostrated, and become a cause of sorrow rather than of envy or admiration to its friends elsewhere; and what should be the monition to us? Ask ourselves whether there is any great injustice unredressed in this country? Ask if there is any flaw in our institutions in England requiring an adjustment or correction, one that, if not dealt with in time, may lead to a great disaster like that in America? It is not by stroking our beards, and turning up our eyes like the Pharisee, and thanking Heaven we are not as other men are, that we learn; but it is by studying such a calamity as this; by asking ourselves, is there anything in our dealings with Ireland, is there anything in India, is there anything appertaining to the rights and franchises of the great mass of our own population, that requires dealing with? If so, let what has taken place in America be a warning to us, and let us deal with an evil while it is time, and not allow it to find us out in the hour of distress and adversity.

Now, gentlemen, it was impossible to talk to you to-night without dealing with the subject that is uppermost in all our minds. But, before I sit down, I will just say a word or two upon the general subject referred to in the resolution that has been submitted to you. You have been told in the resolution certain things, which, I am sorry to say, I cannot deny; you have been told that the Government have not kept their promises. That is a very common thing. You have been told that they ought either to keep their promises, or retire from office; that would be a very uncommon thing. Certainly they have not kept their promises, if they promised you retrenchment and reform. I was not in England when the new party combination was made, when there was a compact entered into at Willis's Rooms. But I think our friend Alderman Livsey has very properly said—I don't feel sure whether he used the term; if not, I am sure he will excuse me if I attribute it to him—he said that the Radicals were 'sold' on that occasion. ['Hear,' from Mr. Ald. Livsey.] You have had, it is true, a very large addition made to the expenditure of this country. But why has it been made? How has it happened? Why, it is nearly all made for the purpose of warlike defences in a time of peace. There is your great item of expense. It has been incurred to protect you against some imaginary [471] danger. Now, what has been the increase of which I speak? In 1835, when, Sir R. Peel and the Duke of Wellington were at the head of the Government, our military and naval armaments cost under twelve millions per annum. Well, now, including the money voted for fortifications, our expenditure last year was nearly three times that,—nearly thirty

millions sterling. Why is that? Sir R. Peel and the Duke of Wellington certainly could not be considered rash, unpatriotic men, who had not a full sense of their responsibility as guardians of the honour and safety of this realm. How is it, then, that we require pretty nearly three times as much to defend us now as was required in the time of Sir R. Peel's Government? Why, there is no doubt that it has been in consequence, entirely, I may say, in consequence of the alleged designs of our next door neighbour; and there is no doubt, also—there can be no doubt—that the person who has been prompting all this expenditure, on the ground that we were in danger of an attack from France, has been the present Prime Minister. There is no doubt about that.

Now, I said something about this when I met you twelve months ago here. I was fresh come from France, where I had as good opportunities as anybody had of knowing all about it. I was living eighteen months in France, and everything was open to me or my friends; anybody might go to the dockyard by my applying for an order. I had access to every document, every public paper. I told you this twelve months ago, what I repeat now, that this country had been as much deluded and hoaxed on the subject of the increase of the French navy as ever this country had been hoaxed since the time of Titus Oates. Now, since this last winter, not being able to speak, and not being able to be idle, I employed myself in writing out an exactly detailed account, year by year, of all the expenditure and amount of armaments that were maintained by France and England for their respective navies,—a most elaborate and detailed account, in which I quoted from official authorities at every step; not an anonymous publication, for I published it under my own name. That little work brought heavy indictments against our public men, charging them with the grossest misrepresentation. I stated—I never attribute motives to any man, for there is nothing so unprofitable; and I admit I may have made the statements in ignorance, but—I made the charge against your Prime Minister and others, but against him most prominently, of grossly deluding the public on the subject of the armaments of France, having, first of all, managed to delude himself on the subject. I am not going to give you any of the details or statistics which I brought together in that little publication, but I will give you a summary in two lines. I took great trouble and pains to make out a tabular statement of the amount of money expended in the French and English dockyards from 1835 every year down to 1859, and I took at the same time a tabular statement of the number of seamen maintained each year by the two countries. The result was as I have already broadly stated—that, so far from the present Government of France having increased its preparations of naval force as compared with our own, it was far less, year by year, in proportion to ours, than it had been from the time of Louis Philippe, when Sir R. Peel was in office. I will give a comparison between the first and last years of the two dates. The expenditure for wages in the English and French dockyards, and the number of seamen in the English and French navies, in 1835, when Sir R. Peel and the Duke of Wellington were in power, and in 1859, the year preceding that in which Lord Palmerston proposed his vast scheme of fortifications, was—in 1835: English expenditure in dockyards, 376,377*l.*; French, 343,032*l.* In 1859: English expenditure in dockyards, 1,582, 112*l.*; French, 772,931*l.*; making the English increase 1,205,735*l.*, and the French, 429,899*l.*; so that the English [472] outlay within the period was nearly three times as great as the French. The number of seamen—for the comparative power of any two naval countries is known by the number of its seamen—the number of British seamen employed in 1855 was 26,041; in 1859, 72,400; the number of French seamen engaged in the same periods, was 16,628 and 38,470 respectively; showing the French increase to have been less than half that of England.

Now, I have told you that the whole of the opinion of this country upon the subject of the naval preparations of France has originated in the misrepresentations of our present Prime Minister, and this brings us to the very part referred to in the resolution before you. There is no doubt that, when the present Government came into power, one of their great claims to the

confidence of the Liberal party was that they should keep on friendly terms with France, since the danger was that the Tories would go to war with France. Well, what has been the course pursued ever since the present Prime Minister came into office? Why, for three years, he has hardly attended a public meeting of any kind, whether it has been social, political, charitable, or anything else, but he has somehow contrived to insinuate in it something of an apprehension of an invasion from France. Promising us peace with France, he has been calling out 'invasion' ever since. We ought to advertise, 'Wanted, a Minister, who, whilst promising, *par excellence*, to keep the peace with France, shall give the tax-payers of this country some of the advantages of peace.' The practice of a ruffian that walks your streets is to keep himself from harm by carrying a bludgeon, or perhaps a knife in his pocket. But that is not the mode of preserving peace which respectable people adopt. We want a Minister who, if he has a good understanding with the Government of France, has the skill to employ that good understanding with the Government of France in such a manner as would bring about economy and rational relationships between the two countries by promoting a diminution rather than an increase of forces.

But now, what shall we say of a statesman who, whilst professing to be afraid of an invasion from France, who is constantly telling you that you must be armed—armed, constantly armed and drilled, because you may be attacked any night from the other side of the Channel—but who is, at the very same time, carrying on a most close and intimate system of alliances, even entering into joint expeditions in various parts of the world, and, in fact, going into partnership with a warlike purpose with the very man who at any night might become an invader? Now, I ask you, if you read of Chatham or Sir R. Peel doing such things as that, would they have ever stood out in history as men deserving for one moment the serious esteem of thousands of mankind? Why, it is making statesmanship a joke. It is making a wry face on one side in the way of a laugh, and on the other side it is making a profession of solemnity. It is a mere joke; it is not serious thought. But it is more. If the man is in earnest when he tells you that he apprehends a danger of an invasion at any time from the other side of the Channel, where must be his intelligence, his patriotism, if he enters into partnership with the very man that he is afraid is coming to play him such a clandestine trick as that? If he believes what he says, he ought to avoid all contact with such a man, since he was mistaken in his estimate of the man's character. If he is not serious, why then he still more betrays the country that he rules, because he offers to that man insults; and he is continually giving him and his country an inducement to play that statesman a scurvy trick, and through him the people whom such a statesman drags into an alliance.

Now, I have told you, and I tell it you upon my honour, and could give it you on the most solemn pledge, that I can give it to my countrymen or my constituents—I tell you that there is not a shadow of foundation in fact for all that [473] has been said by the Prime Minister for the last three years upon the subject of an increase of the French navy in relation to our own. For, bear in mind, that cry of invasion would have done nothing unless it had been backed by something more practical and substantial to satisfy the practical English mind. We have been told over and over again—I have heard it myself—that France was making great preparations to equal us as a naval Power. I tell you that there is not the slightest shadow of foundation in fact for such a statement. I have shown you what France spent in her dockyards during the year 1859; that, while we spent in 1859—the year before the fortification scheme (upon which I am going to say a word)—1,582,000*l.* in our dockyards for wages only, for the wages of artificers, in constructing ships of war, France spent 772,000*l.*, or less than one-half; and as we can build ships so much cheaper than France, that we can send ships to France and pay a duty of twenty per cent. upon them—then, I ask you how could France, having spent less than half for wages in her dockyards, where her artisans are acknowledged to be inferior to ours,—how could France, spending half the money we spent, have been in the way of preparing a fleet to rival or to equal our own? When I was in France, and those statements

were constantly made, I confess to you I was ashamed of them as an Englishman—placed there to represent, in a certain sense, the Queen and this great country—I was ashamed of those constant statements that were being made by the Prime Minister of this country to the House of Commons; while the Government of France was lost in bewilderment as to the motives of these repeated assertions. My friend M. Chevallier—who is not only my friend, but also the friend of every man who wishes for progress and the enlightenment and prosperity of mankind—he and I spent many an hour over the statistics of the two countries, trying if we could find a shadow of foundation for the statements that were constantly being made in England with a view to excite you to a jealousy and a fear of the French nation; and we could not find the slightest shadow of a ground for anything that had been said. The Government of France put forward in their organs of the press the most emphatic denial of those statements; but, not merely that, several of our most able practical men in the House of Commons—so astonished and puzzled were they by the constant statements made there by the Prime Minister—actually took the trouble either to go to France themselves, or to send trusty agents. For instance, Mr. Lindsay went to France, and himself consulted the Minister of Marine; Mr. Dalgleish, the Member for Glasgow, who had been appointed on a commission to examine into our dockyards, went to France himself to inquire into the matter; Sir Morton Peto sent a trusted agent, a practical man, who was allowed to go and visit the French dockyards. Others took the same course, and they came back to the House of Commons, and stated their convictions of the utter groundlessness of these statements.

Now, what motive, I ask you, could be sufficient to make a public man like myself come before you and advance these statements, if they were not true? What motive could those Members of Parliament of whom I have been speaking—they were not official men—what motive could they have but the best and most patriotic of motives, in going to France to satisfy themselves of the truth of this matter? Well, then, I say there is not a shadow of foundation for the statements that have been made. I will tell you what there is a truth in,—we have spent money, no doubt, in building useless and antiquated vessels; we went on wasting our money upon sailing vessels long after it was known that nothing but steam-vessels would be of any use; we have gone on squandering our money upon wooden vessels long after it was known that iron would supersede wood. Well, but France has not wasted quite so much as we have. I don't give her or any other Government credit for being [474] quite so economical and so wise as it should be in the matter of its expenditure; but France, not having spent her money quite so foolishly as we generally have, has managed to present something that was going to be done a little earlier than we did; and it was because we had wasted our money in useless constructions that we raised the cry of an invasion from France to cover the misdeeds and defalcations of our own Government. Recollect, I am not now leaving this an open question as to whether France had certain designs upon us. I don't rest my case upon any assumed friendliness on the part of any Government. I am speaking as to matters of fact, and I say that you have been grossly, you have been completely deluded. This country has been misled altogether by the statements that have been made from what should have been the highest authorities upon the subject of the preparations of France.

Well, now, it was under this state of things,—I have told you what the comparative strength of the English and French navies in 1859 was,—that the very year following, Lord Palmerston brought forward his gigantic scheme of fortifications for this country, and that is a subject upon which I wish to say a word or two, because it has in one sense a far more important bearing than any other on our military and naval expenditure. In the session of 1860, the Prime Minister himself brought forward a scheme of fortifications for which he proposed to borrow money. The original scheme embraced vast detached forts in the neighbourhood of Portsmouth, going over the South Downs some seven or eight miles—so vast, so extensive, so far inland, that we passed an Act in the House of Commons to abolish an ancient fair, at which cattle were sold on the South Downs, in order that the place might

be occupied with these great forts; it embraced a plan for a large fort in the midland counties, on Cannock Chase; and the whole scheme was devised at an estimated cost of about nine or ten millions sterling, but by those who thought upon the subject—I was in Paris while all this was going on—it was said that it would be more likely to reach twenty or thirty millions than nine or ten, if it were ever allowed to begin. In bringing forward that measure for these fortifications, not one word was said in the speech of the Prime Minister respecting our ability to defend ourselves at sea, though our force was double that of France; he assumed that an enemy would land and burn our dockyards, and these fortifications were devised in order to protect our fleets. Why, I always used to think our navy was intended to defend us, and that we had not occasion to build forts to defend our navy. You remember the anecdote told of Nelson, when he had an audience of George III., during the great French war, and during the time when there was a talk of invasion. The King said, in his curious repetitive way, ‘Well, Admiral, well, Admiral, do you think the French will come? do you think the French will come? do you think the French will come?’ ‘Well,’ replied Nelson, ‘I can only answer for it that they will not come by sea.’ Well, we seem to have abandoned altogether that confidence in our navy. I think, after having spent twice as much as the French for making our navy, and paying for twice as many sailors to man our navy, that we are cowards if we are assuming that any enemy is coming to land upon our shores. But, however, this great scheme of fortifications was brought in, and it was passed like everything else is in this House of Commons.

Now, I will tell you what the effect of that will be, and, perhaps, it has not been sufficiently thought of by the country. You are borrowing the money to make these fortifications—borrowing it for thirty years. Mark the insidious process by which you are allowing this grand scheme to be accomplished. If the Government had to ask every year for the money in the Estimates to come out of the taxes, I would engage for it that the 1,200,000*l.* wanted the last session would not have been voted, because it would have been needful to lay on fresh taxes, [475] and fresh taxes would not have been laid on. But they borrowed the money, and so this expenditure of pretty nearly a million and a quarter is got from a loan. I will tell you what the consequence will be. You are going on building fortifications, which, according to the estimate of Sir Frederick Smith, the Member for Chatham, who opposed this scheme from beginning to end—and he is about the highest authority we have in the House of Commons, for he has been a professor of engineering, and is a man of high and acknowledged talent—according to the estimate of Sir Frederick Smith, those great forts in the neighbourhood of Portsmouth alone will require 30,000 men to man them, and the other forts will require 60,000 or 70,000 more men to man them. Now, once build those forts, and you must have an army to keep them, otherwise you must blow them up again, because nothing can be more unwise, as everybody will see, than to build forts and leave them unprotected, to be taken and occupied by an enemy. I will tell you what this scheme is. I don't say what men's motives are,—I only tell you what the effect of this scheme will be. We are just now getting into a discussion with respect to the policy of keeping an army for the defence of our colonies. Very soon that discussion will ripen—as all discussions in this country are apt in time to do—into a triumph of the true principle, and the colonists, who are much better able to do so than we are, will be left to defend themselves, or, if they call upon us to defend them, will have to contribute towards the expense. We shall be able to withdraw from the Colonies, nobody can tell how many—it may be 20,000—troops. Here you have a plan—I don't attribute motives—but, if the design was to prepare a mode by which the governing class of this country, who, unless they have been very much maligned, would like excuses for keeping up our military establishments, could keep them up—here will be a good excuse furnished them for keeping every man of those troops at home. You will have the fortifications built, and you must have an army to put into them, and that will be just the result of this fortification scheme.



Well, gentlemen, there is no doubt in the world that all this is the work of one man; it is the work of your Prime Minister. I don't question the man's sincerity, but he is under an impression, he is under a delusion, I don't hardly know what to call it, because I wish to observe the proprieties, but he is under the delusion that he is living in about 1808, and, as long as he lives, you will not rescue him from that delusion. I can make every allowance for one in his position for entertaining such delusions, but what must we say of his colleagues? They are silent. The Prime Minister has to start up every moment to defend every detail of the plan of fortifications. If the Minister at War gets up to say a word upon it, it is in such a languid fashion, with such a total absence evidently of all knowledge on the subject, that it savours of the burlesque. Mr. Gladstone has never said one word in support of this grand scheme. I need not say that such men as Mr. Milner Gibson and Mr. Villiers are entirely silent upon it. It is wholly the work of one man, and that is the Prime Minister; and there is not a man in the House of Commons who, behind the scenes, will not admit that it would be impossible to carry out such a scheme as that, if it were not the act of the present Prime Minister. It is opposed more or less in its details, and denounced by every authority. You saw the opposition to it last session, which was not on the part of the so-called peace men; our friend Mr. Bright was not present for a great period of it, but it was opposed by eminent naval and military authorities. It was opposed by Sir Frederick Smith, the hon Member for Chatham, and by Mr. Bernal Osborne. It was such men as these who opposed this scheme, and yet it was carried by the Prime Minister.

Now, I say, what shall be said of his colleagues? What shall be said of the House of Commons? No doubt these great monstrosities and excrescences in [476] our towns, on our plains, and on our heaths, will be ridiculed by future generations, will be looked at and pointed at as Palmerston's follies. Well, there may be an excuse for a Minister verging on four-score, who was brought up in the middle of the wars of the first French Revolution—there may be an excuse for him. But what excuse is there for the manhood and intellect of this country in allowing itself to be dragged into wasteful extravagance and follies like this, and to be made the laughing-stock of nations, to gratify the whim, the mere whim, of a Prime Minister? Are we not become as politicians an enfeebled generation? Look at the speeches that are made everywhere. What is there in them? Is there no taste for anything having good stuff in it,—having, what you call, the weft in it? We seem to have fallen or entered upon our decline, unless some revival or vigorous effort is made to get us out of the terrible trouble in which this district is now involved. How is it that such a state of things as this can exist in Parliament? I'll tell you how it is: we have not an honest state of parties in Parliament. That is the whole thing in a few words. It is a hard truth, but it is the truth, that parties are not on an honest basis in Parliament. You have got a Prime Minister who is at your head, who professes to lead the Liberal party, and—as I have said to his face in the House of Commons—is about the staunchest Tory we have there. The consequence is, that the Tories—particularly the most antiquated and incorrigible Tories—are not the men who intend to be in office; they could not go farther than he does; and so the Tories who sit below the gangway, on the Opposition side, are supporting the present Prime Minister. And why? For a very good reason. He spends far more money to obstruct reform, and that more effectually, than the Tories would, if they were in office. I volunteer my deliberate opinion that he is spending five millions more of the nation's money every year than would be spent if the Tories were in power. We are in this most anomalous position: the High Tories are in power, but not in office. We, the Liberals, are responsible for what is being done, and if we protest against it, our leader calls in the aid of the Opposition, and the Tories enable him to carry his measures in spite of us. There cannot be anything more unfortunate for the country than such a state of parties. There can be nothing so bad in public or private as a man holding a position for which he is not responsible, which is the position the Prime Minister occupies at this moment. He is not responsible to us; he carries on the policy of the Tories, and is supported by them. And there is no remedy for this state of things, that I am aware of, but in the change

that shall make the party which is ruling and governing become responsible for the Government.

Now, let us suppose that, instead of our being on the Government side, we were on the Opposition, and let us suppose Mr. Disraeli in power with Lord Derby. You might say it is the practice of the Tory party to spend as much as they can for the military and the naval services. That is true, unless we have very much maligned them all our days. Not that the Tory party has been desirous of engaging in a larger expenditure than the present Ministry has. But bear in mind, that from the moment they got into office other motives came into play. They will make great sacrifices of their own interests in the way of expenditure in order to preserve office, and when they are in power they will immediately begin to carry out works of reform and retrenchment in order to remain there. But, whilst they are in Opposition, as they are now, they are willing enough to see all this extravagance and all this obstruction of reform on the part of a so-called Liberal Government, because it is doing two things: it is giving them an expenditure which they like, while it does not saddle them with the responsibilities of office. But it is doing another thing: it is so damaging the so-called Liberal party, that they know it is only a question of [477] time as to when we shall go out of power, and the more they can tar us with their own brush before we leave, the less we shall have to say in opposition to them when they get there. I don't argue in favour of bringing any party into power, but what I do say is this, that it is dishonouring to us, the so-called Liberals, to sit where we are on the Government side of the House and see everything administered in opposition to, and in downright derision of, our principles. And it must come to this question, 'Will or can this system go on much longer?' We have two principles at work in our Cabinet, as there are two principles at work in every individual, and in every body of men—there is the good principle, and there is also the evil principle. During the first two years of this Government's existence, the good principle had some influence and power, and it was manifested in those great and those conclusive reforms of the tariff carried out by Mr. Gladstone, in conjunction with the French Treaty. This was, to a certain extent, the triumph of the good principle in the Cabinet. That occurred in 1861. There was the completion of reform in our tariff, so far as protective duties were concerned, and there was the repeal of the paper duty, both being great and comprehensive measures. But during the last session of Parliament the evil principle of the Cabinet was wholly predominant, and gave us no compensation whatever in the form of good measures.

Now, is that to be continued next session? If it be, well then, I say, it is quite impossible, if the so-called Liberal party be true to itself, that they can continue to give their support to the present Government. It would be betraying the people, the constituents that send us to Parliament. We sit there, and know what is going on. We are behind the scenes, and we see what is vulgarly called in the prize ring 'a cross' being fought between the leader of our party and the worst part of the party opposite, by which we are victimised and you are betrayed. But to continue to witness that, and to connive at it, we betray our trust. We must separate ourselves from that state of things if it is to go on any longer. You cannot expect the constituents to fight the battles of reform if they see that their chief who represents them in the House of Commons is in fact handing them over to their enemies. Why, how would M'Clellan's troops fight in the army of the Potomac, if they knew that M'Clellan had a secret understanding with Jefferson Davis and Beauregard? Now that seems to be very much our case, as a Liberal party.

Well, gentlemen, there will be something for us to do next session. We shall see. We shall see whether the good or the evil principle is predominant in the Cabinet, and the proof will be found in the measures of next session. I can only say for myself, that if the next session is to be anything like the last, and I should not be deprived of my vocal powers by the frosts of the winter, you may depend upon it my voice will be raised in protest against such a state of

things. And I will do my best to put an end to it. I will not forget the resolution you have passed—that if the Ministry don't carry out their pledges and their principles, the best thing for them will be to go into Opposition.

I have only a word more to say. We are not merely dealing with financial reform. I am of opinion—and the opinion grows every day, in spite of the apparent apathy that is on the surface—I am more and more of opinion that the true solution of our political difficulties—I mean this state of parties—will only be found in reform of Parliament. I hold to that opinion more and more. I don't see what it is to be, or where it is to go to; but this I know, that the longer you wait for reform the more you will have, because these changes always pay great interest for keeping. For my part, I am moderate—people, when they get grey-haired, always get moderate: I should like something done, [478] and done quickly; but of this I am certain, that you can have no great rectification of this state of parties until you have a reform of Parliament, or, at all events, a party in opposition that is honestly advocating a reform of Parliament. We are frequently asked, 'What would that do?' I am not fond of predictions; but, as that has been thrown out as a challenge—as they frequently say, 'What would you get by a reform of Parliament that you don't get now?'—I will answer that challenge. It is my firm belief that, with a thorough representation of the people of this country, the extravagant expenditure in warlike armaments in time of peace would not be possible. I don't say that the whole people would not go to war sometimes. I should not pretend to say that the English people are altogether certain to keep the peace; but this I do say, that there is something in the self-assurance, and in the dignity, and in the high sense of security which great multitudes of men feel, which would prevent their lending themselves to these delusions, to burden themselves with these enormous expenses, in order to protect themselves against imaginary dangers. The late panics with regard to France never penetrated amongst the mass of the working people—they rested amongst a section of the middle and upper classes. If anybody asks me the question in a spirit of defiance, 'What could you do with a reform of Parliament that you cannot do now?' I assure you,—I do not say it as any more than an opinion, though it is my earnest belief, that if you had a thorough representation in Parliament, you could not persuade the people of this country to spend half the money that is now spent under the pretence of protecting them, but which is really spent in order that certain parties may get some sort of benefit out of it. I am very sorry to have detained you so long. ['Go on.'] You know I never give any peroration to my speeches. When I have finished, I sit down.

I have nothing more to say, but to thank you most cordially for this kind and friendly welcome, sincerely hoping that your stout hearts may bear you manfully through your present difficulties, believing, as I do, that our countrymen will come gladly to your rescue, and assuring you, as I do, that wherever I may be, my humble voice and influence shall not be wanting, in any way, to aid you in your present difficulties.

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**FOREIGN POLICY. IX.**  
**ROCHDALE, NOVEMBER 23, 1864.** ↩

[The following was the last Speech which Mr. Cobden made. The allusion in the first paragraph was to the loss which Mr. Bright had just sustained in the death of a son.]

BEFORE I commence the few remarks I have to offer, I must be permitted to join in the expression of my profound sympathy with the language of condolence which you have used towards my esteemed friend, and your absent and bereaved neighbour (Mr. Bright). The feeling that has been shown by thousands here to-night is one that will be felt by millions in all parts of the world. May he take consolation by the consciousness of that deep feeling of sympathy and sorrow with which the knowledge of his bereavement will be followed!

Nor can I allow this occasion to pass without noticing a blank in our ranks upon the platform to-night. I have never attended a public meeting at Rochdale which has not been animated by the presence of our departed friend. You will know to whom I allude—Mr. Alderman Livsey. By his death the most numerous portion of the community of Rochdale has lost an amiable neighbour, and in many cases a powerful protector and advocate. And quite sure I am that all classes and all parties would concur in inscribing this epitaph upon his monument,—'that he was an honest and consistent politician, an earnest and true friend.'

Now, gentlemen, when I see this vast assembly before me—and it is certainly the largest meeting on one floor that I have ever had the honour of attending—my only regret is my inability, I fear, to make the whole audience hear what I would wish to say to them; but if those upon the outside will have patience, and if they will practise some of that principle of non-intervention in the affairs of their neighbours which our friend Mr. Ashworth has just been so eloquently advocating—I mean, with their elbows and their toes—I will endeavour in as short time as possible to make myself heard by those who are present.

It is not much my habit when I come before you, in pursuance of the good custom of a representative paying at least one annual visit to his constituents, to recapitulate what has occurred in the preceding session of Parliament. I have taken it generally for granted that you have been paying attention to what has passed, and that you do not require any retrospective criticism at my hands. But I am disposed to make the last session an exception to my rule, and I will offer a few remarks upon what has passed during that session in order to illustrate and expound that question to which Mr. Ashworth has alluded,—I mean the question of non-intervention, and to show you how, in my opinion, the proceedings of the last session of [480] Parliament have necessarily led to a complete revolution in our foreign policy, and must put an impassable gulf between the old traditions of our Foreign-office and that which I hope to see adopted as the foreign policy of this country.

Now, during the thirty years since I first gave utterance by pen or voice to a sentiment in public, I have always attached the utmost importance to the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of foreigners. I have looked upon it as a fundamental article in the creed of this country, if we would either secure good government at home, or protect ourselves against endless embarrassments and complications abroad. You may remember, the last time I had the honour of addressing you here, I was complaining of the incessant violation of this principle; how I compared the state of a country which is always engaged in looking after the affairs of foreign countries, to what would be the case in Rochdale if your Town Council were engaged in managing the affairs of Leeds or Blackburn instead of attending to their own

business.

Well, we met at the last session of Parliament, and the Queen's Speech announced to us impending negotiations respecting the affairs of Sleswig-Holstein. From the opening debate on the Queen's Speech, throughout the whole session of Parliament, down to the end of June, which was practically the close of the session, I may say that, without any exception, the whole business of Parliament, so far as the action of the two great parties who contend for power and place in the House was concerned—the whole attention of the House was given to the question of Sleswig-Holstein. I am not going into the history of that most complicated of all questions further than this: In 1852, by the mischievous activity of our Foreign-office, seven diplomatists were brought round a green table in London to settle the destinies of a million of people in the two provinces of Sleswig and Holstein, without the slightest reference to the wants and wishes or the tendencies or the interests of that people. The preamble of the treaty which was there and then agreed to stated that what those seven diplomatists were going to do was to maintain the integrity of the Danish monarchy, and to sustain the balance of power in Europe. Kings, emperors, princes were represented at that meeting, but the people had not the slightest voice or right in the matter. They settled the treaty, the object of which was to draw closer the bonds between those two provinces and Denmark. The tendency of the great majority of the people of those provinces—about a million of them altogether—was altogether in the direction of Germany. From that time to this year the treaty was followed by constant agitation and discord; two wars have sprung out of it, and it has ended in the treaty being torn to pieces by two of the Governments who were prominent parties to the treaty. That is the history (I don't intend to go further into it), or a summary of the whole proceeding.

Now, during the whole of last session the time of the House of Commons, as I have said, was occupied upon that question. If you will take those volumes of *Hansard* which give the report of our proceedings in the last Parliament, and turn to the index under the head of Sleswig-Holstein, or under the head of Denmark or Germany, you will find there, page after page, such questions as these put to the Government:—'When will the blue books be laid upon the table?' 'When will the conference be called together?' 'When will the protocols be published?' and 'When will the protocols be laid before Parliament?' In this way the two great parties occupied the whole of the last session, because, when they were not talking upon this subject, they made the want of the papers or the want of the decision of this conference or the protocols an excuse for doing nothing else. Now, we had great debates in the House, and you will find some of the most prominent among our Members of the House of Commons—men, I mean, who wage the great party battles in the House—hardly opening their lips upon anything else [481] but Sleswig-Holstein. And in the House of Lords they were still more animated. I have observed, that if ever there is anything connected with an exciting foreign topic, anything that is likely to lead to an excuse for military or naval expeditions, and public expenditure, the House of Lords becomes more excited than even the House of Commons; but you never see the Lords lose their calmness and self-possession upon any domestic question.

Now, there was one noble Peer, who spoke repeatedly on this question, who seems to me to be peculiarly framed for illustrating the fact, that a man may have great oratorical gifts and be quite destitute of common sense or ordinary judgment. That noble Lord, in the early part of the session, in a speech delivered upon this question, assailed the Queen—he attacked her Majesty for having influenced her Ministers in the interests of Germany. But this country is not a republic. The Queen, so long as she accepts a Prime Minister dictated to her by the House of Commons, has no political power, and, therefore, can have no political responsibility. That our present Sovereign accepts her Prime Minister for that reason, and no other, I think we have pretty good reason to know. But what shall we say of the chivalrous

assembly which allowed a person to be assailed in her absence—the only person in the country who is defenceless, and that person a lady; for, with the exception of Lord Russell, who spoke in defence of himself rather than of the Crown, there was no one who rose to rebuke that noble Lord—the man that assailed his Sovereign? Later on in the session, we heard more of the noble Lord, who claims the merit of having involved us in the Crimean war, and who has taken the lead in advocating all our fortifications and every abomination of modern times. Having begun the session by attacking the Sovereign, it was only, perhaps, consistent that he should end it by vituperating the people. He said in July, ‘I appealed to the higher and nobler feelings of Parliament and of the nation, believing, as I did, that a course which was dictated by generosity was also recommended by policy. Others, with more success, appealed to more common things—to love of ease, to love of repose, to love of quiet, but above all to love of money, which has now become the engrossing passion of the people of this country.’ Now, if I were going to call a witness to prove that the English people are in pecuniary affairs so chivalrously generous, almost so foolishly generous, that they can give an annual allowance to an individual who has certainly no moral claim upon them, who would in no other country be recognised to have a legal claim to an allowance which actually amounts to 7,700*l.* a year for life—the individual I would call as my evidence would be this very peer, the Earl of Ellenborough.

That to which I wish to call the attention of this room, and of those who will see what we are here saying, is what followed at the close of those debates. The newspapers that were in the interest of the Government were harping in favour of war to the last moment in large leading articles. Some announced the very number of the regiments, the names of the colonels, the names of the ships, and the commanders that would be sent to fight this battle for Denmark. In the House of Commons there was a general opinion that there was a great struggle going on in the Cabinet as to whether we should declare war against Germany. At the end of June the Prime Minister announced that he was going to produce the protocols, and to state the decision of the Government upon the question. He gave a week's notice of this intention, and then I witnessed what has convinced me that we have achieved a revolution in our foreign policy. The whippers-in—you know what I mean—those on each side of the House who undertake to take stock of the number and the opinions of their followers—the whippers-in during the week were taking soundings of the inclination of Members of the House of [482] Commons. And then came up from the country such a manifestation of opinion against war, that day after day during that eventful week Member after Member from the largest constituencies went to those who acted for the Government in Parliament and told them distinctly that they would not allow war on any such matters as Sleswig and Holstein. Then came surging up from all the great seats and centres of manufacturing and commercial activity one unanimous veto against war for this matter of Sleswig and Holstein. The conversation that passed in those gossiping purlieus of the House of Commons—the library, the tea-room, the smoking-room, and the rest—was most interesting and striking. ‘Why,’ a man representing a great constituency would be asked, —‘How is it that the newspapers are writing for war?’ The newspapers write for war, because the newspapers in London that are in the interest of the Government have been giving out in leading articles that there was to be war. But they only express their own opinions, and not the opinions heard on ‘Change. By the end of the week preceding the speech made by the Prime Minister, when he laid the protocols of the Convention upon the table, and gave the decision of the Government upon the policy they would pursue, there came up such an expression and manifestation of opinion, that I was satisfied no Government, whatever the press said, whatever was the opinion in the Cabinet at the time, could get us into war whilst the Parliament was sitting. And when the subsequent debate came on, and I spoke upon the subject, I challenged the House of Commons to tell me if I was speaking incorrectly, when I said there were not five men in the House of Commons who would vote for war on any matter connected with that question. Nobody contradicted me.

Well, but the feeling out of doors in London was one of intense anxiety. I never saw the House of Commons—not even in the time of the Corn-laws—so mobbed by what I remember a Member called a middle-class mob, as it was on the night when Lord Palmerston came to make that final declaration of the decision of the Government on that occasion. It was evident that the middle classes of London thought that the question of peace or war was hanging in the balance, and they seemed rather apprehensive than otherwise that war would be the decision of the Government.

Well, this places the Parliament and the Government—and, to some extent, the nation represented—in a somewhat ignominious position. And the natural solution, in a case like that, in our constitutional form of government, is this,—the nation must find some vicarious sufferer, who shall be made to pay the penalty of this national blunder. The Opposition in the House of Commons is the proper mechanism by which this necessary constitutional process should be carried out. In ancient times, you know, a Minister that had got the country into a mess would have had his head cut off. Now he is decapitated in another way. He is sent away from Downing-Street into the cold shade of the Opposition, on the left-hand side of the Speaker. But on this occasion the Opposition brought forward a motion condemnatory of the Government, which the Opposition had no right to bring forward, because the whole proceedings of Parliament during the session showed that the Opposition was far more to blame for the delusion that had been practised upon the country than the Government itself. The Opposition was constantly stimulating the Government to do something, or making them responsible for not doing something, and putting grave questions to them, keeping their countenances while they did so, and not leading us to suppose it was all a joke; and, therefore, when they had been parties to this waste of the session, on the ground that they thought the Government was responsible for everything done that was being done about Sleswig-Holstein, it was not becoming in them to take the course they did, for they could not very logically or consistently bring forward a motion condemning [483] the Government for what had been done. Mr. Kinglake, who had never been in favour of the proceedings in regard to the Sleswig-Holstein affair, substituted a clause or passage in the resolution, which did not either absolve the Government or condemn them, but it merely expressed the satisfaction that we had escaped war, and there the matter ended.

Well, but now let me tell the solid, substantial manufacturing and commercial capitalists of this country, that this is not a very honourable position in which to be left. The Government was allowed to go on and commit them—commit them as far as a Government can do, in backing up and encouraging a small Power to fight with a big one. It was very much like a man taking a little fellow and backing him for a prize-fight. He 'draws the scratch,' as they say, across where his toe is to come to, and tells him to stand up to the mark, advises him how to train himself, takes him under his charge, and then, just at the moment when he comes to the place, he moves off and leaves him.

Now, that is the position in which we are left as a nation by what was done last session about Sleswig-Holstein. We were caricatured in every country in Europe. I myself saw German and French caricatures immediately after-wards. There was a French caricature representing Britannia with a cotton nightcap on; there was a German caricature representing the British lion running off as hard as ever he could, with a hare running after him. This is not a satisfactory state of things, because I maintain that to a certain extent we deserved all that;—that is, we did deserve it, unless we show that we did not run away on that occasion, just because it did not suit us to fight, and unless we intend to adopt a different principle in our foreign policy, and say that other countries must not expect us to fight, except for our own business.

The manufacturing and commercial interests of the country were in a state of almost unparalleled expansion. They had entered into vast engagements, expecting that they would be realised and fulfilled in a time of peace; both capitalists and labourers felt that if war had arisen just then, it would have produced enormous calamities, such as no nation ought ever to bring upon itself, unless in defence of its own vital interest and honour. But all that ought to have been foreseen and anticipated, if not by your Governments, which are living in the traditions of fifty years ago, by an active-minded public spirit on the part of your people. You cannot separate yourselves from the honour or dishonour of your Government, or from the acts of those Cabinets and legislators whom you allow to act on your behalf and in your name.

I'll tell you what appears to me to be the result of that week's debate on the Sleswig-Holstein question. Both sides felt that they were parties to such a ridiculous *fiasco*, and were in such an ignominious plight, that as the representatives of this great nation they had so compromised you, that there was a general disposition to take the pledge of non-intervention. But you know when people have got a headache after a debauch, they sometimes take the pledge to be teetotallers for life, but they do not keep it. Now, what I want to do is to prevent a recurrence of that disgraceful proceeding which wasted you the last session of Parliament, and ended by making you as a nation, as far as a Cabinet can make you, ridiculous.

I think we had made some progress, through the general declarations of sentiment in the House of Commons from leading men of all sides. But what did I hear? What do I see? I see the report of a speech made by an honourable and learned Gentleman to a constituency whose good voices and support he is canvassing for the next election—a manufacturing borough that shall be nameless, further than that it is on the banks of the Roche. I read a speech in which this hon. and learned Gentleman, addressing this manufacturing borough, and received with—with [484] immense applause—in which he has a long programme of foreign policy, in pursuance of which, if it is to be carried out and adopted by our manufacturing community, I think we ought to reckon upon being at war every year of our lives; and instead of spending—as we do now, unfortunately—25,000,000*l.* upon our public services, we ought to begin by spending at least 50,000,000*l.* Amongst other things this honourable and learned Gentleman proposed we should do is this: we should maintain our armaments on a due scale, in order to prevent France from swallowing up Germany.

Well, now, I can only say, for my part, if the French were to perform such a feat as that, they would suffer so terribly from indigestion, after swallowing those forty millions of uncomfortable Teutons, that I think they would be objects of pity rather than terror ever afterwards. Really, you know, when men aspiring to be statesmen come to talk exactly as if they had taken passages from 'Baron Munchausen' or 'Gulliver's Travels,' how can we possibly say that we have made any great progress? If such sentiments as those can be applauded in a manufacturing borough on the banks of the Roche, what must we expect to hear in agricultural districts in the neighbourhood of Midhurst?

There has been a speech lately made by my right hon. Friend, Mr. Bouverie, at Kilmarnock, and there seemed to be some baillies, who are generally rather acute folks, on the platform with him, in which he gave utterance to some opinions which rather tended to show that, in spite of what was done in the last session of Parliament, we shall have to do with this foreign policy and this non-intervention just what we did with the Corn question—reiterate and reiterate, and repeat and repeat, until that comes to pass which O'Connell used to say to me, 'I always go on repeating until I find what I have been saying coming back to me in echoes from other people.' Now my friend, Mr. Bouverie, talks in favour of a foreign policy which should be founded upon a benevolent, sentimental principle—that is, that we shall do what is right, true, and just to all the world. Well, now, I think, as a corporate body—as a political community—if we can manage to do what is right, and true, and just to each



other—if we can manage to carry out that at home, it will be about as much as we can do. I do not think I am responsible for seeing right and truth and justice carried out all over the world, I think, if we had that responsibility, Providence would have invested us with more power than He has. I don't think we can do it, and there's an end of it. But my friend talks as though at some time or other it was the practice in this country to carry out a sentimental policy; and he carried us back, first of all, to the times of Queen Elizabeth. He says that she was a Sovereign who did what was right and true and just, and in the interest of Protestantism, all over the Continent of Europe. Now, I think he could not have made a more unhappy selection than that example he has given; for if ever there was a hard-headed and not a soft-hearted Sovereign it was she; if there ever was a place where there was little of that romantic sentiment of going abroad to do right and justice to other people, I think it was in that Tudor breast of our 'Good Queen Bess,' as we call her. Why, when I read Motley's 'History of the Rise of the Dutch Republic'—an admirable book which everybody should read—when I read the history of the Netherlands, and when I see how that struggling community, with their whole country desolated by Spanish troops, and every town lighted up daily with the fires of persecution,—when I see the accounts of what passed when the envoys came to Queen Elizabeth and asked for aid, how she is huckstering for money while they are begging for help to their religion,—I declare that, with all my principles of non-intervention, I am almost ashamed of old Queen Bess. And then there were Burleigh, Walsingham, and the rest, who were, if possible, harder and more difficult to deal with [485] than their mistress. Why, they carried out in its unvarnished selfishness a national British policy; they had no other idea of a policy but a national British policy, and they carried it out with a degree of selfishness amounting to downright avarice.

Mr. Bouverie next quotes Chatham. Do you suppose that Chatham was running about the world protecting and looking after other people's affairs? Why, he went abroad in the spirit of a commercial traveller more than any Minister we ever had. Just step into the Guildhall in the metropolis, and read the inscription on the monument erected by the City of London to Lord Chatham. It is stated to be 'as a recognition'—I give you the words—'of the benefits which the City of London received by herampleshare in the public prosperity;' and then they go on to describe by what means this great man had made them so prosperous, and they say—I give you again the very words: 'By conquests made by arms and generosity in every part of the globe, and by commerce for the first time united with and made to flourish by war.' Well, they were living under another dispensation to ours. At that time, Lord Chatham thought, that by making war upon France and seizing the Canadas, he was bringing custom to the English merchants and manufacturers, and he publicly declared that he made those conquests for the very purpose of giving a monopoly of those conquered markets to Englishmen at home; and he said he would not allow the colonists to manufacture a horseshoe for themselves.

Well, that was the old dispensation, when people believed that the only way to prosper in trade was by establishing a monopoly, and that blood and violence would lead to profit. We know differently. We know that that is no longer necessary, and that it is no longer possible. Now, if I take Chatham's great son; if I take the second Pitt, when he entered upon wars, he immediately began the conquest of colonies. When he entered upon war with France in 1793, and for three or four years afterwards, our navy was employed in little else than seizing colonies, the islands of the West Indies, &c., whether they belonged to France, Holland, or Denmark, or other nations, and he believed by that means he could make war profitable. We know that is no longer possible. We know it, and I thank God we live in a time when it is impossible for Englishmen ever to make a war profitable. Now, what we want in statesmanship is this—that we should understand what are the interests of our days, with our better lights and knowledge, and not be guided by maxims and rules which appertain to a totally different state of things. For no statesman ever was great unless he was carrying out a policy that was suited to the time in which he lived, and in which he wrought up to the

highest lights of the age in which he flourished. That is the only way in which a statesman can ever distinguish himself; and I have no hesitation in saying, that any modern statesman who is trusting for fame or for future honour to anything he has been doing in foreign policy for the last twenty or thirty years, is most miserably mistaken, and that he will be forgotten or only remembered as an example to be avoided within two years after his death.

Now, I am going to touch upon a very delicate question. It is not enough that our Government should not interfere in foreign questions; it is not enough that our Government should not lecture and talk to foreign countries about what policy they should pursue. There is something more required. Englishmen, through their public speakers and through their press, must learn to treat foreign questions in a different spirit to what they have done. And they must learn to do it as a point of honour towards foreign countries as well as a matter of self-respect which is due to themselves. You will mislead foreign countries by demonstrations of opinion in this country which are not to be followed by acts. Instead of benefiting a country, instead of benefiting a people abroad, you are [486] very often injuring them with the very best possible intention.

Of all the public men who have been prominently engaged in politics, probably there are none who, so much as my friend Mr. Bright and myself, have always avoided public demonstrations in favour of some nationality or some people abroad. Nothing would have been cheaper from time to time than for us to get immense applause and popularity by going down to the Guildhall or somewhere else, to attend a meeting and make a flaming and declamatory speech about the Poles, or Hungarians, or some people else a thousand miles away. But I have always felt that in doing that we were very likely to do a great deal of harm to the persons with whom we sympathised. I hope that nobody will suppose that my friend Mr. Bright, and myself, and those of the Free-trade school who have acted with us, have less sympathy for other people abroad than these gentlemen who come either to speak at public meetings, or to write in the papers in favour of some foreign nationality. I maintain that a man is best doing his duty at home in striving to extend the sphere of liberty—commercial, literary, political, religious, and in all directions; for if he is working for liberty at home, he is working for the advancement of the principles of liberty all over the world. See what mischief has been done. I have no hesitation in saying—and I speak with the authority of persons who have been parties interested and who have been themselves victims of that which was done in Paris and in London last year upon the subject of Poland, which has led thousands of the generous youth of Poland to premature graves, and sent thousands more into Siberian exile. The manifestations and the instigations in London and Paris incapacitated that unhappy insurrection—if it can be called by the name of an insurrection—in Poland last year. It never had a chance from the beginning. I never like to speak disrespectfully of any movement of the kind—there are always, God knows, plenty to decry those who have failed—but the insurrection never had the slightest chance. The mass of the people never were with it; the insurgents were a few generous enthusiasts, always young men. Out of a population asserted to be many millions, and said to be interested in this revolt, you never saw more, even by the most favourable reports, than 2,000 or 3,000 engaged in some guerilla warfare at a time.

Now, however, I hear from the very best authority, that the class of nobles and proprietors in Poland from whom all the previous efforts at national emancipation have sprung, have been practically ruined, if not exterminated. by this last abortive effort; and they themselves—many of the most intelligent men you see here or in France—tell you it is futile to expect another effort from that same class; that God, in His own good time, may probably bring up a class of peasant proprietors—the serfs are now made peasant proprietors—and at some future time, either from religious impulse or motives of patriotism, that this more numerous class may take the field; but that the class that has always hitherto moved is practically *hors de*

*combat*. There was a meeting held in the London Guildhall in favour of that insurrection. There were present Members of Parliament and noble Lords; and the Lord Mayor was in the chair. I, who have travelled in those very countries, know what vast and exaggerated ideas are attached to a political meeting held in the London Guildhall, with the Lord Mayor, Members of Parliament, and Peers present. You may say that by a public meeting like that you only meant moral support and moral force; but you cannot persuade the poor people abroad but that other consequences would follow a meeting like that, and that England would give material aid to this revolution. So of Sleswig-Holstein. There is no doubt in the world that England and her Government encouraged that small country of Denmark to hopeless resistance by the false expectation excited from the first that we should go to its help.

[487]

But that is not the only mischief we do. The moment another nation appears in the field you excite far more resentment, and you stimulate to far greater efforts, the Government which is engaged in putting down an insurrection. I have no hesitation in saying that the manifestations which came from England and France respecting Poland, did more than anything else could have done to consolidate and unite the power of the Russian empire just at the time when it was in danger of being thrown into discord and confusion by the emancipation of the serfs. Directly France and England began to address their despatches to the Russian Government, the Russian Government made an appeal to their own people, not so much against the Poles, against whom there was no great resentment, but to resist the attempt of the Western Powers to dictate to Russia; and Russia was enabled by that appeal, not only to call out the patriotic efforts of her own people, but to incur expenses in preparing for a war with Poland, such as she never would have ventured on had it not been for the assumption that she might have gone to war with France and England. A friend of mine who was travelling in Russia was told on very good authority that the Russian Government spent three or four millions of money in consequence of what were understood to be threats held out by France and England, and that was of course available to put down the Poles. These are considerations that ought to make the best-intentioned in the world pause before they join in any demonstrations of this kind. You must not only discourage your Government from taking proceedings, but you must do nothing that is calculated either to mislead the people abroad, or to stimulate the Governments abroad to increased efforts against their own populations. Now, you know, if I would only flatter you, instead of talking these home truths, I really believe I might be Prime Minister. If I would get up and say you are the greatest, the wisest, the best, the happiest people in the world, and keep on repeating that, I don't doubt but what I might be Prime Minister. I have seen Prime Ministers made in my experience precisely by that process. But it has always been my custom to talk irrespective of momentary popularity. You know I always get afterwards, with exorbitant and usurious interest, far more than I deserve.

Now, we English people have a peculiar way of dealing with foreign questions. We are the only people in the world that ever make of a foreign topic a matter of passionate, earnest, and internal politics. You never see in France, or in America, or in Germany, newspapers taking up foreign questions, and attacking one another because they are not of the same opinion. But this is the commonest thing in the world in England. I have had a message from some hon. Gentleman, living in this town, to say that he would not vote for me again, because I did not entertain the same opinions that he did about the American war. Well, I said in reply, that I did not profess at all to dictate to other people what opinions they should have upon a matter of such pure abstraction as that, but I wanted to know who made him my political Pope. Now, when we come to have a proper and due opinion of how little we can really do to effect any change abroad, if we act wisely we shall change our tone with regard to foreign policy, and we shall discuss—if we discuss those questions at all, which every-

body will do who is intelligent, and lives in an age of electric telegraphs—we shall discuss these questions calmly and temperately, as I intend to do now just for one or two minutes, upon the subject of the American question.

I am exceedingly tolerant with everybody that differs from me about this dreadful civil war in America. I have intimate friends—some of my dearest friends—who differ totally from me on this question. It never drives me from their doors, or prevents my associating with them in just the same way as if our opinions coincided. Nay, more, I have always said that, while I believe there [488] are many who take a sinister view of that question in America, there are, on the other hand, a great many people who have taken up the side of the South because they are the weaker party—because they are the insurgent party; and also because, looking at the map and looking at the extent of the country, they don't believe it possible that the North can succeed in subduing them, and that therefore it is a hopeless struggle, which ought to be put an end to by separation. Well, all that is very fair and reasonable, and ought to be regarded with perfect tolerance; but at the same time I repeat there are parties in this country, and they have not had the sense to conceal their motives, who want to see America humbled. They have not concealed their sentiments, because we had an explosion in the House of Commons. 'That republican bubble has burst.' They could not contain themselves when the war broke out.

I'll tell you what my opinion is with regard to Republicanism. I think we may have every advantage in this country with an hereditary monarchy that we might have by electing a president every four or six years. That is my theory. But, at the same time, I see a people raising up a Government upon a standard very far in advance of anything that was ever known in the world,—a people who say, 'We rule ourselves by pure reason; there shall be no religious establishment to guide us or control us; there shall be no born rank of any kind, but every honour held, every promotion enjoyed, shall spring from the people, and by selection; we maintain that we can govern ourselves without the institution of any hierarchy or privileged body whatever.' Well, every one will admit that at all events that programme is founded upon an elevated conception of what humanity is capable of. It may be a mistaken estimate,—it may be too soon to form so high an estimate,—it may fail; but don't ask me, who always consult to the best of my ability the interests of the great masses of my kind—don't ask me to wish that it may fail—don't ask me to exult if it seems to fail, because I utterly repudiate the possibility of my partaking in any such sentiment as that.

We have lately seen that country brought into just such a stress and difficulty as we might be thrown into tomorrow. We are governing India. The world never saw such a risk as we run, with 130 or 140 millions near the antipodes, ruling them for the sake of their custom and nothing else. I defy you to show that the nation has any interest whatever in that country, except by the commerce we carry on there. I say that is a perilous adventure, quite unconnected with Free Trade, wholly out of joint with the recent tendency of things, which is in favour of nationality and not of domination. You might have something happen to you there at any time. You might have the same in Ireland.

Is it Conservatism to jump up and exult immediately this great Republic falls into the throes of civil war, from no fault of any one who is now living; but, if you may trace it back to the first cause, rather from the fault of the British nation and the British Court some 150 years ago? I ask, is it Conservatism in this country, or amongst the ruling classes in Europe, that they should have jumped so hastily into a kind of what I must call partisanship with this insurrection? Let us see what it is. Here you have a great political disruption, in which the active parties, who are very able men—I know the leaders on both sides—were aware of what they were doing; they knew the tremendous consequences they were going to entail upon this cotton region, for instance. They meditated a disruption, by which they were going to throw into convulsion this great and populous district; and many a man here present is

wearing a paler brow than he would have worn but for this civil war. What, then, do they do to justify themselves in the eyes of foreign States, that our statesmen and the ruling classes on the Continent should spring forward to recognise them immediately as belligerents?

Now, in all other great political convulsions that I remember, the parties [489] who have sought to create a disruption which tends to shake a community, and by that means to cause loss and inconvenience abroad, have always put out, in decent respect to the opinion of the world, a programme of their grievances. Where is it here? Take the case of our civil war, when Cromwell and his party, who, I always think, followed on the heels of much better men, committed then acts of greater violence and greater tyranny than the Stuarts whom they had put down, and left very little trace of good on their own account to posterity. But what was done when Cromwell and his party and the Parliament deposed and decapitated Charles I.—a crime that has been followed by a reaction, as all crimes of blood are, down even to our own time? The Parliament put out a programme of their grievances; they published it in three languages; they circulated it all through Europe, stating to the whole world why they had deposed a king, and why they had established a commonwealth. What happened when James II. fled, and William III was invited over? Read the Declaration of Rights with which the Parliament met William III.; there was on one hand a narrative of the grievances they had against James II.; there was a programme, and a compact of the conditions they required from the succeeding king; there was a justification of what they did. What did the Americans do when they declared their independence in 1776? They put forward a declaration of grievances, and no Englishman can now read it but will admit that they were justified in that rebellion, and in the separation from the mother country. But here you have a civil war of far more gigantic proportions than those I have alluded to—than them all put together; where the parties knew and calculated upon their losses as a means of success—knew they were going to convulse a peaceful district by their insurrection. Have they ever put forth a programme? Have they ever stated a grievance? I know the men, and I know no one more competent to write such a programme than Mr. Jefferson Davis. He could do it as well as Thomas Jefferson did the Declaration of Independence in 1776. But there is none. And why is there none? Because they had but one grievance. They wanted to consolidate, perpetuate, and extend slavery. But, instead of that, what do they constantly say, these eminent men—eminent, I mean, for their intellect—who could so well state their case, if they dared to state the truth? ‘Leave us alone; all we want is to be left alone.’ And that is a reason that the Conservative Governments of Europe, and so large a section of the upper middle-class of England, and almost the whole aristocracy, have accepted as a sufficient ground on which to back this insurrection. How would they have liked it, if, when Essex and Kent had been beaten on the Corn-law question (and we know Essex gave a united and unanimous vote against us), Kent and Essex had chosen to set up themselves as an East Anglia right across the mouth of the Thames, as the secessionists have done by Louisiana across the mouth of the Mississippi, and if, when we asked them why they did it, they should reply, ‘We want to be left alone’? Can any Government be carried on if a portion of the territory, or a section of the people, can at any time secede when beaten at the polls in a peaceful election? I again repeat, where is the Conservatism amongst the governing class of this country? I come to the conclusion that there is more Conservatism amongst the Democracy, after all.

Now, we have heard news from America lately which I confess has struck me as presenting to us one of the most sublime spectacles in the whole history of the world. You have twenty-three or twenty-four millions of people spreading over the territory of some thousands of square miles, exercising on one day the right of suffrage upon a question about which torrents of blood are flowing. You have seen the result of that peaceful election given without as much tumult as I have seen in the dirty little village of Calne, or the little town of [490] Kidderminster. Well, I say that is a thing for humanity to be proud of, and not for any particular party to exult over, or for any party to scowl upon. A people that can do that, have

given to the world a spectacle such as never was presented before by any other people. And what have they done? They have decided, mind you, after three years of war, and after every other household almost has lost an inmate or a relative by war. The contest that arose was this: Gen. M'Clellan offers himself as a candidate to put down the war and to restore the Union without making the abolition of slavery a condition of it. On the other side, Abraham Lincoln says, 'We will put down the war, and we will extirpate slavery.' And, notwithstanding that the appeal was made to the whole people who have been suffering from this war, they have preferred, in the interest of humanity—for that can no longer be questioned now—you can no longer call it pride, it is the lofty motive of humanity that has induced them to risk the longer continuance of the war rather than allow the degrading institution of slavery to continue. Well, now, let us have no more of the old talk about this not being a war to put down slavery. Everybody now admits, that whatever the issue of this struggle may be, slavery will be abolished by it, and the slaves will be emancipated.

Now, with regard to the issue itself. I told you here two years ago, that I did not believe I should ever live to see two independent States on the Continent of North America. I have repeated it since, and I come to confirm that opinion, but with far more emphasis than I ever expressed before. I do not believe that that country will, in our day, ever be separated, for I consider the geographical difficulties in the way of a separation to be absolutely insuperable. For instance, take the case of the Mississippi River. There are 20,000 miles of navigable waters through that great western region that fall into the Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the Mississippi. In order that the United States might have the mouth of that river in their own keeping,—that they might, so to say, have the key of their own door in their own pocket,—they purchased, with the money of the whole Union, from the first Napoleon, the State of Louisiana for three millions sterling. And now, some two or three hundred thousand who have squatted there—some French, some Spanish, some Irish, some English, some Americans—have taken it into their heads that they will carry off this State of Louisiana, and put the mouth of that great river and the outlet of all these vast tributaries into the hands of a foreign State. I just now illustrated this question by a reference to Essex and Kent, and I say it would be far easier for Essex and Kent to carry off the mouth of the Thames and to set up an East Anglia, than it will be for Louisiana to carry off the mouth of the Mississippi and set itself up as an independent State, and for this reason:—in the case of the Thames there may be a population at some future time, perhaps, of ten millions of people interested in that question in the valley of the Thames, and there will be a few hundred miles of navigable waters; in the case of the Mississippi River, there will be two hundred millions of people, the richest and most prosperous in the world—no doubt of that—living in that Mississippi valley; and therefore it makes it ten times impossible, if the word may be used, that they should ever allow the mouth of the Mississippi River to be blocked. And besides, they can prevent it almost with no expense; a few gunboats patrolling in the Mississippi will keep absolute possession of it; and if they could not in any other way capture Louisiana, why, they might cut the dykes—as the Dutch did against their enemies the Spaniards—above New Orleans, and drown the whole State of Louisiana.

Now, I am speaking merely of motives and of forces; I am not speaking my own opinion, not uttering my own wishes in the matter—I am only speaking of what you have to look to when you are [491] estimating the probable future of this struggle. If you think that Mr. Jefferson Davis and his Southern Confederacy would like to have a slave empire merely confined to the cotton States—that he should not be allowed to extend his government across the Mississippi into Texas—why, he would not thank you for anything of the kind. What they are fighting for is to be allowed to carry their slaves not only across the Mississippi into Texas, but into new regions beyond it. And, therefore, when you tell them that they shall not have the Mississippi River, it is giving up the whole question on which their whole cause depends. I say that the chief difficulty, if it had been looked at by our ruling class, by many of

those who write in the newspapers, lies in geographical causes, which these writers ought to have considered, for if they had done so they would not have arrived at the conclusion they have as to the success of the Southern cause.

I have spoken of the newspapers. There is a newspaper in London, which, I suppose, is read by almost everybody, and I have marvelled at the ignorance it has displayed on this question. In one leading article, a river of 580 miles internal navigation, to which the largest river in this country is a mere brook or rivulet, was made to run uphill a great number of miles into another river, and then these two rivers united, the waters of which are never blended at all, were made to flow into a third river, into which neither of them pours a drop of water. Now, I think there is a real danger in this ignorance of what I must call for want of a better term the ruling class of this country—in this total ignorance of everything relating to America. These people may get you into a difficulty from their ignorance, which it may cost you much of your national honour to escape from. If I were rich, I really think I would endow a professor's chair at Oxford and Cambridge for teaching modern American geography and modern American history. I will undertake to say—and I speak it advisedly—I will take any undergraduate now at Oxford and Cambridge—there is a map of the United States there—and I will ask this young gentleman to walk up to that map and put his finger upon the city of Chicago, and I will undertake to say that he will not go within a thousand miles of it. And yet Chicago is a city of 150,000 inhabitants, from which from one to two millions of our people are annually fed. These young gentlemen, I allow, know all about the geography of ancient Greece and Egypt.

Now, I shall be pelted with a heap of Greek and Latin quotations for what I am going to say. But I think I have said it before; therefore I think all the severe things they can say to me they have said. When I was at Athens, I sallied out one summer morning to see the far-famed river, the Ilyssus, and, after walking for some hundred yards up what appeared to be the bed of a winter torrent, I came up to a number of Athenian laundresses, and I found they had dammed up this far-famed classic river, and that they were using every drop of water for their linen and such sanitary purposes. I say, why should not the young gentlemen who are taught all about the geography of the Ilyssus know something about the geography of the Mississippi, the Ohio, and the Missouri? There has been of late a good deal of talk about the advantages or disadvantages of classical education. I am a great advocate of culture of every kind; and I say, where you can find men who, in addition to profound classical learning, like Professor Goldwin Smith, or Professor Rogers, of Oxford, have a vast knowledge of modern affairs, and who, as well as scholars, are at the same time thinkers,—these are men I acknowledge to have a vast superiority over me, and I bow to those men with reverence for those superior advantages. But to bring young men from college with no knowledge of the country where the great drama of modern political and national life is being worked out—who are totally ignorant of countries like America, but who, for good or for evil, are exercising [492] and will exercise more influence in this country than any other persons,—to take young men, destitute of knowledge about countries like that—their geography, their modern history, their population, and their resources, and to place them in responsible positions in the Government of this country—I say it is imperilling your best interests, and every earnest remonstrance that can be made against such a state of education ought to be made by every public man who values the future welfare of his country.

You all know my opinion with regard to the future of America. I want nothing done to enforce my opinions. I should never even have said so much as I have upon American affairs, if there had not been so much said upon the other side. I wanted to trim the scales, to prevent there being an undue preponderance in favour of the other side. I wanted no intervention, I wanted nothing but neutrality: but if we are to have perfect neutrality on this subject, for Heaven's sake let us try also to have a little temper in the discussion of those questions for

which we are, happily, not at all responsible. Take up the newspapers and see them assailing each other, or public men, because they have no particular views on foreign questions. It is sheer childishness, when you come to consider that we are not responsible for the facts.

If any one attacks me for my political opinions on home questions, I recognise his perfect right to do it; the more the better. Every public man's language, and his acts, and policy should be well sifted; but to quarrel with each other about a country over which we can exercise no influence whatever, seems to me the most absurd thing in the world. If we were a nation that never went to war, then as a nation we might with justice, perhaps, complain that America is shedding so much blood; but I am mute, I am silenced when I recollect that I have been protesting against the wars of England ever since I came into public life—war in India, China, Russia, New Zealand, Japan, and all over the world—but I never could succeed in this country in preventing bloodshed. We have a fresh war every year, upon an average, with some country or other, and therefore I am mute. I could not say to America, 'Why do you carry on this civil war?' Should I not be subject to the reply, 'Take the beam out of your own eye before you take the mote out of ours'? I should have some ground for using that language as compared with some other people; but I find those who have been the advocates of all these wars against which I have been protesting are now turning up the whites of their eyes, and exclaiming for all the world as if they had been Quakers from their birth.

Now, gentlemen, I have done with foreign policy, and I have only spoken so much to-night upon these subjects in violation of my usual rule, because I say that last session was an exceptional one; and if I have spoken upon the subject of non-intervention, it is because I wish to have less to say about it in future, and that we may be able to talk upon home affairs without this eternal meddling abroad to distract our attention and prevent our doing anything for our own people. I am happy to give you, from a very orthodox source, what I consider to be very sound doctrine in few words with regard to our foreign policy. The *Edinburgh Review* of last month thus defines the views of foreign policy which have now been accepted by Parliament, and the majority of the nation, as to our relations with the Continental Powers of Europe, and here are the words of the orthodox Whig reviewer. It is not my language. It was my language some years ago, but I am very glad to disappear altogether now, and place before you the much more influential words of the Edinburgh reviewer:—

'That this country should enter into no official discussion and no public engagements on affairs remotely concerning herself; that she will reserve her power and influence for British purposes; that she will not pronounce an opinion unless she is resolved to support it by action; and that she will throw on other States the whole [493] responsibility of acts affecting themselves more directly than they affect us.'

Now, that is unquestionably a wise and sound doctrine. The only wonder is that ever anybody should have had any opposite opinions to that, and that they should have now to pronounce it for the first time. That is taking the pledge, you know, after the headache in the House of Commons. I must say I am very glad indeed also to have the opportunity of quoting the same orthodox publication on another most important question. The Reviewer speaks of the measures that still require to be carried out in England in our domestic policy, for which course we shall have time, when we give up meddling with everybody's affairs on the face of the earth. Now, here are the Reviewer's own words in speaking of the domestic reforms that await our attention:—

'At home, we have still to apply to land and to labour that freedom which has worked such marvels in the case of capital and commerce.'



Bear in mind, that is not my language about free trade in land. But I say 'Amen' to it. If I were five-and-twenty or thirty, instead of, unhappily, twice that number of years, I would take Adam Smith in hand—I would not go beyond him, I would have no politics in it—I would take Adam Smith in hand, and I would have a League for free trade in Land just as we had a League for free trade in Corn. You will find just the same authority in Adam Smith for the one as for the other; and if it were only taken up as it must be taken up to succeed, not as a political, revolutionary, Radical, Chartist notion, but taken up on politico-economic grounds, the agitation would be certain to succeed; and if you can apply free trade to land and to labour too—that is, by getting rid of those abominable restrictions in your parish settlements, and the like—then, I say, the men who do that will have done for England probably more than we have been able to do by making free trade in corn.

Now, all that has to be done. Really, the chief embarrassment one has in meeting one's constituents once a year to talk over so many questions is that you cannot logically follow out any subject but that you are obliged to break off from one to another. As our eloquent friend, unhappily, cannot succeed me, you will excuse me if I take up ten minutes more of your time than I should otherwise have done. Besides the question of Reform in Parliament, which lies at the bottom of most things, there is something for next year which must be done, in the way of our finances; and it will be done very much as a corollary, as already showing the fruits that may be reaped from the adoption of our new foreign policy. You must needs see this reform, if you will only avow the principle that you are not going to fight for anything but your interests and honour—and by honour I mean, not the honour of the barrack-room—for I maintain that the honour of this great Christian country need never, with a wise Government, be dissociated from its interest. But if you will only admit that you will never fight for anything but a direct question of your own honour and interest, I defy you to keep up your present establishment, and spend twenty-five and odd millions a year on your army and navy. There is no pretence for that; and already I see from authoritative quarters that there is to be a reduction next year. I am glad of it; and I am glad of it very much indeed for the sake of Mr. Gladstone, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Gladstone is the best Chancellor of the Exchequer England ever had,—and I say that, knowing that he has had amongst his predecessors William Pitt. But I am going to say that Mr. Gladstone has been the most extravagant Chancellor of the Exchequer we have ever had. He has been a master in the adjustment of the burdens of the country; that is, he found the weight placed upon the animal in such a way as rendered it the most difficult to carry his burden. It was tied round his knees, it was fastened to his tail, it was hung over his eyes, it blinded [494] him, and impeded him, and lamed him at every step. Now, Mr. Gladstone took the burdens off these limbs, and he placed them most ingeniously over the softest possible pad upon the animal's shoulders. But the beast is carrying the burden still, and carrying a great deal more than it did before all this beautiful process was commenced. We never before had a Government that extracted from the people ten millions of income in a time of peace. People exclaim against the American expenditure. A friend of mine wrote to me the other day, and told me that the Americans were spending two millions of dollars a day; what did I think of it? Well, I said—I think it was rather more, but I took him at his own word—if you take into account the depreciation of the American currency, and at the present rate of exchange, the dollar there being worth 20*d.*, or 2*s.* here, that was as near as I could possibly calculate the amount Mr. Gladstone in a time of peace was drawing from this country. And, mind you, as long as the English people are given up to that comfortable complacency, that they can go abroad only to find out objects of pity, they will always be persuaded that they are very clever people, and are doing a great deal better than other folks. Why have the Americans astonished everybody? Why have they laughed to scorn the predictions of all your City magnates, all your authorities upon finance, who told them that they could not go on for six months in their war without coming to Europe for a loan? How is it, then, the Americans have so deceived and disappointed the whole of Europe? I'll tell you why. Because the Americans never spent—never allowed their

Government to incur a war expenditure in time of peace. That is the whole secret. They were spending from fifteen to seventeen millions sterling per annum for their Government, for a population about our own size, at the time the war broke out; and the saving and accumulation that they were thus making has enabled them to go through this terrific strain. You just take only ten millions of savings for forty years; add ten millions every year to it for compound interest, and at the end you will see what a fabulous amount it will come to. You will hardly be able to calculate the amount. That is just what the Americans were doing. What are you doing here? You are committed to a war expenditure in time of peace, and your people are discontented with the extravagant expenditure, and the consequence is, if you were to go into a war, you would certainly find yourselves comparatively crippled by your previous expenditure.

I hope, therefore, that Mr. Gladstone will be enabled, for the next session, to make a large reduction in the actual expenditure. I do not want any more of this delusion about the reduction or diminution of particular taxes. I want to look at the whole amount of revenue the Government is getting from us. For instance, here is a very customary piece of deception: we are told how many Customs and Excise duties have been abolished, and how many have been reduced, during the last twenty years. Yes; but I look at the whole amount now paid, and I find that, this year, it will be about forty millions sterling more than ever we used to pay before these reductions began. Now, I say, the proper way to look at that is to see how the whole amount of the income from the taxpayer is reduced; and I hope that this next session will not pass without Mr. Gladstone doing justice to himself; because you must bear in mind that Mr. Gladstone has been telling us repeatedly that he considers the expenditure excessive. It is sailing very near the wind indeed for any Minister to attempt to justify himself in saying, 'I am spending more money than I think I ought to spend; and do you, the people of England, come and try to prevent it.' But I am constrained to say that Mr. Gladstone, by his immense services in other directions, is the very man who enables the Government to get this money. I am perfectly ready to admit that Mr. Gladstone has, by his skill in dealing [495] with finance, justified himself, up to this time, in remaining in the Cabinet and doing what he has done. But I am sure he will perceive that he has nearly finished his career of manipulating the sources of our taxation. He has removed every protective duty; he has reduced most of the other duties. And though I am by no means prepared to say that other Chancellors of the Exchequer may not do a great deal more in giving us direct instead of indirect taxation, yet, as regards the question of protection, Mr. Gladstone has finished his work; and therefore any further services he must render us must be in the reduction of expenditure—in taxing us less. He must remember, too, what we have heard from the other side. Lord Stanley intimated, you know, not long ago, that he could not see his way to sixty millions of expenditure. I think, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer sees his opponent on the other side—the most distinguished member of the Opposition—announcing sixty millions, if I were Mr. Gladstone I should hurry back to that amount as fast as I could, for fear of being tripped up by the other side, and I would recommend him to take advice from that quarter. He has declared the present expenditure to be profligate—I think 'profligate expenditure' is the term he used—and I know Mr. Disraeli talked of bloated armaments; so that we have the whole thing condemned all round. Mr. Gladstone makes an appeal to the British public. I do not know how the British public can interfere in the arrangement of his Budget in the House of Commons; but, as there is to be a general election next year, I advise him to appeal to the British public at the general election on the question of taxation as the way to give them a chance of expressing their opinion, and I am very much inclined to think that is the only way the British public can interfere in the matter.

But I consider the House of Commons to be a great deal more extravagant than the Government. That is my experience. I once stated it in the House. Since I have been in the House, we have voted upwards of five hundred millions sterling for the army and navy

services; and I never saw one item of a single shilling reduced in all that time; though I have constantly known items increased. Last session the Government proposed to save 200,000*l.* by not calling out the yeomanry; but the country gentlemen went up, and compelled them to give the money. The House of Commons is more extravagant than the Government, and is always urging them to expenditure. But if Mr. Gladstone will invite the British public to speak in the only way in which they can exercise their voices, at the general election, I am quite sure they will support him, and not support any other Government that attempts to oppose him in the reduction of expenditure. What is the obvious remedy for this state of the House of Commons? We all know that the House of Commons wants an infusion of the popular element. I see before me middle-class men, and I see beyond the operatives. Now, you are told, and some of you persuade yourselves, that the middle-class govern the House of Commons. It is a great delusion. The middle class element is very small in the House of Commons, and it is getting less and less. We are becoming more and more a rich man's club. That is just it. What you want is a greater infusion of the popular element, and you cannot have that unless you have an enlargement of the political rights of the people. And I would advise the middle class not to allow this to be dealt with as a working man's question. The middle class themselves are interested in having a reform of Parliament, in order that their influence should be felt there, for it is not much felt there now, I assure you; we are a very small ingredient. The world is not standing still, and you must not stand still. A friend of mine the other day said to me, 'I will lay a wager that the blacks in America have votes before the English working-man.' Well, now, I should not like to see that—I don't think that that would be becoming in this country, [496] which has boasted of itself as being in the van of free nations. But of this I am quite sure—and I say it to the middle class here—you cannot with safety exclude the great mass of the working people from a participation in the suffrage; for, recollect, this question never before got into the position it is in now. You have had several successive Governments in their Queen's Speeches recommending a reform of Parliament with the view of increasing the number of votes in this country. But nothing is done, and the mass of the people feel that they are trifled with. There is nothing that breeds such a resentment in the great mass of the people—all history shows it—as a sense of having been betrayed. You will find in all history that the mass of the people are magnanimous and forgiving for everything else but the conviction—sometimes erroneous—of having been betrayed.

The working classes are very significantly silent upon the subject of the suffrage. That is something new; and if they did not move at all, I should say that that was an additional reason to the middle class why they ought to move in the matter; because times and circumstances do come—they always turn up once in twenty or thirty years—when there must be an appeal to the whole mass of the community; when the power of the nation really falls into the hands of the mass of the people, as it always is virtually in their hands, whenever they choose to exercise it. Now, it is not desirable that you should leave the mass of the people with a grievance not a grievance of their own creating, a grievance for which they can convict you upon your own declarations. It is your Government, the middle class, it is your Sovereign, speaking through her Prime Minister, who dictate the public policy; it is they who have told the working people that they ought to have the vote, and who have trifled with them for ten or fifteen years, while nothing is done. I say there is danger in it; and the shape which the controversy is taking is, to my mind, very undesirable; it now takes the broad aspect of a question whether the working classes as a whole should be enfranchised, or whether they should not. But it never presented itself in that way before, because we all know that in olden times, in the times of the guilds, the working classes were represented in many forms. You had boroughs, with scot and lot suffrage; you had in the City of London, for instance, guilds where every man belonging to a certain business had a right to exercise his franchise as a freeman. And do you suppose, now, it is possible that, in an age when the principles of political economy have elevated the working class above the place they ever

filled before, and when that elevation is constantly increased by discoveries and the inventions of machinery, that you can permanently exclude the whole mass of the working people from the franchise? You say you must not give them the whole power. Well, they answer, 'You give us none.' And I say it is the interest and duty of the ruling class of this country, and of the middle class who are supposed to have power, that it is their interest as soon as possible to solve that question, and that there is danger in allowing it to go on unsolved.

You know, gentlemen, I never perorate; when I have done I leave off, and sit down. On this occasion I most cordially thank you. When I came into this room I confess I felt daunted, for I did not believe I could have talked so as to be heard by this whole assembly; but your kindness and your exceeding indulgence has made the task pleasant to me, and I thank you for the manner in which you have received and listened to me.

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## INDIA.

[497]

### INDIA. HOUSE OF COMMONS, JUNE 27, 1853. [↪](#)

[On June 3, 1853, Sir Charles Wood introduced his India Bill. Lord Stanley moved an Amendment, the object of which was to delay the measure, but this Amendment was rejected by 182 votes: 322 to 140 Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright were in the minority.]

I DO not know whether I should have deemed it necessary to address the House myself but for the circumstance of my having served upon the Committee appointed to inquire into the Government of our Indian territories; but, before troubling the House with the few remarks which I feel bound to make, I should wish to offer an observation on the question which has just been asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Hindley). With regard to the conduct of that Committee, allusion had been made to its proceedings during the last Parliament, and it is allowable to speak of that Parliament as one would speak of the Long Parliament, without offence to the House, since it has passed away and is now matter of history. Now, I feel bound to say, that during that Parliament the conduct of that Committee was not such as to entitle it to be cited as an authority, or to inspire any very great degree of confidence in its action.

That Committee was appointed to inquire into the important question of the Government of India, and it was divided into eight heads. The first was the question as to the machinery by which the Government of India was carried on. Upon that head the Committee examined eighteen witnesses, every one of whom had been officially in the employment of the Court of Directors or of the Board of Control, or had been in some manner connected with one or other of those services; and, after the examination of those persons, the Committee came to a kind of qualified Resolution approving the conduct of the Government of India. In my opinion, at a future period, if some dusky agitator on the banks of the Ganges should want to find a grievance in the conduct of the British Legislature towards the Hindoo population, he would cite the fact which I have just mentioned, and he would find it potent to raise the indignation of the population, for a more unfair proceeding was never perpetrated by any tribunal calling itself impartial. I will mention, as requested by the hon. Member for Montrose (Mr. Hume), that in that Committee there were two Members who voted against that Resolution.

But, before the Committee in the present Parliament has proceeded to the extent of half their inquiry, it is announced to the House that the Government measure on the subject is prepared. Now, I will confess that from the time that this announcement was made, I have myself never attended that Committee, [498] for although I always try, when serving upon any Committee, to be as assiduous as any member of it, yet I consider that from the moment the Government has taken up this question it has passed from the hands of the Committee. I see no good that we can do in collecting facts and information for the Government of India, seeing that they are generally obtained from persons who come from India, or who have been employed there, and who are more accessible to the Indian authorities. It is my opinion that the whole case is prejudged, and that a verdict has been brought in without going through the preliminaries of a trial; and I must decline, except under the express order of this House, to attend that Committee for the future, or in any way to sanction such a course of proceeding.

The question at issue now is—whether the subject shall be postponed; and, if it be decided that such is to be the course pursued, I will willingly return to my duties in the Committee, and give my constant attention to the inquiry, which should, I must say, be one of considerable importance in deciding the question. The House is now called upon to decide whether the present Bill shall pass, or whether the subject shall be postponed for two years, leaving the Government of India, in the interim, just as it is at present. I wish to state now, once for all, that I do not consider it a party question. The hon. Member for North Staffordshire (Mr. Adderley) complains that I and my friends have taken too material a view of the question, as affecting the interests of Lancashire and the other manufacturing districts. Now, if that were true, it cannot be said that we have taken up the question in a party spirit; but, as far as I am acquainted with the feelings of the people of Lancashire and Yorkshire, I believe they are generally in favour of postponement.

In my opinion, the subject is one which calls for further inquiry, more particularly as regards the Home Government of India. The problem to solve is, whether a single or a double government would be most advantageous; and, in considering that point, I am met by this difficulty—that I cannot see that the present form of government is a double government at all. I have endeavoured to find out what are the powers of the East India Directory, which entitle them to be called a Government, and I have looked through the Charter Act to see what controlling power is bestowed upon them, and, with the exception of the disposal of the patronage, there is no power granted to them by Act of Parliament. The Act leaves the whole controlling power to the Board of Commissioners for managing the affairs of India. I, therefore, look upon the Court of Directors, not as a Government, but as nothing besides a screen, behind which the real Government is hid. It is because I wish to get rid of that screen, and that the real Government may stand before the House and the world in its proper character, and take upon its shoulders the responsibility of the misgovernment of India—if there be any—that I want to have this matter simplified, and to do away with the double government, that is, to bring into office the real Government of India.

There has been much misapprehension with regard to this double government. Till the last year or two, I do not believe that anybody understood it at all. Lord Hardinge spoke of it as a mystery, and said it was looked upon as a mystery in India; and he mentioned the instance of an officer of rank in India, who had written an indignant letter to the President of the Board of Control in reference to a communication of the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, expressing his amazement at the conduct of that Committee; and he was only restrained from sending it by Lord Hardinge telling him that the Secret Committee of the Board of Directors was the President of the Board of Control himself. Many persons whose opinions on the affairs of India are most authoritative, in reality do not know what the double government really is. Mr. Marshman, the conductor of the *Friend of India*, a strong advocate of ‘things as they are,’ when fairly [499] probed and pushed on the subject, shows that he, who was instructing them all, and sending pamphlets to all the Members of the Legislature, has very little fundamental knowledge of what this Government is. Part of the evidence given by this gentleman is so illustrative of this, that I hope the House will permit me to read an extract:—

‘In seeking to acquaint yourself with the form of Government for India, you would resort exclusively to the Act of Parliament under which the present Government of India is constituted?—Yes.

‘Do you find that by this Act of Parliament any discretionary powers are vested in the Court of Directors, except with reference to the disposal of the patronage?—I should think they are responsible to the Board of Control.

'Admitting that the Court of Directors have no uncontrolled power in the Government of India, how can you make them responsible either to Parliament or to the people of India?—It was the intention of the Act to confer certain powers upon them, and to give a control over the exercise of those powers to the Board of Control.

'You admit that, unless a party has power entrusted to it, it cannot be responsible for the exercise of its power?—No; I can, therefore, only say that they are responsible for the exercise of all the powers given to them in that Act.

'You say still that this Act was intended to vest a certain power in the East India Company?—There must have been some object in view in creating the present Government of the East India Company.

'You say you believe that the intention of Parliament was to give certain powers to the East India Company; having admitted that no such powers exist, except in the disposal of patronage, you would admit that, if Parliament had such an object, it has failed to accomplish it?—That very much depends upon the working of the system. Although Parliament may have exempted nothing from the control of the Board of Control, yet it is certain that the Court of Directors were intended to be a body employed in the administration of the affairs of India.

'To the extent of the disposal of patronage?—Not merely to the extent of the disposal of patronage, because the patronage of the Court of Directors consists only in appointment to service, and not in appointment to office. The great patronage lies in the hands of the Governor-General and the Governors of the various Presidencies. All the patronage which the Court has to dispose of is the appointment to writerships and cadetships.

'Will you explain to the Committee what power the Court of Directors have under this Charter Act beyond the disposal of patronage?—I cannot exactly speak to that, because I have not seen the interior working of the system of either the Court of Directors or the Board of Control.

'I only wish for an answer founded upon this Act of Parliament for the government of India?—All I can say is, if this Act of Parliament was intended to give them no power whatever except the disposal of patronage, it could not be considered an Act for vesting the administration of affairs in the hands of the East India Company.'

This great oracle of the East India Company himself admits that, if there is no power vested in the Court of Directors but that of the patronage, there is really no government vested in them at all. Now, all this mystery is productive of the greatest evils. You have been simplifying the procedure, and getting rid of fictitious forms, in your own Courts of Law recently. You have banished John Doe and Richard Roe from your Courts; but here you still have John Doe and Richard Roe in the Government of India. Then what is the advantage of such a system? Is it for the benefit either of the people of England or of India? On this subject I would refer to the evidence of a gentleman, the most remarkable for ability among all the able men who have been brought before the Committee by the Court of Directors, who has filled very high offices in India—I mean Mr. Halliday. This gentleman—speaking in the face of the Court of Directors—in the very presence of his employers and masters—having stated that the Charter, giving a twenty years' lease to the East India Company, was considered by the natives of India as farming them out, was subjected, on account of the use of [500] this word 'farming,' to a great deal of cross-examination:—

'You used the expression "farming the Government;" do you believe the people of India think the Government of India is farmed to the Company in the same sense that the taxes were farmed at the period you allude to?—They use precisely the same word in speaking of the renewal of the Charter. They will talk with you as to the probability of the "jarch" or "farm" being renewed; and, as far as I know, they have no other term to express it.

'Is not that merely through the infirmity of their language; have they any word which signifies "delegation"?—They may have; I speak of the fact, and their use of the term carries with it a corresponding idea.

'How would you translate "delegation" into Hindostanee; might not "jarch" be a fair translation of that term?—It would rather signify "farm" or "lease."

'You said that, in fact, the Government was that of the Crown, and that the natives, as they become more enlightened, will more and more understand it to be so?—It is the case.

'As they become more and more enlightened, will not the mischief which you consider arises from their notion of a farm disappear of itself?—It may be in that sense, no doubt, and does; and yet there arises a proportionate weakness to the Government from their seeing that the body held up as their apparent governors are not their real governors. Without wishing to speak irreverently, it has somewhat the appearance of a sham.'

Mr. Halliday, in my opinion, disposed of the whole question as regarded the interests of India, and of this country also, if we wish to govern India cheaply and beneficially. He said,

—

'If you were to change the system, and to govern India in the name of the Crown, you would immensely add to the reverence which the people of India would have for your Government, and increase the stability of your Empire in the Eastern world.'

Mr. Marshman himself, though he did not speak of carrying on the Government of India under the Crown, distinctly and repeatedly laid it down that the Government of India should be carried on in one office; that the President of the Board of Control, or whoever was the responsible Minister of India, should sit in the same room with those who constitute the Council, (now the Court of Directors in Leadenhall-street,) and should communicate with them orally, instead of by correspondence, as at present.

But what are the evils of this delusive form of Government? The first and greatest of all is this, that public opinion is diverted from the subject; that enlightened public opinion is not brought to bear on Indian questions, which would be the case if India were governed in the name of the Crown, in just the same way as the Colonies have been. It might be answered, that if India were governed as the Colonies have been, it would be governed badly; but if any good has arisen from our government of the Colonies, it has come from enlightened public opinion, emanating from this country, and chiefly brought to bear on our Colonial Minister in this House. If there be any hope for the amelioration of India, it must come from the same source; and I want the Indian Government to have such a tangible, visible form, that the public opinion of this country may be able to reach it, and that there may be no mask or screen before it as now. With an enlightened public opinion brought to bear more directly on the affairs of India, there will be a better chance of avoiding that source of all fiscal embarrassment, constant wars, and constant annexation of territory. In other parts of the world, no Minister of the Crown would take credit for offering to annex territory anywhere. On the west coast of Africa, it might not be less profitable to extend our territory than in Burmah; yet a Resolution of a Committee of this House, many years ago, forbade the extension of our territories in tropical countries. When an adventurous gentleman, Sir James Brooke, went out and took possession of some territory on the coast of Borneo, the enlightened Government of Sir Robert Peel and his colleagues [501] resolutely resisted all attempts to induce them to occupy any territory there. Recently, when it was announced in this House that orders had been given to the admiral on that station that on no account should any fresh territory be acquired, the announcement was received with loud cheering. We had arrived at a point when public opinion in this House and the country would prevent any such



thing; and I believe the leading statesmen on both sides would resolutely set themselves against any extension of our territory in tropical countries.

Then how is it that this goes on constantly in India, to the loss and dilapidation of its finances? With a declaration in the journals of this House, and in an Act of Parliament never repealed, that the honour and interest of this country were concerned in not extending its territory in the East, these continual annexations still go on in India. Why do these things happen? It is because at the present time all the authority in these matters is left virtually in the hands of the Governor-General of India. I say virtually, because I believe they rest, in point of law, with the President of the Board of Control. Nothing can be more conclusive than the distinctness of the avowal of Lord Broughton, that he was responsible for the war in Affghanistan; and the declaration of Lord Ellenborough, that when he was President of that Board, he knew that he governed India. I am, therefore, astonished, when I hear the right hon. Gentleman opposite (Mr. Herries) state, that neither he nor his predecessors in office were responsible for the wars in India, but that the Governor-General is responsible for them.

When there exist such differences of opinion on such an important question—a question which involves not only the fate of India but of England—is it not high time to come to some definite understanding on the subject? Is it not right, when such differences of opinion exist between men of the highest authority, that there should be a little delay, in order that we may all come to an understanding on so vital a point? Practically, I believe that these things are carried on in India, where the Governor-General is surrounded by an atmosphere of a warlike tendency—where the mere rumour of war is received with favour by all who constitute public opinion in that country. Even Lord Dalhousie himself has so far given in to this spirit as to make a declaration, that—

'In the exercise of a wise and sound policy, the British Government is bound not to put aside such rightful opportunities of acquiring territory or revenue as may from time to time present themselves.'

Yet this is said in the teeth of an Act of Parliament which declares that it is contrary to sound policy to annex any more territory to our dominions in the East. And this declaration of Lord Dalhousie came out before the declaration of the President of the United States, General Pierce, who made a qualified statement that the United States would annex territory by every just and lawful means. We can be very censorious when we hear of such a declaration being made by the President of another State, but we do not attach the same importance to what is said by Lord Dalhousie. How is this? If Lord Dalhousie had been in any responsible position in this House, or had stood in the character of a Colonial Minister, he could have been asked for an explanation, and might have been reminded that such declarations are not in accordance with the views and interests of the nation. It is, however, my firm belief, that nothing will awaken the people of this country to a proper sense of their responsibility and peril in the East, but a due appreciation of the state and prospects of the revenue of that country. There can be no doubt that in India the extension of our territories is popular among the servants of the Company. In one of the most influential organs of the Indian Government it is stated,—

'Every one out of England is now ready to acknowledge that the whole of Asia, from the Indus to the Sea of Ochotzk, is [502] destined to become the patrimony of that race which the Normans thought, six centuries ago, they had finally crushed, but which now stands at the head of European civilisation. We are placed, it is said, by the mysterious but unmistakable designs of Providence, in command of Asia; and the people of England must not lay the flattering unction to their souls, that they can escape from the responsibility of this lofty and important position, by simply denouncing the means by which England has attained it.'

When asked if Calcutta was a good central station for the metropolis of India, Mr. Marshman, the proprietor of the above newspaper, stated to the Committee that—

'It may not be at present, but it will be a good central station when we extend our dominion eastward.'

This shows the projects which the most influential men in India have in view.

I will now refer to the Secret Committee of the India House. I should like to have the cross-examination of every Member of that House, and to ask them what they do know of this Secret Committee. It is composed of three gentlemen from the Board of Directors, to whom all the communications from the Board of Control are made. It is in the power of the President of the Board of Control to sit down and write an order to annex China, and send that order to these three Gentlemen, who form what is called the Secret Committee at the India House; and they are obliged to send the order to India, for prosecution by the Governor-General. They may altogether disapprove of the order, but nevertheless they are compelled to send it to India. Mr. Melvill, Secretary to the East India Company, stated, that in all cases of declaration of war, it is within the power of the Board of Control to act through the Secret Committee, without the concurrence of the Court of Directors—that orders may be sent out by the President of the Board, through the Secret Committee, to annex the Burman or Chinese Empire to India, without the English people knowing anything about the order. The Court of Directors cannot know it. On the question being asked,—

'How are the English people to know it, if the Court of Directors do not know it?' his reply was—"Till it comes back from India, till it is a *fait accompli*, or the result of the orders is ascertained, they cannot know it.'

Now, what is the practical effect of this state of things? The Court of Directors are often attacked for not making railways and works of irrigation; and I think they deserve the charges brought against them, so long as they submit to the humiliation of their present condition. How can they be expected to make railways and other public works, when they cannot prevent the President of the Board of Control, or the Governor-General, at any time wasting the substance in war which should be applied to these improvements? Suppose that some of the twenty-four Directors should sit down, having 4,000,000*l.* surplus, which the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Mangles) spoke of, and a surplus of 2,000,000*l.* a year besides, for the purpose of devising plans of railways, and other works for India? Suppose that they have the maps and plans before them, and that they have called in the assistance of such able engineers as Mr. Locke and Mr. Stephenson? At that very time a letter may come from the office of the President of the Board of Control requiring them to send out an order to Lord Dalhousie to fit out an expedition to Rangoon for the conquest of Burmah; and when that is done, then adieu to the railways and the fabulous 4,000,000*l.* which the hon. Member for Guildford speaks of. But the most ridiculous part of the matter is, that the gentlemen of the Secret Committee, looking over these surveys, plans, and maps, and knowing the orders sent from the Board of Control, must be perfectly aware that all this is a mere waste of time; and yet they dare not tell their own colleagues, and they must remain in complete ignorance till they learn how the matter stands, by the arrival of the [503] Indian mail. Under such circumstances, they do not deserve the name of a Government.

And what can be the motive for inducing these twenty-four gentlemen to endure being taunted with the evils of a system under which they are held to be responsible, and yet are not trusted with power? The reward which they receive for submitting to this humiliation is the patronage of India, and this is another evil arising from the system of double government. Now, it is one of the evils of this system, that the patronage is in a great many instances given to Europeans, where it ought to be given to natives. But as the Court of Directors are paid by

patronage and not by stipends, they, of course, dispose of that patronage to their friends in this country. I want to see a large number of natives brought into the employment of the Government. (Hear.) Yes; but the same thing was promised in 1833, and it was contemplated in the Act of Parliament, but it was never carried out, and it never will be, as long as the patronage is disposed of in its present form. But if we get rid of the double government, and make the Minister for India responsible for the government of India, then public opinion in this country will be brought to bear upon him, and he will be invited to distribute more of his patronage amongst the natives, because the people of this country will not endure that the vast patronage of India shall be in the hands of the Minister of the Crown for distributing amongst his political supporters here.

I have been particularly struck with the overwhelming evidence which is given as to the fitness of the natives of India for high offices and employments. Nothing comes out clearer before the Committee than this—that the natives are well fitted to hold the higher class of offices. It was stated that ninety-seven per cent. of the judicial cases were disposed of by them. But they are employed to do the humblest work, at low and insufficient salaries. I wish to see some of the offices, which are now filled by Europeans, at salaries from 2,000*l.* to 3,000*l.* a year, filled by natives at half that stipend, which will be as much to them as double the amount to the Europeans who receive it. All the great authorities in Indian matters, Munro, Metcalfe, Malcolm, and Elphinstone, advocate the distribution of patronage to the natives. I was greatly struck with the answer of Sir G. Clerk to a question on this point. He says, that the natives are perfectly competent to decide cases and settle differences. Mr. Halliday also gave evidence to the same effect. But the only way of ensuring the employment of natives in the higher offices is to take away the patronage from the Court of Directors.

I will now call the attention of the House to a point of considerable importance, which was strikingly illustrated by the facts attending the commencement of the Burmese war in which we are now engaged. It is another fact, which is a proof of the precipitancy with which the measure has been brought forward, and I believe it has not been noticed before in the course of the debate. I wish to refer to the state of the relations between the vessels of war in the Indian waters and the Government of India; and, in illustration of what I mean, I beg leave to state what has taken place on the breaking out of this war. In the month of July, 1851, a small British vessel arrived at Rangoon, the captain of which was charged with throwing a pilot overboard, and robbing him of 500 rupees. The case was brought before the Governor of Rangoon; and, after undergoing a great many hardships, the captain was mulcted in the amount of rupees. A month after this, another English vessel arrived, having on board two coolies from the Mauritius, who secreted themselves in the vessel when she left. On their arrival, they said that the captain had murdered one of the crew during the voyage. The captain was tried for this, and he was mulcted also. An application was made to the Governor-General for redress, and a demand was made on the Burmese [504] authorities to the amount of 1,900*l.* for money extorted, for demurrage of the vessels, and other injuries inflicted. The Governor-General ordered an investigation of the case, and he awarded 920*l.* as sufficient. At this time there was lying in the Hooghly a vessel of war commanded by Commodore Lambert, and the Governor-General thought that the presence of this vessel afforded a good opportunity for obtaining redress. The House should understand that there was no other case to be redressed than these two; that the parties in them were British subjects, and that the Governor of Rangoon did not adjudicate between Burmese subjects and British subjects. Commodore Lambert was furnished with very precise instructions indeed. He was first to make inquiry as to the validity of the original claim, and, if he found that it was well founded, he was to apply to the Governor of Rangoon for redress; and, in case of a refusal on his part, he was furnished with a letter from the Governor-General to the King of Ava, to be sent up by him to the capital; and he was then to proceed to the Persian Gulf, for which place he was under orders. He was told not to commit any act of hostility, if redress

was refused, till he had heard again from the Governor-General. These were very proper and precise instructions. On the arrival of the Commodore at Rangoon, he was met by boats filled with British subjects, who complained of the conduct of the Governor of Rangoon. If the House wishes for an amusing description of the British subjects of Rangoon, I would recommend them to read Lord Ellenborough's sketch of them in a speech which he delivered in the House of Lords. Rangoon is, it appears, the Alsatia of Asia, and is filled by all the abandoned characters whom the other parts of India are too hot to hold. Commodore Lambert received the complaints of all these people; and he sent off the letter to the King of Ava at once, which he was instructed to send only in case redress was refused; and he made no inquiry with respect to the original cause of the dispute, and the validity of the claims put forward. He also sent a letter from himself to the Prime Minister of the King of Ava, and demanded an answer in thirty-five days. The post took from ten to twelve days to go to Ava, and at the end of twenty-six days an answer came back from the King to the Governor-General, and to Commodore Lambert from the Prime Minister. It was announced that the Governor of Rangoon was dismissed, and that a new Governor was appointed, who would be prepared to look into the matter in dispute, and adjust it. Commodore Lambert sent off the King of Ava's letter to the Governor-General, with one from himself, stating that he had no doubt the King of Ava and his Government meant to deal fairly by them. Meantime, the new Governor of Rangoon came down in great state, and Commodore Lambert sent three officers on shore with a letter to him. The letter was sent at twelve o'clock in the day, and when they arrived at the house they were refused admittance, on the plea that the Governor was asleep. It was specifically stated that the officers were kept waiting a quarter of an hour in the sun. At the end of that quarter of an hour they returned to the ship, and, without waiting a minute longer, Commodore Lambert, notwithstanding that he had himself declared that he had no doubt justice would be done, ordered the port to be blockaded, having first directed the British residents to come on board. During the night, he seized the only vessel belonging to the King of Ava, which he towed out to sea.

This brings me to the point to which I am desirous of calling the attention of the House. Lord Dalhousie had no power to give orders to Commodore Lambert in that station; he could merely request and solicit the co-operation of the commanders of the Queen's forces, just as we might solicit the co-operation of a friendly foreign Power. See what the effect of this system is. If Commodore Lambert had been sent out with orders from the First Lord of the Admiralty, he would not have dared to [505] deviate from them in the slightest respect, much less to commence a war. Owing, however, to the anomalous system existing in India, Commodore Lambert felt at liberty to act on his own responsibility; and hence the Burmese war. Why has not this blot been hit upon by the framers of the present Bill? Can there be a stronger proof of the undue precipitancy with which the Government measure has been introduced than this—that it leaves the great defect which I have pointed out—a defect leading to results of immense gravity—uncured? The Government cannot plead ignorance; they cannot allege that their attention had not been directed to the matter. On the 25th of March, Lord Ellenborough referred to the subject in the House of Lords; and on that occasion Lord Broughton, who had just left office, stated that he had received an official communication from Lord Dalhousie relative to the anomalous character of the relations subsisting between the Governor-General and the Queen's commanders, and expressing a hope that the evil would be corrected in the forthcoming Charter Act. But there is nothing on this important subject in the present Bill; and is not this another ground for delay till we have obtained further information?

I have now to say a few words on the subject of the finances of India; and, in speaking on this subject, I cannot separate the finances of India from those of England. If the finances of the Indian Government receive any severe and irreparable check, will not the resources of England be called upon to meet the emergency, and to supply the deficiency? Three times

during the present century the Court of Directors has called on the House of Commons to enable them to get rid of the difficulties which pressed upon them. And do you suppose, that if such a case were to occur again, that England would refuse her aid? Why, the point of honour, if there were no other reason, would compel us to do so. Do you not hear it said, that your Indian Empire is concerned in keeping the Russians out of Constantinople, which is, by the way, 6,000 miles distant from Calcutta; and if we are raising outworks at a distance of 6,000 miles, let no man say that the finances of England are not concerned in the financial condition of India. The hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Mangles), referring to this subject on Friday night, spoke in a tone that rather surprised me; he taxed those who opposed the measure with a readiness to swallow anything, and twitted my hon. Friend (Mr. Bright) with saying that the debt of India, contracted since the last Charter Act, was 20,000,000*l.* The hon. Gentleman (Mr. Mangles) said it was only 9,000,000*l.* There has, he said, been 13,000,000*l.* increase of debt, but that there was 4,000,000*l.* of reserve in the Exchequer. I will quote the evidence of Mr. Melvill, who signed all the papers that have come before the Committee on this point. Mr. Melvill, being asked what the amount of the debt was, says:—'The amount of the debt is over 20,000,000*l.*' After this answer of Mr. Melvill, what becomes of the statement of the hon. Member for Guildford? But I must say that there is a very great difference in the opinions and statements of Indian authorities. The evidence of Mr. Prinsep was different from that of the hon. Gentleman (Mr. Mangles); that of the hon. Gentleman was different from the opinion of the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir J. Hogg); that of Mr. Melvill was different from all of them, and Mr. Melvill was sometimes of a different opinion from his own papers. I want to give you an opportunity of making up your minds on this subject, and of correcting the statements that come before you, for you are to judge of the financial results of your management of India.

The honourable Baronet the Member for Honiton stated the deficiency at 15,344,000*l.*; but he has not taken into the account, as he was bound to do, the sum realised by the commercial assets of the Company. Three or four years subsequently to the renewal of the Charter, in 1833, the Company's assets, consisting [506] of ships, stock, &c., were sold, and realised 12,661,000*l.* What people want in taking stock, is to know how much richer or poorer they are as compared with the last time of striking the balance; and yet these gentlemen kept out of view a sum of upwards of 12,000,000*l.*, which they have consumed, exhausted, and spent; and they say that there is only a deficiency of 15,344,000*l.*, when, in fact, there is a deficiency of 28,000,000*l.*, as compared with the former period. The hon. Member for Guildford shakes his head; but I appeal to the House whether those who are entrusted with the affairs of the East India Company, and who cannot take stock in a way to satisfy any Commissioner of Bankruptcy in the case of the humblest retail trader, are entitled to manage the vast concerns with which they are now entrusted? The amount, then, of defalcation, in the last nineteen or twenty years, has been 28,000,000*l.*; and, if things are to go on in the same way for the next twenty years, we should have a debt very nearly approaching 100,000,000*l.* But the worst part of the case is, that whereas in former instances, when this question has been discussed, there was something very bad indeed in the present and the past, yet the House was always told that there was something in the future to be appealed to which would compensate for all previous calamities; but now it is a remarkable circumstance, that, while there is nothing satisfactory in the past, still less is there anything consolatory in the prospects for the future. The hon. Member for Honiton has told the House, that, with respect to one essential item of Indian revenue—that of opium—he considers it in peril. That hon. Gentleman does not seem to see how he is changing his tone, and assuming two characters in the course of his speech, when dealing with the future and the past. The hon. Gentleman, while answering in an indignant tone the remarks of the hon. Member for Manchester (Mr. Bright), said, with a view of showing that the 'Constitution had worked well,' that—

'The gross revenue has increased nearly 9,000,000*l.*, yet many taxes have been entirely abolished and others reduced. Is it not astounding, when the Indian revenue has increased to such an amount, to hear declamation about the misery, the destitution, and the poverty of the country? The debt shows an increase of 15,344,000*l.*; but what is this compared with the increase which I have shown to have taken place in the revenue? The revenue has increased in an infinitely greater proportion, so that the increase of the debt is perfectly immaterial.'

Now, what would a person think of a steward who came before him with an account of the condition of his estate, and told him that the debt had increased so much, but, as the rents had increased so much more, it did not signify how the debt had increased? Yet the steward might have said that he had spent the money in improving the estate, in erecting buildings, and making roads. The Directors of the India Company, however, do not tell the House that they have increased irrigation, or the facilities of communication in India. All this money has been wasted, and is gone, and the people have no compensation for it. The hon. Member for Honiton argues, that it is of no consequence how the India Company got into debt, so long as they have increased the revenue thirty per cent. Is it, then, to such financiers that the fate of India and of England—for the interests of both are connected—is to be entrusted? But, after giving this glowing description, the hon. Member for Honiton took the other side, when he had another purpose to serve; and then he endeavoured to show that, after all, the state of the Indian finances was not such as to encourage Parliament to assume the possession of them on the part of the Crown. The hon. Gentleman said that—

'The cultivation of opium was, he believed, about to be legalised in China; and, if that were so, it would have a considerable effect upon the finances of India, and the House ought, under such circumstances, to hesitate before assigning India entirely to the Crown with its liabilities and its debts.'

[507] And then he turned round and said,—

'Will you, with the Burmese war at hand, and with the prospect of losing the opium revenue, take upon yourselves all the responsibilities involved in governing India?'

I am sorry to find the right hon. Gentleman (Sir C. Wood) falling into the same tone:—

'Seeing,' he said, 'into what a debt the East India Company has fallen, do you think it would be a pleasant thing for me to announce to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that he would have this deficit to provide for in his financial scheme?'

Was there ever anything more utterly indefensible than such a position as that? If we allow the right hon. Gentleman to have another lease, on the plea that the finances have been brought into such a state that it is not desirable for us to assume the management for ourselves, what inducement do we hold out to him to do better in future? I think this House must be very shallow indeed, and the country greatly wanting in that sagacity for which it has credit, if they allowed themselves to be deluded by such a plea as this. The hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Mangles), in the course of his remarks, took the hon. Member for Manchester (Mr. Bright) to task on the subject of the Punjaub and its expenses. The hon. Member stated, in the jaunty style to which I have alluded, that the acquisition of the Punjaub had not increased our expenses, because the troops there have been pushed forward from the frontier, and, therefore, constitute no addition to our expenditure. I will again quote on this subject from the East India Company's own authority, the statement made by Mr. Kaye in his 'History of the Administration of the East India Company.' Mr. Kaye said,—

The Punjab is not yet remunerative. Some little time must elapse before the revenues of the country can be made to exceed the cost of its productive and administrative establishments. The estimated amount of revenue for 1851-2 is 130 lacs of rupees, with about four lacs of additional receipts in the shape of proceeds of confiscated Sikh property and refunded charges. The total expenditure is estimated at about 120 lacs of rupees. This leaves only a surplus of fourteen lacs for the maintenance of the regular troops posted in the Punjab; and, as a large reduction of the army might have been, indeed would have been, effected but for the annexation of the Sikh States, it cannot be argued that the military expenditure is not fairly chargeable to the province. It is true, of course, that the possession of the Punjab has enabled us to withdraw a considerable body of troops from the line of country which constituted our old frontier, and that a deduction on this score of frontier defence must be made from the gross charges of the regular military establishments employed beyond the Sutlej. Still, the cost of the regular troops fairly chargeable to the Punjab absorbs the estimated surplus, and leaves a balance against the newly-acquired States.

Mr. Kaye says, there would have been a large reduction of the army, if it had not been for the occupation of the Punjab. In 1835, the number of troops, European and native, was 184,700; in 1851, according to the last return, it was 289,500, being an increase of upwards of 100,000. What was this increase for, unless it were that the new acquisitions required an augmentation of force? During the same period, the European force was increased from 30,800 to 49,000 men; the ground of this particular increase being, that the Sikhs, being a northern nation, could only be kept in awe by Europeans.

Now, if I could treat this question as many persons do; if I could believe that the East India Company is a reality; if I believed that they could transfer India to the management of some other body, and that England would be no more responsible; that we could have the trade of India, and be under no obligations in reference either to its good government or its future financial state, I should not be the person to come forward and seek a disturbance of that arrangement. Other people may not share in my opinion; but I am under the impression that, so far as the future is concerned, we cannot leave a more perilous possession to our children than that which [508] we shall leave them in the constantly-increasing territory of India. The English race can never become indigenous in India; we must govern it, if we govern it at all, by means of a succession of transient visits; and I do not think it is for the interest of the English people, any more than of the people of India, that we should govern permanently 100,000,000 people, 12,000 miles off. I see no benefit which can arise to the mass of the English people from their connection with India, except that which may arise from honest trade; I do not see how the millions of this country are to share in the patronage of India, or to derive any advantage from it, except through the medium of trade; and therefore, I say emphatically, that if you can show me that the East India Company is the reality which many persons suppose it to be, I shall not be the party to wish to withdraw their responsible trust and to place it again in the hands of a Minister of the British Crown. But when I see that this vast territory is now being governed under a fiction, that the Government is not a real one, but one which one of the most able and faithful servants of the Company has declared to be a sham, I say, 'Do not let the people of this country delude themselves with the idea that they can escape the responsibility by putting the Government behind a screen.' I wish therefore to look this question fairly in the face; I wish to bring the people of this country face to face with the difficulties and dangers with which I think it is beset. Let it no longer be thought that a few gentlemen meeting in Leadenhall-street can screen the people of England from the responsibility with which they have invested themselves with regard to India. Since the granting of the last Charter, more territory has been gained by conquest than within any similar period before, and the acquisition of territory has been constantly accompanied with a proportionate increase of debt. We have annexed Sattara, and our own blue-books prove that it is governed at a loss; we have annexed Scinde, and our own books

prove that it, too, is governed at a loss; we have annexed Pegu, and our own authorities said that this annexation also will involve a loss. All these losses must press on the more fertile provinces of Bengal, which are constantly being drained of their resources to make good the deficit. Let me not be told, by-and-by, that the annexation of Pegu and Burmah will be beneficial. What said Lord Dalhousie? He said in his despatch—and the declaration should not be forgotten—that he looked upon the annexation of Pegu as an evil second only to that of war itself; and if we should be obliged to annex Burmah, then farewell to all prospect of amelioration in Indian affairs. Well, then, believing that if this fiction be destroyed—if this mystery be exterminated—the germ of a better state of things in reference to this question will begin to grow; and believing that as yet we are profoundly ignorant of what was wanted for India, I shall vote for the Amendment, that we should wait for two years; and I hope sincerely that the House will agree to it.

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# PEACE.

[509]

## PEACE. I. WREXHAM, NOVEMBER 14, 1850.↵

[The following was a Speech made at a great meeting in Wales, held under the auspices of the Peace Society.]

OF all the memorable meetings I have ever attended in the United Kingdom, I do not think there has been any which, in some respects, is more significant and surprising than that which I have the honour of addressing. The present would be a large assembly in any town, upon any subject; but when I remember the size of Wrexham, and when I remember that the large assembly before me is not admitted within the precincts of this building without payment, and that a tolerably large payment, I think this part of the United Kingdom must contain a very great number of persons who are, at all events, ready to avail themselves of the opportunity of hearing discussed the subject now submitted to their consideration.

I have heard my own name mentioned here several times, and received with more kindness and partiality than I could possibly have expected to attract from such a meeting. But it is my happiness to be half Welsh, and that the better half. Though I never before had the honour of addressing a Welsh audience, I am happy that my first meeting with you should be on a question second in importance to none that can be brought before you. We have met this night to talk about peace and the Peace Congress; and let me once for all say, that when I came here to talk of peace, I did not mean to treat it as an abstraction. I came here as a practical man, to talk, not simply on the question of peace and war, but to treat another question which is of hardly less importance—the enormous and burdensome standing armaments which it is the practice of modern Governments to sustain in time of peace. For I confess to you, what I have before avowed again and again, that I have never felt any alarm about any war in which England should necessarily be concerned. I am quite sure it will be our own fault if we enter into any war, for there is no danger of anybody coming to molest us. Still, I find that we are placed in a state of things hardly different from that of actual war, being, indeed, subject to the burden of war in time of peace.

I am not ashamed to avow that I have approached this question not altogether and exclusively from that point of view from which Mr. Richard has surveyed it. I have been brought to the discussion of the question from another consideration. In dealing with the practical affairs of the country, and especially as a politician and Member of Parliament, whose duty it is to study and control the finances of the country, I have come to my conclusion, apart from those high convictions [510] which Mr. Richard and Mr. Sturge have avowed, and in which I concur, though in their presence I am not the proper person to dilate upon them. I gather my conclusion as one desiring to see that the country is governed with economy, and the people are not burdened with ruinous taxation; that there is a necessity for the people of this country to unite in supporting the principles of peace, as the only means of improving their temporal condition.

Now, I say that I deal with this question as a practical man. I have lately been travelling in the rural parts of Wales, and I find that there is a considerable amount of inconvenience among the rural population, among the farming world, who complain of low prices, and the weight of tithe-rent and taxation. We shall have those questions to talk over next session. The whole question of taxation will then come up. Government and Parliament will then have to

deal with a Budget of pretty nearly 50,000,000*l.* a year, and they will have to vote money to meet this enormous outlay out of funds raised by taxation on the people. Now, while the great mass of the people are in the enjoyment of a large amount of comfort, probably never exceeded in the centres of industry in former times, I do not conceal that there is also another great mass of the population, and not the least important in a political point of view, who are suffering considerable pecuniary uneasiness; and therefore there will be next session a pressure on Parliament for a remission of taxation. Now, it is in order to be able to deal constitutionally and honestly, and not to take the Government or the country by surprise on any vote, that I now wish to record my opinions, and to prove that no sensible remission of taxation can be made, unless the country comes to the principles of the Peace Society, or at all events, goes some length towards its objects, and determines to make a very large reduction in the military establishments.

Will any one, then, dare to say that I am making a Utopia of this Peace question, and that I am not a practical man? Can there be any doubt that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, viewing his position in his retirement and during the recess, must have directed his mind to this question, and that he finds dangers and difficulties impending over him in the enormous amount of taxation he is compelled to demand? There is a Budget of nearly 50,000,000*l.* to vote next session, and has it never entered the minds of Gentlemen present to analyse what it was composed of? In the first place, we have to provide 28,000,000*l.* in round numbers out of the taxation, to meet the interest of the funded and floating debt—that debt of nearly 800,000,000*l.* having been almost every farthing contracted in former wars. Deducting those 28,000,000*l.*, there are left 22,000,000*l.*, about 6,500,000*l.* of which (I still speak in round numbers) are alone required to carry on the civil government, including the expenses of the courts of law, of diplomacy, consular establishments, official salaries, and everything necessary to cover the charge of civil government. After that, we have to vote about 15,500,000*l.* (I speak of what was done last year) for the expenses of the army, navy, and ordnance; so that out of 22,000,000*l.* required of you to pay the current expenditure of the State, more than two-thirds are required for military expenses—for these two-thirds, taken from the taxation of the people, are spent on red-coats, blue-jackets, and their appurtenances—and one-third covers all the other expenses. I cannot but think that I should deserve to be scouted if, talking to the people of financial reform, I advocate the principle of Free Trade, that is, of subjecting all classes to the rivalry of the foreigner, and declare that I wish to see the burden of taxation reduced, and yet conceal from you the fact, that out of our current expenditure about two-thirds go to the army, navy, and ordnance.

I therefore declare, that if you wish any remission of the taxation which falls upon the homes of the people of England and Wales, you can only find it by [511] reducing the great military establishments, and diminishing the money paid to fighting men in time of peace. No doubt the next session of Parliament will open amidst great clamour for the reduction of a great number of taxes; but we cannot reduce taxation unless we reduce expenditure. If the expenditure is kept up, we must have taxes to pay for it; and therefore taxation can only be reduced by coming to a resolution that we will in some way curtail the expenditure. But how am I, as an individual Member of Parliament, to deal with these questions? Motions were frequently brought forward to repeal obnoxious taxes—such as the window-tax, the taxes on knowledge; and one motion last session was to repeal the tax on attorneys, who, we are told, were very oppressed individuals. One hon. Member wanted half the duty on malt taken off; and another, with more reason, wished to repeal half the duty on tea. These motions are submitted, one after the other, to the House of Commons, which is then called on to vote ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ upon them: but I cannot vote for taking off taxes that have been rendered necessary by the expenditure which has been voted, and I have said, ‘Meet a reduction of taxes by a reduction of expenditure.’ But having acted in this way, I have now no hesitation in declaring in these meetings, that if the Government does not do that which the country is

told by the organs of military men they are not going to do, if it makes no reduction in military establishments, then, under these circumstances, I shall vote for taking off taxes, and see whether it is possible to pay for the military establishments without money. This, I own, is a clumsy way, and does not recommend itself to my reason; and I would rather go to work as in private matters, and rationally discuss what we can reduce in our expenditure, before taking off taxation; but if I find an unfair, unreasonable resistance to what I believe to be a fair and rational proposition for some reduction, I must adopt the course I have referred to.

I am not liable to the charge of advocating the total and immediate abolition of all our war establishments; but, after such meetings as the present, and after the declarations which I have openly made for many years, I feel I shall be perfectly free next session, with clean hands, and with full consistency and honesty, to vote for the removal of taxation, and leave the Government to cut the coat according to the cloth. I have no doubt that in the volume written by Sir F. Head, the author of 'Bubbles from the Brunnen of Nassau,' which has been referred to, we may find some statements which run counter to our principles and reasonings. But I dare say these 'bubbles' are just as substantial as the facts in the volume; for there is something in the antecedents of Sir F. Head, and his conduct in Canada, which does not recommend him to me as a good authority in this affair of our finances. But no doubt I shall be told that we are in great danger from other countries keeping up large military establishments and coming to attack us. Now, the answer I give to that is, that I would rather run the risk of France coming to attack us than keep up the present establishments in this country. I have done with reasoning on that subject. I would rather cut down the expenditure for military establishments to 10,000,000*l.* and run every danger from France, or any other quarter, than risk the danger of attempting to keep up the present standard of taxation and expenditure.

I call those men who write in this way cowards. I am not accustomed to pay fulsome compliments to the English, by telling them that they are superior to all the world; but this I can say, that they do not deserve the name of cowards. The men who write these books must be cowards; for I know nothing so preposterous as talking of a number of Frenchmen coming and taking possession of London. Who is afraid of them? I believe there never was an instance known in the history of the world of as many as 50,000 men in military array being transported across salt water within twelve months. Napoleon, on going [512] to Egypt, had not so many; and France, with twelve months' preparation, could not transport across the sea 50,000 men, with all the appliances and muniments of war. It never has been, and I do not believe that it could be, done in twelve months. But I repeat, that I would run any risk, and not listen to those who would frighten me. I must, however, say that I am not one, because I advocate the reduction of armaments, who would plead guilty to the charge of being a coward, or who would submit to injustice. Many people suppose, that because I do not advocate bullying every nation on the face of the earth, that, therefore, I would necessarily submit to any one who might do me an injury. That is not the character of the Peace Society, nor of the members of the Society of Friends, who constitute the main force of the Peace Association. Read history, and see what great courage had been shown by the Society of Friends, and whether they did not extort from cruel and intolerant Governments toleration before any other sect, not by buckling on armour, but by knowing how to suffer, and by defeating through passive resistance those who attempted to do them injustice and wrong. And I say that those people on the Continent, who have a righteous cause, and wrongs to redress, would do well to imitate the calm endurance and patient long-suffering of the members of the Society of Friends. I know more than one community on the Continent to which this attitude might be adopted—Lombardy has been mentioned—in which was situated that town of Brescia, where were perpetrated those enormities by Haynau, and referred to by Mr. Richard. The population of that country consists of Italians; and men, women, and children all joined in opposition and hatred to the Austrian rule. But what

chance had they in conflict with an enemy who possessed all the fortresses and muniments of war? How would it be if the Lombards folded their arms, and profited by the example of the members of the Society of Friends? Might they not by passive resistance alone set at nought the power of the strongest Government in Europe? Let me not be told that I am advocating injustice, and a supine acquiescence to wrong; for I have observed, that those who take up arms to contend against tyranny are not generally remarkable for having any success in the process, and I have a suspicion that the people on the Continent will ultimately find better means of emancipating themselves from their wrongs than by fighting and soldiering, which too often prove disastrous to the cause of liberty.

The best way for us, as Englishmen, to deal with the question, is as politicians, and more particularly as looking at facts from a financial point of view. Everybody can see, and everybody admits, that the course pursued on the Continent cannot be continued for five years longer by any Government. Everybody admits that Austria is bankrupt. When some time ago I went to the London Tavern, and spoke against the Austrian loan, and denounced the Austrians as bankrupts, there was an attempt to oppose my views; but everybody now admits that their bankruptcy is inevitable. Well, let us take France, Prussia, and Russia; and they too, through their enormous military establishments, are hastening to bankruptcy and revolution. And it is by peace meetings, by peace congresses at Frankfort and elsewhere,—it is by such means alone that attention is awakened to the danger of such a course; and by such means alone,—by public meetings, and agitation, and public discussion, is any great reform effected in the affairs of the world.

But when we call attention to these evils, we do not leave them without suggesting practical remedies. We say to the Governments of the world, ‘Cannot you find some other way of settling your disputes, and for guaranteeing peace, than by an array of enormous armaments? Cannot you recognise between Governments the principle of submitting your disputes to the arbitration of a neutral party?’ In France and England, and other countries, instead of [513] keeping up those gigantic forces in time of peace, cannot the Governments of the world in 1850 devise some other means of providing something like a guarantee for the continuance of peace? There is no present quarrel between France and England—no tender question, and no claim that ought to interrupt the professions of eternal peace and concord which are made by both parties. Yet we are told that something might arise which would cause a war; and, therefore, the country must prepare for war. But the contingency of a dispute arising might be prepared for by other means than war; and we, the advocates of peace, say, Let the Governments refer their disputes to the arbitration of some impartial umpire. I ask Governments to do in the case of a nation what we always do in the case of individuals. If a Frenchman living in London commits a crime, the law—and Englishmen may be proud of it—allows him to claim to be tried by a jury, half of whom are foreigners. Now, all I want is, that the nations of England and France, and other countries, should carry the same principle into operation, and that when they have a dispute—when they charge a country, as Greece had been, of being in debt to another, and when that country denies the justice of the claim (and in the case of Greece subsequent events prove she is right), then let the matter be referred to arbitrators, instead of sending out a dozen ships of war, and saying, if another nation does not take our account of the matter, we will compel them. Let two arbitrators, one for each nation disputing, be appointed; and if the two cannot agree, let them appoint an umpire to settle the dispute according to reason and the facts of the case. Thus would be avoided the recourse now had to enormous forces. Is there anything so Utopian in this? The Peace Congress came to a resolution to recommend the nations of the world to enter on a system of disarmament. I have referred to this topic again and again, and I have learned that the only way to instruct men is to do with them as with children, and to repeat the lesson.

We have a Treaty with the United States, according to which only a certain number of ships of war are to be maintained by each nation on the liminary lakes—only one on each lake. Now, what has been the consequence? Why, from the moment of the existence of that treaty, both parties have totally disregarded the maintenance of the force altogether, and there is not at the present moment more than one crazy English hulk on all these lakes, and I do not believe that the Americans have one at all! This occurred from the moment our country showed that she had no desire to run with America that race of national rivalry which Sir F. Head would persuade England to run with France, fitting out a new fleet at Portsmouth, to be followed by an increased French fleet at Cherbourg, and by an augmentation, I suppose, of 100,000 men to the military force of each nation. If England enters with an honest spirit into a treaty with France, similar to that which exists with America, it would, if accepted, be advantageous to the interests of both countries; and if we have not got a Minister for Foreign Affairs who understands his business, and would enter into such an arrangement, then let the English people, who understand their business, advertise for a Foreign Minister, who, instead of following old courses, shall be alive to the spirit of the age, who shall be deemed worthy to have lived in the age of electric telegraphs, railways, and steamboats. It would simplify our foreign policy, if we entered into arrangements with other countries, binding ourselves by previous treaties, in case of dispute and hot blood, not to have recourse to war or violence, but to submit to arbitration. If I could only get the people of England and Wales to feel alive to this question, and to deal with the scorners of the peacemen as they deserved—with that contempt which Englishmen are sure, in the long run, to throw on such offenders,—if I could only get these views implanted [514] into the minds of the people, it would not be long before we should have another Sir Robert Peel to carry them out.

I cannot mention the name of Sir Robert Peel without expressing my deep regret, not for the fame of that statesman,—for, probably, under all the circumstances, he could not have died at a moment more favourable for his fame,—but for the sake of his country. There are many reasons why we should regret that we have lost such a man at such a time. I cannot be expected, of course, to endorse the acts of Sir R. Peel's long political career. Sir R. Peel was in early life placed, before, probably, he had the choice of his own career, in a wrong political groove; but that such a man, after forty years' training in an adverse political school, should at the end of that time have taken the course he did, entitling himself, as he had done, by the last act of his political life, to the lasting veneration of his countrymen, makes me firmly hope that England has great future benefits to expect from the wise counsels of that great statesman. On those questions on which I am now addressing you, and which are agitated by the Peace Congress, I watched Sir R. Peel's course during the last three years, and, as my friends know, predicted that Sir R. Peel was preparing gradually to do for his country what he had done on another question, only secondary in importance to that advocated by the Peace Congress. It was in 1851 that Sir R. Peel was the first to recommend that agitation in which the Peace party and I are now engaged. That statesman then referred to the numerous standing armies, to the danger caused thereby to the finances, and to the consequent risk of revolutions incurred by the Governments of Europe; and he said that those Governments ought to endeavour to come to terms on the basis of a mutual reduction of the military establishments; and he declared, emphatically, that he hoped the Governments would take that course; or, if not, he hoped the different communities of Europe would so spread their opinions as to force their Governments to adopt that plan. I have frequently referred to that declaration as being a direct incentive to the course which is adopted at peace meetings; and I claim for the peace meetings the sanction and approval—nay, I claim for them the origination of the most practical statesman that ever lived.

But this is not all. In the House of Commons, on the 12th of March, 1850, Sir R. Peel spoke as I will presently read; and I well remember the feeling of surprise, not unmingled with a feeling of dissatisfaction, which pervaded that peculiar assembly when the words were

delivered. I remember, when they were finished, that half-a-dozen of the Members sitting round me, congratulated me on having again got Sir R. Peel's assistance for a movement in favour of reducing expenditure. The words of Sir Robert Peel, to which I now allude, were these:—

'For what was said about the comparative lightness of taxation I care nothing, for there are many taxes pressing on the energies of the country and diminishing the comforts of the humbler classes; and their repeal, if it could be effected with good faith and public security, will be of inestimable advantage to the nation. Nay, more; I will say, that in time of peace, you must, if you mean to retrench, incur some risks. If in time of peace you must have all the garrisons of our colonial possessions in a state of complete efficiency—if you must have all our fortifications kept in a state of perfect repair,—I venture to say that no amount of annual expenditure will be sufficient; and if you adopted the opinions of military men, who say that they would throw upon you the whole responsibility in the event of a war breaking out, and some of our valuable possessions being lost, you would overwhelm this country with taxes in time of peace. The Government ought to feel assured that the House of Commons would support them if they incurred some responsibility with respect to our distant colonial possessions by running a risk for the purpose of effecting a saving. *Bellum para, si pacem velis*, is a maxim generally received, as if it were impossible [515] to contest it; yet a maxim that admits of more contradiction, or should be accepted with greater reserve, never fell from the lips of man.'

When Sir R. Peel delivered those words, discrediting the authority of military men, he spoke in an assembly and especially from a side of the House where the military spirit was dominant; and he must have felt those sentiments strongly, or he never could have delivered them in such an assembly and in such an atmosphere. And orators should not forget that statesman's advice, when in after-dinner speeches they propose 'the Army and Navy,' and declare that to have peace it was necessary to be prepared for war. That was not Sir R. Peel's opinion; and yet I dare say that many of the men who utter the sentiment about being prepared for war would have shouted for Sir R. Peel, and would subscribe for a monument to him.

I remember, not long ago, a speech delivered by a sheriff of London at the sheriffs' inaugural dinner. I do not remember the sheriff's name; in fact, very few persons ever remember the names of the sheriffs of London, and as the gentleman I allude to happened to be sheriff and alderman of the City of London,—a very corrupt corporation,—it is not to be wondered at that his name has escaped my recollection, though it has been inserted in the columns of that very best champion of peace—*Punch*, which ought to be seen on the table of every one, both in wealthy drawing-rooms and humble cottages. This gentleman hiccuped out a great deal of incoherent nonsense about Cobden, and also said that he was in favour of armaments to preserve peace, and called the principles of the Peace Society 'Utopian,' for that is the standard word. Now, what has the Corporation of London lately done? I must say I had not supposed they possessed so much wit—I had not given them credit for having a joke in their whole body. Why, they have changed their programme of that great children's raree-show on Lord Mayor's-day, and, instead of exhibiting men in armour, they provide in their stead a figure emblematical of Peace, followed by representations of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. No doubt that was intended as a sly vote of censure on this talkative alderman and sheriff; but it was too bad that, after eating his dinner, they should have gone away and served him such a scurvy trick as that. It was said that the peace which the Peace Society was aiming at, and the reduction of armaments, was Utopian and quite impracticable; but, somehow or other, I find that everybody comes before the public with the pretence of being a lover of peace, and endeavours to point out facts in the world with the view of showing that we were going to arrive at peace. But if it is said, 'Then let us gather these facts together; let us make use of the railways, and visit different parts, as Paris and Frankfort had been visited,

and let us invite people to talk over the question of peace, and see if it cannot be forwarded,' then these people turn round, denounce and ridicule the peacemen, and affect a great deal of scorn for their reasonings, while they very probably desire peace in their hearts a great deal less than they pretend.

There is a large portion of the community which does not want peace. War is the profession of some men, and war, therefore, is the only means for their occupation and promotion in their profession. 15,000,000*l.* sterling are spent on military establishments. That is a considerable sum of money spent upon classes who are not very likely to be favourable to peace. Read the *United Service* and the *Army and Navy Gazette*. Do you think that these publications are intended to promote peace? Do they not seek the opportunity of exciting jealousies,—pointing to the ships of war of foreign countries, and saying, 'There are more guns there, and, therefore, we must have more'? Do they not endeavour to produce that rivalry of establishments and armaments which is always tending of necessity to hostile feelings and hostile acts? Again, there is a large portion of the continental community [516] which is similarly situated to the portion of which I have just spoken in this country. Four millions of men—the flower of Europe—from twenty to thirty-three years of age, are under arms, living in idleness. There are often no men in the country parts; the women are doing their farm work, and toiling up to their knees in manure, and amidst muck and dirt, at the age of thirty and forty. They may be constantly seen thus employed, tanned and haggard, and looking hardly like the fair sex. They do this, in order that the muscle and strength of the country should be clothed in military coats, and should carry muskets on their shoulders—a scandal to a civilised and Christian age. Thus there is a large body of men who do not desire peace. I do not believe that peace is their object. I do not know why they entered the army if they did not want war. This is their employment, and they must be idle if they have not war; and, therefore, it is not unfair to argue that they are not altogether favourable to peace, whatever they may say; and consequently I do not believe that all those men who use these cant phrases about peace care for it.

I have endeavoured to show that I have a practical object in view, and that the members of the Peace Society have some sanction from practical men for what is sought after by this Society. What do other men propose—those most opposed to the Peace Society? Do they say that the system which we are opposing will last for ever? Why, every man admits that it cannot last five years. Is there any person prepared to reverse this system of enormous expenditure and ruinous establishments—of waste, bankruptcy, and ultimate revolution? The conduct which the Governments are pursuing is calculated to shake the faith of the mass of the people in the very existence of Government—marching and countermarching troops—and all for mere parade and the exhibition of armed men. It seems to me as if there ought to have been a battle long ago on the Continent, and then, I think, there would have been more chance that this turmoil would have been put an end to. For what purpose does this marching and countermarching of troops serve, unless the secret and covert design of bringing the system into disrepute? And it is coming into disrepute. And if we could only prevent the Governments from 'raising the wind' (as Mr. Richard said), we should put an end to it.

I now come to another point of our Peace doctrine, and that is, that we want to prevent people lending money to those bankrupt Governments in order that they may keep soldiers. I said, last August twelvemonths, that the Russian Government, about whose rich and ample resources so much was then uttered, could not make the campaign in Hungary without coming to London or Amsterdam for a loan. I was laughed at; but the campaign was hardly over before a loan was applied for, under the pretence that it was wanted for a railway. I denounced that loan as an Imperial falsehood. I do not mean to say that the Emperor knew so when he signed the decree, but the Emperor knows that to be the case now, and he ought to repudiate it. It was raised to pay for the atrocities perpetrated in the Hungarian war, not from

the savings of Barings or Rothschilds, for they are not the people who lent the money, but from the small capitalists in England, who have small savings, and who wish to get five instead of four per cent. They lent that money, by which they as much cut the throats of the Hungarians and devastated their villages as if they had gone there and done it with their own hands. I was asked whether I, as a Free-trader, was consistent with my principles when I denounced this use of money? I was told that a man had a right to lend his money without inquiring what it was wanted for. But if he knew it was wanted for a vile purpose, had he the right of so lending it? I put this question to a City man:—'Somebody asks you to lend money to build houses with, and you know it is wanted for the purpose of building infamous houses, would you be justified in [517] lending the money?' He replied, 'I would.' I rejoined, 'Then I am not going to argue with you—you are a man for the police magistrate to look after; for if you would lend money to build infamous houses, you would very likely keep one yourself, if you could get ten per cent. by it.' I say that no man has a right to lend money if he knows it is to be applied to the cutting of throats. The whole of this system of enormous armaments is built on the system of lending money; and thereby there are concentrated into one generation those evils of war, which would not have been suffered except successive generations were called upon to pay for them.

The system is indefensible, both on the principles of humanity and political economy; and I believe the time will come—it is coming (for I have heard the principle broached in high intellectual places)—when future generations will raise the question whether they shall be held responsible for debts incurred, often for keeping their own country in slavery, and also for foreign wars, in which they can have no possible interest.

We have all heard of the disturbances in Sleswig-Holstein; and I join both with Mr. Sturge and Mr. Richard in the expression of opinion that our Government is heavily responsible for having meddled in that affair in the way in which it did, and in joining France, Russia, and Denmark in a hostile demonstration against Sleswig-Holstein. We have no business to do so; and I could corroborate every word used by the preceding speakers to the effect, that it had left a feeling of deep alienation among the whole Protestant community of Germany. I do not use that term with a view of instituting an invidious comparison in respect to the Roman Catholics; but the Protestant part of Germany is the most constitutional; it is the part which has been, and most naturally, in sympathy with England; but, in consequence of that proceeding of our Foreign Minister, deep, lasting, if not ineradicable feelings of alienation and indignation have been produced against the Government and people of this country.

But the point to which I wish to refer is this,—Last year these two parties (the Danes and Sleswig-Holsteiners) were in collision, and then there ensued a suspension of arms. In the interval, Denmark raised a loan of 800,000*l.* That money was spent in preparation for bloody conflicts; and, if it could not have been raised from the English or Dutch, I firmly believe that, from the destitution of the resources of Denmark, peace must necessarily have ensued, and those hostilities, which have caused so much devastation within the last few months, could not have been renewed. So with respect to Russia. We heard of the Emperor dictating to Germany at Warsaw. I believe that the cost of the visits between Petersburg and Warsaw has been defrayed out of the money raised from the English; and if that money had not been raised—if those 5,000,000*l.* had not been lent out—if English capitalists had folded their arms, or better still, had closed their purse-strings—if, too, they had lent no money for perpetrating atrocities in Hungary, and had declared that henceforth no assistance need be expected from them for wars and deeds of violence, then those armaments must have been reduced, and instead of the Czar, in consequence of being full of money, riding backwards and forwards from one city to another, he would have been kept at home, minding the affairs of his own country and not those of Germany, and we should have been saved this turmoil



which will very likely be made an excuse next session for not reducing the army of this country.

Before I sit down, let us prepare for what will be said of this meeting. We shall be called enthusiasts and Utopians, who think the millennium is coming. Now, as the gentlemen who use these phrases are very much at a loss for something new, I will say, once for all, that I am not dreaming of the millennium. I believe that long after my time iron will be used to make the spear, as well as the pruning-hook and the ploughshare. [518] I do not think the coming year is to produce any sudden change in the existing practice, or that the millennium will be absolutely realised in my time; but I think, if the principles of the Peace Society are true, we are engaged in a work in which conscience, and, I believe, Heaven itself, will find cause for approbation. In that course, therefore, I shall persevere, in spite of sneers and sarcasms. I believe we shall not have long to wait before we shall find from our opponents admissions that they are wrong and we right. I have seen some such things before from the same quarters on another question; and I expect to hear the same things again, Those parties tell us that we must look to Free Trade and to other causes to accelerate the era of Peace—those parties who opposed Free Trade. But when I advocated Free Trade, do you suppose that I did not see its relation to the present question, or that I advocated Free Trade merely because it would give us a little more occupation in this or that pursuit? No; I believed Free Trade would have the tendency to unite mankind in the bonds of peace, and it was that, more than any pecuniary consideration, which sustained and actuated me, as my friends know, in that struggle. And it is because I want to see Free Trade, in its noblest and most humane aspect, have full scope in this world, that I wish to absolve myself from all responsibility for the miseries caused by violence and aggression, and too often perpetrated under the plea of benefiting trade. I may at least be allowed to speak, if not with authority, yet certainly without the imputation of trespassing on ground which I may not reasonably be supposed to understand as well as most people, and to say, when I hear those who advocate warlike establishments or large armaments for the purpose of encouraging our trade in distant parts of the world, that I have no sympathy with them, and that they never shall have my support in carrying out such measures. We have nothing to hope from measures of violence in aid of the promotion of commerce with other countries.

Away with all attempts to coerce any nation, whether civilised or barbarous, by ships of war, into the adoption of those principles of Free Trade, which we ourselves only adopted when we became convinced by the process of reason and argument that they were for our own interest. If we send ships to enforce by treaties this extension of trade, we shall be doing more harm than good to the cause we pretend to aid. Such a policy is calculated to react on the people, by imposing on them great burdens, in order to support those armaments by which it is endeavoured to force our views on other nations. I shall have something to say on another occasion about China and Borneo. I will give some facts, and, before long, I will adopt the most effectual mode which I can, and show the people of this country that they are mistaken, in a pecuniary point of view, when they think that they enforce their interests by ships of war or troops. Therefore, as a Free-trader, I oppose every attempt to enforce a trade with other countries by violence or coercion.

I never thanked the Foreign Minister who came with a Treaty of Commerce from China, or Borneo, or St. Domingo, or Russia, binding them to extend their commerce with this country, and to relax their restrictions, should that Treaty be obtained either by force, chicanery, or fraud; for, depend on it, a policy so enforced will react, and we shall never make progress in the principles which we advocate until we leave it to other countries to take the course they believe to be best for their own interest, after calm consideration, and until they have seen by the example England had set, that the Free Trade adopted by her was beneficial to her own interests.

Therefore, on high religious grounds, and on Free-trade grounds, I support the gentlemen who are devoting themselves to the cause of Peace. I think myself that I have done very little in this matter, and I am ashamed when I find myself singled out for obloquy, which I do not deserve, in relation to this cause. I am not ashamed of the title of the [519] "Champion of Peace,"—I only wish I deserved it. I thank the gentlemen who have taken up this cause on all these grounds. I know that they consider no sacrifice too great in order to carry out their conscientious convictions. I thank them for it, and for the opportunity they have afforded me in addressing this meeting, and at the meetings at Frankfort and other places, to address all the countries of Europe, and I entreat them to go on. They are the sons of parents who fought the battle of Catholic Emancipation—(applause)—I meant to have said Slave Emancipation, but the cheer needs not to be recalled, for they were the friends of liberty of every kind, whether to the white man or to the black. Let them not be discouraged by sneers, but let them go on unfalteringly, and, as on the Slave Question, they will bequeath this struggle from father to son until as glorious a result will be accomplished as any yet recorded on the page of History.

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**PEACE. II.**  
**MANCHESTER, JANUARY 27, 1853.** ↩

[The following is one of the speeches which Mr. Cobden made with the purpose of disabusing the public of a panic which was common some years ago. The second Empire had just been established in France.]

I CONFESS I have listened to those letters from our French correspondents with feelings of shame and humiliation,—shame, that it should be deemed necessary by our well-wishers on the other side of the Channel that they should give us assurances that there is no intention on the part of France to come and, without provocation, to invade our shores; and humiliation, that there should have been a considerable number of the people of this country who could have been deluded by the merest child's cry, the mere baby's talk that we have been listening to, for the last few months, and that they should have believed for a moment that anything so absurd and all but impossible was going to happen.

Now, let me just call your attention to the source from which those assurances come. The outcry that we hear in this country about an invasion from France is levelled at the present Government of France. The parties who are addressing us are not the partisans of that Government. We have had a letter from M. Carnot; he is not a friend of the present Government. I have an extract here from the *Journal des Débats*, which is a pacific newspaper, not in the interest of Louis Napoleon, but a decided advocate of peace and free trade; and what is the tone in which that paper speaks of this cry of invasion in this country? It says, that 'whilst the British journals are every day accusing our Government of making large augmentations of its navy, we observe that under this unfounded pretence, England is constantly adding to its fleet and other armaments; and we are led to believe that the English press can have no other object in thus declaiming against the imaginary armaments of France, than to conceal the real preparations that are going on in that country.' Well, you have had a letter from M. Emile de Girardin; he is not a partisan of the present Government; he was an exile after the last revolution, and he is expressing his doubts whether the preparations we are making for 'a disembarkation from France without an object'—for, mind you, with his usual logic, he, in a word, has hit upon the whole point of this absurd outcry,—these preparations, he is rather inclined to think, there must be something else to account for, than the absurd supposition that we are preparing for a descent from France *without an object*; because nobody has ever professed that there is any object; we have had no quarrel; there is no dispute,—no unsettled boundary, no Spanish [521] marriages, no Tahiti question, no Mr. Pritchard; there is no quarrel at all; and, when I ask our invasionist friends what it is the French are coming here for, I never could hear an intelligible answer. Sometimes they say that some five thousand men are coming here to burn down one of our towns, and yet they admit these men will never go back again! I am as much at a loss as M. de Girardin is to see any logical ground for any such attempt as that.

But you may depend upon it that you are apt to underrate the effect of all this kind of menacing demonstration. The effect will be precisely the contrary of what these alarmists want. Instead of damaging Louis Napoleon, you will unite all parties in France with him as against England. And that is the great evil of such demonstrations as this,—you make every man in France, that has one atom of self-respect, or of French spirit in his blood,—you make him feel indignant that you have lowered him and his country to the rank of savages, in supposing that they are to come here some day, without notice, without declaration of war,—a thing that never happened in any civilised country in the world; that you are assuming that

it is going to be done, some day, without any fact to warrant it; and that you are making all the preparation which he sees in your ports, in order to receive those savages. And you find people who are still considered fit to be trusted in the management of their business, whom you meet in the streets every day, who will shake their wise heads, and tell you that they believe that there is some danger of a French invasion. Might not I say, 'I think there is some danger of somebody attacking me in the street,'—might not I, with just the same logic, prepare myself with a dreadnought club or life preserver; or, perhaps, a brace of pistols, if I deemed it necessary; might not I make any kind of provision against any such imaginary danger as that? But I should be no more rational in doing it than we are as a nation in making these preparations against France.

I wish I could get some of these public instructors and bring them to the test of how far they are in earnest when they write in the way some of these Manchester papers write about a French invasion. Now, to my knowledge, they have been writing in the same way these last five years; I have had them upon me ever since December, 1847, which is about five years ago. They were writing in the same way when Louis Philippe was King of the French, and when M. Guizot was his Prime Minister. I will not let them off on their protesting that all they want now is to guard us against a usurper and a despot. I say they raised that cry as long ago as in 1847, when Louis Philippe was king, as loudly as they do now. They have been five years in this state of panic and alarm; and I say it is high time that such people should take some assurance against the consequences of this invasion, when it comes. Well, now, I am prepared, not only to give them that assurance on moderate terms, but I will put their sincerity to the test. Bring me that public instructor in your town, that has been telling you for the last five years, and upwards, that this invasion is so imminent; bring him to me, and I will make a proposal to him. If he will pay one shilling a week to your Infirmary, as a subscription, I will enter into a legal bond to pay him down ten thousand pounds when this invasion takes place. Well, but you sometimes have your public instructors, who write as though they had some special sources of information from London.

Now, I tell all those writers in newspapers in the provinces, who have joined in this cry of invasion, that they are being heartily laughed at by those in London, who are profiting by the cry. The Government has no belief in any danger of a sudden invasion. I will prove it to you in a moment. If an invasion took place without notice, our Government would be certainly impeached, because they are allowing our largest concentrated fleet—a fleet more powerful than the whole American navy;—now, I am [522] speaking deliberately when I say that we have a fleet before which, if every ship of war which the Americans have were brought, they could not exist for twentyfour hours; and that fleet is now lying at Malta, or amusing itself between Malta and Corfu (with a great expenditure on the part of the officers for kid gloves for their parties and excursions); and I say that if Parliament believed what the Government and the instructors of the people are saying, as though it were derived from some special sources of information, that any Government that ever existed in the country, and which was proved, if an invasion or descent on our shores took place, to have suspected it, to have anticipated it, and to have given a hint of it to some of those public instructors in the country, would inevitably be impeached, and deservedly so, for having left our largest fleet 1,200 miles off, and at such a distance that it could not be collected in less than a month's time. So I assure gentlemen in the provinces who join in the cry, that they are only being heartily laughed at for their pains, and that the Government, which may profit by the cry, is by no means a sharer in the panic. And that is one of the worst parts of the panic—that Governments do manage to tide over a session, and gain time when they can find silly people through the country who will occupy their fellowcitizens by such a cry as this, because those who would be better employed in urging forward the Government to do something, are kept trotting about the country to try to prevent the mischief which these alarmists create. Don't you think, now, that I and others on this platform, who form humble units in the political

world, might be better engaged, and might perhaps be troublesome to some party in the Government, if we were not kept on trotting about by this cry of an invasion? It is a very clever contrivance, and is the very thing that despotic Governments are always seeking for—something to keep the country always in a state of agitation, from a fear of invasion by any other Power than themselves. That has been the system that has always been adopted from the very beginning of misgovernment; since Governments will always find not only silly people who will believe them and become their dupes, but also people who will perform the part of impostors to those dupes; for there is quite as much knavery as folly at the bottom of this cry.

Now, I think that we are playing very much the part of bullies in this matter. If I have read history to any purpose at all, we have some atonement to offer to the French people. We are not in a position to put our fist constantly in the face of the French, and accuse them of an intention to come and molest us. The last French war arose out of a gross and unprovoked aggression on our part. The last war on the Continent originated with us, from an oligarchical Government, fed from the resources of this great nation, but carried on against the interests of liberty and in the interests of despotism. But, after that war is at an end, I think we might have expected that if there were any complaints, or accusations, or suspicions, they would more naturally have come from the other side of the Channel. I think that, under the circumstances, when we investigate the origin and character of the last great French war with this country, it is surprising that there is not a greater feeling of resentment and indignation on the part of the French nation against the English. But are the English people in a position to begin again to exasperate the French people by accusing them of an intention to invade us, and of entertaining those base intentions against our shores, when the only example in the memory of living man, is one in which we played that part against them? If there should be suspicion in the minds of any, it should be in the breasts of Frenchmen. If we follow the Christian maxim, of doing as we would that others should do unto us, we should try a different tone, and see what a little conciliation towards France would do.

I will tell you what is at the bottom [523] of the whole of this cry in England about a French invasion. It is ignorance in the minds of the great masses of the people, as to what the real condition and circumstances of the French people are. I have told my friends who are met here from different parts of the country, and who are proposing to take steps for a vigorous agitation on behalf of peace, that the first thing they have to do is to spread four or five lecturers over the face of the land, to enlighten the public mind as to the state of feeling in France. We have no danger, it is admitted on all hands, from any other country. If it was not for this bug-bear of France and the French invasion, there would be lamentation and woe in some clubs in London, for I do not think they could have any excuse for keeping up so large a military and naval force. As to America, they do not give us any excuse for keeping up our navy. If France was out of the way, and we had only to look to and to be prepared for competition with America, or even with Austria or Russia, that would hardly afford us an excuse for keeping up our present armaments. It is France alone that you are threatened with danger from, and I say that the people of this country are alarmed with respect to France, simply because they don't understand the circumstances of that nation; and, being in ignorance, you may persuade them anything. It is like blindfolding a man and spinning him round once or twice. He then does not know where he stands, and you may persuade him that anything in the world is coming to eat him up; but unbandage his eyes, and he is not easily frightened. You must go through the country with lecturers, deluge them with tracts, and show them the actual position of the French nation. I tell you candidly my firm belief is, and I am quite prepared to meet the consequences, that if you will let the people of this country know the whole truth as to the economical and social condition of the millions of France, instead of their fearing that the French people are coming to take anything they possess, they will be themselves possessed of a considerable amount of dissatisfaction that their own

condition, as a mass, is not equal to that of the French. The French people coming here, like a band of pirates, to take what the English people have! Why, you have to deal with 8,000,000 of landed proprietors. A very worthy friend of ours, who is now travelling in the south of France, and who is known to most of my friends about me, has written within the last few days to us, that, as the result of his inquiries and investigation, the condition of the rural population of France is very superior to that of the English peasantry. The French peasantry are the proprietors of the land. When the man follows his horse to field there, he is turning up the furrows upon his own soil.

Now, do you think that is exactly the population to run over from their acres and come here on a mere marauding expedition? Our mistake is in judging the French people altogether by our own standard. It is true the French have not yet quite got an appreciation of the representative forms of government according to our machinery, and the habit of association and public meeting, and the freedom of the press which we have; it is because it does not enter into French feeling to appreciate these things. For instance, the French people have no Habeas Corpus Act, as we have in England, to give them the guarantee for their personal liberty. We attach the utmost importance to the inviolability of individual freedom, and I think we are quite right. But the French, though they have had three or four times possession of power in the streets, have never known one of their leaders, when he had absolute possession of their assemblies,—have never seen one of their democratic leaders getting up and inserting a fundamental clause in their Constitution to give them that protection which we have against any arbitrary and undue infringement of our personal liberties. Again, with regard to their habits of [524] association and public meeting, it does not enter into the ideas of the French people to have public meetings such as we have, and discuss such questions as we do. It is not in their habits to do it. No class or party in the country has used it or adopted it with any general success. And, therefore, these things which we prize, the French, up to this time, have not shown that they attach much importance to. Now, the time may come when they may have precisely the same feelings and views that we have with reference to these questions. The time may come. Recollect that hitherto they have been about fifty or sixty years in pretty constant and successive revolutions, so far as the political form of their Government goes. Well, but we had to go through a century of revolution before we settled down. From the time of the commencement of the civil war with Charles I. down to the time of our last civil war in 45, this country passed through a whole century of revolutions. Give them time, and perhaps at some future period the French may have your tastes upon those questions to which you attach so much importance.

And now I'll tell you the lesson I think we ought to learn from the French having parted, apparently with so little reluctance, from their representative form of government, and their freedom of the press; and the lesson, I say, is this—that we English ought to learn—not to stroke our beards and to thank Heaven we are not as other men; but we ought to say, 'Let us take care that our newspaper press shall be such a useful organ, both in the cause of morality, of truth, but, above all, so useful in the cause of international peace, that the popular mind shall cling to it as an institution, and never allow it to be infringed upon; and let public men, leading statesmen, be so truthful in their representative capacities; and let them show patriotism enough, that the people shall have confidence in them, and cling to their representative system, and not abandon it as the French have done, because probably they have not found those attributes of which I am speaking.' Now, what the French do, is this. Recollect I am now, with all submission, indicating what I think is the line necessary for peace lecturers to take, and whatever it is absolutely necessary to take, if we are to put an end to this howl of a French invasion. What the French do prize, and we don't prize much, is equality in social rank. The French people have abolished and destroyed feudalism for sixty years, completely. They don't tolerate any arbitrary rank or title, or any entails, or anything which can tend to give social inequality. They carry that principle of equality into their

religious concerns; the French people won't tolerate one exclusively endowed religion, even although you had the Church selected that comprises nearly the whole population. All people are treated alike in France. Every religion is put upon a perfect footing of equality. So in the taxation, which is the most equal, fair system of taxation in the world; you could not have in France a probate and legacy duty upon one description of property and not upon another.

Now, I see that France could not have what we have in this country, because public opinion revolts at it. They would not have an hereditary House of Peers. Louis Napoleon would fall instantly—his throne would not be worth twenty-four hours' purchase if he were to attempt anything of the kind. Therefore, they have their tastes, and we have ours. They do not understand our tastes;—I can vouch for it, from being a good deal among them, that they are very much puzzled at our little regard for this principle of equality which they attach so much importance to; but they discriminate, and they say, 'We envy you your jealousy of personal liberty; we wish we had it; we wish no man might have his personal freedom infringed. But that is not our taste. We have a passion for equality—you have a passion for personal liberty; and we should be better if we perhaps interchange [525] a little and share our respective qualities.'

Well, now, I say, let the English people be told exactly what is the condition of French society. Let them understand, when we are told the French are coming here to rob our banks, that the French have had more silver in the Bank at Paris than we have had of gold and silver in the vaults of the Bank of England at the time that we were treating them as pirates who were coming to rob our Bank. Then we talk of their coming to carry off the various commodities we have in this country. There are more silver forks and spoons in France than in England, a great deal. If you were to go to a roadside publichouse in France, you would get a napkin and a silver fork; and we know in all their private families the class of people who live in that style are much more numerous than they are with us; the spirit of equality keeps up a vast mass there who have not similar tastes or aspirations here; and, therefore, when we hear of the French coming to commit a piratical incursion upon our shores, we are dealing with a people who would not be bringing all their worldly wealth in their canoes, like the New Zealanders or the Malays, but with a people that in many respects are considered by the rest of the world more civilised than ourselves. The rest of the world imitates their dress, their language, their amusements, and not ours. We are dealing with a people having more portable property in their country than they would find here. Well, then, I say, to tell us all that of a people that have never molested us within the lifetime of any living being, is absurd. On the contrary, they have a good right to complain of a most aggressive attack upon their shores on the part of our aristocracy sixty years ago. Well, I say we are placing ourselves in the attitude of an insolent, impudent bully that goes about the streets holding up both his fists, and trying to incite peaceable men to attack him. I hope that we shall not separate until we have organised a plan by which we can spread this information, and a good deal more, through the country, in the interest of peace.

Now, something has been said about the financial reformers. I cannot understand what a financial reformer can be thinking of who expects ever to get any reduction of Government expenditure, or any remission of those taxes which are pressing us in so many places, unless he can hope to effect a reduction in our warlike expenditure. Now, take in round numbers—I won't trouble you with figures, but take in round numbers our expenditure: say eight-and-twenty millions annually go to pay the interest of the debt incurred in past wars,—I am sorry to say, aggressive wars; well, then, we have about twenty-four or twenty-five millions more to pay. Out of that, about sixteen millions go for our present warlike expenditure. Well, these invasionists tell us, that cannot be reduced; and if the interest of the debt must be paid, which we all admit, there you have twenty-eight millions and sixteen millions, which make forty-four millions, that must not be touched. Then the financial reformers find some five or six

millions more, which make the whole expense of our civil Government. Ours is not an expensive Government, really, for twenty-eight millions of people. We can find no fault with these six or eight millions. But if the financial reformers join in this great cry for more warlike armaments, and give way to this redherring drawn across our path in the shape of an invasion, then, I think, they ought to close their books and retire from business, and no longer call themselves financial reformers.

Now, gentlemen, if you can only destroy this wicked delusion, that is spread abroad respecting the conduct of France and the intentions of France, there is a very productive mine still to be worked in this large amount of military and naval expenditure. I won't promise you that it shall be quite as productive as the repeal of the Corn-laws, and yet I really don't know but what, if you would give me the amount which, by putting [526] an end to this wicked spirit of animosity which has crept between France and England, might be fairly taken from our warlike expenses, and let me deal with it in the readjustment of taxation, in the reduction of taxation, I think I could so relieve industry by removing its trammels in the shape of custom-houses and excisemen, that I verily believe I could give a new lease to trade, almost as profitable as that derived from the repeal of the Corn-laws. And if you tell me that this invasion cry is founded in common sense and reason, that we must be prepared with our present armaments and then increase them, I should be guilty of the grossest imposture in the world if I were to tell you that any appreciable diminution could be made in the amount of our Government expenditure. You must, in that case, make up your mind to bear it, and I advise those who advocate this expenditure to do it without grumbling, and without making wry faces over it. I would not, if I believed what these people tell me; I would pay my taxes with right goodwill, and be very glad indeed to pay my money for such security.

Well, now, one word upon that which is of most vital importance in any agitation which may be renewed from this time. We are going to make this a revival, gentlemen; this is to be a new start. Now, you will all remember—I am sure my friend, Mr. Sturge, will—in fact, he has said as much to me this very day himself, and, therefore, I need not appeal to him to confirm what I am going to say,—no taunts ever thrown upon me have ever, to this moment, that I am aware of, led me to open my mouth to say that I disavowed the principles upon which the Peace Society is founded, and that I don't profess to go the lengths which the members of the Peace Society go. I have been told, I confess candidly, by political friends as well as political enemies, that I was doing myself a great deal of harm by allowing it to be thought that I was opposed to all defensive armaments. My answer has been:—If anybody believes that of me, and chooses to make that a reproach to me, I don't suppose that if I disabused him it would do much good, for he would be sure to find something else, to invent something else; and, besides, I add, I have so much respect for those gentlemen who belong to the Peace Society, and see that they are doing so much good, that I don't feel disposed at all to say anything that should appear to be construed to imply anything like a slight or disapproval of their conduct. But it is very well known to my friend Mr. Sturge, and others with whom I have acted,—and who know me very well, that although I am as anxious as they are to put an end to war at once and for ever, and see universal peace, yet that I was not educated in the principles of the Society of Friends, and it is generally to our education that we are indebted for our principles. And I have never avowed—I should be hypocritical if I avowed—that I entertained the opinion, that, if attacked, if molested in an unprovoked manner, I would not defend myself from such an act of aggression. Nobody, I presume, who wishes to do me justice, ever dreamed that I would do so. But it was not necessary, because I found every one bullying and crying, 'We will remind them of Waterloo; we will sing "Rule Britannia;" we will remind them of Trafalgar and the Nile;'—it was not necessary I should join in reminding them of that. But I hold opinions which are held by the great body of my countrymen, and an unprovoked attack would find, I dare say, as resolute a resistance from me as from many of those who are now crying out in a panic, and who, I suspect, would be



very likely to run away from the enemy.

Now, the Peace Society has just as tolerant views towards me as I have towards them. The Peace Society has never attempted to coerce me into their principles of non-resistance. I must say I have never found them attempting to make a proselyte of me. They perfectly understand what my views are on this subject,—that I will put an end to war if I can, but will submit to no injustice if I can prevent it. Now, it is intended [527] from this time that we shall enlarge the scope of this movement. We have met this morning, and we have had a gathering which has reminded me of the good old time of the League. I have seen at the very outset of this agitation noble-minded men put down their names for a sum of money which we were glad to wind up with in our League agitation after five years' struggle—I have seen 500*l.* put down to one name this morning; and it is proposed that there shall be not a new society, because the Peace Congress Association forms the common ground on which all men may co-operate. We don't propose to found any new society, but we intend to extend the operations of that body which was founded when we began the Peace Congress which visited the Continent, and also sat in London. We intend that there shall be a more abundant supply of the sinews of war placed in the hands of your committee by the addition of some other names in Manchester and elsewhere; and we hope to set at work, not only with a machinery for inundating the country with printed papers for its information and instruction, but we hope to set four or five lecturers to work in visiting every borough in the country, and see whether we cannot counteract the poison that is being infused into the minds of the people. When I met one of my friends in the streets of Manchester yesterday, he said, 'Why, you have come at a very inopportune time for your Peace meeting; for everybody is in a panic, and thinks you wrong.' I said, 'Why, that is the very reason why we are here; there never was a time yet when it was so necessary for the Peace party to redouble their efforts as at present.' And I venture to predict that the creation of the militia, and the present cry for an increase of our armaments, will give a date for the downfall of this very system which we condemn. This insane and wicked attempt at misleading and exasperating the people will recoil upon its authors—there will be from this time but the beginning of a reaction; and we won't fail to profit by it.

Then our lecturers and our tracts will be directed to disabuse the public mind, in the first place, of the impression which is created with respect to the intentions of France. That is the first thing to be done, because there's where the danger is. Then let them deal with the economical view of the question—I mean the pressure of the enormous burdens on the industry of this country. Let our lecturers go and show what each town pays—why, I heard it stated that Manchester has to pay 200,000*l.* as its share for our past wars, and for our present preparations. Let them go and show in all our towns and boroughs what are our economical objects. But don't let us lose sight of the still higher motives for peace. I have always been of opinion that the mainspring of this movement must be with those men who look beyond temporary concerns of any kind—who, instead of viewing this as a pounds, shillings, and pence question, or even a question of physical suffering, have an eye to the eternal interests involved in it. I say these are the men who are the mainspring of this movement. If anything be done to destroy the energy, or check the zeal, or to wound the consciences of those men who, from 1815 to the present time, when there was little attention paid to the question, kept the sacred lamp burning in the midst of contempt and contumely—if we do anything to disparage these men, I would not give a button for the prospect of this movement. And, therefore, our lecturers and tracts and publications must not only advocate the cause of peace on the ground of religious duty and the interests of morality, but they must not say one word that shall wound the convictions of those men who conscientiously believe in the inviolability of human life, and who would not resist to the death even to save their own existence.

Now, I know well that our opponents will try to make it appear that it is very inconsistent for men to co-operate together with such different objects, and for those who call themselves members of the Society of Friends to co-operate [528] with others who stop short of their principle. Well, that is a new doctrine, at all events. It was not so when the French war broke out. I find that then the Society of Friends co-operated with Mr. Fox and his colleagues of the Whig party in trying to prevent that most unrighteous and most unhappy war of the French revolution. I find that Mr. Gurney, of Norwich, corresponded constantly with Mr. Fox in the House of Commons, and that Mr. Fox corresponded with Mr. Gurney, entreating him to get up a county meeting in Norfolk, and encouraging him to get up numerous petitions from Norwich; but I certainly never heard anybody among the Whig party saying that Mr. Fox was inconsistent in co-operating with Mr. Gurney to prevent that dreadful war, or saying that Mr. Gurney sacrificed his principles in lending his help to Mr. Fox; although, if they had come together and sought out their points of difference instead of seeking out their points of union, they would have found, very likely, that their principles were quite as opposite, as the principles I hold would be found if compared with those of my friend Mr. Sturge. But we shall not have from the present Ministry, I think, any cavilling—no, nor from their organs of the press either; we shall not, I should think, have any cavilling or criticising as to men co-operating who don't agree on all points.

I recollect that during the debate on the Militia Bill, a certain noble Lord, who is now filling a very important office in the present Government, somehow picked up a pamphlet, written by a gentleman to show the inconsistency of a clergyman joining a rifle club, and the object of the writer was to show that the taking of human life at all, under any circumstances, was inconsistent with a belief of the New Testament; but who, being pushed by his adversary to the logical consequences of his own argument, made sundry admissions which, to those who have not adopted these views, appeared somewhat absurd. Well, this noble Lord, I say, got this pamphlet, and very dexterously turned this pamphlet, written by this gentleman, who, I dare say, was very consistent and very honest in what he wrote—he turned its contents against us who were opposing the militia. Well, that noble Lord is now filling an important office in the Government of Lord Aberdeen. I think I remember when the Earl of Aberdeen was Foreign Secretary under Sir R. Peel, that that noble Lord, from 1841 to 1846, employed a vast deal of his time, when in opposition, in criticising and condemning in no very measured terms, the principles upon which Lord Aberdeen's foreign policy was carried out. But I suppose the noble Lord must now have changed all his views on foreign policy since he took office under Lord Aberdeen; or if he has not, I suppose now that he will contend that it is not impossible for men to co-operate together without having identical views, and without being ready to go to the same extent in their views upon every question. If that be the case, I should hope that the noble Lord will, from the exigencies of his present situation, have learnt toleration for others, and that we shall hear no more of those taunts against men in the House of Commons who advocate the reduction of our armaments, or who resist the increase of those armaments, and who still may no more be identified with all the views of the Society of Friends than the noble Lord would be with all the foreign policy of the Earl of Aberdeen.

Gentlemen, our object here is business. You are here, from all parts of the country; and we have made a beginning in the essential part of our business this morning. At the meeting that has been held since the morning meeting, I think some four or five thousand pounds have been subscribed. It is proposed that it should be made up to ten thousand pounds, and that we go to work at once. Now, let us tell those people who have fancied they have it all their own way, for some time, in calling out for more soldiers, and in threatening us with a French invasion, that we are going to have a good deal to say upon that question, and they may expect to meet us in every borough [529] and town in the kingdom. I presume that our friends who are here will take charge of counties; for instance, suppose my friend Mr. Bowley would take charge of Gloucester,—I was going, almost, as a challenge to him, to

take charge of a county myself; but I certainly think that all those who are, as I am, imbued with the conviction that the present is a most critical time in the cause of Peace, should bestir themselves now. I hope they will, and that they will be ready, not only to give their time to it, in all parts of the kingdom, but that they will subscribe the sinews of war; and if it be only known through France that in Manchester, in the centre of the Free-trade agitation, surrounded by the very men who won that battle, there are men here now who are prepared to commit themselves, ay, and to commit liberally of their fortunes, to the agitation of this Peace question, and to the disabusing the minds of the people of this country as to the intentions and as to the condition of the French people,—I believe that if this be known in France, it will have more effect than anything that could possibly be done to counteract the mischievous effects which are being produced by those publications which are now issuing from the press.

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## POLICY OF THE WHIG GOVERNMENT.

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### POLICY OF THE WHIG GOVERNMENT. MANCHESTER, JANUARY 23, 1851.↩

[The most important or engrossing public business discussed in the Session of 1850 was the dispute between the Foreign Office and the kingdom of Greece in the affair of Pacifico. Towards the end of the year occurred what was called the Papal Aggression, the Pope having divided England into dioceses. This act caused great excitement, and a law was passed, under the name of the 'Ecclesiastical Titles Act,' prohibiting the Roman Catholic prelates from adopting territorial designations. From the commencement the Act was a dead letter. In the following speech Mr. Cobden commented on the apathy of the Government of Lord Russell.]

It used to be my practice, when I was agitating with my friend Bright, to stipulate that I should speak before him, and I need not tell you why. In entering this room to-night, I was under the same difficulty that he has expressed. I was not quite aware of the character of the present meeting; but when I looked round upon the countenances of the gentlemen assembled, I perfectly understood the character of the meeting. It comprises, I can vouch for it from personal knowledge, the pith and marrow of the Reform and Free-trade party in South Lancashire. It comprises men who worthily represent those who cannot be present in this room,—men without whose co-operation no election can be carried in South Lancashire, Manchester, or Salford, and against whose opposition it is equally important to know that no victory can be won. I appear here tonight as a spectator and visitor, to be a witness of your reception of those who represent you in Parliament. I am glad to have had the opportunity of beholding the cordial, the kind, and the flattering reception with which you have greeted them. It is right they should be so received by you. They are the men who stand the brunt of abundance of abuse; they have to meet detraction coming from your own city, and professing to express your own sentiments. The shafts of calumny, the mean insinuations of base motives, are continually flung at them—those unfair weapons of political warfare which are never resorted to except when men are either conscious of a bad cause, or acting solely from personal pique and spite. This is the abuse and this is the calumny with which these men have to contend, not only in the arena where they have to fight your battles; but I repeat it, in the very city which they represent, whose best sentiments they express. It is right, when they have to bear the brunt of such attacks, that they should, when they meet you, receive the reward which you [531] bestow upon them. But I, for my part, come here, not to answer to you for my conduct in Parliament, nor to share the tribute of respect and gratitude which you have bestowed upon them; it is as a listener and spectator that I rise here, at half-past ten o'clock, to say a few words; for, after the speeches you have just heard, I should be doing great injustice not only to you but to myself if I were to attempt long to arrest your attention.

This has been called a meeting to talk over all sorts of subjects. Now I am not going to deal in vague generalities. I do not mean to say that anybody who preceded me has done so, for they have been special enough; but I will not range the wide topics of political controversy. I will say, generally, that after we succeeded in the Free-trade controversy, I set myself a certain task in public life. I thought that the natural and collateral consequence of Free trade was first to endeavour to give the people, along with physical comfort and prosperity, improved intellectual and moral advantages. I thought that the country which had bargained for itself to enter into the lists of competition with the wide world, seeking no favour, but asking only for a fair field and free competition, would set about to economise its

resources, and in every way to attempt to mitigate a load of taxation which must impede the career of any nation that is unduly burdened in its competition with more favoured countries. I thought that, when we had said, 'We offer to trade with the whole world, and we invite the whole world to trade with us,' by that very declaration we told the wide world we sought peace and amity with them. Entertaining these views, I set myself the task, as a public man, of endeavouring, by every effort which, in my humble capacity, I could bring to bear, to stand prominently forward as the advocate of education, peace, and retrenchment. I do not come here to enter into a discussion on these questions, each one worthy of an essay by itself; but I will say this, that whilst upon all these subjects we have met with keen opposition, and upon two with obloquy and derision, I see such progress making, and made, as will encourage me to persevere in the advocacy of these principles with renewed and redoubled efforts. I find education assuming a prominence and importance, even by the admission of those who, until lately, have been opposed to it in every form, that I cannot have a doubt in my mind, that public opinion will be brought to bear on that topic with such irresistible force, that, ere long, we shall find a solution for this, which is one of the most difficult problems of our social existence. I find the question of peace, even in the eyes of those who have been attempting to ridicule its advocates, has become a leading topic of the day. Those who have derided us for helping forward the movement in favour of peace, do not hesitate to signalise this as an age which has the pleasing advantage over all preceding ages, of being characterised by symptoms which indicate that we are approaching an era when peace will become the maxim of the whole world. I find that what I told you in the Free Trade Hall, just three years ago,—that we might live to see the time when the expenditure which sufficed for 1835 would suffice again—is in process of being realised. We have already made such progress, that some four or five millions of reduction in our expenditure has taken place. I have no doubt that further retrenchments are going on at this very moment; and I now repeat, not only my conviction that we may return to the expenditure of 1835, but that we shall, ere long, attain that point, and that we shall not stop even there.

As fiscal questions will engage a good deal of attention in the ensuing Parliament, I would have you draw a rigorous distinction between two questions which are very often jumbled together, causing great confusion in the public mind. I mean the difference between a surplus caused by increased revenue, and a surplus occasioned by reduced expenditure. The Government comes forward with a surplus of 2,000,000*l.*, arising [532] from an increase in the receipts of the various existing taxes; and the Government is then too apt to take credit to itself for the great merit of having effected the superabundant revenue. They do not tell you, and you are too apt to forget it, that this surplus is merely the effect of your having given out of your pockets 2,000,000*l.* more into the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in one year than you did in the last year; and then the Chancellor of the Exchequer tells you, 'I have 2,000,000*l.* more than I estimated, I will return it to you.' 'Thank you for nothing,' is all you should ever say for that. But I wish that when the Chancellor of the Exchequer brings forward his Budget, you would look critically to the amount of the reduction of his Estimates for the next year's expenditure as compared with the Estimates of last year. If, in the ensuing session, the Chancellor of the Exchequer does that which we may do, bring forward a reduction in our establishments, then you may leave an estimated surplus over the expenditure of next year of nearer 5,000,000*l.* than 2,000,000*l.* The surplus that is now being estimated is upon the present year's Estimates. I want to see the next year's Estimates and the Budget, that we may judge of the Government by their Estimates, and not by any revenue they may have reached. I am not going into any tedious fiscal argument to-night. I only want to take this opportunity of saying two words upon a question which has been already alluded to. I have not since the close of Parliament addressed any audience upon general political topics. I have addressed peace meetings; I have addressed meetings of freehold land societies; I have addressed education meetings; but I have addressed no meeting where so wide a range of discussion and observation has been permitted as is now open to us in this

assembly. I very much regret it, because I should like to say a few words upon a controversy which has been raging in this country for two or three months, and to which if I did not refer I should be guilty of cowardice, seeing it is always my practice to deal with the prominent topics of the day. In these few words I beg to say I speak to you solely as a politician. For the last two or three months there has not been a calm in this country. We have heard of a great political calm, but there has been no calm. On the contrary, there has been an agitation. It has, I admit, been mainly sectional, but it has been widespread, and it has almost exclusively occupied the attention of the leading public prints.

I need not tell you that the question is that which is called the 'Papal Aggression.' The remark I wish to make is, that the discussion of this topic, as a political topic, has overlaid, arrested, and smothered for a time every other political topic. It is well known that in this country the public mind entertains but one question at a time; therefore the first remark I wish to make is, that the discussion of this topic, as a political topic, has prevented the public mind from occupying itself with fiscal questions, and questions affecting reform in the representation, and other questions which politicians have had for many years at heart, so that we approach the meeting of Parliament without the opportunity being afforded, or taken, by the country, of signalling to the Government the views we take upon those questions. I wish you to bear in mind that when we meet, ere another fortnight, in Parliament, our time will then, I fear, be very much occupied with the discussion of this same question; for, if we may believe Mr. Hugh Stowell in what he told us at a very large assembly, every political question, whether fiscal, social, or reformatory, must be suspended until this one great question be settled by the House of Commons. What, I want to ask, is this demand? Is this a question that can be settled by politicians? I speak as a politician. I may settle it in my own mind as a Protestant, and as a Protestant I may have my own opinions. [533] I have my own opinions, for it is everybody's duty to have his own opinions, and if he has an aggressive opponent, I doubt if it be not his duty to defend actively the opinion he entertains—always, of course, as an individual. But I want to ask, if there is any reason why religious questions should not be removed out of the domain of politics, just as they are in the United States of America? Lord Carlisle, when he, I will not say descended from his seat in the Cabinet to deliver an address to the Mechanics' Institution of Leeds, but when he honoured himself by coming out of the Cabinet for that purpose, made a remark which, coming at the time it did, I think, expressed more than the ordinary meaning of the words, when he said, 'I confess I do envy the complete toleration which exists in the United States.' I think that was a significant expression, and might be taken, probably, to justify those who believe in the rumour, that the Cabinet is not quite united upon the question of Papal Aggression. In the United States, the Pope may appoint bishops whenever he pleases; he may parcel out that vast Continent into as many dioceses as he pleases, including even California; he may send as many cardinals as he pleases; and no matter by what pompous phraseology all that be done, the United States politicians, and the United States Legislature at Washington, would be perfectly indifferent to it all. Why cannot we, in this country, as politicians, while giving the same security to private and individual judgment, leave the settlement of this question as it is in the United States? Is it that we are so ignorant, or that we are so liable to be misled? Then, I say, let us look sharp, and follow the advice given by Mr. Lawrence, the American Minister, and educate ourselves.

But I am told that the reason is that we have a State Church in England. Well, but does a State Church render the people of this country less able to protect themselves by their own unaided judgment, knowledge, and sound sense, from aggression? Are the people less able to protect themselves against error because they have a State Church? Will that be the confession? No. But the State Church has been made the obstacle, or attempted to be made the obstacle, in every parish, to the promotion of the same liberality that exists in America, against every proposal with regard to liberty, whether civil, religious, or commercial. There is no advance made in the path of freedom of any kind, but we are, and have been, continually

threatened with obstruction by the cry of 'The Church in danger.' Yet, I must say, that in every case the partisans of the Church have found their predictions singularly falsified. After the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act, after the accomplishment of Emancipation, after the Reform Bill was secured, there was the same cry; but I believe it will be admitted by both Churchmen and Dissenters, that the Church never was so active and prosperous, never were so many churches built, and never had the Establishment greater authority, than after the last of those great reforms down to the present day. Where, then, are the grounds for fear, on the part of Churchmen, for the security of the Church? But I say here that we will have toleration and religious freedom in this country, cost what it may. I do not stand here as the advocate of the partisans of the Roman Catholic body. As a politician, I do not presume to offer my opinions on the faith of any man. On the polity of that Church, I might possibly be allowed to offer an opinion; yet at the present moment, when county meetings are held and advertised (partly at the expense of Roman Catholics themselves, who pay rates as well as Protestants); when, I say, so much abuse is lavished upon them, I should be loath to offer any observation upon the polity of that Church. But I may be allowed to say that I am no friend to the organisation of the Roman Catholic body. It is too centralising for me; it is too subduing to the intellect for me; and if I changed my religion at all, I should [534] be as little likely as any gentleman in this room to go into their chapel, nay, as any one upon the face of the earth. But, at the same time, let the Roman Catholics living in England judge for themselves, not only of their own faith and motives, but of the mode in which they would constitute the organisation that will always follow religious teaching. Why should you dictate to the Roman Catholic bishops whether they will govern by a cardinal, an archbishop, or diocese? They do not come to me, as a politician, to ask me to give force and validity to their titles, or to give them stipends out of the public purse. What right have I, then, as a politician, to come before a public meeting, or to get up in the House of Commons, and say a word upon the subject of their faith, or on the polity of the Roman Catholic Church?

We shall be told pretty often, no doubt, that unless Government interferes, the privileges and prerogatives of the Queen of England will be invaded by the Pope,—not by Cardinal Wiseman. Cardinal Wiseman is a British subject; he cannot invade the prerogative of the Crown without being guilty of high treason; and if he is so guilty, let him be tried by the law. But what prerogatives have been invaded by the conduct of the Pope? Not the temporal prerogative. Why, the Pope has at this moment in his army a few thousand French and Austrian troops. And I have it on the best authority, that if these troops were removed, dire would be the dismay and speedy the flight of the whole body, Pope and cardinals. It is not, then, the army of the Pope that can threaten the temporalities of the Crown. Are the temporal prerogatives threatened by sea? You may have a list of the active naval force of the Pope; it amounts to two gun brigs and a schooner. Put one quarter of the effective service which is stationed on the coast of Sussex, and it would be quite sufficient to guard the whole island against the Pope's navy. It is not, then, the temporal sovereignty or the secular privileges of the Queen that can be endangered by the Pope, but her spiritual dominion, we are told, is to be perilled.

Now are we, as politicians, who are called upon fairly enough to vote money for ordnance, and for shot and shells, to meet and repel the aggressive enemy that meets us with spiritual weapons? Are we to forge the spiritual artillery with which we are to meet the aggression? If we are, I beg you to consider how capitally we are suited in the House of Commons for that purpose. I won't say a word to asperse the character of that body, of which I form a humble unit,—I mean the general character of that body, as a religious body. You may say, if you will, and believe, if you please,—I leave you to enjoy the pleasures of your credulity,—that a large majority of that House of Commons are living in an especial odour of sanctity and piety. You may believe it, if you please; I offer no opinion on it, for being one of the body, and having to face them in about a fortnight, I hope you will excuse my expressing

an opinion on the subject. But admitting, if you please,—admitting that we are, the great majority of us, eminent for our piety,—how are we constituted? Are we all Churchmen, owning the spiritual authority of the Queen? Why, we are about forty or fifty of us Roman Catholics, and, mark me, you will have a great many more Roman Catholics returned from Ireland at the next election. We have an Independent or two, we have three or four Unitarians, and we have a Quaker, I am happy to say, and I wish we had a good many more; and we have a fair prospect of having a Jew.

Now, is not that a very nice body of men to uphold the Queen's supremacy as the head of England's Church? Why, gentlemen, if you wanted to give us a task in the House of Commons which should last till Doomsday, and that we should therefore put off, as no doubt Mr. Hugh Stowell would require, all reforms, whether fiscal or parliamentary, till that remote day, then give us the task of settling this question of Papal [535] Aggression. I say, give it to the politicians to settle, if you want it never to be settled at all. As has been well expressed here by Mr. Bright, politicians have been at the work already for four or five hundred years. They have used every available method. They have tried fire and faggot: that is the most effectual means, I admit—but, then, you must exterminate also those who hold the opinions from which you differ. That was too shocking even for the sixteenth century, and so it was given up—I mean the attempt to exterminate those who professed these opinions. Then came the penal laws, which went every length short of extermination. What has been the tendency of the last century? Constant relaxation—a tendency more and more to religious toleration. What has been the course taken by the leading statesmen of this country? Why, to their honour be it said, the greatest and most illustrious statesmen of the last sixty years were so far in advance of the latent bigotry still existing in this country, that they were ready to sacrifice their fame—I mean such a fame as temporary popularity—they were willing to forego place, patronage, everything which statesmen and politicians hold most dear, rather than lend themselves to the continuance of that system. But I very much fear there are men now in the Cabinet, who owe all their distinction in public life to having been identified with that principle of toleration to which we are constantly more and more progressing, but who are now ready to sully their fair fame, and belie, I had almost said, the whole of their past political career, on entering into the political session of 1851. Gentlemen, I entreat you to remove this question of religious opinions,—remove it out of the domain of politicians, if you wish not only to make progress in those questions which we cannot delay, and if you wish to prevent a retrograde policy. It will not end in a mere return to the paths of religious monopoly, but will be certain to conduct you into a retrograde track, in questions affecting our temporal interests, and for which many of those who fancy themselves sincere, are now lending their voices when they raise this cry for religious intolerance. I agree with Mr. Gibson completely, that if this country permits one step backward, in the career of religious toleration, you are endangering yourselves on questions in which you feel most nearly interested. I never felt the slightest doubt in the world come across my mind on the subject of retaining everything we have gained in the way of social improvement, until I saw the account of a county meeting in Essex, which has had its counterpart nearly in every part of England, and at which Sir John Tyrell was one of the most prominent actors, when he called for three cheers for Lord John Russell.

Look at the actors throughout the country, in this present movement against what is called the Papal Aggression. Who are they? Have you seen those men advocating the repeal of the Corn-laws? Have you not seen in every case, that the most prominent actors in these county meetings are the men who resisted the establishment of that principle of commercial reform? Let me ask you if by any accident,—such accidents as may happen in our Constitution, which are precipitated at any moment,—you who entirely agree with me upon the subject of commercial freedom, and generally upon questions of liberal policy in secular affairs, let me ask you to answer me this question: Suppose a general election were to take



place, and those who are prominent in opposing religious toleration succeeded (and I am not sure that they would not succeed), in returning to Parliament a majority for re-enacting the disabilities and restrictions upon Roman Catholics, would not that be a majority that would either tamper with the Corn-laws, or take care to indemnify themselves for what has been taken from them? It is so; and those who are acting have not been so discreet, in this case, as to conceal their belief in the possibility of retrieving their monopoly. I say to those who have generally been favourable to commercial freedom, who [536] have been, in fact, friendly to civil and commercial freedom, and who join in this cry, and lend themselves to the support of this party who are in favour of religious restrictions,—I say that they would, in my opinion, bring back on themselves the commercial monopolies and political monopolies; and I say to them as inconsistent men,—for I don't address myself to those who oppose freedom in every shape,—but to those who were generally with us in advocating civil and commercial freedom,—I say if they gain the triumph of religious intolerance, and if they gain along with it a monopoly in food, they richly merit their fate.

But there is one thing that has been said by those who preceded me,—they have alluded to the bigotry, and fanaticism, and ignorance, which prevailed fifty years ago amongst the mass of the people of this country. Now, there is one symptom, and almost the only symptom, which has consoled me in this agitation for religious disabilities, and it is this:—the calm, passive, and, in many respects, contemptuous silence and indifference with which it has been regarded by the great mass of the people of this country. If the same tumults had occurred fifty or sixty years ago, owing to the prevailing ignorance and bigotry of the mass of the people of this country, half the Roman Catholic chapels would have been in flames, and half their occupants' lives in danger. And I thank the demonstration only for this: that it has given me, more than anything else, a conviction of the great progress that has been made in real intelligence by the great mass of the people, especially in the north of England. I will not say so much of the south. And I cannot say much for the Corporation of London. Why, only think of that Corporation professing to represent the City. Only think of it! Last year it was setting itself up and agitating in a ferment of enlightened intelligence and patriotism, in favour of religious liberty to the Jews. Now it is denouncing the superstitious ceremonies of the Roman Catholics. When has there been such a spectacle, so absurd a spectacle, exhibited as that which was shown, when the London Corporation took that great gingerbread coach, the pattern of 200 years ago, and clothed themselves in that Bartholomew-fair dress of theirs, and took a man with a fur cap, whose pattern dates back, I believe, five centuries, with a long sword in his hand, and all the other paraphernalia of the Corporation of London, and went down by the railroad to Windsor, in order to present an address to the Queen, in order to put down—Popish mummeries! If you want to see mummeries, go and see the Lord Mayor's procession. I have seen the grand ceremonies in the Vatican at Easter, I have seen the most gorgeous religious processions the Church of Rome can boast of, but I never saw anything half so absurd, or half so offensive to intelligence or commonsense, as the mummeries in which the Corporation of London indulge every year. Now I am glad to say of the north of England, that the mass of the people here have not joined in this intolerant outcry. I only regret that circumstances have prevented this meeting from being held in the Free Trade Hall, that I might have heard the cheer which I should have had from five thousand auditors, in expressing the sentiments I have just enunciated.

Now, gentlemen, only one word more, as a politician again, but not as a party politician, if you please. Something has been said about conduct or misconduct during the last session. I don't come here to answer to you, because I have not the honour of representing many of you. But this I will say, I am exceedingly tolerant of every Member of the House of Commons who strains a point to vote with the Government, provided he has been some fifteen or twenty years longer in the political arena than I have been. I believe my friend Mr. Brotherton, for instance, aims as much at benefiting the mass of the people in this country, in

[537] every form by which he can effect it, as I do; but I believe Mr. Brotherton has a stronger sentiment of reliance and sympathy towards the present Government than I have, and it is easily accounted for. Mr. Brotherton entered Parliament after the passing of the Reform Bill, and shared the struggles in obtaining that Bill, which I still regard, notwithstanding what Mr. Dyer said, a great progress in political reform. He shared all the struggles in carrying that Bill, and it is natural that he should have those sympathies. But I will say this in vindication of myself, that I entered somewhat at an advanced time of life for a man who has taken up the discussion of a public question, and I did it resolved to devote my labours to the solution of that question, without reference to the temporary interests or conveniences of any existing political party; and the result of that agitation in the case of the Corn-laws has convinced me that if anything is to be done in this country for the great mass of the people, if you are to succeed in establishing any reform of magnitude, it can only be done by the people out of doors, and in the House resolving to do that one thing, and totally disregarding the existing political parties in that House.

I desire to see something accomplished. I have set myself the task of accomplishing certain things, and amongst them that which is most dear to my heart is the advocacy of a more peaceful and conciliatory policy in the intercourse of nations, or, as I would especially say, in the intercourse between this country and weaker nations. If you want to wound my principles most acutely, it will be to show me England violating the principle of a conciliatory and humane policy when it has to deal with a weak Power, which is like a child in its grasp. I look upon inhumanity, rudeness, or violence, on the part of England towards a powerless state like Greece, with additional resentment, just as I should regard that man as a coward as well as a despot who molested and ill-used a child. Feeling, then, that my principles were violated in the case of Lord Palmerston, in the Greek affair, I voted against him on that occasion, and I should do so again, if ten thousand seats in Parliament depended on the issue of my vote.

Now, gentlemen, let me give one word of advice to those who are in Manchester or elsewhere, and take up a hasty conclusion against some of our Members, with whom you generally agree, and in whose judgment and sagacity you have some confidence, to beware how you take a side against them, merely because you see a certain line of policy argued in certain public prints. Give them credit for being wary; they have a better opportunity of sifting public men than you have. A man must be a fool, if he does not, after being in Parliament seven or eight years, and sitting in Committees with nearly all the Members, discover the motives of Governments when they are disclosed, not on the public arena, but where they are chatted over by friends in private. Depend upon it your Members will have rather better opportunities than you will have of judging the conduct of public men. And if you happen to think that Lord Palmerston, although he did try to maintain a fixed duty long after Lord Aberdeen had become the advocate of total repeal and untaxed bread,—if, notwithstanding certain other symptoms I could mention, which prove that Lord Palmerston is not the champion for liberty that you suppose,—if, I say, notwithstanding you have an impression in favour of Lord Palmerston, your Members come to a different conclusion, why, give them credit for the same honesty of purpose and intelligence with yourselves; and bear in mind, that they have the better opportunity of forming an opinion than yourselves. I have no desire to stand out singularly in my vote. As was well expressed by Mr. Bright, it is a very unpleasant thing to do so; it would be far more agreeable to make companionship with those men on the Treasury-benches, instead of treading on their toes [538] and poking them in the ribs, and making them uncomfortable. Is it any satisfaction to me, do you think, that Lord Palmerston's organ, the *Globe*, has denounced me, over and over again, as a disappointed demagogue, and hurled language at me which no other journal, the *Times*, for instance, has ever levelled at me? I know perfectly well that on the Manchester Exchange, and the Leeds Exchange, and the Liverpool Exchange, where the *Globe* paper is taken, and is understood to

be a Whig paper, when persons see it speak in such terms of the Member for the West Riding, they are apt to think there must be a great deal in it, and that the Member must be making himself especially ridiculous in the House of Commons. I am not a disappointed demagogue; if ever there was anybody who ought to be satisfied with his public career, it is I. I thank you for giving me the only response which could relieve me from the imputation of great egotism in saying so.

Well, as I said before, my position is not the same as that of Mr. Brotherton. I cannot see the line of demarcation between Whig and Tory which he sees. I cannot see what principle the Whigs advocate which the Tories do not advocate. I find in Lord John Russell, in the House of Commons, not simply great impatience but petulance, and I had almost said great insolence, in his dealings, particularly in the remarks he has made to our friend, Mr. Bright. He, I am sure, is very indifferent to the remarks themselves, but they are sufficiently important as indicating the tone of the man who is supposed to be the leader of our party. I must confess that, in regard to fiscal matters, I am bound to say, I believe the Opposition party would do quite as much in the way of retrenchment as the Whigs; I am not sure that they would not do more. I believe Sir James Graham, for instance, would show less subserviency to the Duke of Wellington, in military arrangements, than Lord J. Russell or Lord Palmerston. I believe in Colonial policy, whilst Sir R. Peel resolutely refused to add another acre to our tropical possessions, the present Government are taking possession in Asia, as well as Africa, of tracts of tropical territory, which, I believe, notwithstanding anything that may be said to the contrary by the Manchester Association, are only calculated to entail additional expense upon us, instead of benefiting us, as a free-trading community; and I fear that next session we shall be placed in a still worse dilemma. If we are to believe the reports that Lord J. Russell, instead of being the champion of religious liberty, is going to embark in a crusade against religious freedom, I shall find myself then still further alienated from the present party. But this I say: if I do not see that I have at least the liberty of voting in the House of Commons for something different to that which now exists,—if I cannot hope to see some change and some reform,—at least if I am not allowed the free advocacy of my own opinions for some distinct principle different from that which is now the rule of conduct with Whig and Tory,—why am I to be sitting up till twelve o'clock every night in the House of Commons? This disappointed demagogue wants no public employment; if he did, he might have had it before now. I want no favour, and, as my friend Bright says, no title. I want nothing that any Government or any party can give me; and if I am in the House of Commons at all, it is to give my feeble aid to the advancement of certain questions on which I have strong convictions. Deprive me of that power; tell me I am not to do this, because it is likely to destroy a Government with which at the present moment I can have no sympathy; then, I say, the sooner I return to printing calicoes, or something more profitable than sitting up in the House of Commons night after night in that way, the better both for me and my friends. I have come here, then, merely to renew personal acquaintances,—or rather, anxious by a short sojourn in this neighbourhood and in Yorkshire, not to [539] lose old acquaintances which I highly prize and value. I come, moreover, in order to have an opportunity of testing the current of public opinion a little, and sounding its depth, to see whether it be an unusual tide, or a steady, permanent stream. I think this meeting has demonstrated to me, that whatever exists in other parts of the country, here at least there is no reaction; and that, remembering what are our recorded opinions, you in Lancashire, and I hope my friends in Yorkshire, will always be found true to the principles of liberty and toleration.

## PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

[540]

### PARLIAMENTARY REFORM. I. HOUSE OF COMMONS, JULY 6, 1848. ↪

[On June 20, 1848, Mr. Hume moved the following resolution:—'That this House, as at present constituted, does not fairly represent the population, the property, or the industry of the country; whence have arisen great and increasing discontent in the minds of a large portion of the people; and it is therefore expedient, with a view to amend the National Representation, that the elective franchise shall be so extended as to include all householders, that votes shall be taken by Ballot, that the duration of Parliaments shall not exceed three years, and that the apportionment of Members to population shall be made more equal.' On July 6, the motion was rejected by 267 (321 to 84).]

I RISE under great disadvantages to address this House, after the hon. and learned Gentleman (Serjeant Talfourd) who has just sat down; and the difficulty of my position would be very much increased if I were called upon to address myself to this question in the manner, and with the eloquence and fancy, by which his speech has been distinguished; but I make no pretence to follow in such a track. I can only help observing, that the hon. and learned Gentleman has not given us any facts as the groundwork of his reasoning. There is one statement, however, made by the hon. and learned Gentleman, which is not a fact, but on which the opponents of my hon. Friend the Member for Montrose (Mr. Hume) seem very much to rely. The statement to which I allude is to this effect,—that the wishes of the country are not in favour of the change which my hon. Friend proposes. That assertion, as we all know, was made by the noble Lord the Member for London. Now, it must be generally felt that this statement is of more importance than any other that has been uttered upon this subject. On other subjects connected with the Government and Constitution of this country there may be much diversity of opinion; but I ask, is there any great diversity of opinion, at this moment, amongst the great class, who are now excluded from the franchise? I put it to the noble Lord to say, does he, or do his friends, mean to say, or do they not, that the masses of the unrepresented population in this country have no desire to possess political power and privileges? Will any one utter such a libel on the people of England? Will any one say that they are so abject, so base, so servile, as not to desire to possess the rights of citizens and freemen? I have not believed, and I do not believe, that such are the sentiments of my fellow-countrymen. I should entertain a very poor opinion indeed of the people of this country if I were to give a vote in favour of such a proposition; but yet it forms an important element in the reasonings of the [541] Gentlemen who oppose my hon. Friend the Member for Montrose. If you admit the most evident truth that can come under the notice of any man, you must admit that at least six-sevenths of the male population of this United Kingdom are earnestly pressing for and claiming the rights which you are denying them. I will go further, and tell the House that a very large proportion of the middle class regret that so many belonging to a humbler order of society than themselves should have been included amongst the unrepresented portion of the community. They express a sincere desire that the franchise should be extended; they look with great interest to the result of this night's division; and I undertake to say, that you will find those Members of this House who represent large and independent constituencies, comprising, for the most part, persons belonging to the middle class, you will find such Members voting with my hon. Friend—they are the men who will go into the lobby in favour of his motion. It is thus that the strongest and most useful appeal will be responded to by the great mass of the middle orders, and thus, I think, it will be

shown, that the middle class entertain no such feeling of hostility against the admission of working men to political power as they are said to indulge. In proportion as the middle class are free and independent, in so far do they desire the freedom and independence of the rank nearest to themselves, in that proportion do they desire to open the portals of the Constitution to the poor man. Some hon. Members in this House have contended against this truth; but I take the liberty of saying, that I have for a long time been accustomed to watch the progress of opinion on this subject out of doors; and this I tell the hon. and learned Gentleman, and I can prove it, even to his satisfaction, that I have had better opportunities than he possesses of estimating the state of opinion out of doors upon this matter; and I beg to inform him, that this opinion in favour of my hon. Friend's motion has arisen spontaneously—that there has been no organization; and the best proof of this assertion that I can offer is to be found in the fact, that the number of public meetings to consider, discuss, and petition upon this subject, has been no fewer than 130. I find it so recorded in the *Daily News*, and I repeat that this is a purely spontaneous movement. I have no hesitation in frankly acknowledging that we were five years agitating for a repeal of the Corn-laws, before we reached so advanced a point as that which the friends of the present question now occupy. Respecting the repeal of the Corn-laws, the mass of the people were said, truly enough, perhaps, to have been galvanized from a centre. But, with regard to the motion of my hon. Friend the Member for Montrose, the practice has been reversed; and whatever manifestations of opinion have been displayed out of doors, they have arisen without any exertion of central influence.

I do not say that all men are agreed upon this subject—that there are no diversities of opinion; but I say there is much less of this than those who resist my hon. Friend's motion at all like to see. We have had petitions from those who favour the Charter, and from those who desire universal suffrage, and very many in favour of the particular plan upon which we are now speedily to divide. I have not anything to say against those petitions in favour of the Charter, or in favour of universal suffrage. I am not contending against the right of a man, as a man, to the franchise—I mean the right that a man ought to enjoy apart from the possession of property; but I feel I should not be justified in taking the line of argument adopted by the hon. and learned Gentleman, and by the noble Lord the First Minister of State, who addressed himself to the advocates of universal suffrage, and seemed to argue that they were more right than the advocates of household suffrage. If he intends to vote for universal suffrage, I can understand the force of that argument; but as I am not going to oppose universal suffrage, and as I do not stand [542] here to support it, I leave him in the hands of the advocates of universal suffrage, and, judging by what has been done, they seem disposed to make the most of the argument which has been put into their hands.

I will not occupy the time of the House in discussing this point further, but rather prefer to direct attention to this circumstance,—that the hon. and learned Gentleman did not display his usual legal skill and knowledge in dealing with the question of household suffrage, for it certainly is not surrounded with the difficulties which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has imagined. To judge from his speech, it would seem to be the law, that no one except the landlord and occupier of a house enjoys a vote in right of that house. Surely the hon. and learned Gentleman ought to have known that the Court of Common Pleas has decided that lodgers paying more than 10*l.* annually, and rated to the poor-rates, are entitled to be placed on the list of voters—that is to say, in cases where the landlord does not live on the premises. That is the state of the law as established by the Reform Act, and my hon. Friend seeks only to extend that privilege a little; it therefore can scarcely be considered a matter difficult of arrangement. The mere extension of the existing rule gets rid of all difficulty, and gives the franchise to prudent young men—too prudent to marry and take houses with insufficient means; to them, being lodgers, and paying a rent exceeding 10*l.*, the plan of my hon. Friend gives the franchise. The law of the land already goes very near to this.

The allusion which the hon. and learned Gentleman made to the case of Cooper must be fresh in the recollection of the House. I am sorry he alluded to that part of Cooper's career, who, I believe, greatly regrets those events, and would be glad to forget the part that he took in the affair at the Staffordshire Potteries. I again say, I am sorry that the subject was introduced here, for we want no additional examples to prove to us that a very good poet may be a very bad politician. The object of the motion of the hon. Member for Montrose is, that he may bring in a bill for the purpose, among other things, of giving votes to householders; that is to say, that parties not only paying taxes to the country, but rates to the poor, should have a voice in the election of Members to this House. In advocating this principle, we are really acting on the theory that exists as to the franchise of this country; for we say that the people of this country elect the Members of this House. Is that sham, or is it reality?

Now, if there is one thing more than another that the people do not like, it is sham. The people like realities. The theory of this country is, that the people like political power; and there is nobody responsible, as the hon. and learned Gentleman in his poetical flight seemed to imagine, for the education of the people and the preparation of them for the political franchise. If there had been any such responsible parties, the thing would have been done long ago. But, I ask, what danger is there in giving the franchise to householders? They are the fathers of families; they constitute the laborious and industrious population. What would be endangered by giving this class the franchise? When our institutions are talked of, I always hear it said that they live in the affections of the country, and that the Queen sits enthroned in the hearts of the people; and I have no fear of danger from any such wide extension of the suffrage as we now contemplate. I do not believe that it would lead to any change in the form of our government. I say, God forbid that it should. I sincerely hope, if there is to be a revolution in this country in consequence of which the monarchical form of government shall give way to any other form, that that revolution may happen when I shall be no longer here to witness it, for the generation that makes such a revolution will not be the generation to reap the fruits of it. I do not believe that the people of this country have any desire to change the form of their government, nor do I join with [543] those who think that the wide extension of the suffrage, of which we now speak, would either altogether or generally affect a change in the class of persons chosen as representatives. I do not think that there would be any great change in that respect. The people would continue, as at present, to choose their representatives from the easy class,—among the men of fortune; but I believe this extension of the suffrage would tend to bring not only the legislation of this House, but the proceedings of the Executive Government, more in harmony with the wants, wishes, and interests of the people. I believe that the householders, to whom the present proposition would give votes, would advocate a severe economy in the Government. I do not mean to say that a wide extension of the suffrage might not be accompanied by mistakes on some matters in the case of some of the voters; such mistakes will always occur; but I have a firm conviction that they will make no mistake in the matter of economy and retrenchment. I have a firm conviction, that, if proper political power were given to the people, the taxation necessary for the expenditure of the State would be more equitably levied.

What are the two things most wanted? What would the wisest political economists, or the gravest philosophers, if they sat down to consider the circumstances of this country, describe as the two most pressing necessities of our condition? What but greater economy, and a more equitable apportionment of the taxation of the country? I mean, that you should have taxation largely removed from the indirect sources from which it is at present levied, and more largely imposed on realised property. This retrenchment and due apportionment of taxation constitute the thing most wanted at present for the safety of the country; and this the people, if they had the franchise now proposed, would, from the very instinct of selfishness, enable you to accomplish. Let me not be mistaken. I do not wish to lay all the taxation on property. I would not do injustice to any one class for the advantage of another; but I wish to see

reduced, in respect to consumable articles, those obstructions which are offered by the Customs and Excise duties. You ought to diminish the duties on tea and wine, and you ought to remove every exciseman from the land, if you can; and I believe that the selfish instinct—to call it by no other name—of the great body of the people, if they had the power to bring their will to bear on this House, would accomplish these objects, so desirable to be effected in this country.

Then where is the danger of giving the people practically their theoretical share of political power? We shall be told that we cannot settle the question by household suffrage; and I admit that by no legislation in this House in 1848 can you settle any question. You cannot tell what another generation or Parliament may do. But, if you enfranchise the householders in this country, making the number of voters 3,000,000 or 4,000,000, whereas at present they are only about 800,000, will any one deny that by so doing you will conciliate the great mass of the people to the institutions of the country, and that, whatever disaffection might arise from any remaining exclusion (and I differ from the hon. and learned Gentleman, who thought that more disaffection would thereby be created), your institutions will be rendered stronger by being garrisoned by 3,000,000 or 4,000,000 of voters in place of 800,000?

The hon. and learned Gentleman has expended a great deal of his eloquence on the question of electoral districts. Now, when you approach a subject like this, with a disposition to treat it in the cavilling spirit of a special pleader, dealing with chance expressions of your opponents, rather than looking at the matter in a broad point of view, it is easy to raise an outcry and a prejudice on a political question. But, as I understand the object of the hon. Member for Montrose, it is this,—he wishes for a fairer apportionment of the representation [544] of the people. He said that he did not want the country marked out into parallelograms or squares, or to separate unnecessarily the people from their neighbours; and I quite agree with the hon. Member for Montrose, that his object can be attained without the disruption of such ties. The hon. and learned Gentleman dealt with this question as if we were going to cut up some of the ancient landmarks of the country, as the Reform Act cut up some counties in two, and laid out new boundaries. But I will undertake to do all that the hon. Member for Montrose proposes to do without removing the boundary of a single county or parish; and, if I do not divide parishes or split counties, you will admit that I am preserving sufficiently the old ties. I must say that I consider this question of the reapportionment of Members to be one of very great importance.

When you talk to me of the franchise, and ask me whether I will have a man to vote who is twenty-one years of age, and has been resident for six or twelve months, whether a householder or lodger, there is no principle I can fall back upon in order to be sure that I am right in any one of those matters. I concur with those who say that they do not stand on any natural right at all. I know no natural right to elect a Member to this House. I have a legal right, enabling me to do so, while six-sevenths of my fellow-countrymen want it. I do not see why they should not have the same right as myself; but I claim no natural right; and, if I wished to cavil with the advocates for universal suffrage, I should deal with them as I once good-humouredly dealt with a gentleman who was engaged in drawing up the Charter. He asked me to support universal suffrage on the ground of principle; and I said, 'If it is a principle that a man should have a vote because he pays taxes, why should not, also, a widow who pays taxes, and is liable to serve as churchwarden and overseer, have a vote for Members of Parliament?' The gentleman replied that he agreed with me, and that on this point, in drawing up the Charter, he had been outvoted; and I observed that he then acted as I did,—he gave up the question of principle, and adopted expediency.

I say that, with respect to the franchise, I do not understand natural right; but with respect to the apportionment of Members, there is a principle, and the representation ought to be fairly apportioned according to the same principle. What is the principle you select? I will not take the principle of population, because I do not advocate universal suffrage; but I take the ground of property. How have you apportioned the representation according to property? The thing is monstrous. When you look into the affair, you will see how property is misrepresented in this House; and I defy any one to stand up and say a word in defence of the present system. The hon. Member for Buckinghamshire alluded the other night to the representation of Manchester and Buckinghamshire, and made a mockery of the idea of Manchester having seven representatives. Now, judging from the quality of the Members already sent to this House by Manchester, I should wish to have not only seven such Members, but seventy times seven such. I will take the hon. Member's own favourite county of Buckingham for the sake of illustration, and compare it with Manchester. The borough of Manchester is assessed to the poor on an annual rental of 1,200,000*l.*, while Buckinghamshire is assessed on an annual rental only of 760,000*l.* The population of Buckinghamshire is 170,000, and of Manchester 240,000; and yet Buckinghamshire has eleven Members, and Manchester only two. The property I have mentioned in respect to Manchester does not include the value of the machinery; and, though I will grant that the annual value of land will represent a larger real value of capital than the annual value of houses, yet, when you bear in mind that the machinery in Manchester, and an enormous amount of accumulated personal property, which goes to sustain [545] the commerce of the country, is not included in the valuation I have given, I think I am not wrong in stating that Manchester, with double the value of real property, has only two Members, while Buckinghamshire has eleven. At the same time, the labourers in Buckinghamshire receive only 9*s.* or 10*s.* a week, while the skilled operatives of Manchester are getting double the sum, and are, consequently, enabled to expend more towards the taxation of the country.

If this were merely a question between the people of Buckinghamshire and Manchester, — if it were merely a question whether the former should have more political power than the latter, the evil would in some degree be mitigated, if the power really resided with the middle and industrious classes; but, on looking into the state of the representation of the darling county of the hon. Member, I find that the Members are not the representatives of the middle and industrious classes, for I find that eight borough Members are so distributed as, by an ingenious contrivance, to give power to certain landowners to send Members to Parliament. I will undertake to show that there is not more than one Member in Buckinghamshire returned by popular election, and also that three individuals in Buckinghamshire nominate a majority of the Members. If called on, I can name them. What justice is there in, not Buckinghamshire, but two or three landowners there, having the power to send Members to this House to tax the people of Manchester? When this matter was alluded to on a former occasion, the hon. Member for Buckinghamshire treated the subject lightly and jocosely, as regarded the right of Manchester to send its fair proportion of Members to this House, and that jocularly was cheered with something like frantic delight in this House; but I think this is the last time such an argument will be so received. I maintain that Manchester has a right to its fair proportion of representatives, and I ask for no more.

I will now refer to the case of the West Riding of Yorkshire. That contains a population of 1,154,000; and Wilts contains a population of 260,000. The West Riding is rated to the poor on an annual rental of 3,576,000*l.*, and Wilts on an annual rental of 1,242,000*l.*, yet each returns eighteen Members; and when I refer to Wilts, I find six of its boroughs down in *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* as openly, avowedly, and notoriously under the influence of certain patrons, who nominate the Members. I hold in my hand a list of ten boroughs, each returning two Members to Parliament, making in all twenty Members; and I have also a list of ten towns in the West Riding of Yorkshire which do not return any Member; yet the



smallest place in the latter list is larger than the largest of the ten boroughs having two Members each. Is there any right or reason in that? According to a plan which I have seen made out, if the representation were fairly apportioned, the West Riding of Yorkshire should have thirty Members, whereas it now has eighteen only. We do not wish to disfranchise any body of the people,—we want to enfranchise largely; but what we would give the people should be a reality, and they should not be mocked by such boroughs as Great Marlow, where an hon. Gentleman returns himself and his cousin; as High Wycombe, Buckingham, and Aylesbury; but there should be a free constituency, protected by the ballot.

With respect to Middlesex, the assessment to the poor is on an annual rental of 7,584,000*l.*; and the assessment of Dorsetshire is on an annual rental of 799,000*l.* Yet they both have fourteen Members, while the amount of the money levied for the poor in one year in Middlesex is as large within 6*l.* as the whole amount of the property assessed to the poor in Dorsetshire. The assessment to the poor in Marylebone is on an annual rental of 1,666,000*l.*, being more than the annual rental of two counties returning thirty Members. Why should not the metropolis have a fair representation according to its property? I believe [546] that the noble Lord at the head of the Government did intimate a suspicion of the danger of giving so large a number of Members to the metropolis as would be the result of a proportional arrangement. I am surprised at the noble Lord holding such an opinion, as he is himself an eminent example and proof, that the people of the metropolis might be entrusted safely with such a power. I observed, that in the plan for the representation in Austria, it was proposed to give Vienna a larger than a mere proportional share in the representation, because it was assumed that the metropolis was more enlightened than the other parts of the country.

Now, notwithstanding all that may be said to the contrary, I maintain that the inhabitants of your large cities—and of a metropolis especially—are better qualified to exercise the right of voting than the people of any other part of the empire; for they are generally the most intelligent, the most wealthy, and the most industrious. I believe that the people of this metropolis are the hardest-working people in England. But where is the difficulty? An hon. Gentleman has objected to large constituencies, on the ground that Members would then be returned by great mobs. Now, my idea is, that you make a mob at a London election by having too large a constituency. Some of your constituencies are too large, while others are too small. Take Marylebone, or Finsbury, with a population of between 200,000 and 300,000; the people there cannot confer with their neighbours as to the election of representatives. But you may give a fair proportion of representatives to the metropolis; and you may lay out the metropolis in wards, as you do for the purpose of civic elections. I do not undertake to say what number of electors should be apportioned to each ward, that is a matter of detail; but if the subject were approached honestly, it would not be difficult to come to a satisfactory conclusion. I believe that if the metropolis were laid out in districts for the election of Members of Parliament, the people would make a better choice of representatives than any other part of the kingdom. Do not be alarmed by supposing that they would send violent Radicals to Parliament. You would have some of your rich squares, and of your wealthy districts, sending aristocrats: while other parts of the metropolis would return more democratic Members. It is a chimera to suppose that the character of the representation would be materially changed; the matter only requires to be looked into to satisfy any one that it is a chimera. I tell you that you cannot govern this country peaceably, while it is notorious that the great body of the people, here in London and elsewhere, are excluded from their fair share of representation in this House. I do not say that you should have an increased number of representatives. I think we have quite as many representatives in this House as we ought to have; but if you continue the present number of representatives, you must give a larger proportion to those communities which possess the largest amount of property, and diminish the number of Members for those parts of the country which have now an undue

number of representatives. You cannot deal with the subject in any other way; and you cannot prevent the growing conviction in the public mind, that whatever franchise you may adopt—whether a household or a 10*l.* franchise—you must have a more fair apportionment of Members of this House. Do not suppose that this is a mere question of mathematical nicety. No; where the power is, to that power the Government will gravitate. The power is now in the hands of persons who nominate the Members of this House,—of large proprietors, and of individuals who come here representing small constituencies. It is they who rule the country; to them the Government are bound to bow. But let the great mass of the householders, let the intelligence of the people be heard in this House, and the Prime Minister may carry on his Government with more security to himself, and with more security [547] to the country, than he can do with the factitious power he now possesses.

Upon the ballot I will say but a few words; and for this reason—because it stands at the head of those questions which are likely to be carried in this House. I mean, that it has the most strength in this House and in the country among the middle classes, and particularly among the farmers, and among persons living in the counties. Some hon. Gentlemen say, ‘Oh!’ They are not farmers who say ‘Oh, oh!’ they are landlords. The farmers are in favour of the ballot. I will take the highest farming county—Lincolnshire. Will any one tell me that the farmers of Lincolnshire are not in favour of the ballot? I say this question stands first; it will be carried. Why, no argument is attempted to be urged against it, except the most ridiculous of all arguments, that it is un-English. I maintain that, so far from the ballot being un-English, there is more voting by ballot in England than in all the countries in Europe. And why? Because you are a country of associations and clubs,—of literary, scientific, and charitable societies,—of infirmaries and hospitals,—of great joint-stock companies,—of popularly governed institutions; and you are always voting by ballot in these institutions. Will any hon. Member come down fresh from the Carlton Club, where the ballot-box is ringing every week, to say that the ballot is un-English? Will gentlemen who resort to the ballot to shield themselves from the passing frown of a neighbour whom they meet every day, use this sophistical argument, and deny the tenant the ballot, that he may protect himself not only against the frowns but against the vengeance of his landlord?

As to triennial Parliaments, I need not say much on that subject. This, also, will be carried. We do not appoint people to be our stewards in private life for seven years; we do not give people seven years’ control over our property. Let me remind the House that railway directors are elected every year. Something has been said by the Prime Minister as to the preference of annual to triennial Parliaments. I think I can suggest a mode of avoiding all difficulty on this point. Might it not be possible to adopt the system pursued at municipal elections—that one-third of the members should go out every year? I mention this only as a plan for which we have a precedent. If one-third of the Members of this House went out every year, you would have an opportunity of testing the opinion of the country, and avoiding the shocks and convulsions so much dreaded by some hon. Gentlemen.

I will only say one word, in conclusion, as to a subject which has been referred to by the hon. and learned member for Reading (Mr. Serjeant Talfourd) and the hon. Member for Buckinghamshire (Mr. Disraeli). They complain that leagues and associations were formed out of doors, and yet in the same breath they claim credit for the country that it has made great advances and reforms. You glorify yourselves that you have abolished the slave-trade and slavery. The hon. and learned Gentleman has referred, with the warmth and glow of humanity by which he is distinguished, to the exertions which have been made to abolish the punishment of death. Whatever you have done to break down any abomination or barbarism in this country has been done by associations and leagues out of this House; and why? Because, since Manchester cannot have its fair representation in this House, it was obliged to organise a League, that it might raise an agitation through the length and breadth of the land,

and in this indirect matter might make itself felt in this House. Well, do you want to get rid of this system of agitation? Do you want to prevent these leagues and associations out of doors? Then you must bring this House into harmony with the opinions of the people. Give the means to the people of making themselves felt in this House. Are you afraid of losing anything by it? Why, the very triumphs you have spoken of—the triumphs achieved out of doors—by reformers, have been the salvation of [548] this country. They are your glory and exultation at the present moment. But is this not a most cumbrous machine?—a House of Commons, by a fiction said to be the representatives of the people, meeting here and professing to do the people's work, while the people out of doors are obliged to organise themselves into leagues and associations to compel you to do that work? Now, take the most absurd illustration of this fact which is occurring at the present moment. There is a confederation, a league, an association, or a society,—I declare I don't know by what fresh name it may have been christened, formed in Liverpool, a national confederation, at the head of which, I believe, is the brother of the right hon. Member for the University of Oxford, Mr. Gladstone, a gentleman certainly of sufficiently Conservative habits not to rush into anything of this kind, if he did not think it necessary. And what is the object of this association? To effect a reform of our financial system, and to accomplish a reduction of the national expenditure. Why, these are the very things for which this House assembles. This House is, *par excellence*, the guardian of the people's purse; it is their duty to levy taxes justly, and to administer the revenue frugally; but they discharge this duty so negligently, that there is an assembly in Liverpool associated in order to compel them to perform it, and that assembly is headed by a Conservative.

It is not with a view of overturning our institutions that I advocate these reforms in our representative system. It is because I believe that we may carry out those reforms from time to time, by discussions in this House, that I take my part in advocating them in this legitimate manner. They must be effected in this mode, or they must be effected, as has been the case on the Continent, by bayonets, by muskets, and in the streets. I am no advocate for such proceedings. I conceive that any man of political standing in this country—any Members of this House, for instance—who join in advocating the extension of the suffrage at this moment, are the real conservators of peace. So long as the great mass of the people of this country see that there are men in earnest who are advocating a great reform like this, they will wait, and wait patiently. They may want more; but so long as they believe that men are honestly and resolutely striving for reform, and will not be satisfied until they get it, the peace and safety of this country—which I value as much as any Conservative—are guaranteed. My object in supporting this motion is, that I may bring to bear upon the legislation of this House those virtues and that talent which have characterised the middle and industrious classes of this country. If you talk of your aristocracy and your traditions, and compel me to talk of the middle and industrious classes, I say it is to them that the glory of this country is owing. You have had your government of aristocracy and tradition; and the worst thing that ever befell this country has been its government for the last century-and-a-half. All that has been done to elevate the country has been the work of the middle and industrious classes; and it is because I wish to bring such virtue, such intelligence, such industry, such frugality, such economy into this House, that I support the Motion of the hon. Member for Montrose.

**PARLIAMENTARY REFORM. II.**  
**LONDON, NOVEMBER 26, 1849.** ↩

[The object of the meeting held at the London Tavern, and of which Mr. Samuel Morley, now Member for Bristol, was Chairman, was to advocate the scheme of the Metropolitan and National Freehold Land Association. Mr. Cobden's Speech introduced the following resolution:—"That this meeting is of opinion, that the Freehold Land movement, adapted, as it is, to the varied position and circumstances of all classes of the people, is calculated to improve the parliamentary representation of the country.']

If I understand the character of this meeting, it is assembled solely for business purposes. We are the members and friends of the Metropolitan and National Freehold Land Society, and we meet here to promote the objects of that society. It is an association framed for the purpose of enabling individuals, by means of small monthly contributions, to create a fund by which they may be enabled, in the best and cheapest way, to possess themselves of the county franchise. You will see, then, that this society has a double object in view: it is a deposit for savings, and a means of obtaining a vote. Now we don't meet here to-day, as a part or branch of the Birmingham Society, which was formed a few days ago, and called the Birmingham Freeholders' Union. That is a society composed of individuals, from all parts of the kingdom, who choose to subscribe to it, for the purpose of enabling a committee in Birmingham to stimulate throughout the country by lectures, and by means of a periodical journal called the *Freeholder*, to be published on the first of next month, the formation of freehold land societies. We do not meet as part of an agitating body, but merely to promote the objects of the Metropolitan and National Freehold Land Society. The plan of that society is, to purchase large estates—large, comparatively speaking, and to divide them amongst the members of the association at cost price. In that explanation consists the main force and value of this association. The principle, you will see in a moment, is calculated to give great advantages to those who wish to join associations of this kind. I know that some gentlemen, who have given their attention to building societies, will say that this is not a building society. Why, the building societies, as they are called, are none of them, strictly speaking, building societies. They may be properly called mutual benefit security societies; but this Freehold Land Association is enrolled under the Building Society Act, and certified by Mr. Tidd Pratt, the revising barrister; and the object is, that members of the [550] association shall have all the benefits the Act of Parliament can give them, and all the security it confers; and we propose to give them some other additional advantages. It has been said by those who look closely into the rules of this association, 'You have no power under the Building Act to purchase estates and divide them.' That is perfectly true. We have no such powers; but the directors will, at the risk of the parties who buy the estates, undertake to purchase land, and to give the members of this-association the refusal of that land. So that our object is to give you all the benefits of the Building Societies Act, and also the refusal of portions of the estates which have been bought at the risk of others.

I need not tell you, that a great deal of the success of all associations of this kind depends, first, on correct calculations being made in framing the society; and next, and, perhaps, most of all, on the character and stability of those who have the responsible management. Now, with regard to the calculations on which this society is founded, I should be very sorry to allow this opportunity to pass, without coming to a perfectly clear understanding with all who are concerned in the association, as to what I propose, as a member of the board of directors, to undertake to do towards the share-holders. It has been stated that we undertake to find a freehold qualification for a county at a certain sum, say 30*l*. I believe that, in the first

prospectus, that sum was stated; but, when I heard of it, I stipulated that it should be withdrawn, for I will be no party to any stipulation of the kind. I do not appear here, having myself land to sell. All I promise you is, that, while I remain for twelve months as a responsible director, all the property bought shall be divided without profit, and that the members of the association shall have its refusal at cost price. But, whether it cost 20*l.*, or 30*l.*, or 40*l.*, or 50*l.*, is a matter to which I do not undertake to pledge myself, because it is a matter which I cannot control. It has happened, at Birmingham, that many persons obtained as much land as gave them a qualification for as little as 20*l.*, but that may be a lucky accident. I will not be a party to any pledge that we shall procure land for others on equally favourable terms.

Well, having cleared the ground, so that there may be no misunderstanding, I next come to the consideration of the character of those who have the direction of the affairs of the society. I am very happy to see our chairman (Mr. S. Morley) here on this occasion. He is one of the trustees, and I need not tell you that he stands very well in Lombard Street. The other trustees are responsible men; not merely responsible in point of pecuniary circumstances, but men, any one of whom I should be happy, were I making my will tomorrow, to leave as trustees for my children, of every farthing I had in the world. This is the only test you can, with safety, apply. If you have not men, whose private characters will bear such a test as that, you had better have nothing at all to do with them in public matters. Besides the trustees, you have the board of directors. I have attended every meeting of the board of directors when in town, and there is not one of the gentlemen I have found at the board whom I should not be happy to meet in private life, and to call my friend. I believe, therefore, leaving myself, if you please, out of the question, that the affairs of the association are in truly responsible and honourable hands. And here I beg not to be misunderstood. We do not come here to puff ourselves off at the expense of other associations. There are other societies formed, or forming, and, no doubt, their directors are as trustworthy as those of our association. We are not so badly off in England that we cannot find honour and honesty enough for every situation in life. You will get the strictest integrity for 20*s.* a week, and as much as you wish to hire.

It has been objected (and I confess there was some difficulty in my mind on the subject) that, in working an association [551] of this kind, you may not be able to find freehold property, in convenient situations, or of convenient size, to carry out the movement. There may be that difficulty; but there are difficulties in every useful undertaking in this world, and there always will be. Those who make it their business to turn a green eye on our proceedings, will, no doubt, find plenty of difficulties; but, from every inquiry I have made, since my connection with the board of directors, I believe that there will be no insurmountable obstacle in working out our plan. It is perfectly true that, in seeking property, you may not find it at your own doors. If you live in a street in this metropolis, you may not be able to buy building-land in the immediate neighbourhood of your own residence, but you must be content to go farther from home, just as you would in other investments. One man buys Spanish bonds, and another Russian and Austrian bonds. Others, again, buy railway shares, which are running all over the country, and some of them running away. But give me a freehold investment in the earth, which never does run away, and it does not matter whether it is in my own parish or not, so that I have good title-deeds, and receive my rent by the penny post, I need not care, then, whether I see it or not. With that proviso, that you cannot always get land at your own doors, I do not see any difficulty in qualifying a person in the county in which he resides, with a freehold franchise. Many people think, that the only object for which they should buy land is, to build a house upon it; but there are other ways of disposing of it. Gardens, for instance, than which nothing is more sure of a rent; for if you buy land in the neighbourhood of any town, that land is always increasing in value; since, whatever the Corn-laws may have done to the agriculturist, you may depend upon it that, if

food be cheap, population will be increasing in towns, and land, in the neighbourhood of towns, will increase in value. Whatever the foreigner may send us in the shape of wheat, he cannot send us garden-ground.

Now, for the purpose of illustration, I will take the case of Surrey. Many of you, I have no doubt, come from the other side of the river. I will suppose, then, that our friend Mr. Russell, the indefatigable solicitor of this association, whom I have had the pleasure of knowing and co-operating with for many years, has heard that there is a bit of land to be sold in the neighbourhood of Guildford. I will suppose that there is a farm, or one hundred acres of land, to be sold, within a mile or two of that town, and that Mr. Russell goes, with one of the directors, to look at it. They get a valuer to examine it; and, having learned the price at which this farm can be bought, they buy it; and then, instead of letting the hundred acres to one farmer, they determine to cut it up into plots of one or two acres. Now, if the shopkeepers and mechanics of the town were told that this land was to be let, I will venture to say that there is not one of the plots which would not let at the rate of 40s. an acre.

I know the avidity with which the peasantry of our towns and villages take half an acre or an acre of land. It is an article which is in greater demand than any other. I could find land in Wiltshire, which is, I am sorry to say, let to the peasantry at the rate of 7*l.* or 8*l.* an acre. I am supposing that a person wished to buy as much land as would give him a county vote, but, living in a borough, did not require land for his own purposes. Such a person might let his acre of land for 40s., in the form of garden allotments, without any difficulty.

And here I wish much to guard myself against being supposed to countenance a very popular, but, in my opinion, a most pernicious delusion. I would not have it imagined that I am a party to the plan of transferring people from their employments in towns to live on an acre or two of land. If a person leaves a workshop, a foundry, or a factory, and tries to live on even two or three acres of land, [552] why all I can say is, that he will be very glad to get back to his former occupation. No, no; we have no such scheme as that. If a man has followed a particular pursuit, whatever it may be, up to the age of five-and-twenty, and if he is still receiving wages or profit from that pursuit, that man had better, as a general rule, follow his business than go to any other. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he will succeed better in that pursuit than in any other to which he can turn his hand. But what we say is this, that it is a very good thing for a man who is receiving weekly wages to have a plot of land in addition. Nothing can be more advantageous to people living in the country than to have, besides their weekly wages, a plot of ground on which they can employ themselves with the spade, when they have not other employment. With the proviso which I have mentioned—guarding myself against being supposed to be a party to the delusion to which I have alluded—I say, that if you have a freehold qualification in the neighbourhood of an agricultural town at a distance from you, but in the same county, even in that case the security will be good, the rent will be received, and the value of your plot of land will always be increasing instead of diminishing. If your object be to get a vote, and to have along with that vote a freehold property, even at the worst, if you cannot get a bit of garden-ground near the metropolis, you can always get it in the county. The freehold being in the county, you can claim to vote in any part of that division of the county. If the property be situated at one end, you can poll at the other. I have looked at this matter with some care, and, I will confess, with some suspicion; and I must say that I see no difficulty in the way of everybody qualifying, and obtaining good security for his money.

I have explained practically what is the object of this association; suppose I go a little more widely into the question. Leaving our immediate practical object to others who will follow me, and who will answer any questions that may be put to them, let us look at this matter generally. Now, here we are, standing in the ancient ways of our Constitution. Nobody can say that we are red republicans or revolutionists. Here we are, trying to bring back the

people to the enjoyment of some of their ancient privileges. Why, we have dug into the depths of four centuries, at least, to find the origin of this 40s. freehold qualification. But now, as to the practicability of our plan, as a means of effecting great changes in the depository of political power in this country. That is the question. Can you by this means effect a great change in the depository of political power? Because I avow to you that I want, by constitutional and legal means, to place, as far as I can, political power in this country in the hands of the middle and industrious classes; in other words, the people. When I speak of the middle and industrious classes, I regard them, as I ever did, as inseparable in interest. You cannot separate them. I defy any person to draw the line where the one ends and the other begins. We are governed in this country—I have said this again and again, and I repeat it here to-night—we are governed, in tranquil and ordinary times, not by the will of the middle and industrious classes, but by classes and interests which are insignificant in numbers and in importance in comparison with the great mass of the people. Every session of Parliament, every six months that I spend in the House of Commons, convinces me more and more that we waste our time there—I mean the seventy or eighty men with whom I have been accustomed to vote in the House of Commons, and to whom your chairman has alluded in terms of so much kindness—I say, we waste our time in the House of Commons, if we do not, in the recess, come to the people, and tell them candidly that it depends upon them, and upon them alone, whether any essential amelioration or reform shall be effected in Parliament. I repeat, that in ordinary times we are [553] governed by classes and interests, which are insignificant, in real importance, as regards the welfare of the country; and if we did not occasionally check them—if we did not, from time to time, by the upheaving of the mass of the people, turn them from their folly and their selfishness,—they would long ago have plunged this country in as great a state of confusion as has been witnessed in any country on the Continent. Take the class of men who are ordinarily returned by the agricultural counties of this country. What would they do, if you let them alone? Nay, what are they trying to do at this moment? Why, at the very time, when even the Austrian Government is proposing to abandon the principle of high restrictive tariffs; when the Government of Russia has in hand a reduction of duties; when America has participated in the spirit of the times; when Spain, which some wicked wag has called the ‘beginning of Africa,’ has imitated the example set by Sir R. Peel three years ago; these county Members and Members for agricultural districts are thinking of nothing but how they may restore protection. Surely such people must be the descendants of those inquisitors who put Galileo into prison! Galileo was imprisoned because he maintained that the physical world turned upon its axis, whereas these men insist that the moral world shall stand still; and, if left to themselves, they would soon reduce England to the state in which Austria is now. But is it a wholesome state of things, that nothing can be done in this country except by means of great congregations of the people forcing the so-called representatives of the people to something like justice and common sense in their legislation? Nothing of importance is ever done by Parliament until after a seven-years’ stand-up fight between the people on the one side, and those who call themselves the people’s representatives on the other. Now, I say that this is an absurd state of things, and that, by constitutional and moral means, we must try to alter it; and I believe that we have now before us a means by which such an alteration can be effected.

I am here speaking on a subject to which I have given much attention for many years. It is more than six years since it was attempted to secure the repeal of the Corn-laws by means of the 40s. franchise, as part of the tactics of the Anti-Corn-Law League. I should be sorry to claim to myself exclusively the merit of first suggesting it. I rather think that Mr. Charles Walker, of Rochdale, recommended it before I announced it publicly. But from the moment that the plan devised was put forth at a great meeting in Manchester, I never doubted of the ultimate repeal of the Corn-laws; although until then I could never conscientiously say that I saw a method by which we could legally and constitutionally secure their abolition. I will

give you the result of our labours at that time in two or three counties. You know that the West Riding of Yorkshire is considered the great index of public opinion in this country. In that great division, at present containing 37,000 voters, Lord Morpeth was, as you are aware, defeated on the question of Free Trade, and two Protectionists were returned. I went into the West Riding with this 40s. freehold plan. I stated in every borough and district that we must have 5,000 qualifications made in two years. They were made. The silly people who opposed us raised the cry that the Anti-Corn-Law League had bought the qualifications. Such a cry was ridiculous. The truth was, that men qualified themselves, with a view of helping the League to obtain the repeal of the Corn-laws; and you are aware that, in consequence of this movement, Lord Morpeth walked over the course at the next election. We followed the same plan in South Lancashire, and with a similar result. Our friends walked over the course at the next election, although at the previous one we had not a chance. My friend, the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Locke King), joined us in carrying out our [554] plan in his division; and its adoption was there also attended with success. I am not sure that it would not have been better in some respects if the Corn-laws had not been repealed so soon—though of course I should like to have had them suspended for three or four years; for in that case we should have carried half the counties of England. Now, when I came back from the Continent, after the repeal of the Cornlaws, I told my friends—(I have never disguised my feelings from that day to this)—as the result of constant reflection for several years, ‘If you want to take another step, constitutionally and legally, you must do it through the 40s. freehold; by no other process will you succeed.’

Let us talk this matter over, as men of common sense. Ask yourselves how do you purpose to obtain reforms? Do you intend to try violence and fighting? No, no; you see the result of that everywhere that it has been tried. Violence does no good to those who resort to it. I do not mean to blame those in other countries, who have not the right of meeting in assemblies like this, if they do not pursue the same course that we do. I do not blame them, because, being without experience, and not being permitted to gain experience, they do not succeed, when they make a bold and sudden trial of constitutional forms. No; I leave those to blame them, who will blame us equally, for adopting constitutional means. The very same parties who are now so intolerant, with regard to the failure of Hungarians, and Italians, and Germans, were the constant assailants of my friends and myself, at the early stage of the League agitation. Every species of abuse, every sort of misrepresentation, every kind of suppression, was resorted to by them, until we became strong; and when we were both strong and fashionable, we were beslavered with their praise; and I confess I liked it less than their abuse. No; we do not come here to censure other countries. England is under no necessity for resorting to force or violence. Our ancestors did all that for us, and they were obliged to do it. During the greater part of the seventeenth century, England presented a scene of commotion almost as great as that which has been witnessed in Hungary, Germany, and Italy; and to the great sacrifices then made, we owe almost all the liberties we possess at present. But to go back to the kind of warfare pursued in the seventeenth century, would be to descend from the high position, which, at the expense of so many sufferings, our ancestors obtained for us.

But as everybody admits that we must not go into the streets to fight, let me ask my friends what other step they intend to take? Petition Parliament! Petition Parliament to reform itself! Why, no; the clubs would not like that; it would not suit their cards. Nobody thinks of getting a reform of Parliament by petitioning. Well, then, how are you to get it? I find that every person is brought to the same dead lock, as regards substantial reform or real retrenchment, that I was in when, in 1843, I sat down to think of the freehold movement. You must aim at the accomplishment of your object, through the plan which the Constitution has left open to you. Men of common sense, when they have a certain thing to do, look round for instruments for effecting their purpose. In other countries, men who resort to physical force, always adopt that plan. They adapt their tactics to the physical features of the country. If the



people of Switzerland have to fight for their liberties, they retire to the mountains, and there defend them; in Hungary, the army of the people, retreating beyond barren heaths, puts two rivers between itself and the enemy; while the patriots of Holland in former days cut their dykes and let in the water to drown their enemies. These are the means adopted by parties who have to use physical force. What are we to do, who have to fight with moral force? Why, here is a door open, which is so expansive that it will admit all who have the means of qualifying themselves through 40s. freeholds. [555] These are our tactics—these are our mountains—these our sandy plains—these our dykes. We must fight the enemy by means of the 40s. freehold.

Now, what chance have we of succeeding? I have paid a great deal of attention to this subject, and I shall proceed to trouble you with a very few figures, from which you will be astonished to find how little you have to do. We have as near as possible at this moment a million of registered electors for the whole kingdom. According to a valuable return made on the motion of Mr. Williams, the late Member for Coventry, the total number of county votes on the register in 1847 was 512,300. What proportion of them do you suppose are the votes of occupying tenants? 108,790. All that boasted array of force, which constitutes the basis of landlord power in this country, and about which we have frightened ourselves so much, amounts only to 108,790 tenants-at-will in the fifty-two counties of England and Wales. Why, half the money spent in gin in one year would buy as many county freeholds as would counterpoise these 108,790 tenant-farmers. What resources have we to aid us in the process of qualifying for these counties? I shall surprise you again, when I inform you how very few people there are who are qualified for the counties. I will take, for illustration, three or four of the counties at random. There is Hampshire: there are in Hampshire, according to the last census, 93,908 males above twenty years old. The registered electors in the same county amount to 9,223; so that only one-tenth of the adult males are upon the register, and 84,685 are not upon it. In Sussex, there are of males above twenty years old, 76,676; of registered electors only 9,211, or one-eighth of the entire number of adult males: 67,466 adult males are not voters. Take the purely agricultural county of Berkshire, which has 43,126 males above twenty years old; 5,241, or one-eighth, was the number of registered electors; 37,885 are not voters for the county. In Middlesex, the numbers I find are as follows:—males above twenty years old, 434,181; registered electors, 13,781, or one-seventeenth; 420,400 not being voters. In Surrey, the males amount to 154,633; of these, 9,800, or one-sixteenth, is the proportion of registered electors; and thus 144,833 are not voters. Why, if only one in ten of the men who are not qualified to vote in London and Southwark, would purchase votes in the neighbouring counties, it would almost suffice to carry every good measure that you and I desire. In round numbers, there are sixteen millions of people in England and Wales; there are four millions of adult males above twenty years of age. There are 512,000 county electors in the fifty-two counties of England and Wales; so that at this moment there is but one in eight of the adult males of England and Wales who is upon the county register, and seven-eighths of them have no votes. That is our ground of hope for the future. We must induce as many as we possibly can of these unenfranchised people to join this association, or some other association; or by some means endeavour to possess themselves of a vote.

I do not disguise it from you, there is a class in this country that has not the means of finding money to purchase a vote. The great bulk of the agricultural peasantry, earning 8s., 9s., 10s. a week—it is impossible that you can expect that any considerable portion of that class can possess a vote; but when I speak of the mechanics and artisans of our great towns, I will say, there is not one of them that, if he resolutely set to the work, may not possess the county franchise, in a few years; and, having the county franchise, who will not be in a position to help his poorer and humbler neighbour.

I am perfectly well aware that this is work that cannot be done in a day; and, if it could be done in a day, it would not be worth doing. I have no faith in anything that is done suddenly. My opinion is, that no very great change in the policy or the representation of this country will be effected in less than seven years. Many great struggles have lasted seven years. The great war of independence [556] in America took seven years; the civil war, in which our ancestors were engaged against prerogative, in the reign of Charles I., lasted seven years; the Anti-Corn-law contest lasted seven years. I think we might assert of these great public questions, that the danger is, that when you have effected your object suddenly, you do not know how to value it, and have not the conviction that it is valuable and worth preserving. That is the great advantage of having to struggle some time for a great object; and I tell you candidly, when I enter on this 40s. movement, it is with the idea, that it will be a long and arduous struggle. I am prepared, if health and strength are given to me, to give some portion of every working day for the next seven years to the advancement of this question. I do not propose this in exclusion of other reforms; I do not propose this as an obstacle to any other plan which other persons may have in view. If anybody thinks he can carry reform in Parliament by any other plan than this, I hope he will show us how he would do it; I do not see any other way. Let no one who has any other popular object or great reform to carry in this country—if he does not co-operate with us, let him not look disparagingly at our efforts; for I tell him, that in proportion as this 40s. freehold qualification movement makes progress, just in that proportion will he find that the votes of the House of Commons on all liberal questions will also make progress. And when I say that it may be necessary to work for seven years to accomplish this object—that is, to effect a great change in the depository of public power in this country (for this is the object, and I avow it), although it may be necessary, that for these seven years there should be continuous work in this matter, it does not follow you will not reap the fruits long before the seven years are expired. They are wise people in their generation whom we wish to influence. They gave up the Corn-laws, for they saw the question was settled when we carried South Lancashire, the West Riding, East Surrey, and Middlesex. I always said, if we can carry these counties, they will give up the Corn-laws.

In proportion as you exert yourselves for this great movement, you will become powerful. Every class of men that sets itself vigorously to work, by means of the 40s. qualification, to place as many as possible of that class on the register, will find itself elevated, politically and socially, by the position it has given itself. Take the mechanical class. Nothing could so elevate them in the eyes of their countrymen as to know they had a voice in the representation of the country—that the knights of the shire were partly indebted to them for their election. Take the class of Dissenters. Their very existence is ignored by the County Members; the most moderate measure of justice they ask is the removal of church-rates. I do not believe that there are ten County Members who would vote for that moderate instalment of justice—[from the meeting, ‘Not five!’]—perhaps not five; but I have heard the most insulting language from County Members towards Dissenters on that very question. Why is it? Because this numerous and really influential body of men have not had self-respect enough to guard themselves, by the possession of the franchise, so as to be in a position to protect their religious liberties, by the exercise of the dearest privileges of free men. Throughout the country you will find great bodies of Dissenters, who are religious men, moral men, and, which always is the consequence of morality, men who keep themselves from those excesses which produce poverty and degradation; and these are the very men who ought to possess the franchise. We tell them to place themselves on the county list. We do not wish to give them complete dominion and power in the country. I say to no class, come and gain exclusive power or influence in the country; I am against class legislation, whether from below or above; but I say, if you wish to have your interests consulted—your legitimate rights respected; if you wish no longer to have your very existence ignored in the counties; [557] then come forward, and join such a movement as this, and by every possible means promote the extension of the 40s. freehold qualification.

In conclusion, let nobody misunderstand me. I do not come here to seek this or that organic change, without having practical objects in view, which I believe to be essential for the interests of this country. I believe our national finances to be in a perilous state. I say that the extravagant expenditure of the Government is utterly inconsistent with the prudent, cautious, economical habits, which the great body of this people are obliged to follow. I want to infuse the common sense which pervades the bulk of the people into the principles of the Government, and I declare I see no other way of doing it, but by increasing the number of voters, and no other way of doing so, independent of the House of Commons, but by joining yourselves to this movement, and possessing the 40s. freehold.

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**PARLIAMENTARY REFORM. III.**  
**MANCHESTER, DECEMBER 4, 1851.** ↩

[The subject of Parliamentary Reform occupied the attention of the House of Commons for a short time during the session of 1851, for Mr. Locke King carried the first reading of a bill to reduce the county franchise, on Feb. 20, an occurrence which was followed by a Ministerial crisis. In the country, however, the feeling in favour of Reform grew till it was arrested by the Russian war, and the circumstances which followed that war.]

I FEEL too much commiseration for you to delay you more than a very few minutes with any remarks upon this important question. I have been sitting on a comfortable chair with a back to it, and have been surveying the scene before me, and I have felt my heart melt at the position in which you must be placed. And after all, gentlemen, there is nothing new to discuss about the matter that is before us. There have been four propositions, as old as the hills almost, that have been now submitted to this meeting. We have had a discussion in a Conference this morning for five hours; this Conference resulted simply in declaring itself in favour of those four points, which Mr. Hume has for four successive years been bringing before the House of Commons,—household suffrage, with a right to lodgers to claim to be rated and to be upon the rate-books,—triennial Parliaments,—a redistribution of electoral power, and the ballot. Why, gentlemen, these four points have been subjected to a discussion, within the House and out of it, which I am sure renders it impossible for any one to say anything new upon the subject here. There may be persons who think that this programme of Mr. Hume, who is as honest, and sincere, and disinterested, as any man in this assembly or out of it, does not go far enough to satisfy the demands of all. On the other hand, I have no doubt there will be many people who will laugh at us, and treat with scorn a demand which they will consider so unreasonable, because so great.

Well, now, household suffrage is the old recognised Saxon franchise of this country. The whole community in ancient times were considered to be comprised in the householders. The head of the family represented the family; the heads of all the families represented the whole community. With the addition of a clause which shall give to those who are not themselves householders, but who may become so, the right to claim to be rated, I think the rate-book of this country may be taken now for as good a register as it could have been in the time of our Saxon ancestors. When you have a redistribution of the franchise proposed, no one would suppose that you could continue to give Manchester and Harwich the same number of representatives. It does not require an argument; the figures that the chairman gave you are sufficient to settle the point. There is not an argument that can be used to [559] enhance the force of those figures. We don't propose—Mr. Hume never proposed—that you should cut the country into parallelograms in a new fashion; he has always said in the House of Commons,—we have always said in the country,—that we will take the ancient landmarks and respect them as far as we can. Keep to the bounds of your counties; group boroughs together where they are too small to have a representative of their own, that by such means you may get an equalisation of political power, a fair distribution of the franchise, which alone can give anything like a fair representation to the whole country.

Well, we come to triennial Parliaments. Many people say it ought to be annual; in America they say biennial; some people say triennial; we had friends at the Conference who were for quinquennial Parliaments. I think we have precedents for three years' Parliaments in the old custom of the country; but as there is a ground of union sought on that question, I think there can be very little difference about reformers who are in earnest agreeing to the

extent at least of triennial Parliaments.

Well, now, I come to another question, to which I confess I attach great importance—I mean the ballot. Give us the franchise extended, with the other points alluded to, and yet they will be comparatively worthless unless you have the ballot. The ballot in other countries has been adopted as necessary to the protection of the voter. You have never had, I believe, a large representative system anywhere without the adoption of the ballot; but it is perfectly necessary that you should have the ballot in this country, because in no country in the world where constitutional government exists, is there so great an inequality of fortune as in this country, and so great an amount of influence brought to bear upon the poorer class of votes. And I don't confine my advocacy of the ballot merely to protecting the farmers or the agriculturists; give me the ballot also to protect the voter in the manufacturing districts; for you may depend upon it that you have quite as glaring an evil arising from the influence of great wealth and station, in your electoral proceedings in Lancashire and Yorkshire, as you have in any purely agricultural district.

Now, go into any borough like Stockport, or Bolton, or any other neighbouring borough; give me the names of the large employers of labourers, and I will tell you the politics of the men employed by these capitalists, by knowing the politics of the capitalists themselves. Nine-tenths of them in ordinary circumstances vote with their masters. Why is that? Is there any mesmerism, or any mysterious affinity which should make men think the same as those who happen to pay them their wages? No; it is from an influence, seen or unseen, occult or visible, I don't care which, but it is an influence which operates upon the mind of the labouring class. But they have a right to a vote without any such restriction, or any such coercion. I want the ballot to protect everybody in their votes from the influence of everybody else. I want it as a protection against landlords, manufacturers, millowners, priests, or customers; and I for one would look upon any Reform Bill—I don't hesitate here to declare it—as nothing than delusive, that does not comprise the ballot; and I don't call myself, and never will own myself, as a member of any political party, the heads of which set themselves absolutely in opposition to the ballot.

Now, other questions admit of modification, and other difficulties also admit of being surmounted by electoral bodies themselves, and their representatives, without going to Parliament at all. For instance, though the Parliament won't give a vote to a man, there's a way by which some men may get a vote without going to Parliament to pray for it. Though you don't get triennial Parliaments, there's a way by which constituents can arrange with their representatives, as is often done, and make a bargain with them that they will come every year to give an account of themselves, and to receive their re-election. So with the question of the redistribution of the [560] franchise. Well, we all know that that is a question, after all, so vague, that a greater or a less degree of adjustment may be pleaded as meeting our demands, and I don't see how you can lay hold of any defined principle by which you can secure a fair and equal re-adjustment of the representation; but when I come to the ballot, it is something ay or no; you have the whole thing, or you have nothing; and you cannot get it without an Act of Parliament. And I say, I take my stand upon the ballot as a test of the sincerity of those who profess to lead what is called the Liberal party in this country.

Now I, once for all, beg to state that, according to my opinion, settled now for three or four years, ever since the passing of the repeal of the Corn-laws, when parties were all broken up, I have never considered that we had a political party in this country, nor a Whig or a Liberal party: we have had a Free-trade party to fight for and maintain the Free-trade victory; that party is as much a Sir Robert Peel party as a Whig party; but I have always thought that the necessities of parties, and the difficulties of carrying on business in the House of Commons, for want of a party organisation, is no longer to be rendered necessary, and that as the time must come, and come speedily, when everybody would admit that Free

Trade was a matter of history, and no longer to be made a bugbear for maintaining this or that party in the ascendant; so the time must come when there must be a reconstruction of parties, and that there should be now a bid made to the country, by which there could be a reconstruction of what is called the Liberal party. Well, now, I once for all state that, not recognising the bonds of party in any way, since the time of the passing of the Corn Law Bill, —feeling that I as much belonged to Sir James Graham's party as I did to Lord John Russell's party from that moment, I wanted to see where there would be a flag hung out that would warrant me in ranging myself under that organisation, without adding the gross imposture of pretending to belong to a party, when I knew there was no bond of union or sympathy existing between us.

Now, I say, I take the ballot as one test, and it is the smallest test I will accept, of the identity of any political party with myself and my opinions. And I say more, that if any body of statesmen attempt to carry a Reform measure, and launch it on the country with the idea of raising such an amount of enthusiasm as shall enable them to pass such a measure; and if they think that the constituencies will allow that Ministry to leave the ballot out of it, they are under a very gross delusion, and don't know what they're about. In fact it is more palpable every day and every hour, that what the people have fixed their minds upon as one of the points in the new Reform Bill, is the ballot. Why, listen with what acclamation the very word was mentioned here;—there was a perfect unanimity in the Conference this morning, amongst the men who met from all parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire, upon the subject; and I venture to say, that if you take what is called the Liberal party in this country,—that party which is reckoned upon by your Reform Ministry as a support to them in carrying any measure of reform in the House of Commons, I have no hesitation in saying, that nine-tenths of that party are in favour of the ballot; and that being the case, there being a greater unanimity out of doors amongst the Liberal party upon the ballot than on any other question, I say it would be the most absurd, and most inconceivably unreasonable thing on the part of the leaders of that so-called Liberal party, to think that that which constitutes the greatest bond of union amongst the party, should be left out in the programme of their Reform Bill.

I can understand that people should have their doubts about the efficiency of the ballot. I am not intolerant at all with people who tell me that we are deceived with respect to the ballot; who say, 'I don't think it would cure this drunkenness or demoralisation, or that coercion or intimidation would cease; I don't believe that it would prevent many [561] of these evils;'—I can fully understand that there may be a difference of opinion about it; but I never can understand how a person calling himself a reformer, should set himself up resolutely to oppose the ballot; that he should make a point at all times to speak against it, and to quarrel with those who advocate the ballot; that I can't understand, and I must confess, that so far as I am concerned, I can have no party sympathy with any leaders who do take that course in repudiating and opposing the ballot.

Now, gentlemen, I have only to say in conclusion, that I have seen to-day a meeting at the Conference this morning which has exceedingly gratified me, because I there met men from all parts of these great counties, and other parts of the kingdom, among whom were some whom I saw thirteen years ago this very month, when we began another struggle, which, after seven years, was successful, for the repeal of the Cornlaws. I have seen great numbers of those men to-day, meeting in Manchester, some of them more mature in age, I am sorry to say, for the thirteen years that have elapsed, but as earnest and resolute in giving their adhesion to what they believe to be the interest of the great mass of the people, as ever they were in the contest for free trade in corn. Yes, it is a good augury when you find men who possess the sinews of war, as these men do, joining the rank and file of the people in their efforts to obtain political justice. And don't let anybody persuade you, the working classes, for a moment that you can carry out any great measure of political reform, unless you are

united with a large section of the middle and capitalist classes; and don't let anybody persuade you, either, that you have an especial quarrel with those rich millowners and manufacturers down here. For I will tell you, the result of my observations and experience is this: that of all the rich men in the country, the most liberal men are those that you have among you in these two counties. It is not to be expected that a man who has a large balance at his banker's, and perhaps 100,000*l.* capital in his business, should rush at every proposal for change quite as readily as a man who is not so fortunately situated; because the natural selfish instinct occurs to him,—'What have *I* to gain by change? I have got the suffrage; I don't want political power; I don't want the protection of the ballot;' and, therefore, you must make allowances for all such men; but, also, you must value them the more when you catch them. And I can assure you, if you go to Lombard Street, or any other quarter where rich men are to be seen, you will find much fewer liberal politicians, fewer men that will ever join together, pulling shoulder to shoulder with the working classes for great political reforms, than in Lancashire and Yorkshire; and I was glad to find, this morning, the hearty concurrence with which these men joined in advocating the ballot. Let it not be said by the great landowners, or any people elsewhere, that the manufacturers and millowners of this part of the world, those, at least, with whom I have ever been accustomed to associate, are afraid of giving to the working classes political power, and ensuring them in the full exercise of that power. The experience of this morning has redounded to the honour of those men; and if the union which I perceive to have arisen between the working classes and a large portion of those who should be their natural leaders in these struggles, be cemented and continued, nothing can prevent you, be assured, from obtaining those political rights which you seek.

Now, since I have been in Manchester, we have heard news from France, which probably some of our opponents will think ought to be turned in argument against us, as discouraging further political change. We have heard that one branch of the Government of France at Paris has shut up the shop of the other branch. And the latest accounts are, that he and his soldiers together have carried off some hundreds of the representatives of the people, and locked them up. Will it be pretended that [562] that is an argument against our advancing in the course in which we now propose to advance? I tell you what I find it an argument for,—for doing away with some of these soldiers, like those that are doing the work for the President over there. Is it not a nice illustration of the beautiful system of governing by 350,000 or 400,000 bayonets? The Assembly meets, votes the army estimates without any discussion at all; it would be quite heretical to think of opposing a vote for the maintenance of this army. As soon as they have got their pay the President sends for them, and says: 'I intend to-morrow to shut up that Assembly; and you shall assist me by occupying all the streets, and I will declare Paris in a state of siege, and you shall enable me to do it.' Now, I hope one of the lessons learnt from such proceedings as this will be, that no constitutional Government, at all events, is likely to be served by basing itself on the power of the bayonet. But what other lesson do I find in this state of things in France? Why, this, that the French people have not learnt to do what Englishmen have done—to make timely repairs in their institutions; not to pull them down, not to root them up, but to repair them. The French, instead of building upon old foundations, expect the house to stand without foundations at all. They expect the tree to grow without the roots in the ground. The English people have been in the habit of repairing and improving their institutions, and widening the base of their Constitution, as we are going to do now. It is by widening the base that we intend to render the structure more permanent. And when I look at France, and see what a terrible evil it is that men have not confidence in each other, and that there is such a separation of classes, and such a want of cohesion in parties, that there scarcely exists a public man who can be said now to possess the confidence of the people, or whose loss, if carried off to Vincennes, will ever be felt in the hearts of the people; therefore do I rejoice again for the safety and security of my country, that I have witnessed to-day such an instance of the union and confidence that exists among the people of this country.

I entreat all classes to cherish this union for the common benefit of all; for there is no other security for you. I remember, quite well, that, at the time of the passing of the Reform Bill, I was then living in London. Just before the Reform Bill passed, as you will recollect, the Duke of Wellington was for a few days called to power, and there was a momentary belief and apprehension in the country, that the King, aided by the military, was going to resist the passing of the Reform Bill; you know the awful state of perturbation in which the country was placed; you know how you sent off, in a carriage and four, your petition from Manchester, and petitions were carried up with it from all along the line of road; you know what a dreadful state of excitement the country was in. I remember, at that time, one of your largest calico-printers in Manchester called upon me, in my warehouse in London. He employed between 700 and 800 men, and was a very rich man, but had never formed any decided political principles. In our conversation, I spoke to him of the crisis then impending in the north of England. He was deeply anxious, and he said:—'Yes, I expect every day that the cauldron will boil over, and that we shall be in a state of social anarchy.' I said, 'If such is the state of affairs, what do you intend to do in this emergency?' He said, 'I'll go home this very night by the coach, and I'll put myself at the head of my men, and I'll stand or fall by my men; for that is the only security I have, to join with my men, and to be with them. Now, I tell all the manufacturers, and the capitalists, and the men of station in the country, that, whether it be a time of crisis or a time of tranquillity, the only safety for them is to be at the head of the great masses of the people. I therefore do rejoice at the proceedings of this day, which have given so favourable a prospect of that union, in which there is not only strength but safety.

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**PARLIAMENTARY REFORM. IV.**  
**ROCHDALE, AUGUST 17, 1859.** ↪

[Mr. Cobden was elected to Parliament for the borough of Rochdale at the General Election, in April, 1859. He was at that time absent in America. On June 17, the Derby Ministry resigned, and Lord Palmerston succeeded to Office. He offered the Presidency of the Board of Trade to Mr. Cobden, who, however, declined a place in the Administration. The following Speech was delivered to the electors of Rochdale on Mr. Cobden's return.]

I AM rather out of practice, for I think it is now two years and a half since I addressed a public meeting out of Parliament, and I am afraid that, with the disadvantage of being under canvas, I may fail to make myself heard by every one of you who are here present, unless you indulge me with silence during the short time I shall occupy your attention. And first, gentlemen, let me tender to you my too-long deferred personal homage for the kindness you showed me, when I was four thousand miles distant from you, in having returned me for your constituency, which I make no secret of telling you is an honour I coveted beyond that of representing any other constituency. For having returned me voluntarily, I may say almost without solicitation, I return you, one and all, my hearty thanks for the honour and kindness you have shown me. I thank those gentlemen here present who took the leading part in my Committee; I thank those gentlemen at a distance, some of whose letters caught my eye, who tendered substantial support in my cause; and I will venture—if I am not travelling beyond the bounds of strict party discipline—also to express my acknowledgments to our opponents, who on this occasion sheathed their sword, and granted me an armistice, and which I hope—at all events it will not be my fault if it should not be so—may ripen into a permanent peace. And now, when I read and hear of the transactions at the last general election, I think my acknowledgments are still more due to you for having thought of me during my long and remote absence; for, if I gathered correctly the tenor of the last general election, it was this, that there was a more than usual avidity to obtain seats in Parliament; there were more contests than usual to achieve that honour; and, unless I am greatly misinformed, some of the aspirants for that honour did not confine themselves within the strict rules of propriety or decorum.

Now, I do not think it out of place here, at our first meeting, to say a word or two upon that subject, whilst it is fresh upon our memories. We have had presented to Parliament upwards of forty petitions praying for inquiry into the proceedings at so many different elections. But I am informed, that if all those had [564] petitioned who had proofs that corrupt practices had been resorted to, the number of election petitions would have been double what they are. Now, I am going to say something which I am afraid, in these days, when we are very fond of soft phrases, will be considered to be uncharitable, and yet, Heaven forgive me if I am not telling the truth when I say that I do not believe that Parliament is in earnest in its attempts to reform this system, or it would have accomplished the intention long ago. For what do these election petitions mean, after all? Let us say a word or two about them while one is fresh from the scene of their operations.

What is the meaning of an election petition? Why, in the first place, when the petitioner has been unduly deprived of his seat by the improper and corrupt proceedings of his opponent, he has to appeal to a tribunal for justice,—to a tribunal which is the most inaccessible and the most costly in the civilised world. For I will venture to say, that a man who presents an election petition to the House of Commons, goes before a tribunal the expense of which makes the equity which is administered at the Court of Chancery dirt cheap

indeed. In fact, the principal obstacle to a petition at all is that the party paying for redress of this grievance—I mean the grievance of having been deprived of a fair chance of being elected by the free and unbought suffrages of his fellow-countrymen—that the petition is so costly that no man can tell him beforehand how much it may cost. The election petition may cost a man 500*l.*, or it may cost him 5,000*l.*; and no Parliamentary lawyer who had one shred of conscience would ever venture to say that he could guarantee him against the larger amount. The consequence is, that very few men have the courage to present a petition, and to undergo the risk and expense of following it out before a Committee of the House of Commons. But supposing he does so—and this is my great grievance and charge against the proceedings of the House of Commons—what does it end in? He proves corrupt proceedings on the part of his opponent, he proves corruption on the part of the constituency, and the result may be that his opponent is declared unseated. But that does not give him the seat; it merely says that there shall be another election in the same borough, that he may go again, and, if he likes, incur the same expense with the same prospect of an election petition, and that those very men who have been shown to have sold their votes before, may have the privilege of selling them again; another election in such a case being nothing more nor less than a fresh harvest to those corrupt voters who make merchandise of their privileges as free citizens. Such being the case, what wonder is it that not one-half of those who lose their elections venture to petition for a redress of grievances? A friend of mine lost his contest for a very large borough in one of the Eastern counties, and he told me that he had a clear case against his opponent for bribery, but he did not intend to petition, and for this reason—he petitioned once before, and his expenses cost him 500*l.* a day, and if he went into a Committee again, he had no guarantee that it would not cost him as much, and therefore he abstained from prosecuting his petition at all.

Well, now, this is the state of things; and I may be asked, What is the remedy for it? Well, I repeat, if the House of Commons was in earnest to put down this system, a remedy would be found. In the first place, make this inquiry cheaper and more accessible. If you cannot have a tribunal on the spot to inquire into these proceedings, at all events spare the aggrieved party this enormous expenditure; and where he has a case, and where he is proved to have had a case—I would not say where you have frivolous and vexatious petitions, but where there is a good case for a petitioner—let the expenses be borne by somebody else than by him. If the country has an interest in putting down this system, if the very foundations of our representative system depend upon [565] purity at their source, why then, who so interested as the great body of the community in not allowing those forty or fifty boroughs, that are now going scot free, to go unpunished? But who are the parties that should so properly pay the expense as those communities themselves where those transactions are permitted, or by the whole country at large, if it should be thought more expedient? Well, I say, let the inquiry be carried on in such a way that it shall not be the punishment and probably the ruin of the petitioner. But beyond that, let there be some punishment inflicted upon those who are detected as the guilty parties in these transactions.

Now, I will venture to say that if, when a case of bribery is clearly detected, the House of Commons would order in every such case that the parties detected in the act of bribery should be prosecuted criminally by the Attorney-General—I venture to say that that would very soon put down bribery and corruption, more than anything else that the House of Commons could resort to. Formerly, you know, the system of corruption and undue influence in our constituencies was confined very much to a privileged class in this country. One noble family contested a county against another noble family, and they spent a hundred thousand pounds apiece, and all the world knew it; it was agreed that they should all resort to the same habit of expenditure, and it was considered, in fact, the legitimate exercise of their wealth and their power. In the same way, if a contest took place in a borough, it was some leading landed proprietor or some influential family of the neighbourhood who contested with another

individual having the same pretensions as himself, and they fought the battle of some borough during fourteen or twenty days of saturnalia, extravagance, and corruption; and there again it was considered so much a matter of course in this country, seeing that the system was patronised by the titled and the great, that those things were passed over with very little notice. But now, gentlemen, we have another class of aspirants for Parliament altogether. During the last general election, I have seen a new element in our system of electoral corruption. We have had a number of gentlemen come over from Australia, where, I suppose, they have been successful at the diggings; they have brought over great nuggets, and they administer them in the shape of 50*l.* notes. They have gone to some of our boroughs and there fought their battles and bribed just as their betters did fifty years ago. Now, I have great hopes, when this system is resorted to in that unblushing way by parties who have none of the prestige of our ancient nobility about them, that very likely it will be treated differently by public opinion and by Parliament, and that some plan may be resorted to to put it down.

I remember when duelling in this country was so regular a mode of meeting a certain description of insult, that if a man holding a certain position in society received an affront at the hands of his equal, he was obliged to meet him in deadly combat, as a consequence, or he would have been banished from the social life of his equals. Well, I remember that some linendrapers' assistants took it into their heads to go down one Sunday morning (I think it was to Wormwood Scrubs, or somewhere where the nobility used to carry on that pastime), and they began fighting duels; and that as soon as the linendrapers' assistants took to duelling, it became very infamous in the eyes of the upper classes. The consequence was that some of these young gentlemen were sent to Newgate; and now nothing would be so ridiculous as any nobleman or gentleman thinking of resenting an insult by going out and fighting a duel about it. Now, I am very much in hopes that since this system of bribery and corruption has fallen into hands such as I have described,—that is, since gentlemen coming home from the Australian diggings, or from their broad acres and pastures and their flocks and herds of those regions, have begun to [566] rush into the market of electoral corruption here, and offer to buy their seats by the expenditure of 4,000*l.* or 5,000*l.* for a little dirty borough in the west of England—I have very strong hopes that the system won't be as fashionable as it has been, and that very likely we may succeed in having those parties prosecuted criminally. I say criminally—let them be indicted criminally, and let the consequence of their conviction be a few months at Newgate, or in the House of Correction; and if they are ex-M. P.'s, and they wear the prison dress and have their heads shaved, there cannot be the least doubt in the world it would do very much to put an end to this bribery and corruption.

And now, gentlemen, this is a much wider question than that. I do not mean to say that it is the only way in which our electoral system is to be reformed. I shall have something more to say of that to-morrow evening, when, I believe, I am to meet the whole body of my constituents, who will attend here with free access, and to whom a greater development of that system would properly belong; but this I may say, that I look upon all the present attempts and pretended measures for putting an end to this system of corruption as insincere on the part of the House of Commons. There is a rule resorted to when bribery has been proved, in certain cases, of ordering commissioners to proceed to a town and inquire into these proceedings. Now, I will tell you what that amounts to. Your Select Committees that sit in the House of Commons produce a pile of blue-books after every general election. About five years ago I took the trouble to measure and weigh this pile of blue-books and it was just four feet high, and it weighed rather over a hundred-weight, and I will undertake to say that these blue-books, recording the misdeeds of all the delinquent boroughs, were never read by half-a-dozen people in one of them. I will tell you another device of the House of Commons. They pretend to send out commissioners to inquire into these proceedings at particular boroughs, where they have reason to suppose the corruption is more than usually vile. What

does that amount to? Why, two or three young barristers are sent down to a city like Gloucester, and there they pass a few months in summer-time very pleasantly, hearing stories from Jack, Tom, and Harry. They prepare a large blue-book, much larger than the blue-book that comes from the House of Commons, and then in six or twelve months that is presented to Parliament. The report is more voluminous than the one we had before, and if six men read the report from the House of Commons, when there were some people still feeling an interest in it, why, not three people would ever open the big blue-book that comes out when other things occupy the people's attention. The consequence is, you are put to an enormous expense for these commissions, and no result comes from them, and no result is intended to come from them.

Now, I myself voted the other day in Parliament against the issue of a commission in the case of Gloucester, and nobody will suppose that I so voted because I wished to screen that city from inquiry; but I knew the futility, the utter valuelessness of the inquiry, and, therefore, would not lend myself to what I knew would be the perpetuation of a delusion. I say that any man, who will resort only to the existing means of putting down corruption, must have a larger credulity than I possess. I have no faith in any existing means, and I will not lend myself to the delusion that is willing to practise them any longer.

What you want, besides such plans as I have spoken of, is honesty enough in your Parliament to at least try the experiment of the ballot. I do not speak of the ballot as a cure for all these evils; I do not speak of the ballot as a political measure, mixed up with other questions of organic change; I speak now only of the ballot as a means of preventing, to a large extent, the exercise of this gross corruption, and as a moral instrument to check the growth of that rottenness which [567] is sapping the foundations of our electoral system. You have all observed, I dare say, in the accounts that have been published of the recent Election Committees, that when there has been the existence of bribery, particularly in the smaller boroughs, the price of votes has risen just in proportion as the day has advanced; that whilst the polling has been going on, a vote has been worth probably 5*l.* at ten o'clock, 10*l.* at twelve o'clock, 20*l.* at two o'clock, 50*l.* at three o'clock, 100*l.* at half-past three o'clock, and in some cases 250*l.* five minutes before the clock strikes. Again, you have seen, that whenever you have had ruffianism and rowdyism, if I may use an American phrase—whenever you have had the party whom we call the roughs at an election called into requisition—it has been to hustle and jostle the electors just at the critical time of the poll, when probably the scale might be turned by the forced absence of one or two electors. Why, we have seen a trial the other day of a gallant admiral who tried to record his vote in a borough in the west of England, and who was seized by the roughs, not knowing that he was a valiant servant of the Crown, wearing Her Majesty's livery, and who was carried off and prevented from voting at the poll.

Well, now, let us, whilst these pictures are fresh in our observation, see their bearings upon the question of the ballot. If you voted by the ballot, the state of the poll would never be known until the voting was over, and you would have none of this tumult and excitement. The great merit and the great recommendation of the ballot is this—that it would promote order, decorum, and morality in taking the poll. I am by no means certain—and I tell it in all frankness—that the ballot would have a very decisive effect in forwarding any one of the particular parties interested in the poll. I am not prepared to say that my views with regard to public questions would be likely to be more represented in the ballot-box than they are now by open voting. I think it very likely that the political party that most dreads the ballot would sometimes the most profit by it. But this I say, that nobody who has inquired as to the proceedings in elections in America, in Switzerland, in France, in Spain, or anywhere, and compared them with the proceedings, the tumults, the violence, the bloodshed, the disgusting and odious corruption witnessed at our elections—that nobody can doubt that as a moral

engine, as a means of repressing these excesses, the ballot is the best resource, the best expedient that can be resorted to.

I will mention one illustrative fact which I acquired in America upon this subject. Now, understand, I am not going to quote America as a country where you should go for imitation in everything regarding their political institutions; theirs are as unfitted for us in many respects, as ours would be unfitted for them. But this I may say, in passing, that the white men of the United States have a theory of government, and they have laid down a theory of government in their Constitution, which, if the human instrument be equal to the political machine, means to deal justly and fairly by every man in their community. But now I confine myself to one fact that was given to me during my travels in America. I was speaking to a gentleman—whose letter I might read, for it is but a few words—whose name, Mr. Randall, is known to some of our statesmen here, for I remember he gave evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons, upon which I sat, to inquire into the mode of proceeding of our Houses of Parliament, in order to furnish information as to the results of proceedings in the Congress of the United States; he is a man standing high, both socially and politically—who mentioned this fact in conversation with me, and wishing that I should have the full benefit of it under his own signature, wrote me a letter after I had left Philadelphia, where this gentleman lives, which letter I will take care to have published. The letter was addressed to me at Washington, and it contains these lines:—'I have been for [568] fifty years connected with political and party movements in Philadelphia, and I never knew a vote bought or sold.' Philadelphia is one of the largest cities in America, and contains one of the largest populations of mechanics and working-men; for Philadelphia has changed its character from being, as it formerly was, a leading seaport, and it has become almost entirely a manufacturing city, containing now 600,000 or 700,000 inhabitants. Now, this gentleman would not have told me, I am sure, that elections in America were pure in every respect, that there are not a great deal of manœuvring and party management, that there are not very often the same liabilities as here to personation, to double votes and the like; and he would not have told me that, without exception, all their elections were carried on peaceably and tranquilly; but he mentioned the fact that the ballot presented such an obstacle to bribery, that nobody cared to buy a vote, and pay for it, when they did not know that they got value received.

Well, I will say no more with regard to my experience in America at present; for to confess the honest truth, I was so kindly treated there, and I felt that I was treated so kindly from my connection with a great question of cosmopolitan interest—and I felt, in all humility, that I was so treated as the representative of those who had the same claim as myself to receive the kind civilities of that people, and who, if they had presented themselves there, would have been received with the same hospitalities as myself—I confess, I was so kindly treated in America, that I feel I am not an impartial witness in the case, and that I ought to say as little as I possibly can about them.

It is important that we should see that the source of our electoral system is pure, inasmuch as it is quite evident that, for weal or for woe, public opinion in this country, as manifested at the polling-booth, must become more and more powerful in the government of this country. And not merely in our own domestic government, but—and it is a question, too, which at the present moment we may well refer to—public opinion in this country is becoming more and more potent in matters of foreign as well as domestic policy. We have seen lately, and I have seen it with very great satisfaction—it was during my absence that it occurred—that the public voice of this country was raised in opposition to any interference by force of arms in the dreadful war which has raged on the Continent since I left England. I was glad to see that outburst of public opinion in this country in favour of non-intervention; and I congratulate you all, and I congratulate this country, that we have for the first time,

almost, in our modern history, seen great armies march and great battles take place on the Continent without England having taken any part in the strife.

And now, shall we take stock just at the present moment—to use a homely but expressive phrase—shall we take stock, and ask ourselves whether all the old musty predictions and traditions of our diplomacy have been proved to be true on this occasion? They told us that if we did not mingle in European wars we should lose our prestige with the world; that we should become isolated; that we should lose our power. Well, now, I ask you, whilst the thing is fresh upon our memory and observation, have we lost prestige or power by having abstained from the late war in Italy? On the contrary, do we not know that now the great Powers on the Continent, feeling that England is powerful,—more powerful than ever, in her neutrality,—are anxious, are clamorous, are most solicitous, that we should go and take a part in the peaceful conferences that are to take place with a view of securing peace?

Well, gentlemen, we have prevented intervention by force of arms. I say, let public opinion manifest itself, as I believe it has manifested itself, against any intervention by diplomacy, unless it can be upon principles and with objects of which England may be proud to approve; but do not let us have any more Congresses [569] of Vienna, where we are parties to treaties that partition off Europe, and apportion the people to different rulers, just with the same indifference to their wishes and their instincts as though they were mere flocks of sheep. Now, I think Lord John Russell in the House of Commons laid down certain conditions, upon which alone the Government would be disposed to go into a Continental Congress, in order, if possible, to arrange and perpetuate the terms of peace; and he made conditions which I thought were good, though I think they are not very likely to be acted upon or accepted by the great Powers of the Continent. But what I wish now to express, and I am sure I cannot utter any words that will be more likely to express your sentiments; they are these—that if England takes any part in the Congress that is to be held by the great Powers on the Continent, our object, and the sole condition on which they should go into that Congress, should be,—that the Italians should be left free to manage their own affairs; that they should be as secure from intervention—that they should enjoy the privilege of non-intervention in the management of their own affairs, just as entirely and as sacredly as the great Powers themselves. I know what is the excuse that is made by those great Powers for interfering in the affairs of Italy and the smaller States; they do it under the pretence of preserving order,—the hypocritical pretence, I have no hesitation in calling it. Do the great Powers preserve order themselves? Have we had perfect order reigning in the Austrian empire or in the French empire for the last twenty years? Do they preserve the earth from bloodshed? Have not those two great Powers, Austria and France, during the last six months, shed more blood in their mad quarrels than has been shed by all the smaller states of Europe for the last fifty years? And shall these great Powers, for the purpose of interfering, and sending their armed bands to coerce the free instincts of the people of Italy, be allowed to set up the pretence that they want to preserve order and prevent bloodshed? I will face the chance of disorder. I say that if the Italians cannot settle their own affairs without falling into discord, why should not they be allowed even to carry on civil and domestic tumult, or even war itself, without any other Power pretending to take the advantage and entering their territory? How did we act in the case of France, when she fell into her almost red republic ten years ago? Was not our Government most eager at once to proclaim that, whatever happened in France, we would never interfere with her internal affairs, but would leave her free to choose any government she pleased?

Well, I say, that which you allow to the great Powers, allow to the smaller Powers; and I say this, not merely in the interest of those Powers themselves, but of humanity, for I say there can be no peace in Europe, there can be no chance of peace, and no prospect of any abatement of those vast military efforts that prevent the people from enjoying the fruits of

their industry, until you have the principle of non-intervention recognised as applicable to every small State as sacredly as to a large one. I say, therefore, and I do not say wrongly when I express my conviction that I rightly interpret your views on the subject—I say that one condition, and almost the sole condition, on which our Government should be prepared to take any part in any Continental Congress with reference to the affairs of Italy, should be by laying down and insisting upon the fundamental maxim that Italy should manage her own affairs, without the interference, by force of arms, of Austria, or Russia, or any other Power whatever.

I confess that I do speak with some strong sympathies on this question. I have had the opportunity of mingling much with the Italians. I have travelled in all parts of their country. I have watched, with the greatest interest, the proceedings of their late elections. I have seen, with admiration, the orderly moderation in which they have carried [570] on the elections, though plunged suddenly, as it were, into the furnace of revolution, and with all their old landmarks and all their old politics disappearing. And I have been very much struck with this fact, and I mention it not merely for this meeting, but because our proceedings will be heard and read elsewhere: I say that I have observed that both in Tuscany and in the Legations of the Pope, as well as in other parts of Italy with which I am acquainted, the people have elected not only the very ablest men, but they have elected the men who, by their wealth and their position, represent the wealth and property of the country. There are men elected—I have seen their names in the papers—as their representatives, who are as fairly entitled to be taken as representing the great wealth and influence of the country as Lord Derby would be, or Lord John Russell, or Lord Lansdowne, or any of our great names of historic family fame in this country.

Well, the Italians having done this, having shown themselves capable of maintaining order amongst themselves, are entitled, at least, to the forbearance of those countries which surround them. But we all know that if the more powerful nations choose to send secret emissaries, and spend money in corrupting or debasing the least instructed part of the community, it will be very easy to produce disorders in those countries; or it will be very easy to make it difficult for those eminent men who have been elected as the representatives of the people, to carry on a Government with moderation or success. But, I say, if they should fall into disorder by such means, or because they have not within themselves for the moment the elements of self-government (and, God knows, it must be difficult to find them, with so little experience as they have had in such matters), that is no reason—it is a hypocritical pretence, it is no reason—why the stronger Powers of the Continent should go and interfere in their concerns.

What would have become of this great nation, if, when we were in the cauldron of revolution,—if, during the hundred years that elapsed from 1645 or 1650 down to 1745, when the last battle was fought in favour of the Stuart dynasty,—what would have been the effect on this great nation, if, instead of allowing us free opportunity to fight out our own redemption, to turn away first one king and then another, and to overturn one Ministry after another,—what would have become of us as a nation, if some great Power from the Continent, immediately that we fell into civil war or commotion, had planted a large permanent army on our shores, and had insisted on taking the power out of the hands of the people—the power to remove their grievances—the power to rescue themselves from disorder? What would have been the fate of this country? Could it have grown up with that stamina, and power, and force, and wisdom, and experience that we have enjoyed? Why, what we went through during that century was a process of fermentation, which, in the moral as in the physical world, is necessary to throw off impurities and attain objects which it is desirable to secure. What gives strength to nations or individuals but battling with difficulties? Where would have been our maxims of self-government if that century of

commotion of which I spoke had been blotted out from our annals,—if, instead of those contests to which I have alluded we had had a French army, or a Spanish army, or the two united, placed in the city of London to control our operations, to dictate to both parties? They might have preserved peace, but where would have been our liberties.

Now, I contend, and Heaven knows I shall not be charged with being one who looks with anything like sympathy, or anything like toleration, on violence or bloodshed as a process of attaining any human good in this country; but I stand here to maintain the right of every people, however weak, on the Continent, having the same opportunity of going through the same process which we went through; and (if it cannot be had by any other means) attaining to the maxims of [571] self-government which we have attained to, by that dreary and melancholy, but, in such a case, probably inevitable process of civil commotion and strife.

Now, gentlemen, I have said that I am in favour of non-intervention in the affairs of Italy; but it may be said, Where would Italy have been at this present moment if there had not been the intervention of the Emperor Napoleon? Well, I am not going to be so unreasonable, as, I fear, some of us have been, as first to have a quarrel with the Emperor Napoleon for having gone to Italy, and then having a quarrel with him for coming away from Italy. He has removed the Austrians from Lombardy; he has left them in Venetia; and I quite agree with Mr. Gladstone, that he has done as much good for Austria in removing her from that perilous position as he has done for Italy in getting rid of her hated masters; and I will add one word more, and say, that I do not think Austria could do a wiser thing than make an arrangement with the population of Venice and those provinces that are called Venetia, for abdicating her sovereignty altogether, and, for a consideration, such as that a fair proportion of her national debt should be borne by those provinces—and they are rich enough to bear a very considerable pecuniary fine for the blessing of independence—I say, that Austria could not do a wiser thing than to emancipate the rest of Italy, and remove herself into territory where she will be tolerated and probably loved, which she never will be so long as she remains in Italy. I have said, if she were wise; but Governments never are wise: they are never wise in time, and the least wise of all the Governments of Europe is the Government of Austria. It seems to me that this Austrian Government is living in so happy a state of blessed ignorance, that she has no more notion of what public opinion is thinking of her Government, than if she were in the middle ages. She might have avoided all this bloodshed and all her present disasters—she might have left Lombardy, and she might have received, no doubt, a very much larger payment for the independence of Lombardy—nay, she might have avoided this collision with France—if she had only undertaken to have abstained from interfering with the States of Italy, other than those which have belonged to her by the Treaty of Vienna. But she loves no terms—she listened to none—and was mad enough to commence the encounter by crossing into her neighbour's territory; and I say that from such a stupid Government as that, —for it is the stupidest Government in all creation,—it is useless to expect any wisdom; and, therefore, I do not think it is worth our while to say anything upon the subject of what she ought to do with the remainder of her territory in Italy. I said I did not blame Louis Napoleon for going to Italy, and I did not presume to judge his motives for going there; it was no business of mine. I did not blame him for coming from Italy, because, as he did not go there to do my business or my bidding, I do not think I had any reason for calling in question his motives for coming back. But I must say that we Englishmen have quite a due notion of our own importance and power of undertaking to judge people for what they do and what they do not do, and without any reference exactly to our rights or pretensions in the matter.

Now, we have an interest, apart from the question of Italy, in these questions of foreign policy. I may say that our Budget is framed with reference to our foreign policy, not to our domestic policy. It is not what we want to spend at home that oppresses the people, and troubles them with taxes: it is what we want to spend with reference to proceedings abroad;



and it is on these accounts that I talk to you of foreign policy now, because I see no progress (and I will say a word about it directly)—I see no chance of progress in these fiscal reforms to which the resolution which has been read to-night refers, unless we can bring our relations with foreign countries into [572] a different position to that in which they are. I do not come here to advocate, and I never have advocated, a principle of defencelessness—of total disarmament; that we should trust any man on the face of the earth, and not be prepared to defend ourselves, like rational beings, against all probable contingencies. But what I do stand up for is this—that which I heard the late Sir R. Peel declare in connection with the question of our finances, that for England to pretend to take precautions so that every mile of her coasts, and every mile of the coasts of her colonies, shall be safe from aggression, that is a hopeless and a ruinous policy; and he used these words: ‘We must be prepared to take some risks; and the wisest statesman is he who will face some risks rather than undertake these ruinous precautions.’

Now, that is my principle and my policy with regard to our foreign policy. Gentlemen, what would you say if I were to tell you,—and I do it as the result of a little calculation,—that if you take the amount of money which we annually spend in this country as a means of defence and precaution against possible warlike aggression from France, as I will take it, at the very lowest possible amount—six millions sterling,—and I believe it is nearer twelve millions,—if you assume that we spend six millions sterling per annum as a means of protecting ourselves against the possible aggression of France, beyond the ordinary amount which we should sustain with reference to the preparations for war with the rest of the world,—and if I were to tell you that that sum of money represents far more than the whole of our trade with France,—that, as a consequence, as a politico-economical maxim, I can say that it would be for the benefit of England if France did not exist; and assuming that France's preparations against us are in the same way, and on the same scale, that England's are against her, then I say it would be equally an economical truth that it would be better for France if England were at the bottom of the sea.

Well, now, I ask you one question as a corollary to that. Is that man who calls himself a politician, and does he then aspire to the rank of a statesman—is he deserving of the name of Utopian, is he to be considered as living only on dream-land, and to be incapable of giving counsel to practical men like Englishmen—if he asks whether there is no possible remedy to such a state of things as that? Is it so hideously unnatural that 36,000,000 of people in France and 28,000,000 of people in England, separated by only twenty miles of sea, that they, in 1859, are so incapable through their Governments of placing themselves on any footing of real security and of trust towards each other, and so unable to believe the professions and protestations and engagements of each other, that they must keep themselves prepared in this deadly attitude for mutual attack and defence—I say, is it too Utopian to ask whether diplomacy and statesmanship cannot devise some scheme to spare the age in which we live such frightful scandal as this? I need not trouble you at length upon the whole question; you will say I am harping upon the old string; but I am bound to say that we ourselves have much to answer for under this unnatural and most unprofitable state of things. I know I shall be called to account by those organs of public opinion which claim the right to think for us, to speak for us, to predict for us, to guard us, and which expect that we shall allow them to do all that they say, and which, if we attempt to say a word for ourselves, immediately chide us as a very intolerant and very troublesome people; but I venture to say that a large part of the newspaper press of this country, and a good many of the politicians, themselves weak vessels who follow and are easily led by a popular cry, have had much to answer for this state of things in which we are now placed with regard to France; for I hesitate not to say, as an observer of this matter for the last ten or twenty years, and as a close observer of it, that the increase of the [573] army of France, and their preparations in their dockyards, and their other naval and military preparations, so far as they relate to England, have been quite as

much provoked by this country as our preparations have been provoked by theirs.

Now, probably in this matter we should be more inclined to take the opinion of a native of another country. I confess to you that most of the good feeling and all the high respect which I found in the United States was entertained towards this country—the high respect of the offspring towards their parents, and of offspring proud of their parents, and parents proud of their offspring, and I believe and feel that they have a very good cause for their pride,—arose from the fact that they were ever most ready and willing to admit that everything that is worth possessing in maxims of liberty and freedom they owe to that parent. Yet one thing which I saw in the papers of the United States always struck me with shame and humiliation, and that was the ridicule which they cast upon us for this constant cry in England about a French invasion. We were again and again the laughing-stock of the newspaper press of America. I will just read you an extract from the *New York Times*, a paper not unfriendly to England, and one which evidences great knowledge of European affairs; I will read one extract, and no more:—

'There was a time in English history when the "inviolable island" laughed all foreign threats to scorn, and met even the terrible peril of the great Armada of Spain with a front of haughty defiance. But that time seems to have passed by. The press and the orators of England have now no capital stock so rich in sure returns of interest and excitement, as the chronic terror of invasion which seems to have fixed itself in the British mind. On the slightest disturbance of the continental relations of the great Powers; on the least appearance of unusual activity in the dockyards of France; on the merest rumour of a new combination between one or more States of Europe, not commonly united in their policy, England at once sets up her outcry of distress. Her leading journals thunder alarm over the land; the parliamentary candidates make the hustings ring with the "dreadful notes of war;" her captains take down the sword of Wellington, and her poets-laureate take up the lyre of Tyrtæus. If England were consciously the weakest or the wickedest of Powers, her conduct in this respect would be perfectly reasonable. If she knew herself to have fairly earned the hatred of all the world, and felt herself unequal to resist the onslaught of avenging justice, one might attribute her propensity for panics to causes that would be rational, at least, if not respectable.'

Now, I repeat, that it is not pleasant for an Englishman travelling in a foreign country to read paragraphs such as that—and that is the mildest part of the whole article. There is scarcely a post that has not brought me some newspapers from some part of France, and particularly from a seaport, from Havre, and the centres of commerce in France, in which they do not speak with a pity and charity which you would show to a child of the outcry by the English newspapers about a French invasion: the Americans call this outcry the 'craze'—'the English craze.' Well, now, is it too much—I don't want our newspapers to abstain from expressing their opinion—I don't want to say one word then; I don't wish to curtail their privileges to criticise the world. They may say just what they please of Louis Napoleon or any other arbitrary sovereign on the face of the earth; and I tell these sovereigns, that if they cannot bear the criticism of the English newspapers amidst all their other triumphs, they must be difficult to please, and that, if they will only sift it, they will find a great deal more good than bad treatment in this world, and they ought to be content to bear it. I don't want to curtail the liberty of the press, so don't let them get up a screech against me, and say I want to put down the liberty of the press. But I ask these newspapers, in lending themselves to all this absurd scream about a French invasion, not to make me and the rest of my [574] countrymen ridiculous in continuing this tone hereafter. Is that an unreasonable request to make of them? Well, if you will only strike—will only treat these outcries with the ridicule these panics deserve, we shall be able to put an end to them.

Now, what are the facts? When I came home, I looked into a blue-book that had been presented to Parliament. I found—I don't believe anybody else looked into it, because it did not just answer the cries of the moment, it was not the pabulum that these papers wanted for the moment—I found that there was a paper presented to Parliament which had been drawn up by the late Government, giving us an account of the condition of the French and English navies. I read the account in the House of Commons. It has never been contradicted. And recollect that this was the state of our navy and the French navy in 1848, before our present increase. I read these figures in the House of Commons, and they have never been controverted. They showed that for every vessel that France has increased in number in her navy during seven years—the time when all this extension of our navy was going on—that for every vessel she (France) has added to her fleet, we have added ten; and that whilst our writers and those public speakers who seem to pander to this panic, want to make money out of it in some direction or other, while they were giving you merely the statistics of the line-of-battle ships and the frigates that were building and in preparation, they ignored and kept out of view altogether the rest of our naval preparations, and which preparations, I venture to say, the scientific and nautical men of this day declare to be the most perfect preparations you could bring against aggression by a foreign foe; because you have in all one hundred and sixty steam-gunboats lying in the creeks and harbours of our coasts, which have been pronounced by the highest scientific nautical men in Europe and America to be in the event of an aggressive war against this country, the most desirable means for the defence of the country of any you could possess. And for this reason. In the present state of the improvement of our cannon; in the deadly nature of the missiles which can now be projected from our cannon; and in the enormous distances at which we can strike an object, either with solid shot or hollow shell—the most scientific nautical men say that, to put a thousand in a line-of-battle ship—I repeat the words I made use of in the House of Commons—with thirty or forty thousand tons of gunpowder in her hold, and to place her to be shot at with an Armstrong gun, which striking the vessel would blow it to atoms, is a piece of suicide, and has earned for such vessels the *sobriquet* of 'slaughter-houses.'

Now mark what I tell you. We had at the end of 1848, when this panic began, when the French accused us of making excessive preparations, two hundred more steam-vessels of all sizes than the French had; and I tell you that we had increased tenfold in the number of vessels, sailing and steam, as compared with the French increase, since 1852. Now, what has been the consequence of this panic outcry? You have added 4,000,000*l.* or 5,000,000*l.* yearly to the taxation and expenditure of the country. Bearing in mind the rule laid down before, I have no hesitation in saying that this has been a perfect waste, and that we were as safe before from any aggression as now, with all the additional expenditure. Well, but what would that money have done—that is the point which I want to refer to—if left in the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? It would have given him 5,000,000*l.* of revenue to deal with. Instead of voting that money by acclamation, as many do for these useless and senseless preparations, give him that 5,000,000*l.* of money to deal with in the modification of taxes, in the reduction of the customs duties—in relieving us from excise incumbrances and interferences,—give him that money and see what can be done with it,—see how he could remove the incumbrances and obstructions to commerce; see how he could reduce those high duties which [575] check our intercourse with France itself. Give him that money to deal with by reducing the duty on French commodities, and this would be the most effective bond of peace between this country and France. Far more will be done by that means than will be accomplished by any preparations for war, for France is a country which we cannot terrify by preparations; though you may provoke them into antagonistic rivalry, you cannot coerce them into peace by mere shows of superiority of naval strength.

Let me remind you, that while we have heard from France—I don't pretend to know with what truth—a proposition for the reduction of her navy, our trusty advisers are telling us that we must not diminish for a moment our preparations. I will tell you in all soberness what the consequences will be. If you show yourself with ten or twelve line-of-battle ships sailing up and down the Mediterranean—the Mediterranean which belongs as much to France as to us—I say no French Government will dare to disarm or reduce its navy while you make such a display on the French coast. For bear in mind that France has a seacoast second only in extent to England, and her commerce is next in importance to our own. Would a proud nation like ourselves be content to see a vastly superior force at the entrance of her seaports? But it is said that France has no occasion to be afraid of England, that we have no intention of invading her; but if we consult history, we find that whenever there has been invasion between England and France, it has always been an invasion of France by England, and not an invasion of England by France. Bear in mind that the French children read in their schoolbooks of our carrying armies into France, and our taking their great seaports. When they read this, they form a different opinion of us to that which we entertain ourselves, and they don't believe us to be a nation of Quakers, whatever some of us may fancy.

Now, gentlemen, I am not sure that the experience of the last six months may not have had a tendency to incline the great Powers of the Continent to peaceful counsels, if this country should do its best to promote those views. I think the experience of the last six months must have shown the two great military Powers of the Continent that war is too serious a pastime in our day to be resorted to lightly and at very short intervals. It is a very serious thing, with our immense power of locomotion, with our tremendous preparations of the means of destruction, to bring 500,000 or 600,000 men in array against each other; for a few days will now do what would have taken months to do at the beginning of last century; we now bring these mighty hosts into instant collision with means of destruction such as the imaginations of our forefathers would never have conceived. Well, that has been found out, and I think something more has been found out—that public opinion in Europe is not in favour of these wars. I have never presumed, since I have spoken in public on the question of the ruler of France, to offer one word of censure or praise on that individual, and for this reason. The Emperor of the French was elected by the whole people of France, and I believe freely elected, inasmuch as he received more than two-thirds of the whole votes of the country for President when the ballot-boxes were in the hands of his rival, Cavaignac. When I take that as a proof that the feeling of the people was in favour of Louis Napoleon, I take it for granted that they voted for him as Emperor as freely as they voted for him as President.

Well, now, such being the case, what may have been the motives of 6,000,000 of people in the election of their chief, it is not my business, and I have no right, to inquire. I bow to their decision. Supposing they have acted from impulse; that may have been very right in them, though it might not be right in us. I have had the impression the last seven or eight years that the ruler of France has a perception of the altered times in which we live, and that his career was no to be the career of one who bore his [576] name before; and this I will say, that if he or any other ruler on the Continent should so far mistake the spirit and requirements of the age as to dream of repeating the career of war, of annexation, and of conquest which Napoleon the First achieved, then he will find that public opinion, which was impotent sixty years ago, will be sufficiently powerful now to avenge itself against the man, whoever he may be, who may attempt to trouble the industry, commerce, and agriculture of the present world, and deprive the populations of Europe of their just expectations of reaping the benefits of those improvements and those inventions which characterise the present age. I say, if such a man should attempt to convert the inventions and discoveries of the commerce of our day into such purposes—if he should attempt to convert the steamboat, and telegraph, and railroad, merely to purposes of warlike accommodation—I say then that he will have the prayers and aspirations of nineteen-twentieths of the honest, industrious men of Europe in

favour of his dethronement and downfall. And where nineteen-twentieths, where such a majority proclaims its voice now, its power, sooner or later, will make itself felt. And such an individual, in mistaking the character of the age in which he lives, will realise very soon in his own person the truth of that Divine precept, 'They who take the sword shall perish by the sword.'

As I am going to have the pleasure of saying a few words in this place tomorrow, I will not now trespass at further length; but I find I am expected here to offer an explanation with regard to an incident that occurred some little time ago. If it should be thought that, even at this distance of time, it is becoming in me to say a few words to you on the subject—(I should have thought it presumptuous to say anything on the subject to anyone else)—but if I understand from your chiefs on the platform that such is your wish, I, of course, must obey. Gentlemen, I need not tell you that on my arrival in England, on finding myself your representative, I received a communication from Lord Palmerston, and also another from Lord John Russell. In Lord Palmerston's letter, he was kind enough to urge many reasons, frankly expressed, why I should accept a seat in his Cabinet, as President of the Board of Trade. Now, I will not affect any modesty in this matter: I will say that if I was fit for any office in the Cabinet, I should be fit for the office of President of the Board of Trade. I think, probably, if other circumstances had not intervened, my being in that place would have been really putting a square peg in a square hole. But, gentlemen, my reasons, if you will have them, for declining to accept the honour which was offered to me were as follows. The honour, I beg to assure you, I did not consider a matter of indifference, it was probably peculiarly inviting to me, if I had been one of an ambitious character, because, taking it for all in all, it would have been the first instance of a man springing immediately from amongst you, literally a man of business,—being offered a seat in the Cabinet at all. I was not indifferent to the honour; none of the concomitants of office could have been a matter of indifference to me; but in that case I felt that it was a matter calling for my conscientious action; the more so in proportion to the inducements that were held out to take a particular course. Well, gentlemen, I went to London, and before calling on any one, or receiving any one, I thought it best to call upon Lord Palmerston, and to express to him exactly my views in the matter; and I may tell you just as frankly as I have told him what passed between us. I stated to my Lord Palmerston my case thus: I have been for ten or fifteen years the systematic assailant of what I believe to be your foreign policy. I thought it warlike,—not calculated to promote peace or harmony between this country and other countries. I explained to him exactly what my feelings had been, in those words; and I said to him, it is quite possible that I may have been mistaken in all this; when a man takes an idea and pursues it for ten or twelve [577] years, it is very likely that he takes an exaggerated view of his first impressions; but I put it to Lord Palmerston, and now I put it to you, whether, having regard to those opinions, it was fit and becoming in me to step from an American steamer into his Cabinet, and there and then, for the first time, after having received at his hands a post of high honour and great emolument, to discover that I had undergone a change in my opinions; and whether I should not be open to great misconstruction by the public at large if I took such a course; and I candidly confess that it was inconsistent with my own self-respect.

Now, gentlemen, I do not intend to dwell upon this subject, because it would be egotistical to do it. And I do not intend to claim for myself more humility in the matter than belongs to me, and I do not wish that my abnegation should be considered to in any way reflect upon others who take a different course. I must explain to you candidly the course which I took had reference solely to my own conviction in the matter. I told the gentlemen at Liverpool who did me the honour to meet me at my landing there, that it was a question which I alone could decide; and I tell you that I alone could decide it, because I alone was conversant with the extent of my convictions with respect to Lord Palmerston's policy; and I was bound to be faithful to my own convictions, and especially was I bound to be so when

under the temptation which his very magnanimous offer presented to me. I am bound to say, at the same time that whilst my own feelings and convictions prevented my taking that step which many of you here wished, and which so many of my friends in Liverpool and Lancashire pressed upon me,—though I could not take that course myself, I was very glad to find that my friend Mr. Gibson found himself in a position to be able to accept office in Lord Palmerston's Government. And I confess to you that I was glad to find that my friend Charles Gilpin has taken a subordinate office, where there is plenty of work if he chooses to do it; for I will avow to you candidly that I like to see a man cropping up from the lowest stratum,—one who has worked as hard as any man here present,—and step into a public office from the very ranks of the people; because what we want is to show that you need not be born in certain regions to be able to serve the Queen.

Now, gentlemen, I need not, I hope, add—and it is all I have to add—that I had no personal feeling whatever in the course I took with regard to Lord Palmerston's offer. If I had had any feeling of personal hostility, which I never had, towards him, for he is of that happy nature which cannot create a personal enemy, his kind and manly offer would have instantly disarmed me; I think I am made of very yielding materials when anything in the way of conciliation presents itself to me. But I had no such feeling. I should be sorry if it were thought so; and, as I told him, I tell you, if, in my attacks upon his foreign policy, I ever said one word that was offensive to himself or any public man, I am very sorry for it. I told him the motives which actuated me in the course I have taken. I claim no merit whatever for doing more than any other public man in my situation would have done. I can only justify myself by falling back, as I do, upon my own strong feelings and convictions in the matter; and I will only now say to you, that I trust to your kind and indulgent interpretation of the course which I have thought it my duty to pursue.

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**PARLIAMENTARY REFORM. V.**  
**ROCHDALE, AUGUST 18, 1859.** ↩

[This second Speech was delivered to the whole body of inhabitants at Rochdale.]

I AM more distressed and disappointed than I can express to you to find myself so hoarse to-night from the effects of our last night's meeting, that I am almost afraid I shall not be able to make myself heard by this meeting; but I will, at all events, reserve so much of my voice, that if there should be anything which I shall omit to say that may be interesting to any one here present, whether elector or non-elect, I shall be happy, as your Mayor has intimated to you, to answer any questions, and consider myself here now in the position which I should have been if I could have been present when you so generously elected me without having the opportunity of questioning me as to my views on any particular topic; and I shall be gratified if any gentleman present, who feels any inclination to elicit information which I have it in my power to give, would give me the opportunity of imparting it.

Gentlemen, I have heard it announced that this is to be considered rather a non-electors' than an electors' meeting, though I believe this assemblage comprises both classes in Rochdale. You are fortunate in this borough in having less of that jealousy and discord of classes than are unfortunately to be found in other places; and the very fact of my finding myself here to-night, at a meeting presided over by the Mayor of the borough, shows, at all events, that in the eyes of the first magistrate of the borough the non-electors hold the same rank in the social scale, at least in a political capacity, as any other class of the community.

Now, gentlemen, I feel that I have a fair right to consider myself at home in addressing a body of non-electors, for I can conscientiously say—and I do not say it in the way of boast, because there are many politicians who are just as sincere in that respect as myself—but I can conscientiously say that I have never entertained a political view, or cherished a principle in connection with politics, that has not embraced the well-being of the great mass of the community as the fundamental rule and maxim of my politics. And I need not hesitate to say, that I do this not from any exclusive regard for any particular class of the community, but from this view, that I hold it to be quite impossible that you can promote the permanent well-being and prosperity of any part of the community, unless you carry with you in that career of advancement and prosperity the great mass of the people who form the working class in the community. And I will go still further and say, that any policy which has for its effect to promote the prosperity of [579] the great mass of the people, cannot fail in the end also to benefit every class who are above them in the social scale. Therefore, with these doctrines, which I conscientiously hold, I always feel myself as much at home, and as fairly entitled to the confidence and the friendly regard of the working class, as I do to those of any other class of the community.

Now, we have on this occasion promised ourselves that we will discuss that question, which I believe is of most interest to the non-electors of this borough—I mean the question of Parliamentary Reform. It is a good sign to find so many of the working class, the non electors of this borough, taking an interest in this question; for I should despair of my country, I should think that there was little chance, at least, of our preserving those institutions which we prize so much, unless the great bulk of the people, who are now unfortunately deprived of the electoral franchise, were pressing forward, and anxious to elevate themselves to the dignity of free citizens. Now I will, in the first place, say a few

words to you upon the subject which I consider to lie at the foundation of all questions of organic change—I mean the suffrage. I am inclined to think that we Reformers have probably erred in times past in having dealt with the question of reform rather as a compound than as a simple or separate question. I mean this—and I take to myself the full blame of any mistake that may have been committed in it—we have always lumped three or four things together, and advocated them all as one measure, or one bill, when I think it would have been wiser if we had dealt with them separately, and had begun with the franchise as the thing which must carry with it, and as a consequence establish, the other points of our Reform Bill. I once heard Mr. O'Connell, in his humorous way, illustrate this policy, which I think we have erroneously followed, in this fashion. He said, 'If you want to get through a gateway with a waggon, where there is hardly room for one horse to go, it isn't wise to put on four horses a breast, because it will be still more difficult to get through.' I have come to the conclusion that in any future measure of reform the wisest way would be to deal with the question separately, to have one bill for the extension of the franchise, to make the ballot another measure, to make the shortening of Parliaments another,—that, I believe, would be the wisest course to pursue; and my opinion is, that the franchise being that upon which all the rest depends, ought to be dealt with first. My opinions on the franchise have for the last twenty years been pretty generally given. I do not think I have gone as far as everybody in this assembly; I have gone a great deal farther than many of those with whom I have found myself acting in the House of Commons. I always voted for household suffrage. I know you have many partisans of that amount of the franchise, and you have also friends of manhood suffrage in this borough. My idea is this, that whether you get manhood suffrage, or whether you get household suffrage, or whether you get something different from either,—which we are very likely to get before we get the other two,—my idea is this, that some step in advance in the franchise will render future steps in the direction of the franchise and other measures of reform far easier than the first step will be. We have got to a dead-lock now, when the question of the franchise must be dealt with, for parties in the House of Commons have come to that pass, that, whilst all of them have agreed to some measure of reform, there seems to be hardly power in either side of the House to carry any efficient measure; and therefore I say, in the interest of parliamentary government, as well as for the benefit of the people at large, it is most important that this question of the franchise should be dealt with speedily, and I hope it will be dealt with largely and generously.

Now, I have told you what my advocacy has been; I have also named what others in this borough to a large extent. I believe, advocate; but I will not [580] disguise from you, who are non-electors, that, in dealing with this question, we have to argue it before a tribunal which already possesses the franchise, and it would not be human nature if we did not find that the class that already possess the electoral power are a little bit jealous, and a little bit reluctant to diffuse their power over a greater number of voters, and thereby lessen the intrinsic value of the franchise itself. It is very much like somebody having a glass of pretty strong wine-and-water, letting somebody come and water it for him and make it weaker. There is no doubt an idea amongst the electors that the extension of the franchise to a large body of the working classes would weaken their own power, and probably endanger their influence; and therefore it is only human nature to expect a reluctance on the part of those who have the franchise to grant it to those who have not got it. Now you know I was always a practical man; even in advocating the repeal of the Cornlaws, I never found that I could make any progress until I began to take up the landlord's and the farmer's view of the question, and try to reconcile both to the change, and show both that they were not going to get any harm from it.

Well, now, in advocating the extension of the franchise, on your behalf, I should always present myself before the present body of electors with such arguments as I could find to show them that they would not derive any injury from a large extension of electoral rights to those outside of the electoral pale. My first question to the electors would be this, 'What



interest have you of the middle class that the people of the working class have not also got?' You cannot separate the interest of the one from the other. The question then will be, 'Are we sure that if we let in a large number of voters from another class, the working class, that they will see their own interest in the same way as we see ours?' Well, I think people are generally very quick-sighted as to their interests; and fortunately there is this in the constitution of society, and of all earthly things, that if a man does not pursue his interest, if he does what is wrong, he is very soon reminded of it by the damage he does to himself as well as to others. I therefore do not think there is much danger that a large proportion of the working class, by following merely their own instincts, will not take a wise view of their own interest. But I would ask the middle class, if I may call them so, who have now got the franchise, whether they may not incur some difficulties and dangers themselves if they keep out of the electoral pale the vast majority of the community who have now no interest in the suffrage? The working class, and those who are not entitled now to vote, I believe amount to five millions of persons. Well, I say to those who have the vote, 'Take into partnership with you a portion of those who are now excluded from the right of voting, and do it, if you have no other motive, from the selfish motive of being secure in the possession of the power you have.' For your electoral system is standing now upon so narrow a foundation that it is hardly safe to reckon upon its standing at all in case of some certain contingencies arising, which we can imagine may some day arise. Why, what have we seen abroad? I remember quite well when Louis Philippe, the last king of France, was strongly urged by the reformers in France to double the electoral body in that country. They then had only about 250,000 voters. He was urged to double the number of votes. He refused; he continued to govern the country through this small minority of voters; and one evening when we were sitting in the House of Commons, the telegraph flashed the news from Paris that the Government of Louis Philippe had been overthrown, and a Republic proclaimed in its place. And I remember quite well when the buzz of the conversation ran round the House as this piece of news was passed from Member to Member, I remember saying to the late Mr. Joseph Hume, who sat beside me, 'Go across to Sir Robert Peel, and tell him the news.' Sir Robert Peel was sitting then just on the front seat on the [581] other side of the House, having been repudiated by his large party, which he had lost by having previously repealed the Corn-laws. I remember Mr. Hume going and sitting by the side of Sir R. Peel, and whispering the news to him, and his immediate answer was this: 'This comes of trying to govern the country through a narrow representation in Parliament, without regarding the wishes of those outside. It is what this party behind me wanted me to do in the matter of the Corn-laws, and I would not do it.' We stand here upon a different basis; instead of 250,000 voters, we have about a million; but recollect this, that whilst France had been only a constitutional country, at that time, about twenty-five years, we have been governed under constitutional maxims for centuries. Recollect that it is our boast that the people here do rule, and that they have ruled for centuries; and I do say that, taking into account our great pretensions in regard to the freedom of the subject in this country, and comparing our present state, when we have but a million of voters, I declare that our state is less defensible than the case of Louis Philippe was in the time of which I speak, because, compared with our pretensions, our system of representation is no doubt an enormous sham; and there is no security in shams at any time, because they are very liable to be upset by any sudden reality such as that which occurred in the streets of Paris at the time of which I speak.

Now, I can imagine such a thing as our hearing some day within the next five years of some hurricane of revolution passing over the Continent of Europe, and we know what the effect of that was upon this country in 1830; and I can imagine such a state of things as that we should be in such a position at some time, owing, for instance, to some circumstance that has happened in India or elsewhere—for we are not without our outlying dangers—I can imagine ourselves in such a state of things at that moment that there may be very great excitement in this country, and probably very great discontent and suffering and consequent

disaffection; and I can imagine this great change, coming like a thunder-clap from the Continent, might rouse up elements in this country which might produce changes far greater than anything which is now contemplated in this country, and which would make those men who then had to deal with this question look back with regret to those tranquil times in which we now live, and lament that they did not, like wise statesmen, deal with this question as they ought to deal with it, in a time of prosperity and of political calm. I am therefore using the most homely and the most common-sense counsels when I advise the class in this country which has the possession of political power, to deal with this question now, when the people are in a good temper, and when we are in a prosperous state. Besides, we have seen another change on the Continent. We have seen the great mass of the people sometimes throw themselves into the scale in favour of some one great man, or some great party; and although it is not a thing that is very likely to happen in this country, yet I can imagine in any country, that, if you exclude five-sixths of the male adult population from electoral rights,—I can imagine a state of things when, if they have been proscribed for generation after generation, that they might be disposed to avenge themselves upon a privileged class by turning the scale in favour of some other party in the community, who might be in favour of oppressing those whom they may consider to have been their oppressors. I think these are not whimsical fancies, but they are chances which ought to be considered by every thoughtful and prudent man, and they should be a motive, even though drawn from the instincts of selfishness, why the middle class of this country should seek to deal with this question of the franchise at the present moment.

Well, but still we have the bugbear, that the working class of this country are not to be trusted with the franchise; the saying is that the people would injure [582] themselves if you gave them the franchise; that they cannot take care of themselves. Now, in answer to that, I will put another question which has often occurred to me in my travels in distant countries: ‘If the people are not fit to take care of themselves, who are to be trusted to take care of them?’ That is the question which I have asked myself in many countries. I have asked it of myself where they are governed as they are in Russia, I have asked it where they are governed as they are in Austria, where they are ruled as they now are in France—I have asked myself this question: Where will you find a resting-place—how will you ever establish a system by which the people can be governed unless you come to this, that they must be left to govern themselves? Why, we do not profess to go to any of those countries for a rule and system of Government. Well, there is another remedy for this difficulty of ignorance. [A Voice: ‘Go to America.’] A friend says, ‘Go to America.’ Well, I have been to America. But we must deal with this as an English question, and we must deal with it in a practical way; we cannot deal with it as an American question; but I have no objection to illustrate what I am going to say by a reference to America.

Now, in America they have generally universal suffrage, but not everywhere; until lately, the suffrage was not so widely extended as it is now. I saw it lately stated, in a New York paper, that, thirty years ago, the franchise in the State of New York was not more popular than it is in England now. In the various States of the American Union they have a great variety of franchises. In some parts, it is universal suffrage; in others, it is a tax-paying suffrage; in some, it is a kind of household suffrage; and in others, it is a property qualification. But the tendency, everywhere and always, is constantly to widen the possession of the franchise, constantly to increase the number of voters; and the principle is now everywhere admitted, that they must come to manhood suffrage for the whole of the white population. And this is the point that I was coming to as an illustration of my argument with reference to the alleged ignorance of the people. I have found in America that everywhere the question of education lies at the foundation of every political question. I mean this: that in America the influential classes, as you may call them, the richer people, everywhere advocate education for the people, as a means of enabling the people to govern themselves. Their

maxim is this: the people govern for themselves; they govern us as well as themselves; and, unless we educate the people, our free institutions cannot possibly work. Their maxim is everywhere, 'educate or we perish;' and the consequence is that the influential classes in America devote themselves to the education of the whole people, in a manner and to an extent of which no country in Europe can have any idea. Wherever I have been on my travels there I have found—and I have visited in some places where, when I was in America twenty-four years ago, the Red Indians were still encamped, and where, twenty-four years afterwards, I have found flourishing towns—I have found that everywhere in these new communities the schoolhouses were the largest and most conspicuous buildings, and that, even whilst the streets were unpaved, and whilst most of the citizens were still dwelling in wooden houses, there were large brick or stone buildings run up, containing eight, ten, or twelve long rooms, and every room, from the floor to the roof, was filled with children, receiving, without one farthing fee or charge, as good an education as you could give to the sons of the middle classes in this country.

Now, I have no hesitation in saying that the system of education in America has gone hand in hand with the extension of the electoral franchise to the people, and that the one great strong pervading motive of the people of America to educate their sons is that they may be enabled to exercise the power which they possess for the benefit of themselves [583] and the whole country. One of the advantages which I expect to see derived from the wide extension of the franchise in this country is that there will be increased attention paid by those who are in influential places to the promotion of national education. And if it has the effect of drawing the different classes together, and inciting them to a common effort to raise the intellectual and moral condition of the great mass of the people, I know of no better effect which could be produced by any measure than that which will come from an extension of the franchise.

Well, there are questions connected with our taxation which some people think could hardly be safely left to be dealt with by a largely and widely-extended constituency. Now, I am of opinion that the country will gain in the question of taxation; that it will have a chance of reforms, which, under existing circumstances, there seems to be little, or only a very remote, prospect of effecting. Everybody is, or ought to be, interested in a sound and just system of taxation, because nothing cripples people more than unjust or excessive taxation. But having already expressed my belief that the extension of the franchise will tend to the extension of education in the country, I say, in reference to the taxation of which some people are afraid, that I think that the tendency of legislation in our fiscal affairs, as the result of a widely-extended franchise, would, in my opinion, go very far to promote the prosperity of our commercial system.

Now, what is it that people are afraid of? They say, 'If you give a vote to the people they will tax property, and they will relieve themselves of taxes.' Well, now, although I cannot follow the subject into all its details, I am not at all alarmed at this threat. I believe that even if all that is predicted in that direction should be fulfilled—I am not quite sure that it would be, but assuming that the effect of an extension of the franchise was that the votes of the people removed, to a large extent, taxes which now press upon articles of consumption, such as tea and sugar, paper, and other articles taxed at our custom-houses and excise-offices—I say that if it had that effect I do not believe that would prove injurious to the country. I believe that if the instinct of the people—the working people who would be thrown in as an addition to our electoral list—if their instinct led them to substitute for a large portion of our indirect taxes, taxes upon property, or taxes upon incomes, I believe that it would have a beneficial effect upon the commerce of this country; and that, though urged by their natural instincts, their selfishness, you may say, they would, in fact, be carrying out the most enlightened principles of political economy.

Now, I do not know anything that could come from an extension of the franchise that would be more likely to benefit the upper classes as well as the lower, if I may use the term, than a change in our fiscal system, which very largely removed those taxes and duties that are now paid in the consumption of the working classes, and transferring that revenue to income and to property. I therefore see in that fear of ignorance the greatest chance of an improvement in the education of the people. In the tendency of an extension of the suffrage, in regard to taxation, I cannot see that the working-classes can possibly do that which could prove injurious to other classes of the community. But I am sometimes told that the working-classes, if they had the power, would be very likely to deal with their power after the manner of a trades' union, and attempt to force measures through Parliament that would benefit particular classes. Well, I am not afraid of that. We have had classes before who have had possession of the power of legislation, and who have used it for their own advantage. We had the Corn-laws passed by the landowners, the Navigation-laws passed for the benefit of the shipowners, we had the timber duties passed for the benefit of the timber [584] merchants, and we had the sugar monopolies established for the benefit of the West Indies. We have had classes in this country who have usurped political power, and have applied it for their own purposes; but the progress of enlightenment and the continued discussion of these questions have shown that this process of selfish legislation is found only suicidal to those who follow it, and that the best interests of all are consulted by those measures which deal fairly with the interests of all. And I do not think that if the matter came fairly to be discussed between those of the working classes who are possessed of the franchise and those who are above the working classes in the social scale,—I do not think they would be likely to come to any conclusion, respecting these questions, which would prove inimical to the rest of the community. For bear in mind that I always fall back upon this: when we have taken into partnership a larger section of the working classes as electors, we shall all be interested in seeing that they get all the information we can possibly give them on these subjects. The law of self-preservation will be immediately at work, and we shall, through the newspapers, through our addresses, and through our schools, be constantly trying to bring up the intelligence of the working classes—if that be necessary,—so as to enable them to fulfil their duties as electors, without any of those dangers of which some people are—but I am not—afraid.

Well, now, with regard to the probable measure itself, with which we shall have to deal—I am sorry to say it, because it may have the effect of damping some of your spirits, but I do not think the country or the House of Commons is in a mood for a very considerable measure of parliamentary reform. I do not know who is to blame—the House of Commons or the country. I rather think there is quite as much agitation about parliamentary reform in the House of Commons as in the country. It has got into the House of Commons, and they don't know what to do with it. It is bandied about from side to side, and all parties are professing to be reformers; everybody is in favour of an extension of the suffrage; and, upon my honour, I think in my heart that no one likes it much, and that they don't care much about it. Well, then, I must deal frankly—because I like to speak my mind fairly; and, though it may not excite cheers or be very acceptable, it is the best way to tell the honest truth, and I am sure a Rochdale audience will always approve of the truth being told them—I must say that there has not been very much stir in this country in the cause of parliamentary reform. When I was travelling in America, my friend Mr. Bright was making some of the most eloquent speeches that ever have been delivered by any human being in this country in favour of a large measure of parliamentary reform; but I did not gather from the newspapers which fell under my eye in America that there was much spontaneous combustion in the country to help him in his efforts. I will tell you what an American friend of mine said in the course of conversation about it. He was a great admirer of Mr. Bright's eloquence, but he said, 'Ah, you made a great mistake, you and Mr. Bright; if you are going to be political reformers, you should have gone for the reform of Parliament before you repealed the Corn-laws; because

now the people are well fed, and have plenty of work and wages, and they have all turned Tories.' Well, I don't go so far as that; but in looking back to the last forty years, over which my memory unfortunately extends, I must say I have found that in almost all cases of great political excitement—when reform was most popular with the masses,—I must say that it was always at a time of great manufacturing distress, when provisions were dear and labour was scarce, and the people were discontented with everybody and everything about them. On the contrary, there is no doubt that by the measures that have been passed, and with which I hope that, without [585] vanity, I may say Mr. Bright's name and my own, and the names of many other gentlemen here present, are associated, we have put an end to those periodical seasons of starvation. People are not driven now to eat garbage, or to subsist upon cabbage-stalks. There is generally plenty to eat; but I should be sorry to find that my American friend was so far correct that the people of this country, because they are well fed, and because they are generally getting fair wages, are therefore indifferent to their political rights. I hope to find it otherwise; but it must be admitted there has been rather an unusual quiescence in regard to this question of parliamentary reform. I may tell you candidly, that those who advocate reform in Parliament find it very difficult to get admission to the electoral pale for those outside, unless these outsiders are knocking for admission, and knocking pretty loud. You know it is not easy to get those who are inside the privileged apartment to open the door, unless those outside manifest some desire to get in. But still, I say, this is the time when we ought to deal with this question effectually, for all parties now agree that in the next session we must have a measure of parliamentary reform that shall carry us over at least the next twenty years. Lord John Russell has given notice of his view. He has pledged himself to a measure, as I understand—I was not present at the time, and have not referred back to his speech—of a 6*l.* rental for boroughs, and a 10*l.* franchise for the counties.

Well, I suppose a 6*l.* rental in a borough like Rochdale would make a very large addition to your electoral list; because, owing to the high rents paid in a town like this, a 6*l.* rental would include a very large proportion of the working class. But if you go to smaller places in the rural districts, into the farming villages and small towns generally, a 6*l.* rental would not add largely to the constituency; and I believe that in Scotland and Ireland it would have a very slight effect. Altogether, this 6*l.* rental would not, I believe, double the present constituency. I have not had an opportunity to investigate it, and perhaps it would not be easy to ascertain it, but I am told, that if we had a franchise extended to a 6*l.* rental, would not add a million to the present million of votes. I have heard some people say it would not add more than five or six hundred thousand. I hear a voice say, 'Not so much.' Well, I have heard, but I cannot quite believe it, that amongst some of the statesmen, Lord John Russell's colleagues, there is contemplated a resistance even to this measure of a 6*l.* rental franchise; but I would ask those Lords and right hon. Gentlemen, whether it is worth disturbing the franchise at all, if they do not go as far as that at the least? Let us see—it will be thirty years next year since we had the last Reform Bill. That Reform Bill gave us about a million of voters. We wait thirty years, and now it is considered an extreme measure if we add one million more to our voting list; but, as I understand it, there are six millions of adult males in this country, five millions of whom at present have no votes. Well, if we take in a million next year, after thirty years' waiting, and if we are to go on no faster than that for the future, it will then take four times thirty years to bring in the other four millions of voters; and, in fact, it will take 150 years before the whole of the adult males are entitled to vote in this country. I apprehend that nobody would think we were travelling too fast at that rate.

I do not say that it is necessary that we should do everything at once. There are young men now growing up who will have better capacity than their fathers to agitate and work and argue for their own franchises. I have no objection that the measure which I look for shall not come all at once, but gradually, and as soon as we can get it; but this I do say, that if the present Government really falter in that measure which Lord John Russell has proposed, it

will be the most unwise and suicidal thing that the privileged class of this country, who really have the executive power in [586] their hands, could possibly accomplish. Assuming, at all events, that the franchise will be dealt with, there is another question to which I attach the utmost importance,—I mean the question of the ballot. Now, I consider, myself, that the ballot is sure to follow an extension of the franchise. There are about 230 men now in the House of Commons, who are pledged to the ballot. One election under a Reform Bill would inevitably carry the ballot. And, therefore, I consider that an extension of the franchise necessarily leads to the ballot. I am for keeping the questions separate. There is a society in London organised for the purpose of advocating the ballot. I have advised them always to keep their society separate from all others. They have, I believe, some supporters in Rochdale. That society is worthy of your support, and will, I hope, go on advocating the ballot, and adducing, as it is adducing, the best possible arguments to show its morality and its efficiency.

Well, now, since I have been home, I have been asked a dozen times what the people think of the ballot in America. It is a very remarkable thing that I never heard anybody say anything about it in America. It is a thing that nobody thinks of discussing. It is so perfectly understood by ninety-nine hundredths of that community to be the best way of taking votes, that they no more think of discussing it than they do as to whether it is better to button their waistcoats in front rather than button them behind; or whether it is better to mount a horse on the left side instead of getting awkwardly on on the right. It is not a subject that ever forms matter of discussion there. There are not two sides of it. Nobody questions it; it is the last thing you ever hear discussed in America; and the reason is this, that everybody admits, wherever the ballot has been tried, that it is the most convenient, the most peaceful, the most moral, the most tranquil, and therefore the most desirable mode of taking votes of any that was ever devised. In an ordinary case, their votings in their large towns go on with as much tranquillity as your proceedings on a Sunday do, when people walk quietly off to their different places of worship. A man goes to one of the different polling-places; he deposits his vote; nobody is there to shout at him or ask him questions; nobody expects to know how he is going to vote; nobody cares to inquire; it is assumed that no one has a right to interfere with another man's right of voting as he pleases; and when that is once assumed and once conceded, there is nobody that has any interest in opposing the ballot.

I last night alluded to a communication I had received from a gentleman in America—in Philadelphia. I had not the letter in my pocket then, but I have it now. When I was in Philadelphia, a large manufacturing city of more than half a million of inhabitants, I met a gentleman who had been previously very well known to me, and who is in the highest social and political circles in that city, and he was talking to me about the ballot; and after I left Philadelphia, and reached Washington, he sent me this letter, which I have no doubt he intended that I might publish, and therefore I will read it to you:—

‘Philadelphia, April 29, 1859.

Dear Sir,— I called upon you yesterday, a few minutes before twelve o'clock, and found that there had been a mistake about your time of departure. I desired to have had some conversation with you upon the subject of vote by ballot, and to repeat, what I had verbally stated before, and now subjoin in writing. During fifty years' close intimacy with the machinery of parties, and in active participation in conducting our elections, I have never seen a vote bought or sold, nor one which I had any reason to believe had been bought or sold.— Hoping to see you once more before you leave our country,

‘I remain, yours truly,

‘JOSIAH RANDALL.’

Now, that was written to me by a gentleman who is at the head of that party in America, which is considered to include in its body the largest portion of the working classes of that community,—I mean the democratic party; and that gentleman had never seen a vote [587] bought or sold. Now the reason, no doubt, was partly this,—that their constituencies are so large in most cases that it would be quite futile to attempt to carry an election by bribery, just as it would be impossible to carry one by bribery in Manchester or Leeds; and consequently you hear much less of bribery in the large constituencies than in the smaller ones. But I would ask whether, considering that we are twenty-eight millions of people, ought we not to have, as a rule, all our constituencies much larger than they are? I know not how you are to keep your House of Commons within its present numbers, unless you are to enlarge all your constituencies, and thereby secure to a fair proportion of the population their right of representation.

And this brings me to the question of the redistribution of the franchise; and I would say, gentlemen, I have a very strong opinion that where you have to give, as you would have to give in any new Reform Bill, a considerable number of new Members to your large cities,—as, for instance, Manchester, Liverpool, and the like,—and Rochdale will, of course, be included in the number,—it would be the most convenient and the fairest plan, if you apportioned your large towns into wards, and gave one representative for each ward. I mean that, instead of lumping two or four Members together, and letting them be the representatives of a whole town or city, I would divide the place into four wards, and I would let each ward send one Member. I think there is a fairness and convenience about that plan which ought to recommend it to Lord John Russell, and to every one who has to handle a new Reform Bill. For instance, you will find in a town, generally, that what is called the aristocracy of the town live in one part, and the working classes live in another. Now, I say, if, in dividing a town into three or four wards, it should happen that one of the districts where the working class predominates should have the opportunity of sending a Member which that class may consider will most fairly represent their views, and if in another part of the town another class, living there, choose a Member that more completely represents theirs, I do not see why the different classes or parties in the community should not have that opportunity of giving expression to their opinions. I think it would be much better than having two or four Members for one borough; for I have observed, in watching the progress of elections in England, that where you have one Member representing a borough, as in the case of Rochdale, there is a tendency to maintain a higher degree of public spirit—there is a more decided line of demarcation in parties; and men are more earnest in their political views, than where they have two Members to a borough; for I have frequently seen, as in the case of Liverpool, Blackburn, and many other towns that I could name, that the people begin to get tired of contests, and acquiesce in a division of the town. They say, let us vote one-and-one, and do not let us have any more political contests. That is a very bad state of things; because, if a country is to maintain its free institutions, it must constantly have political discussions and contests.

Well, I do not say anything about the shortening of Parliaments; at present, we seem to have Parliaments very short, and I think that we are likely to have a recurrence of elections until, at all events, our Legislature deals with this question of parliamentary reform, and puts us on a footing by which some one party or other can have a preponderance in the House. But I have always advocated, at the same time, the ballot and household suffrage, and a return to triennial Parliaments. I think that a short lease and frequent reckonings are likely to maintain the character both of the representatives and of their constituents; and the oftener they meet, within moderation as to time, to renew the lease of the confidence of their constituents, the better it will be for the working of our free institutions.

[588]

Gentlemen, I could enlarge upon these subjects, if my time and yours would permit; but I am to be followed by other gentlemen—one, in particular, who has more peculiarly identified himself with this question, and to whom, if we get any measure of reform, the country will be largely indebted for succeeding in it. I am to be followed, also, by a gentleman—Mr. Sharman Crawford—who was formerly your representative. I say yours, for the working men and the non-electors never had a more honest representative than Mr. Sharman Crawford. I cannot too much, I cannot too heartily, express my gratitude to him, coming, as he has, across the stormy Channel, to pay us a visit here to-night. I cannot forget, either, that when I was in America, and my name was proposed to this borough, he volunteered to come across from Ireland to represent me at the hustings, if there was any need. I tender him my warmest gratitude for his kindness to me. There are other gentlemen here present who will also address you. I reserve what little voice I have left to answer any questions that may be put to me by any gentleman here present. I invite discussion now, just as if I were going to be elected by you to-morrow. And thanking you all for the kind support you gave me at the late expected contest, knowing, as I do, that I owe my election to the enthusiasm of the working classes in my favour, as well as to the favour of those of their employers who sympathise with my views, I cordially repeat my thanks to you all for your kindness to me in my absence, and for the warm and generous reception which I have met with on this occasion.

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# EDUCATION.

[589]

## EDUCATION. I. MANCHESTER, JANUARY 22, 1851↩

[The National Public School Association, the objects of which were nearly the same as those advocated at present by the Education League, held an annual meeting at Manchester, at which Mr. Cobden moved the following resolution:—'That the present aspect of the Educational Question gives high testimony to the value of the efforts of this association, and promises a complete and speedy triumph.']

THE aspect of this room certainly affords encouragement to the friends of Education. The very numerous and influential body of gentlemen that I see before me is a proof of the growing interest taken in this important question; and I see around me many gentlemen,—I see many of the old familiar faces with whom I was associated in a former struggle; and if continuous courage and perseverance, and an undeviating adherence to principle under trying circumstances can warrant success, then, I think, the past experience which those gentlemen have given to the world, augurs a triumph for the cause we have now in hand. But, gentlemen, I don't disguise from myself,—and you will not for a moment conceal from your minds, that we are indebted for this meeting, in some degree, to a recent movement that has taken place in this city by gentlemen who have hitherto not taken a prominent part in the cause of national education.

Now I join most unfeignedly in the expression of congratulation upon the fact, that those gentlemen have come forward to avow, to a great extent, their adhesion to the principles of this association. They have given the sanction of their approval to the main features of this association, as has been well observed,—they have adopted the principles of local rating; and I will further say, they have, by one of the provisions of that scheme which has been published to the world, given in their adhesion to the principle of secular education, inasmuch as they leave to the parents of children the power of demanding for their children an exemption from that doctrinal instruction, which has been hitherto held by every party an indispensable requisite of education. Now, I must confess, I have always been so impressed with the difficulties of this question, that if a proposal had been made by which it was intended to give an improved education to the people, coupled with conditions ten times as objectionable as those we have lately had proposed to us, I do not think I could have found it in my heart to have offered any very strong opposition. I have really passed beyond the time in which I can offer any opposition to any scheme whatever, come from whatever party it may, which proposes to give the mass of the people of this country a better education than they now receive. I will say more,—that in joining the secular [590] system of education, I have not taken up the plan from any original love for a system of education which either separates itself from religion, or which sets up some peculiar and novel model of a system which shall be different from anything which has preceded it in this country. I confess that for fifteen years my efforts in education, and my hopes of success in establishing a system of national education, have always been associated with the idea of coupling the education of this country with the religious communities which exist. But I have found, after trying it, as I think, in every possible shape, such insuperable difficulties in consequence of the religious discordances of this country,—that I have taken refuge in this, which has been called the remote haven of refuge for the Educationists,—the secular system,—in sheer despair of carrying out any system in connection with religion. I should, therefore, be a hypocrite, if I

were to say I have any particular repugnance to a system of education coupled with religious instruction. But there is no one in this room, or in the country, that can have a stronger conviction than I have of the utter hopelessness of ever attempting to unite the religious bodies of this country in any system of education; so that I can hardly bring myself even to give a serious consideration to the plan that has been now brought forward by gentlemen in this city, and who have brought it forward, no doubt, with the best possible intentions, and who have only to persevere in order to find what I have found, for the last fifteen years,—the hopelessness of the task. For what is it those gentlemen have now proposed to do? Is there any novelty in it? Why, it is precisely what Parliament, and the Government, and the Committee of Privy Council, have been attempting to do now for a great number of years,—that is, to give a system of education to the country which shall comprise religious instruction, and which shall call upon the people of this country to subscribe, through taxation or rates, for the general religious as well as secular education of the country.

There is no novelty in the plan now brought forward; it is merely a proposal to transfer to Manchester, as the theatre of contest, what has been hitherto just going on in the House of Commons and the Government. It is, in fact, a proposal by which everybody shall be called upon to pay for the religious teaching of everybody else. Now, this is precisely what has been objected to by a great portion of this community, and what has prevented the present system, administered through the Minutes of Council, from being successful. There is this novelty, certainly,—that for the first time a body of Churchmen have themselves come forward, and recommended that all religious denominations should be allowed to receive public money for the teaching of their catechisms and creeds. Now, that is a novelty, because hitherto, although the Church body have themselves been in favour of endowment for one particular sect,—if I may be allowed to call it so,—yet the Church has not hitherto been an active promoter of any system which shall recognise the right of other religious sects to receive public money to teach their catechisms. So far, then, we have a difference in the quarter from which this proposal has come; but does this alter the character of the opposition we may expect from those who have hitherto opposed the Minutes of Council and the parliamentary grants for education? It is precisely the same thing over again,—the same thing, whether you ask the religious voluntaries of this country to receive and pay public money for religious teaching through a local rate in Manchester, or through the Minutes in Council voted by Parliament in the annual grants. There is no difference in the two proposals, except that one is done by rates levied in Manchester, and the other by a vote in the House of Commons. How then are we to escape those difficulties in the religious question which we have hitherto encountered? If the members of the dissenting bodies have been sincere in their opposition hitherto to the national system of education, as administered [591] through the Minutes of the Committee of Privy Council, there is not the slightest hope of that proposal, which has now emanated from the Church party in Manchester, being acceptable to this city. But I am not sure we are dealing with any well-considered or matured proposition from any particular religious body. We probably have the plan of an individual rather than the manifesto of a party. I am not sure that any party in this city, any religious body as a body, or any committee as a committee, has yet endorsed the proposal submitted to us; and I do not think the gentlemen who have so far given in their adhesion to this proposal, as to assemble together and discuss it, have considered the ultimate bearing and scope of the proposal that has been put forward. It is based upon the principle of voting public money for the teaching of the religious creeds of every religious denomination in the country. If it does not recognise that principle, it is an unjust proposal. There are but two principles on which you can carry on an education system in this country, or in any other, with the slightest approximation to justice. The one is, if you will have a religion, to form your plan so as to pay for the teaching of all religions; the other is, to adopt the secular system, and leave religion to voluntary effort.

Now, I must say, I doubt if the gentlemen who have so far joined this new association as to attend in person to hear it mooted,—I question if they fully understand the ultimate scope of what must be their proposal, if carried out with fairness; for it amounts to this, that you should pay from the public rates of this city the money for educating children in the Church schools, where, independent of the secular education which they shall have secured to them, they shall be taught the Church Catechism; and to the Independents, the Baptists, and the Unitarians and Wesleyans, the same system would be applied, in which, besides the secular instruction which should be enforced, they must be allowed to teach their various creeds or catechisms. But there is a large body in Manchester and Salford lying at the very lowest stratum of society, whose education must be embraced in any plan, or that plan must be worse than a mere pretence, fraught with downright injustice and negligence, and negligence of the most necessitous portion of the people. I speak of the Roman Catholics,—that portion of the people which was described by Dr. Kay, now Sir James Shuttleworth, in his pamphlet written here, some fourteen years ago,—that portion of the population which he has described, comprising 60,000 or 80,000 of the Irish, or immediate descendants of the Irish, being all Roman Catholics, and who import into this city a great deal of that barbarism which has, unfortunately, characterised the country from which they came. Any system which does not embrace that part of the population, cannot be entertained for a moment as a system.

Well, then, the proposal of the Church party must mean, that the schooling of all of those Roman Catholic children shall be paid out of the public rates, and that, besides the secular instruction they may receive, they shall be taught their catechism, and be permitted to observe their other religious ceremonies, precisely in the same way that the Church of England and the dissenting schools are allowed to do. Have those gentlemen made up their minds that they will pay rates for the purpose of the religious training of the Roman Catholic children? Now, I say, I should be a hypocrite if I expressed any great repugnance myself to that which would give these poor children an education, coupled with that sort of instruction which I am here to advocate. But have the gentlemen who put forward this proposal fully considered the scope of their own plan? Have they made up their minds that the whole of the Roman Catholic children in Manchester shall be taught their religion at the expense of the ratepayers of Manchester? Have they made up their minds, when they talk of enforcing the reading of the Bible—have they made up their minds what version of [592] the Bible they mean in all this? Has that subject been discussed among them,—has it been settled? Do they mean that the Douay version of the Bible shall be taught in these Roman Catholic schools? Because if they do not mean that, when they make the Bible the condition of receiving any schooling, it is at once shutting the door most effectually to the instruction of the great mass of the Roman Catholic children in this town. Do not let any one suppose I am interposing these objections as my objections. They are what I have encountered here for the last fifteen years. I remember so long ago as 1836, when Mr. Wyse, himself a Roman Catholic, and Mr. Simpson, of Edinburgh, and others, came down here to enlighten us on the subject of education—I remember having in my counting-house in Mosley Street, the ministers of religion of every denomination, and trying to bring them to some sort of agreement on the system of education we were then anxious to advocate. I believe the insuperable difficulties that then existed have even increased now, and have not been in the slightest degree modified; and I believe those gentlemen who, with the best intentions, have brought forward this plan now, will find, before they have pursued it to one-twentieth part of the time and trouble gentlemen here have given to the Education question, that they have attempted an impossibility, and will be compelled to turn aside from what they are attempting to do. And if they view education at all as of that paramount importance I trust they do, the effect of this well-meant effort will be to bring many of those gentlemen to our ranks, if, as I sincerely hope and trust will be the case, we do nothing in the mean time to repel them from joining us.

The difficulties I spoke of have been encountered in two other countries, the most resembling us in the state of their civilisation and religion—the United States and Holland. They have both gone through the very same ordeal. In the United States, the education was once religious. When the Pilgrim Fathers landed in New England, the system of education then commenced embraced religious teaching; everybody was taught the Catechism, and there was no objection made to it. But when the number of sects multiplied, this religious education became a bone of contention; a great struggle ensued, and the Americans have had to go through the same difficulty that we have now; and it has ended, as it will end in this case, in the fundamental principle laid down in the Massachusetts statute for erecting common schools, which says that no book shall be admitted in the schools, and nothing taught, which favours the peculiar doctrines of any particular religious sect. In Holland, they have come to precisely the same conclusion. There they have adopted a system of secular education, because they have found it impracticable to unite the religious bodies in any system of combined religious instruction.

Well, now, if ever there was a time when it was desirable, more than another, to try and separate religious from secular instruction, it is the present time. And why? Because we have arrived at that period when all the world is agreed that secular instruction is a good thing for society. There are no dissentients now, or, if there be, they dare not avow themselves. We are agreed that it is good that English boys and girls shall be taught to read, and write, and spell, and should get as much grammar and geography as they can possibly imbibe. There is no difference of opinion about putting the elements of knowledge into the minds of every child in the land, if it can be done. But while we are all united on that, can any one who moves in society conceal from himself that we are also arrived at a time when we have probably more religious discord impending over us than at any period of our history? I do not allude to the dissensions between Roman Catholics and Protestants; I do not allude to them, excepting so far as they may lead to schisms and controversies in the internal state of other religious bodies. But I think there is at the present moment looming in the distance, [593] and not in the very remote distance, a schism of the Church of England itself. I think you have two parties, one probably more strong than the other in numbers, but the other far more strong in intellect and logic, which are going to divide the Church. I see the Wesleyan body torn asunder by a schism, which, I think, the most sanguine can hardly hope to see healed; and I think there are several other religious bodies, not perfectly tranquil in their religious organization.

Now, while we have the prospect of these great internal dissensions in religious bodies,—while we are all agreed that secular education is a good thing,—is it desirable, if it can be avoided—would it be desirable, if it were practicable, which it is not, I think,—that our national education should be one which is united and bound up with the religious organisations, when schisms may prevail in the churches, and must be necessarily transferred with increased virulence to the schools? For bear in mind that what you see now pervading the churches in Scotland, where you have an irreconcilable dispute with regard to the appointment of the masters of the parochial schools—a dispute between the Old Kirk and the Free Church—recollect, if what I say be correct, that you have an impending schism in the Anglican Church, that then you will have precisely the same difficulty in the appointment of masters in the national schools. You will have High and Low Church contending for the appointment of masters; in one parish, High Church predominating, the masters will be dwelling on the necessity of the old forms of the Church, and enforcing the ritual and observances prescribed by the Liturgy and Canons; and in another you will have the Low Church, on the other hand, dwelling on what they regard as the more vital essence of religion, and discountenancing those forms which the High Church regard; and you will have the same discords pervading your schools; and the consequence will be, decreased efficiency of the masters, and, in some cases, a divided school, a disruption of the school along with the

congregation; and you will have to fight the battle again, to reconcile the different bodies; and in the end, I believe in my conscience, it will come as in America and Holland to this,—you will be obliged, after a great waste of time, to return to the secular system which they have adopted, and which we are met here to advocate.

Since I addressed you here last, I have been visiting many places—Birmingham, Leeds, Huddersfield, Bolton, and elsewhere,—and I have sought private interviews with numerous bodies of gentlemen interested in the question. I have especially sought private interviews with those who have been supposed to differ from us, but have been thought usually as ardent advocates of education as ourselves,—those connected with the dissenting bodies in different parts of the kingdom. I have endeavoured to meet them privately, and to have a full and free discussion of the question, because I thought that such a cause would be more likely to put them in possession of the real objects of this association, which have been so much misunderstood. I thought it better to do so in a private conference, rather than to enter on an antagonistic discussion with them in the public arena, where they might be committed to views which I hope and trust, when they have fully considered our plan, they may be induced to modify and even to change. One of the objections made to our plan has been alluded to by my friend Mr. Schwabe; and it is that we propose by our plan to supersede all existing schools, and render all existing school-rooms valueless. Now, it seems to me, that the plan put forward by the Church party here, seems rather to insinuate that they have caught us tripping, when they offer to avail themselves of school-rooms already in existence, and assume that we contemplate doing nothing of the kind. I have mentioned a dozen times, it is my firm belief, if a system of education such as we propose were adopted, you would have no difficulty in getting an Act of Parliament for [594] a local rate in Manchester, and in doing what your Corporation does with the water-works, taking power to use, either by purchase or renting, existing school-rooms. I do not conceal the fact from our friends, that I believe, if we have a system of rating for free schools, the effect will be to supersede all other schools, which are now partly supported upon the eleemosynary principle, that is, by charitable contributions. I do not conceal from others,—I cannot conceal from myself,—that if you establish free schools in every parish, you will ultimately close all those schools that now call upon the poor children to pay *3d.* or *4d.* a week, and in which the difference of expense is now made up by the contributions of the congregations. If they did not have this effect, they would be unworthy of the name of national schools. But I have never considered that the school-rooms in connection with existing places of worship, or otherwise, would be rendered useless, for I have always considered they might be rented or purchased in precisely the same way as Mr. Schwabe has suggested; they might be rented for the week-time, and left on the Sunday in the hands of the congregations. This is merely a matter of detail; but we should be taking a rash leap if we had contemplated closing all existing schools, and wasting the vast capital invested in bricks and mortar for the erection of them.

Another strong objection which I have heard from our dissenting friends has been, that the secular system of education is adverse to religious teaching. I cannot tell how to account for it, but there seems to be a pertinacious resolution to maintain that the teaching the people reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and the rest, is inimical to religion. Now, I have found the most curious refutation of this doctrine, where I have been, in the practice of the very parties who have objected to us. I remember at Birmingham, I found there a preparatory school built by a joint-stock association, by men of every religious denomination—I heard of a clergyman sending his son to that school. No religion is taught there—the building would never have been erected, unless by a compromise, which agreed that no religion should be taught in that school; and yet, the very parties that object to us for not proposing to give religion with secular education, send their sons to schools where secular education is separated, avowedly, from religious teaching. Again, in Yorkshire, I was present at a meeting where a gentleman stoutly maintained it was impossible to separate religious

from secular instruction. It was in Huddersfield. And another gentleman said, 'How can you possibly maintain that doctrine? You know the Huddersfield College here could not exist a day, unless we consented altogether and totally to separate religious from secular teaching; and you know you send your son to the college, and that he never received any religious instruction there!' I must say that gentleman was silent for the rest of the evening. But I also found that at Huddersfield they have, in connection with their Mechanics' Institution, a very excellent school for young children (not for adults), where they may go and enjoy the benefits of this institution for a week, by subscribing  $3\frac{1}{2}d$ . They give the smallest doses of instruction, because they see the ginshops and such places offer to their customers a twopenny or threepenny taste; and so they let the children come in for a week for  $3\frac{1}{2}d$ ., in hopes that they will be tempted to repeat the dose,—I think a very wise regulation. I find there are hundreds of the children in this admirable school; but that excludes all religious teaching. I do not know whether the Bible exists in the institution library; but they never touch it in the schools, and never use it as a school-book for teaching religion. And this applies to the schools generally connected with the mechanics' institutions in Yorkshire, of the union of which my friend, Mr. Baines, is president; in those schools there is no religion taught or professed to be taught. And, therefore, in my travels, I have found that [595] gentlemen offered in their own practice the best example of the success of our principle, and the best refutation of their own theories.

I have heard it said, the voluntary principle is succeeding very well, and that has been said by men for whose judgment in other matters I have great respect; but I am glad, among the other advantages afforded by our friends, the Church Society in this town, that we have got a corroboration of the doctrine with which we started, that the existing system of schooling is very defective. The Church party tell us, what we were aware of before, that we have a multitude of school-houses, but they are badly attended, and the instruction is not sufficiently good to attract children. The great fallacy we have hitherto had in the statistics of education is this,—we have taken school-houses for schooling, and mistaken bricks and mortar for good masters. I never doubted we have had vast efforts made in building schools; nothing is so easy as to galvanise an effort in a congregation or a district for raising a school, or to persuade men that when they have done that they have provided for education. What do bricks and mortar do for education? The gentlemen of this Church system have told us—these schools are in many cases standing idle, and the children do not come to them. I have heard mentioned, wherever I have been, that you have plenty of schools, and the people will not attend the schools until you adopt some system of compulsion, some coercive system, and compel people to send their children to school; it is of no use building schools, for the children will not attend them. I have heard this compulsory system of attendance at schools advocated in private meetings, in friends' houses, wherever I have been—where gentlemen have spoken, probably, with less reserve than they would in public; and I have found, to my astonishment, everywhere a strong opinion in favour of a compulsory attendance in schools.

Now, I beg my friends will understand that I did not bring that principle with me to Manchester. We have stopped short of that yet; and we say, before you call on us to do that you must show us first that people will not send their children to school. You have two things to do: firstly, to establish free schools in Manchester, to receive all the children of those who may choose to send them there; and, in the next place, to have good schoolmasters. I am firmly convinced, as I have told my friends everywhere, that if you set up good schools, and have good school-masters, you will have no difficulty in filling your schools. I have never yet found a good schoolmaster that did not fill his school, even when the children had to pay  $2d$ . or  $3d$ . a week for the schooling. And if, after you had established a free school, and given every one the opportunity of attending gratis, and given them good masters, you find the people will not send their children to the schools, but bring them up in idleness and ignorance, I don't know that, under such circumstances, I should see that it would be any

great infringement of the liberty of the subject, if you did adopt some plan; first, perhaps, to seduce or bribe them to send their children to school, and, if that would not do, to try a little compulsion. I don't see any objection in principle to that; but I say to our friends, before you do that, try every inducement to make them come; and I should not be squeamish about any outcry there might be of the liberty of the subject, and so on;—there is just as much liberty in Switzerland as in England, and in Switzerland they do punish parents who do not send their children to the free school, unless they can show they are giving them an education elsewhere.

These are some of the objections I have heard our friends of the dissenting bodies urge to this plan in the last few weeks. They have objected, on the ground of principle, that they cannot separate the secular from the religious education. Well, I must say we have endeavoured to be very accommodating [596] to these gentlemen, and have found it very difficult to please them. When the attempt was for many years to have an education combined with religion, then these same gentlemen told us it was contrary to their consciences, either to receive or pay money raised by taxation, for teaching religion. When we offer to separate it, we are told by these same gentlemen, that it is contrary to their conscientious convictions to separate religious from secular teaching. I do think such a course, if persevered in, will go very far to alienate the feelings of the great mass of the working community, who, I am very much afraid (speaking of the surrounding district), are not in communion with either Dissent or Church; it will do very much, I fear, to alienate the great mass of the people from those who take an impracticable course, which stops the avenues of education to the working classes, by setting up obstacles which it is impossible for any rational man either to obviate or remove.

Now, have those gentlemen a due appreciation of the value of the education which they are opposing, apart from religious instruction? I believe they must have an adequate idea of the value of secular knowledge. I put it to them, do they not value it in their own cases and in their own families? I put it to a gentleman I met with, one of my strongest opponents,—a minister of religion,—and he told me, in a party of religious men, that 'he valued secular knowledge so much, he would not give his secular knowledge, apart from all religion, in exchange for all the world.' Well, and if he would not put himself on a par with the unenlightened peasant for the whole world, is he carrying out the Christian principle of doing to others as he would be done by, if he lightly interposes obstacles to the acquisition of some portion of that knowledge which he values so highly, by the great mass of his poorer fellow-countrymen? I want to ask the gentlemen, who interpose at all times the question of religion as an obstacle to secular teaching, do they or do they not consider that knowledge is in itself a good? I will say, apart from religion altogether, do they consider that Seneca or Cicero were better for their knowledge than the common gladiator or peasant of their day? But even as a matter of religious import, I would ask those gentlemen, do they not think they will have a better chance of gaining over the mass of the people of this country to some kind of religious influence, if they begin by offering to their children, and tempting their children to acquire, some kind of secular knowledge? It seems to me, that to argue otherwise would contend for this,—that ignorance and barbarism, and vice, drunkenness, and misery, are conducive to Christianity, and the opposite qualities contrary to it. I feel we are in danger of alienating the great mass of the people in these manufacturing districts from every religious communion, and even estranging their minds from every principle of Christianity, if we allow this unseemly exhibition to go on—of men squabbling for their distinctive tenets of religion, and making that a bone of contention, and a means of depriving the great mass of the people of the knowledge that is necessary for them to gain their daily bread, or to preserve themselves in respectability. Why, what a spectacle do we present to the world? Where is our boasted common sense, which we think enables us to steer our way through social and political difficulties, when we vaunt ourselves with our superiority to Frenchmen, Germans, Danes,

and Italians? Where is our boasted superiority, when the American Minister can come to our Town Hall here, and taunt us with the ignorance of our people, and when nobody dares to rise up and say, we have done as much for education as they have in America? Is it not true (as Mr. Lawrence properly said), that we can show a great accumulation of wealth, that we are exporting more largely than any other nation, but there is something more wanted; and I agree with him, there is danger so long as it is wanted; and that there is no [597] time to be lost—not a day, not an hour to be lost. I do not boast of the country we live in, so long as the mass of the people are uneducated and ignorant. Our friend, our worthy president (Mr. A. Henry, M.P.), whom I met at Leeds—and who, allow me to say, most manfully maintains your principles wherever he goes—told them at the Mechanics' Institution meeting at Leeds: —'They say we are a great nation—that is true, we are a great nation, if paying an enormous taxation, and keeping up an enormous navy, and exporting a large amount of goods, constitute greatness, we are a mighty nation; but so long as we have an ignorant people, we have not much reason to boast of our greatness.'

I have nothing more to say than to exhort you, now you have encouraging symptoms of progress, to continue and agitate in the same way you have hitherto done. I have seen nothing since I joined your ranks to make me doubt you have got hold of the right principle. I don't think any other can possibly succeed in this country, that is, provided what I have heard from religious bodies for the last fifteen years be truth,—if they have been shamming, and telling us they have qualms of conscience while they have none at all,—if they have been telling us they are voluntaries, when they are looking and sighing for endowment,—then, I say, the parties who have taken up another principle may succeed, and we may fail, and I can only say I am sorry they allowed me to lose time in trying to make them take up with this. But I do not think it possible that any plan of this kind can succeed. I want you to base it on the American experience; they have gone through this ordeal, and adopted the very plan we want. I call for the American system. I do not want to have my Bible read in the schools; because, if so, the children of 60,000 people here must go uneducated. I am neither an advocate for the Bible as a school-book, nor for its exclusion as a school-book; I am for the American system precisely as it stands. And I say, now is the time for you to continue the agitation of this question, and more actively than ever. The very fact of the attention paid to what is going on in Manchester by the press of the whole kingdom shows to what a degree the whole kingdom looks to Manchester to solve this great and difficult question. You have had the honour of commencing this agitation; you are now met with another agitation, which is far from being an enemy or a rival, and will ultimately be an assistant. I will say,—go on—quarrel with nobody—invite their concurrence. If you will appoint me to the Conference, I shall be happy and proud to be one of a deputation to their body, to seek an interview, and ask a private and confidential conversation with the gentlemen taking the lead in this scheme. I say, don't go in opposition to anybody, but keep your own course. I believe you have got the right principle, and, if you have—I know you of old—I believe you are the right men to succeed in it.

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**EDUCATION. II.**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS, MAY 22, 1851.** ↩

[On May 22, 1851, Mr. Fox, M.P. for Oldham, brought forward the following motion,—'That it is expedient to promote the Education of the People of England and Wales, by the establishment of Free Schools for secular instruction, to be supported by local rates, and managed by Committees, elected specially for that purpose by the rate-payers.' The motion was supported by Mr. Adderley. It was rejected by 90: 139 to 49.]

If some stranger had entered the House during the speech of my hon. and learned Friend (Sir D. Dundas), he would suppose that the motion of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham (Mr. Fox) is not a proposition for voting an additional sum of money to remedy a defect in education, the existence of which we are all ready to admit, but he would rather imagine it to be a proposal to withdraw the funds already applied to the instruction of the people in general, or that my hon. Friend intends to abolish the National Church, and to withdraw the 5,000,000*l.* or 6,000,000*l.*, which is its present endowment; and that the moment he should succeed in carrying his motion, all the present voluntary contributions of the dissenting bodies would entirely cease. That would be the conviction of any one who entered the House during the speech of my hon. and learned Friend. When my hon. and learned Friend charged the hon. Member for North Staffordshire (Mr. Adderley) with fallacy, I thought that his (the Solicitor-General's) speech had been founded on fallacy from beginning to end. And I think the hon. and learned Gentleman has misunderstood and misapplied the argument of the hon. Member for North Staffordshire; for he went upon the assumption that the hon. Gentleman supported two kinds of education—an education of a secular, and an education of a religious kind, both out of the public funds. I understood the hon. Gentleman to say, that there is an ample provision for religious, but that there is no sufficient provision for secular education, and that he would agree to a system of secular education, rather than have none at all. The hon. and learned Gentleman the Solicitor-General said this question was impracticable; but the hon. and learned Gentleman forgets that his own plan has been tried for fifteen years in this country, and has been brought to a dead-lock; and the right hon. Baronet the Secretary for the Home Department (Sir G. Grey) has informed us that a deputation has come from Manchester, and informed him that the scheme which has originated and has been attempted to be carried out by the men of Manchester has failed; and that, he contended, was an argument against the proposition of the hon. Member for Oldham.

Now, before the House decides upon [599] the subject, it is, in my opinion, right that we should examine the statistics which are before us. Let us, in particular, look to the amount of money which we have granted for educational purposes. For the last five years we have had a grant of 125,000*l.* a year, while there has been but a very trifling increase on the population, and scarcely any to the persons who have received education in consequence of the State grant. And why? Because it is a subject that the Government dare not touch in this House; because the present system is so unsatisfactory, that, in spite of two large blue-books of correspondence and minutes, and an expenditure of 125,000*l.* per annum, the little education we do get in this country is owing to the efforts of the Committee of Privy Council; and I do not blame them for those efforts; but I honour them for trying to do that which cannot be done in this House. No one knows better than Government does that it dares not stir the question with a view of getting a grant commensurate with the wants of the country, in order to carry out the system which at present exists. And now what is it that Government is falling

back upon? A local scheme in Manchester, which has already failed in precisely the same way as the Government plan has failed on these religious difficulties. The gentlemen who came to town from Manchester did me also the honour of calling upon me; and I rejoiced to see them endeavouring to overcome the difficulties of realising a system of education. They told me, as they told the right hon. Gentleman the Home Secretary, that they had the concurrence of all the religious sects—that the Roman Catholics had joined them as well as the Dissenters; but I received a letter from them, after their return to Manchester, that, to their surprise and regret, they had to tell me that not two of the Roman Catholic clergy, as the hon. and learned Gentleman had stated, but eighteen, virtually the whole body of the Roman Catholic clergy in that town, had seceded from that plan of education. And why? Simply because the Committee that met in Manchester made it a fundamental principle of their scheme, that in all schools erected at the public expense in Manchester the authorised version of the Bible should be read; and that being a condition which the Roman Catholics could not comply with, that, of course, separated them altogether from this plan of education.

Now, I ask any one in this House, if any plan of public education can be satisfactory in the boroughs of Manchester and Salford combined, which excludes the poorest of the poor classes? There are in Manchester and Salford at least 100,000 Roman Catholics. They are the poorest of the population; and, if ignorance be an evil, they are the most dangerous part of the population to be left in ignorance. And yet this is a plan on which the right hon. Gentleman the Home Secretary relies, in order to relieve him from the difficulty he was in. They are in precisely the same difficulty in Manchester that we are in this House; for I maintain that the little good that is done was done surreptitiously by the Educational Committee of the Privy Council, and not by a vote in this House. What are the Minutes of the Privy Council? Do you suppose they represent the debates in this House any more than they do the motion of my hon. Friend (Mr. W. J. Fox)? Bring forward a vote for the maintenance of Roman Catholic colleges, in which they will be allowed to carry on in their own peculiar way their own doctrines and worship, and do you think that such a vote will pass this House? There is a fundamental evasion and fallacy about the whole of this educational vote. I ask you, when you talk so much of religious education, if this 125,000*l.* is for religious teaching?—because I understood, when we were passing an educational vote, it was not for religious education. When the vote was first agreed to, in 1834, it was called school-money; it was 10,000*l.* or 20,000*l.* to begin with. Afterwards it was changed to a vote for education; but you did not vote the money for religious [600] education. Could you vote any sum in this House, if it were asked fairly for religious instruction? No, it could not be done; and it could not be done for many years past, and never more shall we vote any money in this House as an endowment for religion; and, therefore, when you talk to me about voting for religious education, I say it is not an accurate description of what we vote it for.

The hon. and learned Gentleman the Solicitor-General has talked as if there were some great conspiracy in the country,—as if there were some parties aiming to deprive the country of its religious faith; and he seems to assume that, if we allow schools to be established without religious teaching, they would practically be establishing schools to teach infidelity; and he also says, that by establishing schools for secular education without religion, we are, in fact, divorcing morality and religion from education. Now, when the hon. and learned Gentleman rung the changes about advancing the attributes of our nature, and of promoting the intellectual qualities at the expense of the religious and moral, he might surely give us credit for knowing that it was practically impossible to do anything of the kind. We know that religion is a part of moral training as well as the hon. and learned Gentleman does; but what we say is, that there is ample provision in this country already for religious training. There is twice as much spent in this country for religious training as there is in any other country in the world. Then how can it be said that we should exclude religion from education? I want to do nothing of the kind.

Again; we have been taunted with the use of the word 'secular.' Well, I do not know any other word we could use. I say once for all, I consider there is provision made for religious training, but not for secular training, and therefore I wish to provide for secular education. I want people to be able to read and write—to be able to write their names when they sign a contract, or register the birth of their children; I want people to be trained in habits of thought and forethought; and I do not know any other term than 'secular' for this kind of education. But why ring the changes upon secular education? I say, once for all, that I am not opposed to the Bible, or any other religious book, being read in schools.

What I want is, to have the same system of education in England that they have in Massachusetts, in the United States of America. I will not go to Louisiana or Georgia, but my system is that of Massachusetts; and I challenge hon. Gentlemen to test that system by the experience of that State, and the good it has effected there. That State is not open to the argument that it was a thinly-peopled country: it is an old country, and one which sends forth vast numbers of emigrants; the people are of our own race, and have our own habits; and I want to know why we cannot adopt the same plan in England that they have adopted with success in Massachusetts? We have just now a competition with all the world in the production of that which ministers to the comforts of mankind. If we see the result of ingenuity in any part of the world, we plume ourselves that we can imitate it. If we go to the Great Exhibition, and find a machine there, however cunningly it may be contrived, we shall find men say that what is done in Boston, in America, we can do in England. But if we adopt the Massachusetts system of education, you say it will make the people an irreligious people. I will meet you on that ground. I have been in Massachusetts, and, testing them by any test you may wish—by the number of their churches, by the number of attendants at their churches, by the amount paid for the teaching of religion, by the attendance at Sunday-schools, by the observance of the Sabbath, by the respect paid to religious teachers, by any one test with regard to religion,—I can challenge a comparison between Massachusetts and any part of England.

Well, then, the system of education [601] adopted in Massachusetts is a secular system; and do they prevent the children from reading the Bible? Why, I venture to say, that in the report which I hold in my hand of the Board of Education in Massachusetts, there is not a single word about religion from beginning to end; and yet, probably, there is not one in a hundred of these schools where the Bible is not read. I have no objection to a parish having local management having the Bible in its schools as well as any other book; but what they do in Massachusetts we should do here, by saying, as a fundamental principle, no book shall be admitted into the common school which favours the peculiar doctrines of any Christian sect. Well, now, with a people so jealous of their religious independence as the people of Massachusetts are, what they had been able to do surely we can do in England. They had the same battle to go through there that we have. In Massachusetts, originally, they taught the Catechism in their schools, which had been taken there by the Pilgrim Fathers when they left England, and who carried with them as much intolerance almost as they left behind; but another system now prevails, and with the greatest possible advantage.

Practically, I believe that system will work as well in this country as it does in Massachusetts; and if the system proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham were carried out, I am persuaded that in ninety-nine out of a hundred of the parishes of England, nobody would object to the Bible being read in the schools, provided it were read without note or comment. In a vast proportion of these parishes there are no Roman Catholics; but I have that opinion of the good sense and rational conduct of men, that, if there were a very small minority—if there were a few families of Roman Catholics who objected to the reading of the Bible—the reading of it could be so adapted to particular times as not to interfere with any one's religious conviction, and in a way that would exclude nobody.

I believe that when the system of free schools is adopted, such will be the estimation in which education will be held by the mass of the people, that it will not be easy to keep children from the schools. Where is the difficulty of our doing what has been done in Massachusetts? I will not be driven from that ground. Give me the Massachusetts plan. I declare my belief, that the mass of the people in Massachusetts are as superior in intelligence to the population of Kent, as the latter are to the people of Naples. I say this advisedly. I ask, then, why we cannot have this system in England? Will you tell me it is on account of the Established Church? Why, surely, having an Established Church with a very rich endowment, which supplies a clergyman to every parish, and the means of religious instruction to the mass of the people—for the mass of the people has religious instruction without paying a farthing for it in the rural parishes—will you tell me, having this advantage, you could not maintain your ground against another people, who have left religion to voluntary effort, and who have endowed their secular schools?

Now, there has been an objection made that this scheme is intended to supersede existing school-rooms; it has been assumed that the plan of my hon. Friend (Mr. W. J. Fox) must necessarily throw to waste all existing schools belonging to places of worship. I see no necessity for that at all. I consider that we may make use of the existing school-rooms, as well for this system as for any other, and I never contemplated such a waste as to render useless existing school-rooms. The hon. and learned Gentleman the Solicitor-General has told us, and the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Home Affairs is of the same opinion, that if we adopt this plan of secular education we shall shut up all the other schools. That is [602] an admission, by the way, that we are going to establish something better than the old system. But they went further, and said, when we shut up the schools we shall deprive the people of religious education, because the great bulk of the people get no religious instruction now, except what they get in their schools.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Tavistock (Mr. Trelawny) ejaculated, 'What are the clergy doing?' I thought that was a natural exclamation. We pay 5,000,000*l.* or 6,000,000*l.* a year to the clergy, and it is rather a bold thing for a devotee of the Church to say, if the children do not get religious training in the schools, they will get no religious training at all. The hon. and learned Gentleman the Solicitor-General, when he answered that ejaculation of the hon. Member for Tavistock, turned immediately to the manufacturing hives, where, from increase of population, he says, there is much ignorance. I beg the hon. and learned Gentleman's pardon; but the great mass of ignorance is not in the manufacturing towns but in the rural districts. I admit, indeed, that there is much ignorance in the manufacturing districts, but it is because the surplus population of the agricultural districts go to the manufacturing districts. I do not blame the clergy for being the cause of that ignorance in secular matters, although I think there is a great deal to be said as to the duty of the clergy to see that all persons in their parishes can read, inasmuch as I cannot see how a person can be a Protestant at all, who cannot read; yet I do not attempt to fasten upon the clergy all the responsibility for the ignorance that exists in the country parishes. I know that in many districts they have undertaken more than any one else for the cause of education, and I know that they find great difficulty in maintaining their schools by voluntary efforts in some places. In many rural parishes, three-fourths of the land is owned by absentees, and the clergy have very little chance of getting support from absentee landed proprietors.

How, then, are we to raise the funds to maintain the schools? I want a plan by which, for the purposes of secular education, a parish would be able to rate property. Let property be rated, and each proprietor, whether he were an absentee or resident, would contribute towards the education of the people. I am firmly convinced that money cannot be better applied in any of the small rural parishes than in providing good secular education. By such an education, the people will gain self-reliance and self-respect. Let them be taught a little geography; let

them learn what is going on in other parts of the world—what, for example, is the rate of wages in the Colonies—and they will not then rot in parishes where they are a burden on the poor-rates. 80*l.* or 100*l.* a year laid out on education in a rural parish will do more to keep down the poor-rates, and to prevent crime, than the same amount expended in any other way.

I cannot help expressing the great gratification which I feel at the difference between the tone of the discussion this evening, and the tone of the debate last year. For my own part, I must say that there is no other subject on which I feel so tolerant towards everybody as I do on this subject of education. If I see the Government doing something—I care not how—I am grateful for it. If I see hon. Gentlemen opposite—whether High Church or Low Church—trying to secure for the people a better education, I thank them. I see the enormous difficulty of taking any combined step, owing to the religious element, which always stands in the way. If ever there be a time, however, when it is necessary for parties to combine in a system of secular education, apart from religious sects, the present is such a time; for no one can deny that never before was there so much strife and disunion amongst different religious bodies. The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Heald) [603] belongs to a religious community which is torn in twain. Is there to be one set of schools for the reformed, and another for the old Wesleyans? As a matter of economy—as a matter of charity, good-will, and kindness—let us all try to get on neutral ground; let us try to do so, not only on account of the good which will thus be done to the mass of the people of this country, who will never be educated under any other system, but in order that we may have an opportunity of meeting, as it were, out of the pale of those religious strifes which are now more threatening than ever.

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**EDUCATION. III.**  
**MANCHESTER, DECEMBER 1, 1851.** ↩

[In 1851, two schemes, called respectively the National Public School Association, and the Manchester and Salford Scheme of Education, were recommended to the public, the latter being antagonistic to the former, and projected in rivalry of it. Mr. Cobden gave in his adhesion to the former plan, under which, in the face of religious differences, it was advised that rate-supported schools should not be denominational.]

WE are hardly arrived at that point in this great struggle in which we can venture to say that we will define what the particular kind of secular education shall be which shall be enjoyed in the schools which are to be erected or to be maintained out of the public rates. But when that time shall come, I am quite sure that a great deal of that knowledge appertaining to our own nature, and to our own design and object in this world, as described by our friend Mr. Combe, will undoubtedly form a part of the secular education of this country—as a part, and only a part of that education—combined, as it will be, with the religious instruction. But, gentlemen, we have yet to settle this question,—'Shall we have any education at all in this country, such as is enjoyed in almost every other civilised country,—I mean an education supported by all, and free to all?' Now, that is the question. I hold anything else but that to be short of the real end and object of this controversy. Shall there be a system of education supported by all, and common to all? Well, you are going to settle that question, as you have settled so many other important topics, in Manchester. For I don't conceal from myself, that upon the local contest in which you are now engaged, will depend the kind of education which is likely to be adopted in this country.

The application which is about to be made to Parliament for a private bill embodying a scheme for giving to Manchester and Salford a local system of education, a system confined to those two boroughs, will, if it be adopted, I have no doubt in the world, be made a model for the adoption of all other localities similarly circumstanced—I mean, manufacturing districts and our great commercial centres; and whatever may be adopted as the Act of Parliament for Manchester, will, as in the Municipal Corporations Act, become a general Act, under which other places may put themselves, just as they now apply for the benefit of a charter under the Municipal Corporations Act. I have no doubt of that; and therefore you are engaged in a struggle of vast importance, not only to yourselves, but to the whole community. Scotland, as Mr. Combe says, has its eyes upon you. The rest of the country is equally interested in what you are now doing.

I do not want the National Public School Association to think that at present their important duties lie elsewhere. Their duties lie here at home; and my opinion is, that if their exertions are not centred here, in Manchester and Salford, we shall fail to do our duty in this crisis of this controversy. Now, what is the question at issue between the National Public School Association, which would apply their scheme to Manchester and Salford, and the Manchester and Salford Association, which applies merely for a local bill? Why, I think the whole difference between you may be traced to that long-standing and almost sole difficulty in the way of a national system of education in this country—I mean the religious difficulty. The real question which you are now disputing is this—shall the education be one in which the secular shall be separate from the religious element, or shall it be one where the teacher in your schools shall be paid out of a public rate to teach all kinds of religion, at the expense of

all sorts of people? That is the sole difference—I mean, that is the source of all your differences; because, if you removed the religious difficulty, I do not think that people in Manchester would be at all disputing as to whether there should be more or less of self-government in your scheme. I believe that the members of the Manchester and Salford Scheme Association would be just as much inclined to preserve the municipal self-government of Manchester as you would be; but they remove a part of the administration, and control, and discretion, in their school business to London, simply and solely because they think by that they are going to escape the religious difficulty which lies in their way. And it is not a question of whether the school-rooms that are now in existence shall be used for giving both secular and religious instruction, because by the plan which has been adopted by this society at a Conference which met this morning, it is now the rule of this society,—it is a plan which we propose to adopt as a part of our bill for Parliament, that all schools belonging to separate churches or chapels which may be disposed to give education, subject to inspection, insuring that the secular instruction shall be good in quality, may receive payment per head for all the scholars educated in those schools, just in the same way as it is proposed in the Manchester and Salford plan, only there is a stipulation, there is a safeguard, that there shall be no payment made to those teachers for religious instruction; that the religious instruction shall be given apart, and at separate times; and that it be distinctly understood, that out of the public rates there shall be no payment made for instruction in religion.

Well, then, let it no longer be said that, by the plan which we propose, we are going to sacrifice the existing schools. We propose to take authority for buying existing schools, or for renting existing schools; and we now propose, in addition, by the resolution of this morning, to do precisely what the Manchester and Salford Society proposes to do,—that is, to pay for the instruction of children in secular knowledge, in all schools belonging to the churches or chapels where they may be disposed to give us the guarantee by inspection that they are giving a proper secular education. The question between this association and the rival association is simply reduced to this:—they insist that in all schools religious education shall be given at the expense of the whole community. That involves one or two difficulties and objections, which I think are insuperable. In the first place, what a reflection it is upon the office of religious teacher;—they say, ‘We will make schoolmasters the teachers of religion.’ Do they propose that schoolmasters shall graduate in a course of divinity in order to be qualified for that instruction? Why, how they discount and degrade their own profession, in making a schoolmaster, who is never taught divinity at all, on equality with clergymen, and calling upon him to give religious instruction! But it involves a greater difficulty than that; and here is my [606] objection to the principle which requires absolutely and without exception that religious instruction is to be given in the school. It involves this grand and insuperable difficulty and injustice,—that by these means you exclude from those schools many of those whose parents have been rated to the maintenance of those schools.

Now, in the first place, I find in the local bill, as drawn up here, that in all schools which are to be built out of the rate levied upon all the property of this borough, the reading of the Holy Scriptures in the authorised version shall be a part of the daily instruction of the scholars. Everybody will remember that I took my stand against the exclusion of the Bible from any schools, when we were settling our points of faith as a secular association. I said, ‘I never will be a party to any scheme that attempts to lay down in an Act of Parliament this monstrous, arrogant, and dictatorial doctrine—that a parish or community shall not, if it please, introduce the Bible into its schools.’ I made my stand against that, and said I never would put my hand to any such doctrine; but at the same time, I am just as prepared to take my stand against any system which levies taxes upon Jews and Roman Catholics, which sends the tax-gatherer round to their houses, and calls upon them to contribute to the school-rate, and then insert a clause like that which says they and their children shall enjoy no

advantage from those schools.

Now, I ask those gentlemen, have they any scheme by which they propose to exempt these parties from paying the taxes, whom they exclude by this clause in their bill? Well, then, I ask them if they are prepared to carry us back, not only into a worse state of intolerance and bigotry than any that exists on the Continent of Europe at the present time in any Protestant country, but actually to the times when, in towns like Frankfort in olden times, Jews were shut up and set apart in the town, and made to live in certain streets, and be locked up at home at night long before Christians were required to be in their domiciles! Why, it is a worse treatment to the Jews than they received in those countries where they were thus persecuted. You educate Christians out of Jewish money, and you deny them the right of having education themselves for their own children. What would be said,—now just put a parallel case,—if, after levying a rate for lighting the town and supplying it with water, you compelled the Jews to live in some street by themselves, where there was neither a gas-lamp nor yet a water-pipe carried? And I won't say merely the Jews, but the Roman Catholics; because you absolutely prohibit the Roman Catholic from entering those schools, if you mean what you say in the clause of this bill. You say, 'the authorised version of the Bible,' nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand parts of which are verbatim the same as in the Roman Catholic version; but it contains two or three passages, in which I never yet could perceive any very material difference of meaning, and by retaining those passages, by making that the test, and thereby striking at a point of conscience in those who object to that version of the Bible, you prohibit them as much as though you put a policeman at the door, and said, 'No Roman Catholic shall enter here.' Well, I say it is impossible that such a thing as that can continue permanently to be a recognised state of things in a country that asserts in the slightest degree that it is under the government of just principles.

And now, where is the difficulty of our opponents agreeing to our own terms? Where's the difficulty of the friends of the other society joining in the principle which is now enunciated by this society? They insist upon making the schools doctrinal and denominational, but at the same time they have so far receded from the stand which the Church formerly made, that they will allow a scholar to enter other schools and be exempted from the doctrinal teaching of those schools, provided he carries a written request from his parents to be so exempt. [607] So far, they go a great way towards recognising our principle, that secular education may be given apart from religious instruction, inasmuch as those children who are allowed to carry in their pockets a pass by which they are exempt from this religious teaching, at all events are placed very nearly in the position in which we would place all our schools; and therefore, in point of fact, they recognise the principle which we advocate, with this exception, that they require absolutely that the Bible—the authorised version of the Bible—shall be read daily in all their schools. Now, I do hope that the authors of the Manchester and Salford School Society will address themselves to-morrow to that question, and see whether they cannot move one step farther, and abstain from the attempt to inflict injustice and wrong upon a large section, and that the most necessitous part of the community, by attempting to make them read that which, if they did read, they could only do it with hypocrisy; and, therefore, by practising that hypocrisy for the sake of getting education, certainly could not, in the eyes of any rational being in the world, become more just or more moral by the process.

Well, gentlemen, there's the position in which we stand, or, rather, you stand, in Manchester. I have stated the amount of difference between your two schemes, which will next session come before Parliament. Were I now living in Manchester, I should address myself solely to the question, for the present, at least, as it affects these localities; because, I repeat to you, whatever is done in Parliament the next session will, in my opinion, act very much as a model for a great part of the kingdom; and, therefore, it is your business. We shall



have only that strength in Parliament to deal with these two topics which you give us by your support out of doors. It is for you to decide which of these two plans shall be adopted; but sorry I am to see that a great portion of those who I thought were, above all others, vitally concerned in this question,—I mean the dissenting bodies,—have stood aloof from this controversy under the most vain and delusive ideas that ever possessed human beings,—that this was not a question solely as to one or another scheme, but because they are under the impression that there is a possibility in this country of going back to no scheme at all. How men moving in society can be at all under the delusion that there is a doubt about such a subject, I cannot imagine. If there is one point upon which this great community, I think, has more made up its mind than another, it is in adopting some system of combined action for public education, under the sanction of Government, through local rates and local management, as far as possible. There's no doubt but that is determined on by the great mass of the community: and however any body in sincerity, which is so involved in this question as the dissenting body is, can be moving about the country and trying to advocate or plead for that impossible cause—no public education at all—passes my comprehension. I believe them to be sincere, I cannot doubt they are sincere; but if they were really aiming at playing the game of that party which they have always considered inimical to their religious interests and their religious freedom, they could not have taken a more effectual course than they have been during the last twelvemonth, by ignoring the existence, almost, of this National School Society, and detaching themselves from that side of the question in which I should have thought, at all events, looking upon their principles as they avow them themselves, they were more interested than any part of the community.

Now, I speak with some degree of feeling on this subject, because I have taken to this secular school association simply and purely, as I have avowed again and again, because I thought there was a great act of injustice perpetrated upon Dissenters. I thought they were going to be wronged by another system which they regarded as a system of endowments. I have again and again said, that as one who every Sunday take my [608] children to a parish church, and therefore am living, as it were, upon endowments, I could not plead for myself that I had those conscientious scruples which I was told and believed the Dissenters had. I took up this secular system, because I thought, while it did no injustice to the Church, that it did justice to Dissenters. I find the great body of Dissenters not only holding aloof, but some of them,—Dr. Halley, for instance, and his friends, and the great organ of their party, the *Banner*,—stating that if driven to take one or the other, they will take the Church system. Do they understand their own principles? Have I done right in believing what they have told me of their principles,—that they shun the system of endowments? I was advocating the American system of education, because I knew there, in America, it was applied to the satisfaction of those descendants of the Nonconformists who have not forgotten their principles, and where we know the system works without injury to the rights of conscience of any individual in the country. I speak thus emphatically upon this subject, because I don't hesitate to say, I am for the education of the people. I believe the great mass of the people take less interest in this sectarian squabbling than many others of us are apt to imagine. The great mass of the people want education for their children; they are sick to death of these obstacles you throw in their way. I believe that when our extended franchise throws more power into the hands of the multitude, you will see that what I say is true,—that there's a feeling for national education which will sweep away all these cobwebs with which you attempt to blind the great mass of the people; and feeling this, and having done my best to do justice to all parties in the matter, I say now, emphatically, 'I vote for education; I'll support education; I'll do the best I can for Dissenters;' but I'll never oppose a system of education, which promises to give to the mass of the people an opportunity of raising themselves in life, and benefiting their children, by having a share in its advantages, which, as Mr. Combe says, those alone above them have hitherto enjoyed. I don't, therefore, profess to come here to oppose the local plan. I believe, if that plan be adopted, it won't remain where it is.

I believe, if we once get a system of free schools, the spirit of a free-school system will very soon possess itself of the minds of the people; that it will be found here, what it has been found in Ireland, under a far severer pressure and test than it ever can have in this country; it is superior in its strength to almost all other influences; and I believe, if we once establish a system of free schools supported by rates in this country, it won't be long that you who pay rates here in Manchester will allow either Roman Catholics or Jews to be excluded from the benefits of those rates.

I won't go into the question of how far the people of this country want education. Go and inquire amongst the people themselves. Go and ask the agricultural labourer at his plough; test the amount of thought and capacity that that man has had by instruction imparted to him; ask him where the guano he's dealing with as a manure, day after day, comes from: he has no idea. He never heard such a subject suggested. Ask him whose land it is he's working upon. He can tell you the farmer's name, because the farmer pays his wages; but ask him who his landlord is;—ten to one he has never thought of it; because in England, from want of education, and training the mind to thought and reflection, such men don't learn to note cause of any kind. Ask him the geography of the next parish. As for the geography of the world, he can't tell you whether America is in France or in Spain. It is unquestionably true, and cannot be denied by any one that has travelled, that we are the worst educated people of any Protestant country in any part of the earth. Mr. Combe has borne witness to this; Mr. Baines has borne witness; and I challenge denial on personal investigation. Is that a safe state of things to be left in? They [609] tell us that voluntaryism has worked well. I say we are the only people that have had voluntaryism, and we are behind all the world. What do they say in America? Hear what Mr. Daniel Webster said, in a speech delivered at an open-air meeting the other day, in Washington:—

'The population of the United States is 23,000,000. Now take the map of the Continent of Europe, and spread it out before you. Take your scale and your dividers, and lay off any one area in any shape you please, a triangle, a circle, a parallelogram, or a trapezoid, and of an extent that shall contain 150,000,000 of people, and there will be found within the United States more persons who do habitually read and write than can be embraced within the lines of your demarcation.'

But in the United States they don't trust to voluntaryism. They make use of their parochial and their municipal organisation to secure a system of schools free to all, paid for by all, and not a system of schools merely for that class of destitute people to whom Mr. Baines has alluded. The New England schools have so grown and improved, that they have taken in by degrees from one class to another, from one grade to another, till now, in many parts of New England, you find no private schools at all. All classes are educated at the common public schools.

It is my firm belief that, in this country, a system of schools once established, paid for by all, would very soon here—as, in fact, we have seen in the case of the King's Sombourn school, conducted so admirably by the Rev. Mr. Dawes—be found to go on so, that, by degrees, the small farmer's son would be sitting by the labourer's son; and as you improved still more in your system of education, the small farmer's son would be coming and taking his seat by the side of the rich farmer's son. I have no doubt in the world that would be the case, because by combination—by cooperation—you would have a better system of schools than you could have anywhere else; and therefore I don't look to a system of free schools as one of charity for the great mass of the people,—I mean for the poorest people. One of the benefits we should derive from common schools would be, that it would cause that greater intermixture and blending of society that would arise from the middle and working classes sending their children to one common school, where they would become more familiarised in

their common views, and tastes, and habits, and the boys would be brought up in genial sympathies and more intercourse than that which prevails at present in this country. I do not argue with those gentlemen who tell us that the voluntary system has answered; I don't argue with them. I say, 'Go into the highways, and byways, and inquire for yourselves if it answers.'

I don't think it is safe for us as a nation to be the most ignorant Protestant people on the face of the earth. This is a period in the world's history when the very security, the trade, and the progress of a nation, depend, not so much on the contest of arms, as on the rivalry in science and the arts, which must spring from education. Even lately, we have been inviting all the world to a great competition. Did any reflecting man walk through the Great Exhibition without feeling that we were apt to be a little under a delusion as to the quality of men in other parts of the world, and their capacity to create those articles of utility of which we are apt to think sometimes we possess a monopoly of production in this country? Did nobody feel somewhat struck at the vast superiority of the French in articles of taste and delicate manipulation; and were we not equally struck to find ourselves so closely trod on the heels in everything that relates to the more rude utilities of life, in American productions, where we found ourselves beaten in shipbuilding, in locks, pistols, and many other things we had to show? Did it not make Englishmen feel that they had to look about them? And how will you be able to rally, how will you attain to further improvement in arts and manufactures but by improving the [610] education of your people? I don't think we can wait. And this is a reason why I am tired to death of this sectarian quarrel, which is preventing the people from being educated: year after year is passing away, and the time we are losing is not to be recalled. Why, it has been stated in public, it has been stated in our public records, that the poor people don't send their children to school, upon an average, more than two or three years, and in some cases not more than ten months.

Well, we have passed over two or three years in this sectarian strife, in which we prevent the people from having education as they have in America, by a system of common schools, and whilst we are doing so a generation, a section of the community, passes into mature life without any education at all. One great wave of humanity passes on, and we never get a reflux of the tide, we never have a chance of giving these people an education. We cannot wait! I hope the people of Manchester will rouse themselves to a consideration of the danger and difficulty of this matter. I hope you, who have gained so many victories in other things, will find yourselves called upon to exert yourselves, not only for your own benefit, but for the benefit of the people at large. I augur well from the large meeting I see here to-night; I augur from it that you take an interest in this question. I am told that a still larger meeting is to take place to-morrow, on this subject. All this augurs well of the interest you take in this question. If Manchester men will direct their minds to this question perseveringly and energetically, and if you consider that in this case, as in a former struggle, you are fighting the battle, not only for England, but, in some degree, for the whole civilised world, I have no doubt you will present such a case to the House of Commons next session, that we shall be relieved from any doubt or difficulty as to the course we shall have to pursue. Send up your petitions for what you conceive to be the right measure for Manchester and Salford; give us your support, and your Members, I have no doubt, will do their duty in this matter, and most happy I shall be to be found alongside of them in that which is found to be necessary.

**EDUCATION. IV.**  
**BARNSELY, OCTOBER 25, 1853.**↵

[Mr. Cobden made the following Speech in the Hall of the Mechanics Institute at Barnsley. During the time that he sat for the West Riding, it was his custom to deliver addresses at the principal towns within that division of the county.]

THE details we have heard of the early difficulties and infant struggles of this association are only just those trials which we are all liable to encounter in every good and great work which we undertake; and I should not consider a good worth possessing, unless it were deserving of those efforts which are required to make such an institution as this prosper. I remember the time when the first mechanics' institutions were launched under the auspices of Dr. Birkbeck—a man whose name can never be held in too high reverence for disinterestedness and truly Christian patriotism, and his honoured colleagues, Lord Brougham and others. I remember when they launched the first mechanics' institutions. They were intended not so much as schools in themselves, but as something to supply the defects of early education to that class which in former times had not had an opportunity of receiving such education; for you must remember that Dr. Birkbeck and others were the strenuous advocates of a better system of education for the young, and the mechanics' institutions were, to a large extent, something devised as a resource for those who had not had any opportunities for early education. Such being the case, in order to carry out the object of the founders of these institutions, it is not enough for you to draw together a large number of members in your lecture-room or your library, or to collect books in your library; these things could have been obtained, probably, in a less convenient way before mechanics' institutions were created; but one of the primary objects of mechanics' institutions was to enable young men, feeling themselves deficient in some particular branch of knowledge, to join a society where they could have the opportunity of repairing such a deficiency. For this purpose it has been customary, in all good mechanics' institutions, to establish classes—classes for different branches of study, which young men, or men of middle age, or even old men, could join, and find that particular knowledge they were in quest of. Now, I believe your institution has not such classes. I don't mean to mention it as a reproach, because you have had so many difficulties to fight against, that I did not expect you could get over all these things at once; but, having surmounted so many difficulties, and placed your institution, as I cannot but hope, on a firm basis,—for an institution [612] which has grown under so many difficulties must have a firm basis,—you must determine that it shall be—what all mechanics' institutions were intended to be—a means of instruction to the neglected adult population. I think, too, you must have classes—classes for teaching arithmetic, geography, drawing; and even chemistry is not too much to aspire to. You must have also—and I hope you will—a class for French.

Now, there has been an allusion to one branch of study which particularly interests the manufacturers of this district—I mean drawing and designing. I think I have heard the gentleman who last spoke say that there was no drawing-master in Barnsley; that you must have an itinerant drawing-master, who, located at Sheffield, must have his circuit, radiating from that town, and who must pay occasional visits to Barnsley. If I were a Barnsley manufacturer, and dealt in figured damask linens, I should beg and entreat the reporter not to let that fact get out; don't let the world know that Dunfermline has got all the designs. I am told, for I am very curious in inquiring anything about the art of design, inasmuch as my own business was very much connected with that art,—I have been told, I say, in consequence of

inquiries I have made since I arrived here, that your damask linens—the patterns of those damask linens which we all so much admire, are made by the weavers themselves; that the patterns are designed by the labourer who weaves the cloth; and that he, so far from having had any instruction in the art of designing, has been living in a town where there is no drawing-master. Now, I take it as a proof that you have a talent for drawing among you; that you have had a body of men brought up as weavers, who have been able to make patterns for you; but I say to the capitalists, ‘You are not doing justice to that mechanic, if you are only going to give him a ninth or a tenth part of a drawing-master. You must let it go forth from this moment—and I hope my friend on the left (Mr. Harvey), who is interested in the matter, will rise before the conclusion of these proceedings and declare it—that another month shall not elapse before steps are taken to insure the presence of a drawing-master in Barnsley; and that all those ingenious young weavers who are able to put together a damask pattern shall be so circumstanced as to be able to learn something of the art of design from a practical teacher before we meet here again.

I say, then, that one of your classes must be a drawing-class; and in this respect you will be aided by the Government in a way which I think it is perfectly legitimate for a Government to aid—I mean this, you will be supplied by the Board of Trade with the best possible models, both of sculpture and drawing. I am an advocate so far for centralisation, that I will at all times sanction and applaud a Government which draws to one centre the best designs and models for drawing and sculpture, and then multiplies those designs and models in the cheapest possible way, with a view to their diffusion among the general public. I rather think you have already been to the Board of Trade, and got something in the way of models, or something of that kind; and, if you have, I suppose you are going to make some use of them; but you can’t make any use of them unless you have got classes; and I will undertake, on behalf of this meeting and the intelligent manufacturers of Barnsley, to say, that it is intended to connect with this institution a drawing-class, and that a drawing-master shall be appointed who will be capable of giving efficient instruction.

With regard to other branches—take, for instance, a class for arithmetic—I would ask, how many young men are there who may be sitting at their looms with the best of heads upon their shoulders—phrenologically speaking—but who, from some circumstances not under their control, had no opportunity of cultivating those heads when children? And yet such young men feel within [613] them a capacity to fill any station of life, if they had only had the necessary education to enable them to rise in society. The first thing such young men require, if they are to do anything in the way of business, is to learn something of arithmetic; but in your institution how is a young man to learn the rule of three, or obtain any knowledge of arithmetic? It is necessary, therefore, that you should have a master. I don't mean a stipendiary master, for I hope you will find independent, public-spirited men enough in Barnsley who will begin and initiate the necessary classes in connection with your institutions; and that you will not only have drawing and arithmetic classes, but also a French class; for, now that French is very generally spoken, a knowledge of it is necessary to enable you to enter into communication with a large portion of the public, and there is no reason why you in Barnsley should not be able to do this as well as others. It is the object of mechanics' institutions to bring those branches of knowledge within the reach of adult mechanics and labouring men in all the towns of the kingdom. Now, Barnsley is of such a size, that it ought to be able to maintain a mechanics' institution of such a magnitude as to support all these classes. I am aware it is difficult in a small town to do this; but here you have a population of from 14,000 to 15,000 in Barnsley and the neighbourhood, and I must say that 250 members are not enough for a population of such magnitude. You must double that before we have another anniversary. Let every member try to find another member, and then the thing is done. Your terms are 10s. a year. How in the world can anybody buy amusement, or gratification, or enlightenment, cheaper than at 10s. a year? And I would say

to the members who already belong to the institution, you have a particular motive in trying to add to your numbers. You have a large lecture theatre, a reading-room, and library; and I venture to say, if you double your numbers, you may still comfortably accommodate yourselves in your lecture-hall, reading-room, and library, while your fixed expenses remain the same. If your income at the present is 130*l.* a year, your fixed charges will be from 70*l.* to 80*l.*, leaving you not more than 50*l.* for the purposes of lectures, purchasing newspapers, and such-like things. Your current expenses must be going on, whether you have few or many members; and, therefore, by increasing your numbers, the additional subscriptions you get will be so much gain in the way of providing education, and increased attraction in your institution.

I think you ought also to try to establish a school in connection with this institution. That is one of the most useful of the adjuncts of the Huddersfield and other mechanics' institutions. I would recommend you to endeavour to connect a school with this institution, as a feeder to it, for it is by means of schools that you are to get members. If, in consequence of the advice given by our friend, Mr. Wilderspin, twenty years ago, there had been an infant-school established in every village, you would not have wanted customers for your mechanics' institutions; they would have grown up around you. And this brings me to the question—leaving for a moment this institution—what were these institutions established for? Not as a system of education, but to supplement the want of education, and we want the education still which we wanted when these institutions were founded. I know that it is made a vexed question, and to some extent a party question. I never regarded it as a party question. I don't care through what it comes. Give me voluntary education, or State education—but education I want. I cannot accept statistics to prove the number of people who attend schools—to prove that the people are educated, because I cannot shut my eyes to what is evident to my senses,—that the people are not educated,—that they are not being educated. I was talking only yesterday with a [614] merchant in Manchester, who told me that he had attended at the swearing-in of the militia in one of the largest manufacturing towns of England, and that not one-half of those sworn in could read, and not one-third could sign their names. Now, without wishing to utter any fanatical opinion with regard to the Peace question, I must say, with all sincerity, I think it would have been much better to hand these young men over to the schoolmaster rather than to the drill-sergeant; for I think the safety of this country would be more promoted by teaching them to read and write than by teaching them to face-about-right rightly.

I was talking this subject over to an old friend of mine at Preston, and he said, 'I attended the coroner one day last week at an inquest. There were thirteen jurymen; five signed their names, and eight made their mark.' Can I shut my eyes to what is going on around us? I cannot; and, therefore, I say, we are not an educated people; and I say it is our duty, and our safety calls upon us, to see that the people are educated; and I know of no place more fitting to discuss this subject than in such a meeting as this, because I take it for granted you are all interested in it. You all admit the deficiency of juvenile instruction, or you would not have attended to the defective adult education. We are not an educated people, and I have no hesitation in asserting that, in point of school learning, the mass of the English people are the least instructed of any Protestant community in the world. I say that deliberately. I remember quite well, at the time of the Hungarian emigration into this country after the revolution, a very distinguished minister or religious teacher of Hungary was talking to me on the subject of our education, and I told him a large portion of our people could neither read nor write. He could not believe it, and said, 'If it is true a large proportion of your people can neither read nor write, how do you maintain your constitutional franchises and your political liberties? Why, it is evident to me that your institutions are rather ahead of your people, and that this self-government is only a habit with you.' It is a habit, and we will cling to it and hold it; but I want a safer foundation. I want to have our self-government a habit of appreciation—

something our people will be proud of, not simply a habit; and there is no security unless it is based upon a wider intelligence of the people than we meet with at the present moment. It meets us at every turn—you can't do anything in social reform but you are met with the question of education. Take the question of sanitary reform. Why do people live in bad cellars, surrounded by filth and disease? You may say it is their poverty, but their poverty comes as much from their ignorance as their vices; and their vices often spring from their ignorance. The great mass of the people don't know what the sanitary laws are; they don't know that ventilation is good for health; they don't know that the miasma of an unscavenged street or impure alley is productive of cholera and disease. If they did know these things, people would take care they inhabited better houses; and if people were only more careful in their habits than they are, and husbanded their means, they might get into better houses. And when I hear persons advocate temperance, which I, as one of the most temperate men in the world, always like to hear advocated, I say the best way is to afford them some other occupation or recreation than that which is derived only through their senses—the best way is to give them education. If the working man is deprived of those recreations which consist of the intellectual and moral enjoyments that education and good training give, he naturally falls into the excitement of sensual indulgence, because excitement all human beings must have. Therefore, when you wish to make them more temperate, and secure moral and sanitary and social improvements among the working-classes, education, depend upon it, must be at the bottom of it all.

[615]

Gentlemen, I see in different parts of the country a great social quarrel going on between different classes of the community. For instance, in the town of Preston, you have 20,000 to 30,000 persons out of work; and there is in that place not a chimney but is cold and cheerless—neither smoke nor steam cheering your eyes. Look at the destitution and misery caused by laying a town in this state for a month or six weeks. Why is this? I answer, it springs from ignorance. Not ignorance confined to one party in the dispute. It is ignorance on both sides, and deplorable is its result. But do you suppose that when the world becomes more enlightened, you will have such a scene as this,—of a whole community stopping its labours for a month or six weeks, and creating misery, immorality, and destitution, that may not be removed for five or six years to come? When masters and men understand the principles upon which the rate of wages and profits depend, they will settle their matters and arrange their differences in a less bungling way than that which now brings so much misery upon all parties to the quarrel. Even now, however, we see great progress in this respect. I remember the time when the cessation of labour by 25,000 persons would have led to riot and disturbance, and the calling out of the military. This is not to be seen now. We see passive resistance and firmness to an extent which, if they had policy and propriety at their back, would be highly desirable and most commendable. But we shall probably live to see the time when another step will be taken onward. You will live to see the time when men will settle these matters, not by resorting to blind passion, by vituperation, and counter-vituperation—when the question of wages will be left to the master and man to arrange according to their own interest—when the whole question of wages and the rate of wages will be settled just as quietly as you now see the price of any article fixed in the public market. I am not saying one word of the merits of either side upon this question. Both parties think themselves right, and both are, no doubt, right in attempting to get the best price they can, the one for his labour, and the other for his capital; but if there were more intelligence upon this question—if the laws were better understood which decide finally and inexorably the relative value of labour as well as everything else, these matters would be settled without that hideous amount of suffering which I deplore to see accompanying these strikes and troubles in the manufacturing districts. And when I say, gentlemen, that intelligence will put an end to these things, I am only saying that will be done here which has already been done in America. You

cannot point to an instance in America, where people have more education than they have here, of the total cessation from labour of a whole community, of an entire town given over as a prey to destitution. You cannot point out such an instance in America; neither will you see it in England, when that intelligence and enlightenment which these institutions are intended to promote shall be spread throughout our country.

Well, this brings me back again to the point that we want schools—schools to teach people these principles—schools to teach people from their youth to take a calm and reasoning view of the things which affect their interest, and so to educate them, that they shall not allow others to lead them away by appeals to their passions. We shall never be safe as a manufacturing and mining community until a school invariably grows up along with every manufactory and at the mouth of every pit and mine in the kingdom. Now, I must here again allude to America. When I came through Manchester the other day, I found many of the most influential manufacturing capitalists talking very gravely upon a report which had reached them from a gentleman who was selected by the Government to go out to America, to make a report upon the Great Exhibition in New York. That gentleman was one of the most eminent of the mechanicians [616] and machine-makers of Manchester, employing a very large number of work-people, renowned for the quality of his productions, and known in the scientific world, and whose scientific attainments were appreciated from the astronomer-royal downwards. He has been over to New York to report upon the progress of mechanics and mechanical arts in the United States. Well, he has returned. No report from him to the Government has, as yet, been published, and what he has to say specifically upon the subject will not be known until that report has been so made and published to the country. But it has oozed out in Manchester among his neighbours, that he has found in America a degree of intelligence among the manufacturing operatives, and a state of things in the mechanical arts, which have convinced him that, if we are to hold our own—if we are not to fall back in the rear in the race of nations—we must educate our people, so as to put them upon a level with the more educated artisans of the United States. We shall all have an opportunity of judging of this matter when that report is issued; but sufficient has already oozed out among his neighbours to excite a great interest, and, I may say, some alarm. Well, I am delighted to find an intelligent man has been selected for this duty, for all the world will approve of the selection made, because the gentleman alluded to was fully competent to the task; and he has come back to tell us it is necessary to educate the people.

I went to that country twenty years ago, and I published a record of my opinions. That was written in 1835, and I stated that England would be brought to the consciousness that it was to that country she would have to look with apprehension as to manufacturing rivalry; and now I am delighted that it should turn out as I have stated, that it has come from a quarter—from a person so well qualified to procure correct information, that no one will question the truth of his report when it comes out. I say I am delighted, because I want England to know her danger, if there is one. Napoleon used to say to those in communication with him, ‘If you have any bad news to tell me, awake me at any hour of the night, for good news will keep, but bad news I cannot know too soon.’ I say, then, I am delighted with this, for let but Englishmen know of a danger to face, and of a difficulty to surmount, and there is nothing within the compass of human capacity which they will not accomplish; but the great misfortune is, that Englishmen are too much given up to and incrustured with their insular pride and prejudice,—a sort of Chinese notion of superiority, that they will not awaken up and use their eyes as to what is going on in other countries until it is too late. I am glad, therefore, that this question is to be brought forward; but why should America be better educated than England? Do you think that a new country, which has the wilderness to cultivate, primeval forests to level, roads to make, and every bridge and church to erect,—do you think that such a country is in a position to rival an old country, if that country will only do its duty to its people? No; an old country has greater advantages and facilities at command than a new one;



and if you find a new country beating an old one in this matter, depend upon it, it is because of some fault in the old one. We don't read in ancient Greece, when she sent forth her colonies, that they became the teachers of the mother country. No; Athens always remained the teacher of the whole world. And it is a shame if a new people, sent out from us only yesterday, is to be held up for our admiration and example, and this, too, in the matter of education.

Now, I hope that it won't be said that there is anything in these remarks which is out of place in an assembly such as this. We are all here, at all events, presumed to feel an interest in the subject of education, and therefore anxious to promote it. And I don't despair even now. I should not despair of this country, if the people of this country would only resolve to do it, surpassing all the world in education in a generation or two. But [617] we must not refuse to adopt the improved machinery of other countries. We must not be like the Chinese with their junks, who refuse to build their ships after our improved model; we must not refuse to adopt what we see in other countries if better than our own. If we see the Americans beating us in their spinning-jennies and in their sailing-boats, we adopt their improvements; if they send over a yacht which beats ours, we send over and build one which will beat them; if a man comes over and picks our locks, we may wonder how it is he makes better locks than we do, but we buy them; and so it is in other matters of this kind. But, on the question of education, they have in the United States adopted a system which we in this country have not adopted, except in Scotland to some extent; and what is so natural as that we should follow the same rule in this matter as we do in the manufacture of our machines for spinning cotton, and in the construction of our ships? I take it that, the result being in favour of American education, it proves that they have adopted better means than we have; and, if we would rival them, we must not be ashamed to adopt their plan, if better than our own. There is not any party, I believe, now opposed to education; none who do not think that there is more danger from ignorance in our present artificial state than in education. Whatever our political predilections, there is not one who will not say—whatever we are doomed to undergo, whether proceeding from a straitening of circumstances, from a decline of our commerce, or from difficulties of a strictly political character—whatever there may be in store for us of troubles and distresses—there is nobody but will say we had better have an educated people to meet them than have to encounter them with masses of ignorance and untrained passion; for, after all, the masses of the people do govern in this country—they are called on in the last resort. Everyone must admit it is better to have an arbitrator who is trained to discuss reasons and to deduce facts from evidence—it is better to have minds of this sort to settle great national questions, than to refer such mighty interests to the arbitrament of ignorance and passion.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, if I have said too much on this subject to you, and to those elsewhere who may read what we are now saying, I must tell you that I feel so strongly upon it, that, when among a body of men met together in favour of education, I will not be responsible for withholding my opinions in reference to the want of juvenile education, for it is not possible to compensate for the want of juvenile education by means of such institutions as this. We may by such means improve the education of the people, but we cannot have a really educated and safe community, unless we begin at the beginning by training the young. I can only say, whether you look at this question of education in the interest of morality or religion, as affecting the happiness, interest, or the welfare of society—in whatever way you regard this question, you may depend upon it the very highest interests, the dignity, honour, and happiness of the people, are bound up with it.

## INDEX. ↩

## A.

- ABERDEEN, LORD, why Lord Palmerston quitted his Government, 339; criticisms of Lord Palmerston on foreign policy of, 528.
- Absentee landlords, give but little assistance to education, 602.
- 'Abstract, true in the,' absurdity of phrase, 42.
- Abstractions, out of place in Parliament, 19.
- Accounts, ridiculous character of, from Government manufactories, 301.
- Acres, sluggish, superstitious reverence for owners of, 61.
- Adams, Mr., on blockade running and munitions of war, 351.
- Adderley, Mr., charged wrongly with a fallacy, 598.
- Addresses, annual, to constituencies, a good custom, 425.
- Administration, the *personnel* of, carries on the Government, 309.
- Admiral, an, in the west of England hindered from voting, 567.
- Admirals, number of, in 1849, 244; have a habit of saying that French meditate invasion, 428.
- Admiralty, affairs of, deplorably mismanaged, 429; Board of, has a defective constitution, 430; worst of all Boards, 432; habit of, of building useless ships, 443.
- Advertisement of Austrian loan, criticised, 401.
- Advertisements, tax on, criticism on, 291.
- Agents of loans, profits of, 401.
- Aggression, Papal, wide-spread agitation about, 532.
- Agitation, process by which to be carried out, 55; going on now (1844) not likely to be quieted, 87; against Corn-laws, character of, 211; what kind of, succeeds, 493; for education, commencement of, 597.
- Agitator, the speaker not intended for, 202; dusky, on Ganges, his grievance, 497.
- Agricultural Associations, what do they do for agriculture? 113.
- Agricultural distress, how squires bid farmers meet it, 117; Select Committee to inquire into, 133.
- Agricultural districts, chief abode of ignorance, 602.
- Agricultural interest, Corn-laws for benefit of, 23; depressed by cheapness, 34.
- Agricultural labourer, better off since Free-trade, 224; ignorance of, 608.
- Agricultural labourers, earn minimum of wages, 4; deplorable state of, 110; their consumption of manufactures, 141; their position under Free-trade, 205; why out of employment in cheap years, 208; condition of, 555.
- Agriculture, wants improving throughout, 86; if depressed, when other interests are thriving, why? 224; in China, its character, 388.
- Agriculturists, landlords not, 16; repeal of Corn-laws a benefit to, 49; made to bring their trade to perfection by manufacturers, 52; practical, may give valuable suggestions, 85; landlords are not, 100.
- Alabama*, the, law of France in case of ships like, 356; cruise of the, 357.
- Alderney, suspension of fortifications at, 266.

Alliance with France, an absurdity if it is conspiring against us, 472.

[620]

Allotment of land, landowners' remedy for distress of agricultural labourers, III; a plaything, 144.

*Almanach de Gotha*, on Russian finance, 409.

America, offering of corn from Western States of, 21; supply of corn from, 154; Free-trade in, supported by President Polk and Secretary Walker, 184; its precedents on purchase of munitions of war, 350. See *United States*.

American Consul at Malta, his opinion on the navy, 240.

Amendment proposed by speaker on Corn Bill, 60.

Amusement may be extracted from monopolists' speeches, 64.

Andrian, Baron, on Austrian finance, 400.

Angels, disinterested, landowners pretended to be, 26.

Anglia, East, hypothesis of, 489.

Annuities and pensions, amount of, 256.

Anti-Corn-law League, its collisions with Chartists, 9. See *League, Anti-Corn-Law*.

Anti-Felony Society, its proceedings should be copied in regard to elections, 56.

Antipodes, people smuggled away to, 141.

Anti-Slavery Convention, its report, 93.

Apathy, complaint of, 360.

Appeal, Court of International, 396.

Arbitration, why recommended, 217; in use as a substitute for war, 390; more rational, just, and humane than the sword, 394; in Greek dispute, should have been employed, 419; use of adopting, 512.

Arbitrations, under treaties of 1794 and 1814, 391.

Argument, no place for, during war, 467.

Argyle, Duke of, his argument on the China question, 374.

Aristocracy, who are the real enemies of the, 19; England a paradise for, 172; two kinds of, 198; Manchester school said to meditate ruin of, 284; growing feeling against, 336; civil war in United States a rebellion of, against democracy, 363; government of, its mischief to the country, 548.

Aristocracy, English, its relations to the people, 145; warning to it, *ib.*

Aristocratic system, will be torn in pieces, 216.

Arithmetic, use of, to mechanics, 612.

Armaments, increase of, 234; expense of, 238; reduction of, not abandonment of defence, 241; increase of, never followed by reduction, 245; naval, increase of, 428; great, incompatible with financial reform, 526.

Armstrong, Sir W., adoption of his gun, 296; now manufacturing for foreign countries, 299.

Army, two-thirds of, for colonial garrisons, 218; and navy, a preserve for younger sons, *ib.*; English, not maintained in reference to Continental armies, 263; Crimean, state of, 320; Crimean, amount of, in summer of 1855, 331; increase of, in 1839–49, 393; standing, loan contracted for, 407; Russian, dislike of people to enter, 413.

*Arrow*, the, not a British vessel, 372.

Arsenals, no reference made to these, 258; might be blockaded, 455.

Artillery, most valuable arm in battle, 393.

Artisans, wages of, in dear and cheap years, 102.

Ashburton, Lord, his mission to the United States, 250; mission of, and Maine boundary, 391; his powers as plenipotentiary, 393.

Ashley, Lord, his labours on behalf of factory operatives, 83; voted in favour of Corn-laws, 119.

Ashmolean Society, paper read at, by Dr. Buckland, 176.

Assassination farce, acted in House of Commons, 48.

Assessment on real property and houses, principle of, 272; of others, less objected to than assessment by oneself, 287.

Associations for education, rival, 605.

Atheist, trick of one, to prove his view from Scripture, 105.

Athens, improvement of, 416; once teacher of whole world, 616.

**[621]**

Atherton, Mr. N., his opinion on the effect of Corn-laws on feeding stock, 140.

Atherton, Sir W., on foreign enlistment acts, 356.

Attwood, Mr., his plans, 21.

Auckland, Lord, on forces in the Pacific, 267.

Auctioneers, frequently put forward as farmers, 65.

Austin, Mr., his inquiry into condition of women and children employed in agriculture, 77; on homes of agricultural labourers, 80; on clothing of agricultural labourer, 82.

Australia, hostility to convicts at, 218; candidates from, 565.

Austria, miserable and degraded, 222; officers in army of, 259; indebtedness of, to Russia, for political support, 311; favourable to peace in 1854, and inferences from this, 313; its interests against Russian aggression, 328; expectations of its joining the Allies in Crimean War, 329; only a government and an army, not a nation, 367; character of loans of,—its acts of bankruptcy, 399; revolutionary war in, and its effects, 400; character of war in which it has been engaged, 403; financial condition of, 512; its removal from Italy beneficial to itself —unwisdom of its Government, 571.

Austrian loan, breakdown of, 414.

Ava, king of, and Commodore Lambert, 504.

Aylesbury, meeting at, six years before 1850, 223.

Azoff, Sea of, expedition to, its importance exaggerated, 332.

**B.**

Baby, overgrown colossal, Emperor of Russia like, 405.

Baines, Mr., on ignorance of the English people, 608.

Baker, Mr., a Protectionist orator, who is an auctioneer, 98.

Bakers in Turkey, their risks, 117.

Balance-sheets of Enfield, would not pass Bankruptcy Court, 301.

Ballads, national, on wine-drinking, 427.

Ballot, Conservative delusion about, 447; desired by farmers, 547; special necessity for, in England, 559; a true test of Liberal opinion, 560; use and value of the, 566; must follow an extension of the franchise, 567; operation of, in United States, 568.

Bankes, Mr., his clamorous assault on the Anti-Corn-law League, 15; his benevolence to labourers, 24; states that agricultural distress arises from legislation, 134.

Banking and banks, increase of, between 1831–6, 7.

Bankrupt governments, England must not collect loans to, 410.

*Banner*, the, on Education, 608.

Barbarism, Russia a youthful, 330; discoveries of civilisation made to contribute to, 394.

Baring and Co., their subscription to Sir H. Pottinger, 120; loans of, 412.

Baring, Mr., charges against him in 1815, 17.

Baring, Mr. Thomas, his misrepresentation of Free-trade, 41; says Free-traders have no direct interest in election for City of London, 44; ignores the property of a man in his own labour, 45; not possessed of a brilliant fancy in invention, 48; his rejection at London—questions to be put if he comes forward again, 120.

Baring, Sir F., his navy estimates for 1851, 265.

Barnsley, arts of drawing and designing in, 611; size of, 613.

Bastiat, M., his newspaper, 241.

Battue shooting, mischiefs of, 207.

Bavaria, embassy of, might be suppressed, 256.

Bawtry, Mr., his opinion on the case of agricultural protection, 51.

Bayonets, government by, its effects, 562.

Beans, grown only in certain places, 139; Egyptian, importation of, alarm at, *ib.*

Beer, is it a primary necessary of life? 274; how cheapened by Budget of 1852, 279.

Belfast, movement for Free-trade in, 183; [622] representative of, should be silent on English taxation, 270.

Belgium, King of, on opening Belgian ports, 167.

Benefit, no permanent, can be obtained by doing injury to others, 50.

Benett, Mr., his opinion of Corn-laws, 26; his statement as to what the price of wheat should be, 70; said the landowner's land was no longer his, 206.

Benevolence, schemes of universal, not before House of Commons, 322.

Bentham, Jeremy, his definition of war, 398.

Berks, electors of, and adults in, 555.

Bernal Osborne, Mr., his criticism on Lord Palmerston's fortifications, 475.

Bessemer, Mr., importance of his steel, 297; his proposals to Government, 299.

Betrayal breeds resentment, 496.

Bible, reading of, in schools, 592, 597, 601; no one would object to it, 601; not to be excluded by Act of Parliament, 606; Roman Catholic version of, differs in trifling matters from Authorised, *ib.*

Big loaf, working men not frightened by visions of, 194.

Binns, Mr., his opinion on productiveness of land, 51.

Birkbeck, Dr., merits of, 611.

Birmingham, tenders of trade in, compared with Enfield, 301; complaints from, about 'viewer' of contract rifles, 307; Freeholders' Union, objects of, 549; preparatory school at, secular, 594.

'Black and curly,' Sir W. Molesworth become, 322.

Black Sea, opening of, alleged as cause of war, 311; Russian naval force in, 323; Russian preponderance in, and why, 330.

Blacks will have votes before English working men, 495.

Blandford, agricultural meetings at, 17.

Blight attacking vegetation, 453.

'Bloated armaments,' a phrase of Mr. Disraeli, 495.

Blockade, attempts to run, do not make a Government responsible, 351; must be effective to be recognised, 452; violent breach of, would be an unmitigated outrage, 455; true meaning of, *ib.*; Lancashire virtually in state of, 462.

Blockades, commercial, their character, 451.

Blue-books, voracious appetite of speaker for, 378; magnitude and weight of, 566.

Board of Trade, pamphlets issued by functionaries of, 458; Presidency of, might have been acceptable to Mr. Cobden, 576; assistance of, to art, 612.

Bond Street, Duke of Richmond's Protection Society in, 116.

Bonham, Sir George, on the manners of English in China, 381; on Cantonese servants, 385.

'Boots,' the *Times* said Lord Palmerston had been, to every Administration for thirty years, 339.

Bordeaux, Mayor of, his test of civilisation, the use of claret, 427.

Bornean pirates, arbitration with, not contemplated, 397.

Boroughreeve, election of, in Manchester, 348.

Boroughs, hardly any pure in South of England, 56.

Bouverie, Mr., speech of, at Kilmarnock, 484.

Bowman, Mr. Robert, his evidence as to agricultural labourers, 78.

Bowring, Sir John, his long acquaintance with Mr. Cobden, 370; his conduct in affair of lorch, 371; on the nationality of the *Arrow*, 372; penned the most flagitious public document ever seen, 373; letter of Yeh to, 376; has a monomania for getting into Canton, 384; acted contrary to his instructions, 386; advised to play part of another Clive, 387.

Boxer, Captain, his establishment of manufactories, 295.

Brazil, ambassador of, imaginary conversation with, and President of Board of Trade, 43; imaginary diplomatic correspondence with, 91; a better market for manufactures than English [623] agricultural labourers, 142; quarrel with, and inferences from, 356.

Bread tax, admitted to be intended to keep up rent, 13; a tithe and landlord tax, 127.

Brescia, town of, and Haynau, 512.

Brevets, pressure on subject of, 254.

Bribery, legislative remedies against, 38; League resolved to put down, 47; how it should be checked, 565; impossible in Manchester or Leeds, 587.

Bricks, duty on, but not on draining tiles, 112.

Briggs, General, his canvass at Exeter, 95.

Bright, Mr., his bricks and Lord Stanley's draining tiles, 112; his Committee on Game laws, 147; his attempts to get information from Government as to the Crimean war, 331; speaker the representative of, 337; friendship of speaker for—his illness, 346; his character, fame, destinies not in hands of Manchester men—his powers, *ib.*; his services to the compound householders, 347; has a good Reform Bill in him, 369; and speaker, called members for the United States, 436; his eloquence, ineffectual in time of war—insult to him, 467; his domestic loss, and the sympathy felt towards him, 479; sympathises with nationalities without being demonstrative, 486; the speaker always claimed to precede him, and why, 530; his advocacy of reform, and comments of an American on, 535.

British public, appeals to, and their meaning, 495.

Britton, Mrs., wife of an agricultural labourer, her evidence, 78.

Brooke, Sir James, his attempts at extension of empire, 500.

Brooms, gipsies who sold, story of, 302.

Brotherton, Mr., feelings of, towards Government, 537.

Brougham, Lord, his utterances, 17; the Henry Brougham that was, 125; on Irish Church, 360.

Broughton, Lord, on Government of India, 501.

Brown, Mr., on indebtedness of Ireland to England, 291.

Brown's Hotel, meeting at, in 1839, 104, 178.

Brunow, M., contingent claims of, 420.

'Bubble, the republican,' a phrase in House of Commons, 488.

Buckets in draw-well, agricultural and manufacturing interests compared to, 34.

Buckhounds, Master of, an absurd establishment, 255.

Buckingham, Duke of, what he thinks should be the price of wheat, 11; his presiding at a meeting to celebrate defeat of Great Western Railway, 37; why he excludes political topics from an agricultural association, 110; his influence, 156; his meeting at Salthill, 161.

Buckinghamshire, bad votes in, 156; and Manchester, contrast between, 545; Members of, nearly all nominees, *ib.*

Buckland, Dr., on kinds of food, 175.

Budget, of Mr. Disraeli in 1852, step towards compensation, 272; framed for foreign, not domestic policy, 571.

Building societies, check to, by house-tax, 272.

Burdens, peculiar, on land, a fiction, 12; if any, should be removed, not compensated, 14; compensation for excessive, 26; on land, assertion of, like a trick of mendicants, 148; landowners had better not invite discussion on, 178; on property, and on those who have no property, 215.

Burke, his opinion on slavery, 92; said the food of nations can be regulated by God alone, 198; laid down arguments why Government should not manufacture, 294; charges against, 321; eloquence of, did not prevent war with America, 467.

Burmah, war in, circumstances of, 503 seq.; annexation of, its probable consequences, 508.

Burmese Government, quarrel with, 366.

Burrell, Sir Charles, his advice about carrots, 50; on cultivation of flax, 142.

Byron, said this was a canting age, 119; says a person has a right to give the pronunciation of his own name, 279.

[624]

### C.

Cabinet in 1845, their deliberations and dissensions, 166; dissolution of, sudden, 174; in 1855, language of, 326; dissensions of, and desertions from, during Crimean war, 341; two principles at work in (1862), 476.

Cabinets, no business of Free-traders to form, 173.

Caffres, expense of war with, 218.

Caird, Mr., value of his opinion on foreign supplies of food, 299.

Calamity, teaching of, 470; of cotton famine, general, 463.

Calhoun, Mr., his services to this country in 1837, 354.

California, no naval force at, 267.

Calne, a dirty little village, 489.

Cambridge, Oxford and, education at, 361; ignorance of undergraduates at, 491.

Canada, lakes of, convention about, 267; we cannot afford to keep armies in, 281.; rebellion of, in 1837, and the facts of the case, 353; embarkation of troops for, 436; expedition to, its absurdity, 445; climate of, till March, *ib.*; Sir Francis Head in, 511.

Candidate always knows about corruption, 47.

Candidates, Free-trade, to be started, 37.

Canning, Mr., on American Foreign Enlistment Acts, 352; his opinion about United States, 363.

Canton, bombardment of, 371; regulations as to residence of British at, unpleasant, 381; people of, their temper, 384; city and streets of, *ib.*; inhabitants of, their address, 385; injury done to, as a place of business, 386.

Canvas, instance of absurd contract for, 308.

Cape of Good Hope, behaviour of colonists of, 218; limit of English morality and Christianity, 366.

Capital, want of, a great evil to farmers, 135; shrinks from insecurity of tenure, *ib.*; deficiency of farming, why, 207; floating, proposal to put local rates on, 229; Government manufactories do not understand meaning of, 301; is wasted, and therefore there is lack of employment, 344.

Capitalist and labourer have no quarrel, 561.

Capitalists, attempt to throw blame of cotton famine on, 463.

Caricatures, French and German, on England, 483.

Carlisle, Lord, on condition of Turkey, 316; on toleration in America, 533.

Carlton Club, ballot-box used at, 547.

Carnot, M., letter of, 520.

Carolina, South, law of, about coloured men, 372.

*Caroline*, burning of the, and case of, 395.

Carriage duty, analogy of, to that on newspapers, 292.

Carrots, white, Sir Charles Burrell's advice about, 50.

Cartridges, number of, in store in 1849, 393.

Cass, Mr., despatch of, in 1859, 453–4.

Castlereagh, Lord, his admission that low prices of food and prosperity of manufactures go together, 213; on standard of expenditure to be taken, 254; his Foreign Enlistment Act of 1819, 352; his powers at Vienna, 392; pressure put on, to prevent imports of American cotton, 457.

Cattle, effects of distress on price of, 73; malt a food for, 275.

Cattle, fat, importation of, price of, 139.

Cavaignac, advocating a reduction of the French army, 250.

Cavalry, officers in, absurdly numerous, 259, 260.

Cayley, Mr., his opinion as to what agricultural prices should be, 11; has tried to make Adam Smith a protectionist, 104; said wages were reduced, 205.

Census, facts of, an argument for reform, 435.

Certificate of Suffolk labourer, 144.

Chamber of Commerce, meeting of, in Manchester, in 1838, 449.

Champion of Peace, title of, honourable, 519.

Chancery, House of Commons a more expensive tribunal than, 564.

**[625]**

Chandos Clause, use made of it, 122.

Changes, great, are imminent, 198.

Channel Islands, free trade in corn in, 71.

Charity, not this asked for, but justice, 31; should follow justice, 119.

Charleston, affair of coloured seaman at, 372.

Charter of incorporation for Manchester, how got by Mr. Cobden and Alderman Neild, 348.



Chartists not generally favourable to Corn-laws, 9; opposition of, perhaps hired in Birmingham, 66.

Chatham, charged with unfaithfulness, 321; eloquence of, did not prevent war, 467; policy of, 485.

Cheapness of food, how it stimulates trade, 34.

Cheese, when it rises and falls in price, 74; proportion of price of, in rent, 76; what counties send it to market, and how they are taxed in cattle food, 140.

Cherbourg, defensive works at, why constructed, 266; destruction of, 315.

Cheshire, bad cultivation of, 36, 114.

Chevalier, M., his pamphlet on expenditure, 266; inquiries by, into French armaments, 473.

Chicago, importance of, 491.

China, tariff of, rejoicings over, 120; tariffs of, without reciprocity, *ib.*; trade of, with England, 357; discreditable proceedings in, 367; treaty with, binds to a reciprocal policy, 371; necessity of government of, to watch irregular trade, 374; no country in which trade is more free than in, 382; exports to, low, and why, 383; affairs of, in 1862, 444.

Chinese, cleverness of, are fond of limited liability partnerships, 376; have desired earnestly to carry out treaties, 378; antiquity and intelligence of, 388; not a nation to imitate, 617.

Chinese war, reason why speaker dealt with, 338.

Chivalry, Sir Robert Peel not much alarmed at, 90.

Cholera, epidemic panics like, 236; a vegetable, so to speak, an epidemic blight is, 453.

Christians, some oppose all war, 390.

Christopher, Mr., on agricultural statistics, 136.

Church in danger, cry of, recurrent, 533.

Church of England, clergy of, their invidious position, 184; attitude of, on education, 590; schism in, probable, 593; outcry against, danger to, 601; supported in the country by its endowments, 602; its departure from its original ground of uniformity in schools, 606.

Church-rates, Lord Palmerston's indifference to, 447.

Church, State, its attitude in public questions, 533.

Churches, subscriptions in, to relieve distress, 466.

City, laughs at the speaker's letter, 414.

City of London, Lord John Russell's speech in, 312.

Civilians, may decide on necessity of armaments, 235.

Civilisation, low state of, when no country, particularly if weak, feels itself safe, 306; barbarous hordes unable to cope with, 319; discoveries of, perverted to policy of barbarism, 393.

Civil List, no reduction needed in, 255.

Civil war, American, how said to have been originated, 361; destructive character of, 363; why the speaker is tolerant of opinion about, 487.

*Civis Romanus sum*, a bad motto on a foreign counting-house, 381.

*Claqueur*, Lord Palmerston had a, in the press, 447.

Clarendon, Lord, his speech on Russian war criticised, 326; fallacious argument of, about powers of Hongkong register, 374; on observance of treaties by Chinese, and inference thence, 378; on the wishes of British merchants in China, 381; on coming into office, slackened the rein, 386.

Claret, consumption of, a test of civilisation, 427.

Clarkson, Thomas, on free and slave labour, 93.

Class, legislation for, against the people, 11; Free-trade intends to extinguish legislation in behalf of a particular, 39.

- Classes, no war of, 179.
- Classes in Mechanics' Institutes, their value, 611.
- Classical learning, advantages of, 491.
- Clay, Henry, rejected in America as a Protectionist, 117; his services to this country in 1837, 354.
- Clergy, wages of, only kind which is settled by sliding scale, 12; only class interested in Corn-laws, 106; of Church of England, in an invidious position, 184; their abstinence from support to Corn-laws, praiseworthy, *ib.*; aggregate incomes of, 602; assistance given by, to education, *ib.*; to make schoolmasters the teachers of religion, a reflection on the, 605.
- Clergyman, joining a rifle club, 528; opinion of, on secular education, 596.
- Clerk, Sir G., his evidence as to the fitness of Indians for employment, 503.
- Cleveland, Duke of, his liberties with Adam Smith, 104.
- Clive, Sir J. Bowring is to play the part of, 387.
- Clootz, Anacharsis, England should not be the, of Europe, 312.
- Clothing, of French, bad, 426.
- Clothing colonels, abolished, 303.
- Clothing department, accounts of, fallacious, 304.
- Clothing establishments, character of Government, 303.
- Clover-seed, free admission of, alarmed Mr. O'Brien, 139.
- Club, Carlton, and Reform, put up boroughs to auction, 56; a rich man's, the House of Commons, 495.
- Clubs concert rumours, 148.
- Coal, exportation of, not to be prohibited, 458.
- Cobbett, his prejudice against potatoes, 53; his grammar, for Kings' speeches, 160.
- Cobden, Mr., a farmer's son, 16, 99; contrast of his business with that of landowner, 101; how he obtained his estate in Sussex, 225; letter of, to tenant-farmers, 230; his travels in America in 1859, and inferences therefrom, 361; his work on 'How Wars are got up in India,' 366; his adventure in an omnibus, 411; letter of, on Russian loan, the City laughs at, 414; history of his refusal to take office, 576; his rule in matters of public policy, 578; his efforts for education in 1836, 592; takes his family to parish church, and therefore is living on endowments, 608.
- Cochrane, Admiral, letter of, on Chinese affairs, 380.
- Cockburn, Mr., his speech on the Pacifico case, 421.
- Coffee, effect of equalising duty on, 31; reduction of duty on, 90.
- Colchester, meeting at, 51; Free-trade meeting at, 67.
- Coles, Colonel Cowper, difficulty in getting his turret-ship taken, 307.
- Collier, Sir R., on Foreign Enlistment Act, 352.
- Colonels, two in each regiment, one its tailor, 244.
- Colonies, policy towards, 218; expense of, *ib.*; what should be the policy of, 248; question of, 257; constitutions for, *ib.*; expenses of, paid from a little speck, 281; representatives of, in House, effects of presence of, 290; people of, freer than English, 368; protection of, 433; withdrawal of troops from, 475; government of, bad, 500.
- Colonial interests, power of, 127.
- Colonial system, Free-traders charged with desiring to subvert, but they only want to subvert colonial monopolies, 31.

Colonists, a one-sided bargain with, 257.  
Coloured men, law of South Carolina about, 372.  
Colt, Colonel, his manufacture of small arms, 300.  
Combativeness, speaker affected by, 175.  
Combe, Mr., on details of education, 604; on ignorance of English people, 608.  
Commander-in-Chief, effect of his approbation, 296.  
Commerce of England, its magnitude, 459; position of, in 1864, 483.  
Commercial blockades, maintenance of, gives claim of compensation on part of those who suffer by them, 454.

[627]

Commercial intercourse, effects of war on, 432.  
Commercial treaty with France, its motives, 425.  
Commission, Select Committee better than, and why, 85; on women and children employed in agriculture, 76.  
Commissioners, expense of, 255; in bribery cases, proceedings of, 566.  
Commissioners, Poor Law, their report on the state of the nation, 32.  
Commissions, Irish, cost of, 256.  
Committee, of House of Commons frequently appointed to take evidence, 69; Select, less useful than Commission, 85; to inquire into agricultural distress, 133; Select, proceedings of, 566; of Privy Council, action of, transferred to localities, 590.  
Committees, character of, of House of Commons, 195; futility of appointing, to control expenditure, 295; labour on, great, 424.  
Commodities, Government should buy, not make, 300.  
Commons, House of, not intended to petition further, and why, 38; does not require bribery to be defined, 47; its real indifference to bribery, 56; mere majority of members in, cannot carry a minister on, 68; advantages of speaking in, 147; dread of members that what they have said may be quoted against them, 155; on Schleswig-Holstein, 480.  
Communities, down-trodden, of Continent, not likely to be helped by Crimean war, 325.  
Company, East India, annexation favoured among servants of the, 501.  
Compensation, claims for, under Corn-law, 14; odious principle of, 271; scheme of, spoliation, 272.  
Competition, of farmers for farms, proof of the direction in which profits of protection go, 61; Government should not manufacture that which can be produced by private competition, 295; force of, sufficient check, 306.  
Compliments, empty, are valueless, 465.  
Compulsory system in education, suggested by some, 595.  
Conductor, or non-conductor, of immorality, 92.  
Confederacy, Southern, policy of, 491.  
Confidence, election of 1841 referred to, in Ministers, is sometimes stated, I; not vote of want of, to invite reduction of taxation, 262; vote on Foreign Enlistment Bill a vote of, in Government, 310; want of, in public men, 333.  
Congress, sitting of, December 1860, January 1861, 362; European, invited, but not hopeful, 364; of nations, desirable, 364.  
Conquest, war of, impossible on Continent, 247.  
Conscript, story of Russian, 413.  
Conscription, effect of, on people, 328.  
Conservative, who is the true, 437.

Conservatives, in House of Commons, not followers of Duke of Richmond, 190.

Conservatism, a spurious or ignorant kind of, 488.

Consolidated Fund, plan to put half the local taxes on, 228.

Constantinople, population of, steadily diminishes, 316; speaker at, in 1837, when the affair of the *Vixen* occurred, 395; keeping Russians out of, part of Indian policy, 505.

Constituencies, enlargement of, a necessary reform, 587.

Constituency, annual address to, a good custom, 425.

Constitutional Government, abuse of word, 421.

Consul, better at Athens than an ambassador, 418.

Consumer, benefit to, by remission of taxes, 274.

Consumption, taxes of Consolidated Fund are taxes on, 228; taxation cannot be left on, 285.

Continent, nations of, desire peace, 221 threat of Russia to overrun European, discussed, 312; disturbances in, and their effect on England, 581.

Continental war, originated with us, 522.

Contract, difficulties of, when it is con trasted with Government account, 306; absurdity of forms of Government, 308.

[628]

Contractors of loans, their procedure, 411.

Cook, Mr., on British smugglers in China—is completely anti-Chinese, 375; on trade at Whampoa, 382.

Cooper, case of, in Staffordshire, 542.

Corn, attempt to fix a certain price of, its absurdity, 10; not in Peel's tariff, and why, 59; when cheap, wages high in Lancashire, 62; home-grown, seldom carried coastwise, 72; high price of, always time of manufacturing distress, 128; tax on, most objectionable, 149; why not freely imported, 170; exported ordinarily from Ireland, 214; exports of, from Russia, 330; Black Sea ports left open for a year, to procure, 456; exports of, from America, 457.

Corn-dealers, ruined by Corn-laws, 21.

Corn-law, interest of, to people of England, 2; immediate repeal of, why as just as its immediate imposition, 14; support of, inflicts scarcity, 23; its evils on all, 29; why abolition of it is principally advocated, 59; only a rent law, and no use to farmers, 99; of 1841, petitions against it, 174.

Corn-law repeal, will be carried by some statesman of established reputation in Parliament, 40.

Corn-laws, why passed, 19; taxes imposed in consequence of, 36; said to be for benefit of labourers, 60; condition of agricultural labourers related to, 85; made politics of, 135; repeal of, three ways of effecting, 150; condition of people during the, 426.

Corn-rents, security of, 116.

Corporation of London, its absurdity and mummeries, 536.

Correspondence, imaginary, with Brazil, 91; in blue-book, culled on purpose, 380.

Corruption, always known to candidate, 47; old, character of, 565.

Cortes, Portuguese, elections to, 239.

'Cosmogony,' use of, in *Vicar of Wakefield*, like Protection, a cover for a cheat, 64.

Cottage property, better investment, as far as regards interest, than savings-bank, 123.

Cottages, pulled down by landowners 82.

Cotton, slave-grown, and yet imported, 92; effect of attempting to fix its its price, 60; admission of, delayed, and why, 285; supply of, 369; supply of, dependent, unfortunately, on slavery, 437; from Southern States in the war of 1812–13, 457; cost of obtaining by

force, 469.

Cotton night-cap, each Chinaman buying, would keep Lancashire mills going, 383.

Cotton Supply Association, its services, 369.

Cotton trade, sketch of, 452; prospects of, in 1862, 464.

Counties, more vulnerable at elections than small boroughs, 108; all in hands of monopolists, 121; progress of Free-trade movement in, 123.

Country, state of the, in 1843, 20; soil of, the most attractive investment, 135; its sympathy with the Ministry, assisted by the attacks of the Protectionists, 188; appeal to, why unnecessary in Feb. 1846, 189; new, its disadvantage by side of old, 616.

County franchise, importance of, 164.

County meetings, unwillingness of land-owners to call, 99; should be held, in order to relieve distress, 466.

County Members, their treatment of dissenters, 556.

County representation, character of the, 193.

County towns, meetings at, 101.

County vote, how to be obtained, 123.

Covenants, absurd in leases, 137.

Covent Garden meetings, benefit of, 119.

Cowper Coles, Captain, on Armstrong guns, 299.

Crawford, Mr. Sharman, services of, 588.

Craze, the English, the dread of a French invasion, 573.

Crimea, occupation of, impossible, 314; state of army in, in winter of 1854, 320; climate of, in autumn, 332; war in, naval expenditure during, 432.

Crimean war, ordnance supplied in, [629] satisfactory, 299; experience of, as to the effects of blockade, 456; experience derived from, as to uselessness of argument, 466.

Crimes, rare in Russia, 413.

Criminal, political, sum paid for capture of, 342.

Croly, Dr., eminent for learning, piety, and moderation, 183.

Cromwell, manifesto of, 489.

Cronstadt, Russian ships at, 267; fleet at, absurd, 413.

Crowding, in country places, may be under control, 80.

Culture, value of, 491.

Curry powder, proposal to use, 176.

Custom-houses, not intended to take away, but only certain persons from them, 58.

Customs, what kind of, the League wishes to take away, 41; reduction of, and the explanation, 494.

Customs regulations, vexatiousness of, 281; just complaints against, 285.

Czar, the, a mendicant, 406; subscriptions of, to Austria, the Pope, and Tuscany, fictitious, 408; character of his kingdom, 409; expenses of, met by loans, 517.

#### **D.**

*Daily News*, on petitions in favour of Reform (1848), 541.

Dagleish, Mr., his inquiries into French dockyards, 473.

Dalhousie, Lord, on annexation, 501; and the Burmese war, 504.

Dalton, Dr., anecdote of, 465.

Damask, patterns of, 612.

Dantzig, statement as to price of wheat at, 71, *ib.*, 142.

Danube, navigation of, alleged as cause of Russian war, 311.

Davis, Jefferson, Mr., his capacity, 489.

Davis, Sir John, British Plenipotentiary in China, correspondence of, 379; letter of, in 1846, 380.

Davison, Mr., on house and income-tax, 270.

Dawes, Mr., his admirable schools, 609.

Debates, wish that they were burned, 155.

Debt, Austrian, its growth, 400.

Debt, National, payment of, 261.

Debts, public, responsibility of, 517.

Decline, cessation of progress, the commencement of, 461.

Defensive war, advantage given to, 306.

Deficit, Government proposed to create in 1852, 282; in Indian revenue, 345.

De Girardin, M. Emile, on the cry of French invasion, 420.

Delusion of the legislature in 1815, 9.

Delusions, gross, of Lord Palmerston, 471.

Demagogue, disappointed, the speaker charged with being, by the *Globe*, 538.

Democracy, civil war in United States, aristocratic rebellion against, 363.

Demonstrations, on foreign topics, misleading, 485.

Demoralisation of telling farmers they cannot compete with foreigners, 87.

Denman, Admiral, quotation from pamphlet of, 443.

Denmark, war of Schleswig and, its inconvenience to commerce, 397; integrity of monarchy of, 480; loan of, 517.

Departments, ridicule the control of Parliament, 295.

Dependence on foreigners, a long buried ghost, 194.

Deputations, numerous to Prime Minister on state of manufacturing population, 77.

Derby, recent (1855) meeting at, 335.

Derby, Lord, his brilliant and admirable speech, 376; has no wish to displace Lord Palmerston, 446.

Details, control of, impossible in House of Commons, 295.

Devon, North, highest poor rates, least capital in, 208.

Devonshire, farmers of, their distress, 133; north of, peasantry degraded because tenants impoverished, 138.

Dinners, agricultural, talk at, 52.

Diplomacy, proper business of, 269; feelings akin to contempt for, 419; traditions of, futile, 568.

Diplomatic salaries, charges of, 255.

Direct taxation, when not objectionable, 271; advocates of Free-trade not necessarily advocates of, 278.

**[630]**

Directions, any attempt to give, to trade and industry, will probably be wrong, 197.

Directors, Court of Indian, a mere screen, 498; have no power except patronage, 503.

Dirt, advocates of tax on soap, advocates of, 280.

Disarmament, total, the speaker never argued for, 572.

Discussions, ripening of, into true principles, 475.

Disfranchisement, amount of voluntary, great, 94; said to be an odious plan, but we must do the same on both sides, 124.

Disputes which have not led to war, cost of, 396.

Disraeli, Mr., his plans, 21; his theory of compensations, 203; said the speaker was a party to injuring farmers, 204; on land, and landlords, 225; magniloquent phrases of—has done his best, 280; took a philosophical and able view of finance, 345; his sneers generally *ex post facto*, 389; a phrase of, 'bloated armaments,' 495; on Bucks and Manchester, 544.

Dissenters, treatment of, 556; errors of conduct by, on system of education, 607.

Dissolution, motive for, in Feb. 1846, 189.

Distress, of agriculturists, when others prosper, due to unnatural causes, 34; agricultural, great, 133; will repeal Corn-laws, 154; farming not real in 1852, 271.

Divorced, English peasantry, from land, 368.

'Do something,' a popular cry, 332.

Dockyards, royal, conduct of, 304; Commission to inquire into (1860), 430.

Doctrine of protectionists, not believed by themselves, 196.

Doe and Roe, banishment of, from Courts, retention of, in India, 499.

Dorsetshire, condition of labourers in, 16; highest poor rates, least capital in, 208; compared with Middlesex, 545.

Douay Bible, use of, 592.

Douglas, Sir Howard, the irrelevancy of his speeches, 8.

Drain of gold, absurdity of, 63.

Draining tiles, free from duty, 112.

Drawing, art of, its use in Barnsley, 612.

Drawing master, need of, in manufactures, *ib.*

Drogheda, petition against Corn-laws from, 183.

Drouyn de Lhuys, M., offers of, 331; communications of, with Lord Palmerston, 419.

Drum-heads, gentlemen of England should not be mere, 145.

Drummond, Mr., his adage, that property has its duties as well as its rights, 81.

Drummond, Mr., his criticism on the speaker, 280.

Drunkenness, common in Russia, 413.

Dubergier, Mons. Duffour, a French Free-trader, 201.

Ducie, Lord, his excellent farming, 63; his good sense, 86; an agriculturist and free-trader, 63; his opinion as to proportion of labourers to agricultural requirements, 141; on Corn-laws, landowner, farmer, and labourer, 170.

Dudley Stuart, Lord, his private virtues, disinterested conduct, and boundless generosity, 311; wished Kossuth to see Lord Palmerston, 340.

Duelling, obsolete, and argument from the last, 565.

Duke, a noble, in House of Lords said the League wished to lower wages, 102.

Dukes, argue in the future tense, 103.

Dundee, effects of depression on price of cattle near, 73; memorial from, during Crimean war, 456.

Dunfermline, damask manufacture of, 612.

Dungannon, Lord, his loss of seat for bribery, 56.

Dunkirk, case of, after Treaty of Utrecht, 315.  
Dutch, contempt of, for English keeping their ports shut, 169.  
Duty, fixed, on corn, 149.  
Dynasty, French, said to be at stake in Crimean war, 330.  
[631]

### E.

Earnest, Lord Palmerston not much in, 447.  
Economy, Liberal party has not fulfilled pledges of, 439; necessity of, 543.  
*Edinburgh Review*, on foreign affairs, 492.  
Education, imperfections of, at University, and danger from, 491; system of, difficulty of supplying, 601; public opinion on, 607; best assistance to temperance, 613.  
Education, national, a necessary sequel of an extended franchise, 582; policy and necessity of, 616.  
Education, secular, its urgency, 589; outlay for, good, 602.  
Education grant, amount of, 1851, 599.  
Egerton, Mr., of Tatton, condition of his estate, 114.  
Egmont, Lord, noted for foolish speeches and overrunning land with game, 217.  
Egypt, expedition of Napoleon to, 512.  
Elbe, blockade of, in war between Denmark and Schleswig, 397.  
Election of 1841, question before the constituencies at, differently stated, 1; last general (1841), corruption at, 38; people at large have an interest in every, 44; of 1841, its character, 144; general, only means of checking expenditure, 495; cost of petitions after an, 564.  
Electioneering agents of landowners their land agents, 183.  
Elections, Free-traders wish to influence, 37; intention of League to influence, 54; American, true test of spirit, 468; in United States and England, 489; in Italy, satisfactory, 569.  
Electoral districts, objections against, 543.  
Electors, existing, might think the admission of others would weaken them, 580.  
Elizabeth, law of, giving a garden to every cottage, 111; times of, examined, 485.  
Ellenborough, Lord, generosity of British people to, 481; on Government of India, 501; his sketch of Rangoon, 504.  
Elswick, establishment at, 297.  
Emancipation Bill of 1833, its settlement by religious persons, 6.  
Emigration, effects of, great, on national resources, 281; no relief by, and no need of, 344.  
Emperor of Russia, character of, 318.  
Empire of China, oldest in world, 388.  
Empires, desire and motive for mighty, will hereafter die away, 187.  
Empires, great, less enduring than small states, 467.  
Employers, influence their labourers' politics, 559.  
Employment, a great want, 86.  
Enactments, restrictive, possible effects of, 71.  
Enfield, origin of manufactory at, 301.  
England, gentlemen of, should not be drum-heads, 145; corrupts Europe by the vicious example of her commercial legislation, 185; like a garrison, requiring that its supplies should be kept open, 299; should not be the Anacharsis Clootz of Europe, 312; lesson



learnt by, in Russian war, 319; no duty of, to fight for German interests, 328; most powerful, but most vulnerable, 357; excellent country for rich, 367; how liberties of, obtained, 410; people of, would subscribe to pay back the money claimed from Greece, 421; a free port for manufactured goods, 427; navy of, its proportion to French, 429; commerce, double that of any other country, 460; obstacle to a beneficent change in maritime law, 460; cannot carry on hostilities with United States, 469; institutions of, require amendment, 470; expenditure of, in peace, equal or nearly to that of United States in war, 494; disgraced by acting as a bully, 537; people of, desire the franchise, 541; honour and honesty in, 550; its disorders in 17th century, 554; great inequality of fortune in, 559; what should be the demeanour of, at a Congress, 569; long period of revolutions in, 570.

English, when they get east of the Cape, lose morality and Christianity, 366; not character of, to be bullies, 372; [632] behaviour of, abroad, 381; habits of, in dealing with foreign questions, 487; cannot be indigenous in India, 507; pride and prejudice of, 616.

Englishmen, their veneration for sacred things, 6; generally much the same everywhere, 29; desire of, to possess land, 196; hated in Italy, and why, 248; conduct of, in China, 378; certainly not cowards, 511.

Epworth, Protectionist meeting at, 192.

Equality, religious and fiscal, an advocate of, 289; social, prized in France, 524.

Essex Protection Society, its nonsense, 71.

Establishment, wealth of, 601.

Establishments, additions to, not easily got rid of, 284; no logical end to increase of, 394; expensive, Lord Palmerston always in favour of, 440; military, reduction of, necessary in order to reduce taxation, 510.

Estimates, reason why exception is taken to refusal of, 252.

Eton College, fellows of, at Salthill, 161.

Europe, corrupted by vicious example of England, 185; nations of, have no desire to make war on each other, 257; dread of its being overrun by Russia, absurd, 312; prospects of peace with, according to Mr. Cockburn, 421; how it may negotiate on maritime law with the United States, 460; amount of soldiers in, 516; public opinion of, not in favour of wars, 575.

European Governments, American legislation on foreign enlistment for benefit of, 351.

Exact sciences, mastery of, not so hard as of political economy, 197.

Excitement, political, when most active, 584.

Executive, weakness of, cause of Government manufactories, 295.

Exeter Hall, meeting at, 118.

Exhibition, Great, its lesson, 609.

Expatriation of labour from the United Kingdom, 36.

Expenditure, prospects of reducing, 217; amount of, in 1836 and 1849, particulars of, 254; private, of Crown, small, 252; increase of, how arises, 256; great increase of, 282; Lord Aberdeen did not attempt to increase, 283; naval and military, to be grappled with, 284; progress of scientific knowledge leads to increased, 394; on navy, French and English, 429; amount and character of (1863), 439; under Sir R. Peel and Duke of Wellington, 471; probable reduction of, by a reformed Parliament, 478; American, compared with English, 494; reduction of, the only expedient of finance left, 495; amount of, for military purposes, 510; amount of, and prospects of reducing, 525; saving of its advantage, 574.

Expenses on petition, by whom to be borne, 564.

Experience, its use in political questions, 152.

Exports, increase of, between 1831 and 1836, explained, 7.

‘Extract,’ suspicious character of public documents marked, 373.

Factor, Scotch, 'waur than the laird,' 90.

Faith, every new, must have its martyrs, 187.

Fallacies of House, fun to fustian jackets, 194; some very costly, 432.

Falsehood, definition of, 373.

Falsehoods, enormous, of monopolists, 128.

Famine, effect of waiting for, before the repeal of the Corn-laws, 152; state of, in 1845, 166.

Fanatics, made use of by clever knaves, 92.

*Fantome*, case of the, 417.

Farmer, distress of, prosperity of the nation, 7; Corn-laws delusive to, 24; pays for the Corn-laws, 26; distrusts promises now, 30; has no interest in Corn-laws, 61; interest of, that of whole community, 71; cajoled by landowners, 76; real grievances of, 100; English, close to servility of ryot, 137; does not take a lease, and [633] why, 138; not responsible for condition of labourer, 143; the better off he is, the more he suffers by protection, 162; interest of, involved in abolition of Corn-laws, and why, 186; votes with landlord, 193; frightened by bogies raised by landlords, 195; to be taxed by Mr. Disraeli, on plea of benefiting him, 203; a manufacturer, 204; suffering in certain districts, 205; does not extirpate game, 207; to be instructed on relations of landlord and tenant, 216; does not keep books, and therefore does not know what his profits are, 278.

Farmers, condition of, 16; not responsible for low wages, 82; slow to improve, and why, 88; those put forward by Protectionists, are lawyers, land-valuers, and auctioneers, 89; freetraders, when intelligent, 98; what causes their suffering, 134; speaker's acquaintance with, 141; landlords do not now say that Corn-laws are their advantage, 148; interest of, in maintaining Corn-laws, 151; proportion of, to population, 154; assessment of income-tax on, 276; kept as a separate class, 278; Welsh, complaining of taxation, 510; desire the ballot, 547.

Farmers' friends, party of, its profession, 28; the duty of such people, 74.

Farming, most inviting business of all, 207.

'Farming' the Indian Government, its meaning, 500.

Farming capital, average amount of, 135.

Farms, valuation of, 70.

Fever, intermittent, liability to, in Crimea, 333.

Fever Hospital, London, patients in, 84.

Ferrand, Mr., vote of House of Commons on him, 122.

Feudalism, destroyed in France, 524.

Filibustering, habit of, in Lord Palmerston, 445.

Finance, Austrian, condition of, 401; of India, cannot be separated from that of England, 505.

Finances, reform of, necessary, 493; French, annual statements of, 429; national, in a perilous condition, 557.

Financial Reform Association, its services, 254.

Finlay, Mr., story of, 416.

Fireside jealousy, attacks on Mr. Bright due to, 346.

Fisher, Mr. Malachi, on agricultural labourers' homes, 80.

Fitzwilliam, Lord, his assistance to Free-trade, 54.

Fixed duty, policy of, discussed, 151; what if this had been adopted, 343.

Flax, cultivation of, advised—not protected, 142.

Fleet, use of, in time of war, to protect, not prevent commerce, 459.

Fokien, inhabitants of, begged that Cantonese should be sent away, 385.

'Follies, Palmerston's,' the fortifications will be called, 476.

Food, price of, not relative to price of labour, except where slavery prevails, 4; price of, regulates wages, an opinion in 1814, 9; low priced, does not mean low wages, 53; price of, and of labour, 130; low price of, beneficial to agricultural labourer, 143; dependence on one power for, when undesirable, 470.

Food tax, anxiety of people to get rid of, 2.

Force, government by moral or physical, 150.

Foreign Affairs, Minister for, his business, 513.

Foreign corn, how its import benefits workmen, 130.

Foreign Enlistment Act, necessity for Government to be vigilant in enforcing, 351; two hundred years old, 357.

Foreign Office, approbation of, impossible to vote, 421; mischievous activity of, 480.

Foreign trade, absurdity of a foreigner selling his goods and taking nothing in return, exposed, 63; inferences from, 308.

Foreigner in England, once liable to be insulted, 269.

Foreigners, said to be impossible to compete with, even if land rent free, 74; can get better goods than we do from Government workshops, 299; [634] claim of, for admission to Canton, 384; interference of, causes union, 468.

Forfar, state of peasantry in, 83.

Fortifications, cost of, 440, 475; expenditure on, act of Lord Palmerston, 444; description of, and absurdity of, 474.

Forty-shilling franchise, its origin, 108, 109; justification of creating, 125.

Four Points, basis of peace, proposed by Russia, 310.

Fox, Mr. Thomas, on homes of agricultural labourer, 80.

Fox, Mr. W. J., a distinguished orator, 126; on education, 598; objections to scheme of, 601.

Fox, Charles, denounced as hireling of France, 321; on guarantees of peace against France, 324; eloquence of, did not prevent war of French Revolution, 467; his correspondence with Mr. Gurney, 528.

Fox, Mr., ambassador at Washington in 1837, his communications with American Government, 354.

France, land-tax in, amount of, 12; noblesse of, before Revolution, 40; reasons why it should not go to war with us, 235; its pacific tendencies, 245; claim of United States on, 250; navy of, rule which fixes its amount, 264; interests of, in Crimean war, 330; Lord Palmerston's policy towards, 340; law of, in regard to ships like the *Alabama*, 356; on verge of war with, 379; humiliation of England by, in affair of Pacifico, 420; monopolies in, 426; navy of, its proportion to that of England, 429; invasion cry of, as bad as anything Titus Oates said, 432; Lord Palmerston always raising cry of invasion from, 440; in war with, blockade no service, 455; naval expenditure of, 471; to be prevented from swallowing up Germany, an absurdity, 484; invasion of, an absurdity, 520; has suffered wrongs from England, 522; justifiable complaints of, 525; *coup d'état* in (1851), 561; expense of guarding England against, 572; naval preparations in, provoked by England, 573; invasions of, by England, 575.

Franchise, what constitutes borough, 95; women would make a better use of, than their husbands do, 132; county, its value, 131; early, kinds of, 496; extension of, its necessity, 221; must be extended, 579; an extended, its effects on education question, 608.

Frankfort, peace congress at, its value, 512; treatment of Jews at, 606.

Franklin, Dr., his opinion on slavery, 92; his proposed reforms in maritime law, 450.

Franklin, Lady, answer of American President to, 389.

Freedom, of industry, its meaning, 198; political, brings about distaste for war, 222; gains of, on the Continent, 246; colonial, complete, and consequences of, 257; progress of, on what it depends, 424; enemies of religious, also enemies of commercial, 535.

Freehold, value of, as a franchise, 171.

Freehold Land Association, objects of, 549.

Freeholds, purchase of, 109; how to be obtained, 550.

Free institutions, must be maintained by political contests, 587.

Free-trade, accepted on principle, 18; theoretically and in abstract right, 31; would not adversely affect landowners, 35; what its nature and aims are, 40; its real meaning, 58; effects of, in foreign countries, 62; progress that the movement has made, 67; in corn, would raise average prices, 71; not promotive of slavery, 92; why it is demanded, 105; beneficial to tenants, labourers, landlords, 139; sketch of its ultimate benefits to humanity, 187; North of England Conservatives in favour of, 190; importance of its acceptance, 201; perfectly understood in Manchester, 233; brings peace and harmony, 241; advocates of, not necessarily advocates of direct taxation, 278; its effects on revenue, 279; objection that criticism on principle of loans controverts, examined, 399; objection to loans said to be violation [635] of, 406; coping-stone of edifice of, set by Mr. Gladstone, 427; benefits conferred by, 461; reasons for promoting, 518; policy of a public man who adopts, 531; effect of, on towns, and rents in and near them, 551.

Free-traders, monopolists of public opinion for quarter of a century, 359.

French, dominant passion of, desire for peace, 246.

French invasion, panic of, 284.

*Friend of India*, an advocate of annexation, 387.

Friends, Society of, their success in extorting toleration, 512; their connection with politics, 528.

Fulton, Mr., discovery of, 393.

Funding system, objections of economists to, 400.

Fustian jackets, fallacies of House of Commons fun to, 194.

## G.

Galileo, persecutors of, like Protectionists, 553.

Gallipoli, death of a pacha at, 317.

Game, how the speaker dealt with it, 226.

Gamekeeper, should not be prowling about, 138.

Game-preserving, a nuisance, 207.

Gardens, value of, 551.

Gardner, Mr. Robert, a Conservative who proposed a Free-trader, 103.

Genet, Mr., his proceedings in 1793, 352.

Geography, value of knowledge of, to agricultural labourers, 602.

George III., Watt's saying to him, 132; story of, and Lord Nelson, 474.

Germans, educated people, 327.

Germany, its certain united resistance to French invasion, 247; would be united to resist Russia, 313; Lord J. Russell on, 326; adopting popular sovereignty, 368; policy of nationality in, 468; sympathies of Schleswig and Holstein for, 480; absurdity of France swallowing, 484.

Gibson, Mr. Milner, his work in the House of Commons, 126; his career in Parliament, 448; properly took office, 577.

Gillatt, Mr., an Oxfordshire farmer, on abolition of Corn-laws, 185.

Gilpin, Mr. C., his acceptance of office, 577.

Gilray, caricature of, 322.

Gipsies who sold brooms, story of, 302.

Gisborne, Mr., his views on local taxation, 215.

Gladiators, men who lend to belligerents have not the pleasure of seeing the, 404.

Gladstone, Mr., his opinions on Free-trade, 18; on Corn-law and tariff, 29; on the Corn-law of 1842, and its effect on prices, 134; opinion of, as to effects of Free-trade on poor land, 141; advising importation of raw materials, 169; his pathos in his speech, 283; his defence of income-tax unsatisfactory, 285; his character for sincerity and truthfulness, 291; holds both a philosophical and able view, 345; the powers of his eloquence, 346; on civilisation of the age, 390; his fiscal reform, 426; on public works in 1860, 431; wrong guess of, during American war, 467; has not defended the system of fortifications, 475; his financial reforms up to 1861, 477; his merits as a financier—his budgets, 493.

Gladstone, Mr., of Fasque, his opinion on Corn-laws, 26.

*Globe*, the, Lord Palmerston's organ, its denunciations of the speaker, 538.

Gloucester, commission of inquiry into, 566.

Gold, drain of, crotchet of reciprocity-man, 63; drain of, absurdity of, 224.

Gordon, Mr., his offer to his tenants, to take their farms, 195.

Gordon, General, on military significance of railways, 506.

Goulbourn, Mr., his opinion on Free-trade, 18.

Government, moral, of the world does not suffer that any one should permanently benefit by wrong, 50; moral, of world, never gives a premium to injustice, 93; organs of, discrediting the extent of famine, 168; ought not [636] to be able to be assailed as cause of scarcity, 176; will revert over the world to the municipal system, 187; should be always on the defensive, 244; should have no connection with the Press, 291; cannot understand the functions of a buyer, 299; carried on by a narrow class, 309; responsibility of, in continuing war with Russia, 323; how it becomes unpopular, 335; of 1857, incompetent in matters of finance, 344; English, always in alliance with the most odious Governments in the world, 367; French, good faith of, 433; has nothing to do with mercantile operations, 459; its fidelity to promises, 470; British, does not dread invasion, 521; ahead of the people in information, 614.

Governments, from Mr. Huskisson's time, have all wanted to get credit of being Free-traders, 59; one or two to be disposed of by Corn-laws, 173; rarely wise, 571.

Graham, Sir J., his opinions on Free-trade, 18; his speech on scarcity, 149; his administrative talents, 159; his unpopularity now (Feb. 1846) changed to the reverse, 189; compared with Lords J. Russell and Palmerston, 538.

Grain, consumption of, in United Kingdom, 34.

Grease debate, great and immortal, 148.

Greece, Court of, at Nauplia, 416; grievances against, 418; in the right (in *Pacifico's* case), 513; treatment of, by England, 537; colonies of, 616.

Greek Government, claims on, amount of, 420.

Greenock, Lord J. Russell's speech at, 312.

Greenup, Dr., his evidence as to agricultural labourers, 77.

Gregson, Mr., on China trade, 383.

Grey, Lord, speeches of, in 1830, 421.

Grey-haired, when people get, they get moderate, 477.

Grievance, danger of a, when imposed by others, 496.

Griffiths, Rev. W., speech of, at Derby, 335.

Groaning, speaker not surprised at, since some must groan at their own inconsistency, 420.

Gros, Baron, his mission to Athens, 419.

Ground-rent, tax on houses does not reach, 273.

*Guardian*, the Manchester, its attacks on Mr. Bright, 346.

Guards, English officers in regiment of, 259.

Guildhall, meeting at, in favour of the Poles, 486.  
Guizot, M., reproaches on, for the Tahiti case, 396.  
Gun-boats, best means of defence, 574.  
Gun-factory, wages at, of Woolwich, 295.  
Gunpowder, insurance of works of, what reckoned at, 302; stock of, in 1849, 393.  
Guns, manufacture of, 296.  
Gurney, Mr., his correspondence with Fox, 528.  
Guthrie, Rev. J, his evidence on agricultural labourers, 77.

## H.

Habeas Corpus, not known in France, 523.  
Haddingtonshire, Protectionist party in, 192.  
Hadly, Dr., on vices of Turks, 316.  
Hale, Justice, on wages in 1683, 79.  
Halley, Dr., on education, 608.  
Halliday, Mr., on Indian government, 499.  
Halstead, Admiral, on English guns, 298.  
Hampshire, electors of, and adults in, 555.  
Hanover, embassy of, might be suppressed, 256.  
Hansard, advantage of burning, 155.  
Hardinge, Lord, on Indian government, 498.  
Hardwicke, Lord, his advice to labourers, 144.  
Hartington, Lord, responsible for a feat of commercial legerdemain, 302.  
Harvest of 1842, abundant, 34; deficient, [637] effects of, if it come (1845), 154.  
Hawes, Sir B., on army clothing, 303.  
Haynau, his enormities in Brescia, 512.  
Hayter, Mr., on effect of Corn-laws, 139.  
Head, Sir F., on military expenditure, 511.  
Headache, pledge after, 483, 493.  
Health of towns, gathering for, but not one of them thinks of bread, 118.  
Hemp, Manilla, buyers of, during the Crimean war, 456.  
Henley, Mr., his 'ugly rush,' 368.  
Henry, Mr., on national ignorance, 596.  
*Herald, Morning*, to be made a fool's-cap or bonfire of, 63.  
Herculaneum of buried pamphlets in British Museum, 72.  
Hereditary legislators, and bondsmen, 179.  
Hertfordshire, interest of farmers in, 140.  
High Church, its quarrels with Low, 593.  
Highlander, story of, about ghosts, 89.  
Hill, Mr., obligation of Greeks to, 417.  
History of agriculture, future, what it will say of Corn-laws, 114.  
Hobbes, Mr. Fisher, his opinion on the productiveness of English land, 51; on agriculture, 136.

Holland, only country besides England which ever levied a tax on bread, 3; history of, during a war, 407; mode of its resistance to enemy, 554; its system of education, 591.

Home Secretary, difficult for one in troublesome times to be popular, 189.

Hong Kong, legislature of, limit of its powers, 374.

Honour, national, how far staked in Crimean war, 319; public, and true interest, never dissociated, 493.

Hop-duties, remission of, objections to, 276.

Hope and Co., their transactions with Austrian Government, 400; give no guarantee of loan, 402.

Hops, protective duty on, 140.

Horse, story of starving, and suggestion that corn should be tried, 167.

Horse Guards, system of, 436.

Horsfall, Mr., his motion on the *Alexandra*, 350; motion of, on maritime law, 451.

House of Commons, surrounded by a police force, 11; repeal of Corn-law will not be done in, but out of, 131; young members of, should study political economy, and why, 198; independent members in weak, 251; committee of, on government manufactures, 294; has to deal only with the honest interests of England, 322; duty of, on public questions, 333; members of, their duty on expenditure, 338; if it had right of electing three members, would elect Mr. Bright, 349; more extravagant than Government, 495; a rich man's club, *ib.*; religious opinion in, 534; requires external stimulus for any reform, 537; members of, numerous enough already, 546; does not represent the people, as is proved by associations to move it, 547; a more expensive tribunal than Chancery, 564; not friendly to parliamentary reform, 584; should be composed of single members from districts, 587.

House-tax, for England and Scotland only, 270.

Household suffrage, a Saxon franchise, 558.

Householders, enfranchisement of, 543.

Householders, compound, Mr. Bright's services to them, 347.

Houses, additional law on, an additional income-tax, 272.

Howqua, interview of Sir J. Bowring with Yeh, at his packing - house, 384.

Huddersfield, debate on secular education at, 594.

Hudson, Mr., on distress of Norfolk farmers, 133; his speeches about the League—nickname for him, 160.

Hulls of ships, dockyard difficulties always in construction of, 305.

Humboldt, Baron, an excellent arbitrator on geographical questions, 395.

Hume, his opinion on slavery, 92.

[638]

Hume, Mr. Deacon, his opinion on taxation, 11; his services, 201.

Hume, Mr. J., always a little before his time, but in the right, 210; excellent and tried veteran friend, his character, 251; confirms that 1792 was the standard of expenditure, 254; his acquaintance with expenditure, 393; his labours for parliamentary reform, 558; anecdote of, and Sir R. Peel, 580.

Hungarian war, Russian loan raised to pay for, 516.

Hungarians, high character of, and what they want, 423

Hungary, campaign in, expenses of, not paid, 403; expenses of war in, how met, 409; speaker said untruly to have made an exception to his principles in favour of, 422; interference with Greece, justifies Russia in invading, *ib.*; mode of its resistance, 554; clergyman of, on English ignorance, 614.

Hunt, Mr., on wages and cost of maintaining paupers, 79.

Huskisson, Mr., his authority, and opinions, 6, 7; his changes in 1823, 59; objections to his plan for reducing duty on wool, 72; his legislation on wool, 90; took duties off raw materials, 139; began policy of shifting taxes, 289.

Hypocrites, the assailants of free-trade in sugar are, 43.

## I.

Ignorance, titled, among monopolists, 64; of American affairs, gross, 361; chiefly in agricultural districts, 602; amount of, in Manchester, 614; vices often spring from, *ib.*

Ilyssus, the, present condition of, 491.

Improvements, unexhausted, speaker stipulated for, with tenants, 227.

Income and property, increased expenditure must be met by charges on, 284.

Income-tax, tax on food a very severe form of, 3; levied because the poor could pay no more taxes, 42; why imposed, 64; its employment in finance, 126; no threat to landed interest, said Mr. Benett, for their land belonged to mortgagees and money-lenders, 206; Peel's, not in a desirable form, but not to be parted with, 262; levied on English and Scotch, but not on Irish manufacturers, 270; modification of, by Budget of 1852, criticised, 276; modification of, how possible, 287; why people acquiesce in its inequalities, 288; permanent in character, 293.

Independence, too rare a virtue in House of Commons, and why, 242.

Independence, War of, moral derived from, 334; Declaration of, 489.

Independent members, weak in House of Commons, 251.

India, finances of, ill managed, 345; empire in, state of, 366; risks of governing, 488; government of, single or double, 498; questions on, and public opinion, 500; finances of, 501; natives of, their fitness for employment, 503; debt of, 505; its probable growth, 506; responsibility of governing, self-imposed by England, 508.

Indian corn, no objection made to its import, 170.

Indians, American, wigwams of, better than houses of agricultural poor, 81.

Indirect taxes, remitted yearly, 285; demoralisation by, 286.

Industrious classes, better under Free trade than under restrictive prices, 279.

Industry, pays taxes, not wealth, 262; burdens on, by expenditure, 527.

Industry, French, its peculiarities, 426.

Infamous house, lenders to Russian Government like keeper of an, 409.

Inglis, Mr., his account of Ireland, 13.

Inglis, Sir R., on contingencies of war, 242.

Injustice, produces weakness and injury, 365.

Innovation, of 50*l.* occupancy, how to be met, 194.

Inquests on dead bodies washed on shore, charged to county rate, and so a burden on land, 148.

Insults in China, correspondence respecting, a mystifying title, 378.

### [639]

Insults to England in France, 379.

Insurance of powder-mill, 302.

Insurance duties, tax on, objectionable, 281.

Insurrection in Poland (1863), its origin and event, 486.

Interest, agricultural, its condition under monopoly, 206; common, in general prosperity, 229; true, and honour, never dissociated, 493.



Interests, important, plea for postponing repeal of Corn-laws, 154; material, the smallest part of the Free-trade movement, 187; rival, odious task to reconcile, 198; of buyer and seller, how they differ, 225; honest, House of Commons has to deal with, 322; honest, of England, are of all mankind, 455.

International obligations, how, and why kept, 459.

Intervention, things to be considered in, 364.

Intolerance towards those who do not entertain the same view on Government questions, 415.

Invasion by France, a perpetual cry of Lord Palmerston, 471.

Investment, permanent, character of loans for, 412.

Ionians, the four, the case of, 417.

Ireland, Mr. Inglis' account of, 13; people of, seldom use wheaten bread, 53; pauperism in, 84; forty-shilling freeholders of, how treated, 108; how the rights of property are kept there, 144; failure of potato crop in, 158; famines in, 160; proposals for relieving distress in, 167; what will happen in, 168; Mr. O'Connell and, 179; invitations from, to speak on Free-trade, 183; unholy alliance of protectionists and landlords in, 214; landlords of, their tactics, 214; representation of, rotten, *ib.*; police force and judges' salaries in, 256; an excuse for keeping an army, 259; troops in, *ib.*; extension of income-tax to, 289; indebtedness of, to England, and *vice versa*, 291; education in, its benefits, 608.

Irish, in Manchester and Salford, 599.

Irish Church, a great and glaring abuse, 360.

Irishman, story of, in Kentucky, 130.

Iron, trade in, its fluctuations, 61.

Italians, what they ask of England, 423; good conduct of, in their political crisis, 570.

Italy, English hated in, and why, 248; war in, instructions of United States during, 451; history of nationality in, 467; should be let alone, 569; campaign of Napoleon in, 571.

**J.**

Jackson, General, his claim for compensation from the French, 250.

Japan, war in, 365.

Jefferson, Mr., his opinion on the purchase of munitions of war, 351; autobiography of, cited, 450.

'Jenkinson, Mr.,' in Vicar of Wakefield, 64.

Jersey, prices of corn in, instructive, 71.

Jeweller, his opinion of the value of the custom of great people, 46.

Jews, treatment of, 606.

Job, may be perpetrated out of famine (1845), 167.

Johnson, Rev. C., on fear of tenants that landlords should increase their rent, 136.

*Journal des Débats*, a pacific newspaper, 520.

Journals, metropolitan, their servility to Lord Palmerston, 341.

Judge, nations should not be, in their own case, 394.

Jury, intervention of, in cases of bribery, its value, 38; employment of, to punish bribery, 57; mixed system of, and inference from, 513.

Jurymen at Preston, ignorance of, 614.

Justice, more important in legislation than charity, 31; should precede charity, 119.

**K.**

Kagosima, storming of, 365.

Kaye, Mr., on East India Company, 507.

[640]

Kennedy, Mr., his age, as captain of the lorcha, 376.

Kent, inferiority of education in, 601.

Kentucky, story of Irishmen in, 130.

Kertch, expedition to, 332.

Keyham, works at, and their cost, 266.

Kid, extracting out of maw of wolf, like getting Corn-law repeal from landowners, 131.

Kidderminster, little town of, elections in, 490.

Kilmainham hospital, fights about, 289.

King, Mr. Thomas, his evidence as to agricultural labourers, 78.

Kinglake, Mr., amendment of, 483.

King-street, Manchester, faint voice raised in, in 1838, 181.

Kinnaird, Lord, on price of cattle near Dundee, 73; his presence at meetings of the League, 89.

Knatchbull, Sir E., his opinion on the Corn-laws, 13; his justification of the Corn-laws, 18, 26.

Knaves, make use of fanatics, 92.

Knight, Mr., on protection to cattle and Corn-law on oats, 140.

Knightley, Sir Charles, his abuse of the League, 64.

Knutsford, meeting at, 114.

Kossuth, M., his opinion about Lord Palmerston, 340; claim of extradition of, by Nicholas, 423.

Kuper, Admiral, at Kagosima, 365.

## *L.*

Labour, increased demand for, involves arise in wages, 3; price of, only affected by price of food, where slavery prevails, 4; of England, cheapest in the world, 10; property in, foundation of all property, 45; agricultural improvement will employ, 52; demand for, likely to be increased by Free-trade, 106; price of, and of food, 130.

Labourer, condition of, delineated, 27; effect of Free-trade on, 105; never prosperous when tenantry is degraded, 138.

Labourer, agricultural, effects of high prices and protection on him, 76.

Labourers, state of, in country, 4; smuggled away, when the most valuable part of possessions, 141; better with good hogs, than overrun with game, 226.

Lakes, American, treaty between England and United States about force on, 513.

Lamartine, testimony of, to condition of Turkey, 316.

Lambert, Commodore, his conduct, 504 sqq.

Lancashire, dialect of, 14; its interests identical with those of London, 46; prices of food and labour in, 61; highest wages in, 78; rise and fall of wages in, 102; pride of, in Sir R. Peel, 171; prices of oatmeal in, 176; conduct of people of, 369; difficulties of, in 1861, 436; distress in, would have been avoided had commercial blockades been abandoned, 452; state of, during cotton famine, 464; heroic acts done in, 466; sentiment of, on Indian questions, 498.

Lancaster, Mr., his rifle, 301.

Land, price of, rise in, 79; improvement of, why landlords boast of it, 112; thrown out of cultivation, no object of alarm to poor, 194; not depreciated by prospect of Corn-law repeal, 195; desire of Englishmen to possess, 197; production from, if capital be sufficient, no conception of, 209; why just to lay certain taxes on, 215; continually grows in value, *ib.*; attempts to make an artificial price of, 224; price of, at Athens, 416; free-trade in, 493.

Land-agents, electioneering agents, 183.

Landed interest, would bring down England to Spain or Sicily, 125.

Landlord and tenant, illustration of law of, by case of manufacturer and draper, 100; interests of, divergent, 204.

Landlordism of Ireland, stinks in nostrils not only of people of England, but of the whole civilised world, 214.

Landlords, not agriculturists, 16; political, their objects, 29; not agriculturists, 100; language of, gratuitous impertinence, 112; estates of, seldom theirs, 124; make tenants servile, dependent, and timid, 136; cry of, [641] that food is too cheap—so long considered themselves the whole community, 213; Irish, how they have acted, 214; more friendly to abolition of Corn-laws than farmers, 216; should be excluded from the councils of farmers, 229.

Landlords, political, their advice to farmers, 101.

Landowner, effect of Free-trade on, 105.

Landowners, being absolute in Parliament, were not disinterested angels, 26; prosperity of, during distress of people, 35; would not be adversely affected by Free-trade, *ib.*; political, who dress their labourers and cattle in blue ribbons, 74; may be refuted, but will vote for the Corn-law, 131; their absolute power, 144; how they have avoided taxation, 177.

Land-tax in foreign countries, amount of, 12.

Land-valuers, frequently put forward as farmers, 65.

Lattimore, Mr., his opinion on the effect of Corn-laws on feeding stock, 140; his example to farmers, 229; his plea for abolition of malt-tax, 274.

Law of wicked men substituted for law of Nature, 35.

Law of nations, claim of extradition of political offenders a violation of, 423.

Lawrence, Mr., advice of, 533; on English education, 596.

Laws, just, not temporary, 19; of Nature to be studied by farmer, and not laws of House of Commons, 87.

Layard, Mr., his prediction about the Crimean war, 319; his sympathies in Crimean war, 325.

Leaders of parties, importance of their accession to Free-trade, 194.

League, Anti-Corn-law, its popularity, 17; really a Free-trade League, 31; policy and future plans of, 36; no political organization, 39; had not originally the same breadth of view as now, 49; a peripatetic political University, 99; its operations described, 121; project of, to have a model farm, 137; farmers subscribers to, 141; its advantages in teaching the people, 157; attacks on, 183; cannot be employed for other purposes, 187; suspension of—its expenses, 200; harmony of its seven years' labours, 202.

League for free-trade in land, 493.

*League* newspaper, circulation of, 121.

Leagues, complaint against, but why adopted, 547.

Lease, effect of refusing, rarity of, specimen of a Cheshire, 137; covenant in, not to grow flax, 143.

Leases, best farming under longest, 29; how they should be worded, 138; fair, will bring capital on land, 207.

Leeds, woollen manufacturers of, demanded abolition of duty on wool, 90.

Legacy duty, extension of, 288; story about, 292.

Legal patriots, have already been drawn out, 124.

Legal profession, foundation of all civilisation, must vindicate itself, 374.

Legerdemain, commercial, Government accounts, 302.

Legislation, incompetent to fix prices, 25; cannot add to wealth, but may destroy it, 197; errors in, never debated till we suffer under evils, 449.

Legislators, hereditary, and bondsmen, 179.

Leicester, absurd resolution at, 311.

Liberal party, Lord Palmerston leader of, but without any liberal tenet, 340; professed principles of, 439; should be (1863) in opposition, 448; reconstruction of, to be effected, 560.

Liberals, difficulty of, in supporting Government of 1862, 477.

Liberties of England, how secured, 410.

*Libre Échange*, Free-trade paper, 241.

Licence of lorcha, void, 374.

Licences, trade, policy of tax on, 291; English, in China, their effect, 376.

Lincoln, President, reproaches against his origin, 363; his policy, 490.

Lincoln, rise in rent of city estate of, 27.

Lincolnshire, labourers and farmers better off in, 83.

Lindsay, Mr., his inquiries into the French marine, 473.

Line-of-battle ships, called slaughter-houses, 574.

**[642]**

Linen-trade of Belfast, Barnsley, Leeds, 290.

Lisbon, charms of climate at, 238.

Liverpool, claims of merchants of, 382; merchants of, like inhabitants of Canton, 385; Financial Reform Association at, 547.

Liverpool Association, downright selfish violence and unreasoning injustice of, 382; its policy mischievous, 383.

Livsey, Alderman, his opinion as to the compact at Willis's Rooms, 470; his death, and his merits, 479.

Loan, objection to Russian, 406; lenders of American, morally responsible for its use, 409; of Russia in 1849, an imperial falsehood, 516.

Loans, system of, favours war, 404; of Europe since 1815, 411; morality of, illustrated, 516.

Local burdens, on whom do they fall, owners of property, or capital of country? 203.

Local taxation, incidence of, 273.

Local taxes, how paid, 228.

Lodgers, not enfranchised, but should be, 95; franchise of, given by a legal decision, 542.

Lodging of agricultural labourers, its kind, 80.

Lodgings, to cheapen beer to raise price of, no wise policy, 279.

Lombard-street, people of, not gullible, 402; liberalism of, less than in Lancashire or Yorkshire, 561.

Lombardy, a weakness to Austria, 247.

London, trade of, with manufacturing districts, 45; speaker entitled to register as voter of, 68; rents in, hardly ever lower than 10*l.*, 94; wages in, fixed not in relation to prices of food, 102; unemployed persons in, and why, 344; convention of, terms of, 420; feeling in, on Schleswig - Holstein, 482; city of, their inscription to Chatham in Guildhall, 485; speech of an alderman and sheriff of, 515; their mummeries and processions, 536; constituencies

of, too large, 546.

Lorcha, meaning of word, 370.

Lord-Lieutenancy, a bauble, 289.

Lord Mayor's day, alteration in the show on, 515.

Lords, House of, requires great courage to speak independently in, 102; its indifference to legacy duties, and why, 292; character of debates in, 481.

Lothians, East, farmers of, in 1852, 271.

Louisiana, purchase of, 490.

Louis Philippe, his policy in France, 222; his political death, 245; panics during reign of, 521; impolitic act of, in refusing to extend the franchise, 580.

Low, Professor, on refusal of tenants to take leases, 138.

Low Church, its quarrels with High, 593.

Low prices, Free-trade does not necessarily mean, 278.

Lowe, Mr., his place in the House of Commons, 349.

Loyd, Mr. Samuel Jones, his wealth and intelligence, his opinion quoted, 44; his assistance to Free-trade, 59.

Lyndhurst, Lord, his opinion as to the nationality of the *Arrow*, 372; no lawyer will dispute his doctrine, 374; Yeh's arguments like those of, 377; an authority in America and France, 386.

Lyons, Sir Edmund, mixed up with Greek politics, 418.

### *M.*

M'Clellan, General, his candidature, 490.

M'Gregor, Mr., on sugar duties, 31; his evidence on sugar duties, 42; his services, 201; on indebtedness of Ireland to England, 291.

Machinery, exportation of, committee on, 69.

Macintosh, Sir James, his opposition to the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1819, 352.

M'Lane, Mr., anxiety of, on Oregon question, 395.

M'Leod, trial of, in 1841, *ib.*

M'Neill, Sir J., his report, and Lord Palmerston's conduct to him, 341.

### [643]

Macqueen, Mr., his estimate of the value of land in the United Kingdom, 12.

Mahometans, their opinion of hypocrites, 43.

Maine boundary, arbitration on, 391.

Majority, who would have it in Feb. 1846, if an appeal were made to the country, 190.

Males, number of qualified, in counties, 221.

Malta, great skulking hole for navy, 239; British fleet at, 522.

Malt-tax, complaints against, 204; speaker an advocate for repeal of, but not enthusiastic, 209; objections to, 251; a measure of relief to landed interest, 272; diminution of, for benefit of land, 273; plea for abolishing, less objectionable than any other in its form, 274.

Manchester, meeting of ministers of religion at, 4; meeting at, against Corn-laws in 1819, 9; prices at, 11; cradle of Anti-Corn-law League, 49; men of, have used fly-flappers on the squires, 52; distress in, how commented on, 117; history of its charter of incorporation, 348; effect on, if it rejects Messrs. Gibson and Bright, 349; its influence abroad, 529; Members for, calumniated, 530; comparison of Buckinghamshire with, 544; petition from, in 1832, 562; Roman Catholics in, 591; attitude of, on education question, 597;

local education scheme at, 599; education schemes at, 605; services, and influence of, 610.

Manchester press, vermin of, 346.

Manchester school, charged with a wish to ruin the aristocracy, by Mr. Newdegate, 284; charges against, 343; said not to pay attention to Manchester interests, 347.

Mangles, Mr., on Indian finance, 502.

Mankind, no change in character of, anticipated, 398.

Manufactories, Government, and employment of workmen, 301; Government, analysis of business done by, 302.

Manufacturer, never enters into covenants as to how he should work his mill, 137.

Manufacturers, know that Free-trade will raise wages, 104.

Manufactures, rate of wages in, not affected by price of food, 4; amount of protective duties to, 30; progress of, without any association, 113; consumption of, by agricultural labourers, 142; depression of, after war, 209.

Manufacturing districts, importance of, to London, 45.

March, Earl of, on agricultural labourer, 204.

Maritime law, love of, resemblance to old system of protection. 449; alterations of, real escape from worst evils of war, 470.

Market, foreign, fixes prices in home, 4.

Marlborough-street Police Office, beggars brought before, 85.

Marshman, Mr., his evidence on India, 498; on annexation, 502.

Martin, Mr. Montgomery, on Chinese statistics, 376.

Massachusetts, statute of, for schools, 592; education in, 600; religion in, *ib.*

*Maury*, case of the, 355.

Mechanics' Institute at Huddersfield, and its school, 594.

Mechanics' Institutes, original purposes of, 611.

Mediterranean, trade in hands of foreigners, and why, 381; as much belonging to France as us —English navy in, 575.

Meetings, public, what should be rule at, 66; in favour of arbitration, 398; not allowed in France, 524.

Mehemet Ali, a despot, but man of genius, 44; his reception of Napier, 47; his navy, 267.

Melvill, Mr., on powers of President of Board of India, 502.

Mendicant, common trick of, 148.

Mercantile classes, speaker's sympathies with, 381.

Mercantile marine, use of, as means of defence, 260; essential to a naval power, 267; English, amount of, 357, 433.

**[644]**

Merchant, case of, who bought unsaleable goods, 443.

Merchant Taylors' Hall, feast in, 120.

Merchants, English, favour violent proceedings in China, 381.

Metropolis, representation of, and Free-trade, 190.

Mexico, war in, greatest mistake Napoleon has committed, 364.

Middle class, has scanty power in House of Commons, 495.

Middlesex, compared with Dorset, 545; electors of, and adults in, 555.

Midshipman, case of the, in Greece, 418.

Militia, ignorance of men in, 614.

Millionnaires, able to take care of themselves, 45.

Millowner, losses of (1862), 464.

Mills, rated to relief of poor, 463.

Mincing-lane, its claims for protection, 42.

Ministers of religion, meeting at Manchester of, 4; conference of, in their reports, 110.

Ministers, Her Majesty's, their conduct discussed instead of Corn-laws, 188; process of punishing, 482.

Ministries, fall of, associated with the speaker, 337.

Minto, Lord, mission of, to Italy, 423.

Misdemeanour, bribery made a, by Lord J. Russell's Act, 38.

Misery, may be inflicted without benefit to the doer, 50.

Mississippi, importance of, in United States, 469; geography of, 490; valley of, its fertility, *ib.*

Mitchell, Mr., on foreign supply of corn, 155.

Mohammedan race, war on behalf of, Sir W. Molesworth on, 323.

Moldavia and Wallachia, protectorate of, 324.

Molesworth, Sir W., his speech on the Colonies, 249; his change of opinions, 322.

Monarchy, abolition of, in England, would be mischievous, 542.

Money, doctrine, that one must not question what a man does with his, 408.

*Moniteur Industriel*, French Protectionist paper, 241.

Monmouth, disturbances in, 244.

Monopolies, reference of election of 1841 to, 1; gigantic Government, 295.

Monopolists, their advice to farmers, 50; speeches of, amusement to be obtained from, 64; assertion of, that they keep up the revenue, a monstrous piece of impudence, *ib.*; taxes for, to be reduced, 128; enormous falsehoods of, *ib.*; quarrels of, 157.

Monopoly, Free-traders charged with desiring, 30; attack on to be universal, the Corn-law being the worst, 39; its effects on consumers, 42; what interest has shopkeeper, skilled artisan, and labourer in? 45; system analogous to that of Tudors and Stuarts, 58.

Monsell, Mr., his commencement of Ordnance works, 295.

Moore, Thomas, his *jeu-d'esprit* on the Whigs, 322.

Moral force, necessity of using, 221; mode of using, 554.

Moral restraints, weak among lenders of money, 409.

*Morning Herald*, an anecdote for, 122.

*Morning Post*, to be made a fool's-cap or a bonfire of, 63.

Morpeth, Lord, his return for the West Riding, 553.

Mortgages, Corn-laws intended to pay, 26.

Moseley, Sir Oswald, lord of manor of Manchester, 348.

Moses and Son, attacks on, 117.

Motion, good, never brought forward in a bad season, 397.

Motley, Mr., his 'Rise of the Dutch Republic,' 484.

Mould, theft of, from Duke of Richmond, 24.

Multitudes, ready to listen to disquisitions of political economy, 150.

Mummeries of London Corporation, worse than those of Popery, 536.

Municipal Corporations Act, a model for all corporate action, 604.  
Municipal law, Foreign Enlistment Acts only legally part of, 355.  
Municipal system, will hereafter characterise [645] the government of the world, 187.  
Muntz, Mr., his plans, 21; his speech on Corn-laws, 23.  
Museum, British, Herculaneum of buried pamphlets, 72.  
Mystification, readjustment of taxation, a, 177.

#### N.

Napier, Commodore, his story of Mehemet Ali, 46.  
Napoleon the First, more popular in Spain than Wellington, 248; rule of, in Prussia, memories of, 327; war with Russia of, lesson derived from, 334; expedition of, to Egypt, 512; his nephew very different from him, 575; adage of, 616.  
Napoleon the Third, his aspirations for peace, 246; his efforts for commercial freedom, 426; abilities of, 432; effect of hostility to, on his position in France, 521; services of, to Italians, 571; proofs that he was really elected by French, 575.  
Nassau, order that *Alabama* should be stopped at, 357.  
Nation, degrading that it should submit to bread-tax, 132; will of, certain to carry repeal of Corn-laws, rather than Parliament, 186.  
National Assembly of France, report of, 265.  
*Nationale*, a liberal French paper, its criticism on English Corn-laws, 46.  
Nationalities, oppressed, Government never went to war for, 311; demonstrations in favour of, misleading, 485.  
Nations, intercourse between, increasing, 269; intercourse of, will be like that of individuals, 424.  
Natives of India, their capacity, 503.  
Nature, war against, leads to discomfiture, 71; has repealed Corn-laws, 174.  
Naval force, why maintained, 264.  
Naval forces, reduction of Russian, in Black Sea, nugatory, 323.  
Navigation Act, British, binds Hongkong legislature, 374.  
Navigation laws, to be left to Government, 208.  
Navy, army and, preserve for younger sons, 218; waste in, 219; reduction of, 260.  
Navy, foreign, objection to taking estimates by, 264; French, its proportion to English, 429; English, history of, and waste of, 430; amount of men in English, (1860), 433; English, ought to be greater than that of France, 434; expenditure on, in France and England, 471, 472; confidence in, abandoned, 474; British, at Malta, 522; French and English contrasted, 574.  
Neild, Alderman, his complaint against Manchester Members, 347; his connection with the incorporation of the city, 348.  
Nelson, story of, 474.  
Nesselrode, correspondence of, with Lord Palmerston, 418.  
Nestor of the Conservative party (Mr. Henley), 447.  
Neutral, United States the great Power among nations, 451.  
Neutrality, in what it consists, 356; not known in middle ages, 357; reasons for, in American war, 492.  
Neutrals, right of, in war of 1812, 318.  
Newdegate, Mr., said Manchester school were going to ruin the aristocracy, 284.  
Newspaper, a Manchester, treats French as though they were thieves, 235.



Newspapers, divided opinion of, on advertisement duty, 291–2; English, not probably bribed, 412; activity of, on affairs of Schleswig-Holstein, 482; ignorance of, 491; military, excite jealousies, 515; Manchester, on French invasion, 521; expediency of keeping up character of, 524; criticisms on, 572.

New York, exhibition at, 615.

*New York Evening Post*, citation from, 443.

*New York Times*, quotation from, 573.

Nicholas, Emperor, character of, 408.

Nobility, may be detested, if not well advised, 40.

#### [646]

Nomination counties, their place in legislation, 191.

Non-intervention, profession of policy of, 360; value of policy of, 423; England professes policy of, 461; to be practised as well as professed, 468; progress of principle of, 480; growth of principle of, 568.

‘No popery,’ the cry, the lowest step of degradation, 448.

Norfolk, farmers of, their distress, 133.

Normanby, Lord, communications received by, most humiliating, 420.

*North China Herald*, cited as to British ends in China, 444.

#### O.

Oates, Titus, hoaxes as bad as his perpetrated, 431; delusions equal to falsehoods of, 471.

Oats, their place in ordinary agriculture, 140.

O'Brien, Mr. Stafford, his dread at admission of clover-seed free, 139.

Occupiers, taxation of, 272.

Ocean, property of England on the, 357.

O'Connell, Mr., the value of his assistance, 179; on indebtedness of England to Ireland, 291; adage of, 484; on dividing political aims, 579.

O'Connor Chartists at Birmingham, 66.

Office, Conservatives in power without responsibilities of, 446.

Officers, should be reduced in army, 259.

Oldham, meeting at, and speech of working man at, 129.

Oligarchy, most ignoble, the sugar monopolists, 42; has granted monopolies which the Crown cannot, 58; a miserable, unintelligent, incapable, is misgoverning England, 125; sooner power is transferred from, the better, 132; governed England during the continental war, 522.

Opinion, difference between existence of a popular, and going to war in support of an, 314.

‘Opinion of the country,’ what does it mean? 190.

Opium, trade in, with China, 383.

Opposition, Parliamentary, between Whig and Tory, an intangible line, 107; ‘factious,’ useful, 344; work of, and growth of, 448; support of, to Government, 476; functions of the, 482.

Orange-men, dread of Liberal alliance with, 448.

Order, for keeping, at home, how far is army necessary, 259.

Ordnance, economy in, 261; wages paid to labourers in 1849 and 1864, 295; Committee on, and its value in 1862–3, 297–8; purchase of, before and at Crimean war, 299.

Oregon, squabble about boundary, 245; misunderstanding concerning, 395.

Orleans, New, might be submerged, 490.

Osborne, Hon. and Rev. S. G., on homes of agricultural labourers, 79; his evidence, value of, 81.

Outlaw, a nation becomes, if it violates international law, 460.

Oxford, Ashmolean Society of, 176; an avowal at, its extraordinary character, 242; and Cambridge, education at, 361; ignorance of undergraduates at, 491.

## P.

Pacifico, M., attack on house of, 417; valuation of furniture of, *ib.*; case of, an atrocious one of swindling, 419.

Pacifico debate, Sir W. Molesworth on, 323.

Paget, Mr. Charles, his explanation of rent and cost, 75.

Paget, Lord Clarence, defends naval abominations with cheerfulness, 365; his criticism on naval expenditure, 430.

Palmerston, Lord, invited to resign by Sir R. Peel, 22; on prospects of peace in 1848, 243; on naval force in 1848, 264; his speech at Tiverton in February 1854, 313; jaunty statements of, about condition of Turkey, 316; his unfortunate ignorance about Turkey, 317; his form of despotism, [647] 338; his career, 339; his foreign policy, his towering genius lately discovered, 341; lives from hand to mouth, 345; dealt with as a policy, 349; on Canadian rebellion of 1837, 353; meek and lamb-like reply of, to Count Nesselrode, 418; perpetual necessity to denounce proceedings of, 421; no champion of Liberalism and Constitutionalism, 423; represents a policy, 440; cost of, to country, *ib.*; a popular minister, 441; Conservatives have greater confidence in him than in their chief, 446; his delusions about France, 471; his ridiculous scheme of fortifications, 474; is really living in 1808, 475; his criticism on Lord Aberdeen's policy, 528; on the Greek affair, 537; his offer of office to Mr. Cobden, 576; his kind and manly conduct, 577.

Pamphlets buried in British Museum, 72.

Panic, cause of fortifications, 265–6; of a French invasion in 1853, 284.

Paper duty, its mischief, 280; objections to maintaining, 292.

Parchment, rustling of, has drawn out legal patriots, 124.

Parkes, Mr., his claim on governor of Canton, 371; his qualifications, 376.

Parkinson, Mr., on the aristocracy, 335.

Parliament, old, the perfection of human wisdom, according to Duke of Wellington, 6; present constitution of, may carry Free-trade, 54; Acts of, not wanted to protect the farmer, 86; dissolutions of, associated with the speaker, 337; are members of, to be whipped in? 342; of 1841, speaker's action in, 343; of 1863, its character, 359; reform must be made in, 434; reformed, probable character of, 435; reform of, advantages to be hoped for in, 477; takes reforms from out of doors, 553; not in earnest to put down bribery, 564.

Parliamentary Reform, speech on, at Rouen, 236; general importance of, 579; an object of anxiety but not desire to House of Commons, 584.

Parliaments, shortening of, why expedient, 587.

Parties, not honest in 1862, 476; broken up, 560.

Partnerships with limited liability, common in China, 375–6.

Party, Protectionist, broken up, 190; public business under representative institutions must be conducted by, 438.

Patronage, establishments in colonies means for, 258; the sole privilege of the Court of Directors (India), 499.

Pattison, Mr., his election, 68.

Pauperism, its amount in agricultural counties, 16, 24; increase of, when price of food rises, 78; always greatest where farming is most unskilful, 86; test of national prosperity, 223.

Peace, securities of, in 1849, 393.

Peace party, not allowed to make objections, 283; charges against, 321.

Peace Society, to be congratulated, and why, 405; purposes of, 516; principles of, not adopted entirely by the speaker, 526.

Pearson, Mr., his remarks on sugar monopoly, 49.

Peasantry, distress of, 24; English, has no parallel on the earth—is divorced from the land, 368; French and English, contrast between, 523; rents paid by, 551.

Peel, Sir Robert, believed that Parliament of 1841 was sent to express confidence in him, 1; his expressions of sympathy with working men, 9; his attempt to fix a price of corn, 11; his insinuations against the Anti-Corn-law League, 17; his avowal of responsibility, 20; his fiscal policy and objects, 30; his changes in tariff, 59; admits that profits and wages cannot be regulated by law, 70; criticism on changes in his tariff, 73; not much alarmed at 'the chivalry,' 90; his advice, 'to register,' 94; character of his Corn-law, 115; attacked League in solemn and pompous tones—will be sacrificed by the farmers hereafter, 122; his character as a financier, 126; his permission to import fat cattle, 139; change in the views of, 149; his plea of important interests, 154; his importance [648] to his party, and his power, 159; is the Government, 166; a critical time for him (Nov. 1845), 169; desires to carry out Free-trade, 170; why we should wish to keep him, 171; will show straightforward conduct, 174; speaker's feeling towards, 176; courses before him on Corn-law, and his probable policy, 184; Free-traders willing to follow him in repeal of Corn-laws, 186; would now (Feb. 1846) be one of the most popular men in the country, 189; has lost office, but gained a country, 201; on colonial expenditure, 218; why speaker voted against income-tax of, 288; resisted appointment of Committees on Administration, 295; justification of following, 343; said more responsibility in finances of India than in finances of Downing-street, 345; said fine harvest and Chinese treaty saved England in 1842, 383; anxiety that he should remain in office till Oregon question was settled, 395; on Tahiti case, 396; growth of his party, 435; his majority in 1841, 448; expenditure under Government of, 471; on extension of tropical dependencies, 501; his death a loss to the nation, 514; on military and naval expenditure, 514–15; on colonial policy, 538; his opinion on defences, 572; anecdote of, in reference to fall of Louis Philippe, 580.

Peers, chamber of, report of, 264; hereditary House of, impossible in France, 524.

Pegu, annexation of, a loss, 508.

Pension list, Corn-laws an extension of, 13.

Pensions and annuities, 255.

People, cannot be supposed to favour monopoly, 1; to be prosperous and useful, must be well fed, 10; reference to, a democratic doctrine, 190; its wealth, power, and public spirit, not its armies, estimated abroad, 249; must carry financial reform, 251; of England, ready to pay just debts, 280; can take care of themselves, or no one can, 582; resentment of, towards their Government, how it arises, 335; of England, illiterate beyond any country, 368; mass of, their indifference to religious bigotry, 536; mass of, alienated from Christianity, and why, 596; mass of, governs in the last resort, 617.

Perekop, supplies from, in Crimean war, 332.

Peroration, speaker never uses any, 478.

Persecution, religious, trial of, and failure of, 535.

Persian war, entered into in 1856, 338.

Pestilence, may vanquish mightiest armies, 333.

Peterloo, Lord Palmerston voted in favour of outrage of, 339.

Petersburgh, St., railway from, to Moscow, 405; red republicanism less anarchical than despotism of, 413.

Petitions, proof of popular opinion from, 191; for Reform, no use, 554; election, character of, 563–4.

Peto, Sir Morton, his inquiries into French dockyards, 473.

Phelps, Mr., on agricultural labourers, 80.

Philadelphia, population of, 568; ballot in, 586.

Philanthropists, true, have always a reason for benevolence, 91; Protectionists cannot be, 118.

Philippe, Louis, expenditure during reign of, 471.

Philosophers who govern country, folly of, 62.

Phrase, cant, of Pitt's time, 314.

Pierce, General, on annexation to the United States, 501.

Pilgrim Fathers, their system of education, 592.

Pimlico, clothing manufactory in, 304.

Piræus, ships in, 260.

Pitt, Mr., his income-tax, 286; prevented from extending the legacy duties, 288; cant phrase of time of, 314; cost of wars of, 421; foreign policy of, 485.

Planet, another, what would be its opinion of our statute-book? 26.

Platform, free, England nearly the only country where there is, 422.

**[649]**

Pleas, Court of Common, its decision on tenements and the franchise, 95; decision of, on lodgers, 542.

Plenty, object of Anti-Corn-law agitation, 158; and security for, according to Sir John Tyrell, the effect of Corn-law, 162.

Ploughing match, for agricultural labourers, 111.

Plymouth, panic at, 266.

Poaching Bill, Lord Palmerston's conduct on the, 447.

Pocket boroughs, their voice in legislation, 191.

Poland, case of, 364; insurrection of, how fomented, 486.

Policy, publication of, why not indiscreet, 109; Lord Palmerston's foreign, has made no one happier or freer, 340; different, by England, towards strong and weak, 372; foreign, British budget passed for, 571.

Political economists, truly benevolent, 118.

Political Economy, study of, the highest exercise of the human mind, 197; questions of, will form a great part of world's legislation in time to come, 198; has raised working men, 496.

Political influence, may be affected by Free-trade, 105.

Political parties, manifest break up of, 107.

Political rights, exclusion from, its dangers, 581.

Politician, speaker has no desire to be, 40; speaker deals with question as, 322.

Politicians, aims of, in House of Commons, 145.

Politics, foreign, English meddling in, 239.

Polk, President, message of, in America, 184; his belligerent language, 245.

Polling-booth, its expression, powerful in future, 568.

Pollock, Chief Baron, in the chair at a Middlesex farmers' meeting, 113.

Poor, have a right to subsistence from land, 215; taxes on consumption of, more heavy than on rich, 286.

Poor Law, operation of, in Wilts, 82.

Poor-rates, where highest, 208; rise as taxation rises, 249.

Pope, the, in advance of some people, 161; a political, in Rochdale, 487; acts of, matter of indifference to Americans, 533; political weakness of, 534.

Popularity, obtained by interfering in other countries, 421; immediate, indifferent to speaker, 487.

Population, daily growth of, and inferences from, 162; growth of, in Europe, 185.

Porter, Mr., his services, 201.

Ports, opening of, its effects, 160; what prevents their opening, 168.

Portsmouth, cost of manning fortifications at, 475.

Portugal, English policy in, 239; absurd treaty with, 427.

Post, penny, its value to the League, 37.

Posts, only two a week at one time between London and Paris, 269.

Potato, people may be constrained to live on, 32; speaker entertains Cobbett's prejudice against, 53.

Pothouse politicians, clamour of, 328.

Potter, Sir Thomas, his labours and services, 346.

Pottinger, Sir H., testimonial to, 119.

Poulett-Thomson, Mr., his motion on the Corn-laws in 1830, 6; labours of Mr. Wilson on his Committee, 348.

Poverty of labouring classes, described by ministers of religion, 4.

Powder-mills, analysis of manufacture of gunpowder at, 302.

Power, of a country, how interpreted, 219; political, in hands of those who nominate the House of Commons, 547; political, how it can be transformed, 552.

Powers, Great, absurdity of, in pretending to keep order, 569.

Preserve of younger sons, army and navy, 218.

Press, Government should have no connection with, 291; exasperation induced by, 396; organs of, on side of loan-mongers, 402; leading organs of, disgracefully recommend loans, 403; Lord Palmerston had a *claqueur* [650] in the, 447; freedom of, limited in France, 523; liberty of, need not be curtailed, 573.

Preston, strike at, its causes, 615.

Price, House of Commons has no power to regulate, 70; of corn, nominal and real, 142.

Prices, home, fixed by foreign market, 4; affected by two causes, 23; of 1790 and 1849 compared, 206; high, of agricultural produce, incompatible with well-being, 209; effects of Free-trade on, 278.

Pride, national, renders it possible that taxes should be extracted, 249.

Prime Minister, made a mere corn-steward, to keep up prices for his masters, 61; should not have the odious task of reconciling rival interests, 198.

Primogeniture, law of, will be discussed, 216.

Principle, no good, sound, or just, at war with another of similar character, 92; every political, must have its advocates, 186.

Principles, justice of, admitted, while practise the reverse, 41.

Printed cottons, tax on, objection to, 274.

Pritchard, Mr., case of, 396.

Privileged classes, their legislation for their own benefit, 583.

Prize-fight, conduct of Cabinet like promoters of a, 483.

Prizes for agriculture, absurdity of, 111.

Probate and legacy duty, in France equal, 524.

Production, agricultural, will be increased by Free-trade, 63.

Profits, fall of, and of revenue, go together, 243.

Profligate expenditure, a characteristic of Lord Palmerston's administration, 495.

Progress, to cease from, is to begin to decline, 461.

Property, speaker advocates rights of, 45; burdens on, and on those who have no property, 215; has duties as well as rights, 404; misrepresented in House of Commons, 544.

Property-tax, rejection of, in 1816, 210.

Proprietors, etiquette of, in county elections, 193; number of, in France, 246, 523; great, election contests of, 565.

Prosperity, how can Sir R. Peel induce it? 6; general in 1844, and why, 128; national, tests of, 224.

Protection, a mere name for a tax, 2; eagerness for, in worst-farmed districts, 28; to farmers, really destruction, 61; compared to cosmogony in *Vicar of Wakefield*, 64; effects of, on farmers, 70; if reduced, then rents should have been, 74; really destructive to agriculture, 87; necessity that it should be inquired into, 134; a vicious circle, 135; a failure, 144; its mischief to intelligent farmer, 164; never advocated by men of average intellect, 170; must be destroyed altogether, and why, 177; new phase of (Jan. 1846), 181; to all, is protection to none, 182; as much good, as horse-shoes to keep off witches, 197; will not be re-enacted, 200; absurd idea of its revival, 212; completely settled by 1863, 360; may be too much, to merchant as well as to agriculturist, 381; maritime law resembles, 449.

Protectionists, alone heard before Committees as yet, 86; who are the 'farmers' they bring forward, 89; their statement about effect of lowering duties on wool, 90; like fraudulent mendicants, 148; speeches of, 182; policy of, with tenants, 227.

Providence, Government arrogates functions of, 176; gratitude to, for its overruling conflicting incidents, 200; obviates evils of injustice, 365.

Prussia, favourable to peace in 1854, and inferences from this, 313; cause of sympathies of, in Russian war, 327; the channel for Russian produce during Crimean war, 456.

Prussian, conversation with a, 327.

Public affairs, living interest in, 360.

Public meetings, proof of popular opinion from, 192.

Public men, want of open and frank declarations from, 333.

Public opinion, gross ignorance of, 333; party an organization of, 438.

[651]

Public works, suggestion of, as means of relief, 167; cost of, 256; Board of, bad administration of, 432.

*Punch*, an admirable authority, an excellent commentator, and admirable critic, never wrong, infallibly right, 149; attacks on an ex-chancellor by, 161; calculation in, 209; an excellent champion of peace, 515.

Punjaub, expenses of, 507.

Pusey, Mr., his judgment on present state of things, 86; his view on agriculture, 135.

*Q.*

Quackery, emigration schemes, as a relief of population, downright, 344.

Quarrel, preconceived design to pick, with Chinese, 378.

Queen, popularity of the, 2, 542; recommendations of the, to take Corn-laws into consideration, 6; memorial to, to dissolve Parliament, 38; not responsible, as a Czar or Grand Turk, 167; her sympathies with Free-trade, 200; her courageous visit to France, 236; her title to hereditary revenues as good as to any estate, 255; attack on, by Lord Ellenborough, 481.

Queen's Speech, anticipation of it, 128; must (1846) propose repeal of Corn-laws, 175.

Questions, political, should be urged separately, 579.

Questions, public, remaining, 359.

**R.**

- Rabble, of the towns, said to have carried Free-trade resolutions, 67.
- Races, modern desire of agglomerating, 467.
- Radnor, Lord, his statement of relation between price of labour and price of food, 102.
- Raglan, Lord, his neglect and mismanagement, 334.
- Railroads, absurdity of believing Russian loan is for, 405; have antiquated blockades, 455.
- Railway Committee, drudgery of, 147.
- Railway, Great Western, its scheme defeated, 37.
- Railways, effects of scarcity prices on, 155; King of, 160; carry common sense, except when their King travels on them, 161; ought to induce an economy of army, 258; Indian, prospects of, 502.
- Randall, Mr, on bribery in America, 567; on ballot in United States, 586.
- Rangoon, Governor of, and Burmese war, 503; an Alsatia, 504.
- Rate, virtually same as vote of money in Parliament, 590.
- Rate-book, a good register, 558.
- Rate-supported schools, would supersede voluntary combinations, 594.
- Raymond, M. Xavier, on French and English navies, 442.
- Reaction, after protection, how signs of it may be detected, 213; Conservative, a delusion, 448.
- Reciprocity, none in Sir H. Pottinger's Chinese Tariff, 120.
- Reciprocity-man, always a busybody, 63.
- Redistribution, of electoral power, necessary, 435; plan of, 587.
- Reed, Mr., his work on the *Research*, 307.
- Reform, Lord Palmerston's objections to, 339; agitation for, spontaneous, 541; advocates of, true Conservatives, 548; to be carried by a combination of classes, 561.
- Reform Act, a machine, the use of which was not known, 200.
- Reform Bill, Lord Palmerston came into office to carry, 440; of 1832, its benefits, 537; of 1832, anecdote of time of, 562; first, its addition to electors, 586.
- Reform, Parliamentary, Mr. Bright's hopes of, in 1861, 435; its probable effects, 478.
- Reformer, claim to be a, inconceivable, unless by allowing the ballot, 561.
- Registration, system of, to be attempted by the League, 55; necessity of, 95; county, importance of looking to, 155.
- [652]
- Religion, ministers of, their assistance, 234; on a footing of equality in France, 524; connection of, with education, a difficulty, 589; votes of money for teaching, 591.
- Religious community, its influence on social questions, 6.
- Religious element, difficulty of, in education, 603.
- Religious faith, rumour circulated, that it is intended to deprive the country of its, 600.
- Religious teaching, if insisted on, a hindrance to education, 595; not to be paid for, 605.
- Rent, artificial, obtained by Corn-law, 26; may fairly be inquired about by farmers, in order to discover results of Corn-laws, 27; its relation to cost of growing wheat, 74; rise of, between 1790 and 1844, 78; no decline of, likely by abolition of Corn-laws, 196; rise of, and its relation to prices, 207.
- Rental, 6*l.*, its probable addition to electors, 585.

Rents, doubled between 1793 and 1843, 27; rise of, during unprosperous seasons, 35; drawn from distress, 76; ten per cent. reduction on, and why, 115; effect of Free-trade on, 551.

Repeal, immediate, of Corn-laws, plea for, 150; of Corn-laws, immediate, effects of, 152; of Corn-laws, immediate, would have obviated distress of 1849, 206.

Representation, its proportion to population, 190; county, should be widened, 194; system of, necessity of altering, 220; of people, reform of, a pressing question, 367; under a system of, party Government must be, 438; how it would be best secured, 587.

Representative, question whether our, should carry on war without sanction, 386.

Representative system, derived from England, 198; demoralised by war, 310.

Representatives, of Colonies, their presence in the House, 290; no fear of change of character in, by reform, 543; and people, fight between, 553.

Reprisals, England in war of, most vulnerable, 357.

Republicanism, red, not so anarchical as despotism of St. Petersburg, 413; theory of, elevated, 488.

Republics, Spanish American, the action of England during their revolt, 352.

Resentment, bred by betrayal, 496.

Resolutions, said to be carried by rabble of the towns, 67.

Responsibility, great, of Sir R. Peel, 22; in case of Prime Minister, what it means, 159; of Ministers, what it means, 167.

Reuter's telegram, charged with creating interest in foreign politics, 360.

Revenue, what causes it to flourish, 7; what it should, and should not be, 39; the, likely to be increased by Free-trade, 106; surplus of, boasted of, 127; contribution of agricultural labourers to, 142; improving, a test of national prosperity, 223; falling off, proves that profits fall off, 243.

Reverence, superstitious, for owners of sluggish acres, 61.

Revival of trade in 1843, its cause cheap food, 34.

Revolution, a world's, the acceptance of Free-trade, 201; in France, effect of, 246; recognition of incompetence of governing classes may provoke a, 309; Lord J. Russell the child and champion of, 325; if it occurs in Russia, prospects of public creditor in, 410.

Revolutions in France, duration of, compared with England, 524.

*Revue des Deux Mondes*, on navies, cited, 442.

Ricardo, Mr., on likelihood of an election, 94.

Rich, tax on consumption of the poor more heavy than on that of, 286.

Richard, Mr., his argument in favour of peace, 509.

Richmond, Duke of, his comments on the Corn-laws, 26; his assertion, that farmers are all monopolists, erroneous, 89; his assertion, that tenantry are against the League, not true, 97; should study the English Grammar, [653] 100; his Protection Society in Bond-street, 116; ought to see the Covent Garden meetings, 126; tells us to trust to hereditary legislators, 179; his Order to be saved from him, *ib.*; his interesting romances, 193.

Rick-burning, what would have obviated it, 77.

Riding, West, cost of contest for, 163.

Rifle corps of Volunteers, formation of, 428.

Rifles, different values of, at different manufactories, 301.

Right, natural and legal distinctions between, 544.

Rights, Declaration of, 489.

Rip Van Winkle, squires like, when at dinner, 52.

Rivalry of expenditure, between England and France, endless, 269.



Rochdale, distress in (1862), 464; thanks of the speaker to the constituency of, 563; character of meeting at, Aug. 18, 1859, 578; rent of houses in, 585.

Roche, speech on banks of, 483.

Roebuck, Mr., his exposure of corruption, 38; motion of, on mischances at Sebastopol, 341; deals with whole policy of Government, 415.

Roman Catholics, speaker will not put a fetter on the consciences of, 289; have a right to their own form of Church government, 533; number of, in Manchester and Salford, 591; difficulty of teaching their religion at public expense, 591; sacrifice of, from education movement, 599; colleges for, would not be endowed by the House of Commons, *ib.*

Rothschild, Mr., his function as a bill-broker and his abilities—his opinion quoted, 44.

Rouen, meeting at, to promote Parliamentary reform, 26.

Russell, Lord John, his expedient, 14; in favour of fixed duty, 32; his bill against bribery, 38; his qualified support of Free-trade, 149; if he takes office, must suspend Corn-laws, 175; his letter to citizens of London, 180; value of his support, 201; his figures on the increase of the army and navy, 244; on Colonial relations, 257; on naval force of 1848, 264; his magniloquent phrases at Greenock, and in the City, 312; child and champion of revolution, 325; difference of his language in London and Vienna, 326; chief offender in stimulating clamour for war, 328; his instructions to Admiral Kuper, 365; said in 1849, that the two last wars were unnecessary, 392; his theory as to American blockade, 457; wrong guess of, during American war, 467; his defence of the Government in the Schleswig-Holstein affair, 481; his impatience and petulance, 538; on conditions of a Continental congress, 569; his pledge on reform, 585.

Russia, despotism, dangerous to Europe, 222; threatened invasion of, speaker's pamphlet on, 236; why not a naval power, 267; war with, by land, how it must be carried on, 311; aggressions of, not to be dreaded, 219; proposals of (1855), 323; pledges of, distrusted, 324; treaties already undertaken with, 325; speaker no friend to, and its despotism, *ib.*; exports of, and prospects, 330; in time of Napoleon's invasion, 334; war with, conduct of Americans during, 354; trade of, with England, 357; hypothetical case of, making demands on Turkey, 382; and Austria, not separated in loan of 1849 — speaker's opportunities of knowing, 403; attitude of, to this country (1850), 407; demonstration against Athens intended as a menace to, 418; why speaker attacked, 422; Lord Palmerston apologised for, 423; effects of demonstration in favour of Poles, on, 487; loan of, in 1849, and its objects, 516.

Russia, Emperor of, has signed an untruth, 405.

Russian loan, if not paid, a righteous retribution, 411.

Russian war, statesman's ground for, 312.

Russians, character of, gentle, 413.

Ryot, English farmer close to servility of, 137.

[654]

## S.

St. Alban's, electors of, 54.

Salamis, fifteen ships of war in Bay of, 416.

Salcina, six Ionian boats at, 417.

Salford, Roman Catholics in, 590.

Salthill, meeting at, 37, 161.

San Domingo, invasion of Spain by, 363.

Sandon, Lord, said it was impious to consume slave-grown sugar, 91; had no objection to Indian corn, 170.

Sanitary reform, necessity for, due to ignorance, 614.

Sattara, annexation of, a loss, 508.

Savages, insult of treating the French as, 521.

Savings-banks, deposits in, 108.

Saxon custom, of public meeting, 191.

Scarcity, artificial, may be produced, 71.

Schedule A, the fate of small boroughs if they formed a Protectionist majority, 191.

Schisms in Churches, imminent, or actual, 593.

Schleswig, disturbances in, 517.

Schleswig - Holstein, war with, and Denmark, its mischief to commerce, 397; affairs of, and its history, 480; question of, a ridiculous fiasco, 484.

School, should be connected with Mechanics' Institute, 613.

Schoolboy who whistled in the churchyard, like Protectionists who boast, 98.

School-houses, number and excellence of, no proof of education, 595; in America, the best buildings, 582.

Schoolmaster, a good, fills schools, 595.

Schoolmasters, to make teachers of religion, a reflection on clergymen, 605.

Schools, existing, need not be shut up, 594; source of fund for, 602; existing, not to be sacrificed, 605; free, benefits of, 608; common, social benefits of, 609.

Schwabe, Mr., difficulties of, in relation to education, 593.

Scientific knowledge, progress of, leads to increased expenditure, 394.

Scoble, Mr., on slave-grown sugar, 93.

Scotch farmers, sagacity of, 116.

Scotland, rental of, increased threefold in fifty years, 27; auctioneers and land-valuers scarce in, 65; proportion of price of wheat in, paid for rent, 75; agricultural labourers in, their condition, 83; dissension between Free and Old Kirk, 593; education of, 617.

Scott-Russell, Mr., his pamphlet on ship-building, 442.

Scrip, on whom loss of, falls, 402.

Scriptures, immutable morality of, condemns the bread-tax, 5.

Scutari, condition of sick at, 317.

Sea, horror of Russians for, 413.

Search, right of, in war of 1812, 318.

Seat in House of Commons, loss of, its consolations, 424; its value to speaker, 538.

Sebastopol, prospects of taking, 314; destruction of, will not destroy Russian power, *ib.*; capture of, its difficulty, 319; capture of, its object, 329.

Sebastopol Committee, on small arms, 300.

Secession, success of, why impossible, 361.

Secrecy, nothing to gain by, 125.

Secret Committee, on Indian affairs, functions of, 498; duties of, 502.

Sectarian quarrels, must no longer delay education, 609.

Secular, taunt against use of word, 600

Secular instruction, admitted to be good, 592.

Secular knowledge, value of, 596.

Secular system, in education, why inevitable, 590; not adverse to religious teaching, 594.

Security, alone warrants investment of capital on land, 135; how best obtained, 262.

Self-government, impossible to a nation under a system of intervention, 571.

Selfishness, suicidal to those who follow it in legislation, 584.

Sensation-policy, Lord Palmerston's a, 445.

Sentimental theory of taxation, not intelligible, 271.

Septennial Act, indefensible, 220.

[655]

Serfs in Russia, their probable action, 410; uprising of, likely, 414.

Session of 1864, its occupation by the Danish question, 480.

Settlements, marriage, Corn-laws intended to pay, 26.

Seven years, frequent duration of a contest, 556.

Seven Years' War, Dunkirk rebuilt in, 315.

Seward, Mr., writes so much, that he is in danger of writing on every subject, 351.

Seymer, Mr., on votes of tenant-farmers, 192.

Shams, dislike of English people to, 542.

Shaw, Joseph, speech of, at Oldham, 129.

Sheep-dog, tail of, had better be cut off at once, than a piece daily, 185.

Ships more cheaply built in England than in France, 473.

Ships of war, idleness and demoralisation in, 238; building of, renders persons liable to fine and imprisonment, 357.

Ship - yards, amount of building by private persons in 1864, 305.

Shirt-makers do not get wages according to the price of corn, 60.

Shuttleworth, Sir James, on educational destitution, 591.

Sign manual, superstitious reverence for, once, 59.

Silk, sources of, 357; growth of trade in Chinese, 383.

Silks rendered unsaleable, 195.

Simpheropol, supplies from, in Crimean war, 332.

Slaughter-houses, a name given to line-of-battle ships, 574.

Slave, only case in which wages and food rise and fall in price together, 102.

Slave-labour, in this, and in labour like this only do wages vary with price of food, 62; more costly than free, 92.

Slavery, objection to using sugar produced by, discussed, 43; how a preacher against, in America, was met, 46; attempt to raise false issues on, 49; contrary to first Christian precepts, 93; Free-trade best means for extinguishing, 93; sole cause of civil war, 361; war on behalf of, cannot succeed, 362; speaker's hope that it will be extinguished in America, 369; motive of American civil war, 489.

Slaves, Russians have vices of, 413; emancipation of, seldom attended by violence, 453.

Sliding-scale, a nostrum for improving the agricultural labourer, 110; a total hindrance to import of wheat, 63; time of importations under, 152.

Small arms, manufacture of, 299.

Smith, Adam, on rights of labour, quoted, 45; his opinion on slavery, 92; how he has been treated by Protectionists—quoted, 104; study of, recommended, 119; did not believe protective duties would ever be abolished, 281; speaker has attempted to popularise, 400; opposed to loans, 406; on free-trade in land, 493.

Smith, Sir F., his criticism on fortifications, 475.

Smith, Mr. Goldwin, his merits — his opinion cited, 366; his learning and accomplishments, 491.

Smith, Sir H., on war—says it is a damnable trade, 234.

Smithfield Show, farmers at, 116.

Smugglers, British, in China, 375; their risks, 376.

Smuggling, commitments for, 287.

Soap, tax on, abominable — advocates of, advocates of dirt, 280.

Soap-duty, scandal of, its abolition, 292.

Soldiers and sailors, veracity of, 380.

Somers, Mr., his speech on behalf of Free-trade, 89.

Somerset, Duke of, on ordnance and guns, 198.

Somersetshire, speech of farmer in, 432.

South, recognition of, discussed, 360; would not get cotton, 455; unavailing, 468.

Southwood-Smith, Dr., on ventilation, 119.

Sovereign, cannot by law grant a monopoly, 58.

**[656]**

Sovereigns, warlike and despotic, check to, 412.

Spain, unpopularity of England in, 248; called the beginning of Africa, 553.

Spaniards, wise maxim of, 247.

Spanish bonds, case of an unfortunate man who bought, 402.

Speculator, his relations to the farmer, 71.

Speech from Throne, how it used to be treated, 2.

Spencer, Lord, his Free-trade sympathies, 54; his opinion as to effect of Free-trade in corn, 62; his cattle farming, 63.

Spencer, Mr., on the climate of the Crimea, 332.

*Standard*, the, its willingness to replace the people on the rack, 160; its character of landlords, 195.

Stanley, Lord, his calumny on the manufacturers—his brilliant talents, 3; his opinion on what assisted the Emancipation Bill of 1833, 6; his opinion as to the effects of the Corn-laws, 18; his opinion on productiveness of land, 51; his misstatements not due to ignorance, *ib.*; his advice to Lancashire farmers improper, 88; his speech on agricultural improvement, 112; on necessity of giving security to the tenant, 136; consequences, if he takes a haughty line, 216; says it is a delusion (1863) to talk of reaction, 448; his estimate of expenditure, 494.

Starvation, lecture on behalf of, a Protectionist meeting, 65; periodical starvation checked by free-trade in food, 585.

States, American, magnitude of, 361.

States, small, have had greatest influence on mankind, 467.

Statesman, in what manner he can get a lasting reputation, 485.

Statesmen, French and English, desire a reduction of armaments, 268; fundamental error of, in relation to American civil war, 360; leading, on toleration, 535.

Statutes, plainly passed by landlords, 26.

Steam-basins, discovery of, importance of, 394.

Steam engines in 1848, the Government only just prevented from making, 305.

Steam navy, magnitude of, in 1849, 394.

Steining, character of Protectionist meeting at, 98.

Stock, effect of Corn-laws on feeders of, 141.

Stockport, effect of scarcity on price of cattle, 74; labour-market in, state of, in 1839, 104; speech at, 240.

Stowell, Mr. Hugh, on Papal aggression, 532.

Strike at Preston, its character, 615.

Stuarts, monopolies of, 58.

Subdivision of property, erroneous view of dangers of minute, 246.

Subscriptions, amount of, which the League intends to raise, 38.

Sudbury, electors of, 54.

Suffolk, county meeting in, 118.

Suffrage, universal, petitions in favour of, 541; extension of, guarantee of peace, 548; household, Mr. Cobden always voted for, 579.

Sugar, duties on, 21; effect of equalising duty on, 31; monopoly of, in hands of a most ignoble oligarchy, 43; effect of differential duties on, 91; objections to taking tax off, 127.

Sulphur, merchants of Holland sold, to make gunpowder to fire on themselves, 407.

Supplements of newspapers, taxes on, 292.

Surplus, how alone to be obtained, 262; two ways of welcoming a, 531.

Surrey, East, its representation, 156; electors of, and adults in, 155.

Sussex, condition of, in 1843, 24; electors of, and adults in, 555.

Sussex, West, speaker's estate in, 217; speaker's estate in, how managed; 225.

Swindling, Pacifico's case an attempt at, 419.

Switzerland, mode of its resistance, 554; compulsory education in, 595.

Syria, war in, and increase of forces, 245.

[657]

#### *T.*

Taepings, opinions of Lord Palmerston about, 367; other rebellions in China besides that of, 445.

Tagus, ships constantly in the, 238.

Tahiti, quarrel at, 250; arrest of English consul at, 396.

Talfourd, Mr. Serjeant, his speech on Parliamentary Reform criticised, 540.

Tallow, Russian, came during the Crimean war through Prussia, 456.

Tamboff, Lord Stanley's absurd statement about exports of, 51.

Tariff, reductions of, 21; changes in, by Sir R. Peel, and their effects, 73; change in, has caused no reduction in prices, 74; Chinese, a Free-trade one, 120; of Europe, will be changed if we change ours, 185.

Tarrant Hinton, condition of poor in, 81.

Tattersall's, odds about continuance of Corn-laws at, 131.

Tax on food, its amount per cent., 2.

Taxation, recommendation to reduce, how can it take effect, 2; readjustment of, a mystification, 177; opinion of Duke of Wellington on, 198; reduction of, impossible without reduction of expenditure, 253; effects of reduced, on the prosperity of the people, 261; direct, would vote for 10 per cent., 262; evil of subjecting different portions of United Kingdom to different modes of, 270; excessive, will enforce emigration, 281; interests of working men in, diminished, 343; limit of, limit of expenditure, 394; amount of, per head, at different times, 439; adjustment of, 493; manipulation of, nearly finished, 495; cannot be remitted, except expenditure is reduced, 510; equitable in France, 524; adjustment of, necessary, 543; revision of, a consequence of extended franchise, 583.

Taxes, clamour for reducing, 510.

Taxes, local, plan to transfer to Consolidated Fund, 215.

Taxpayers, should decide on necessity of armaments, 235; of England, will not collect debts of foreign fundholders, 410.

Taylor, Mr., his plan of reform, 221.

Tea, reduction of duty on, thought good, 127.

Tea duties, alteration of, 279.

Teatotallers, arguments of, on malt-tax, 275; political, 483.

Temperance, best assisted by education, 614.

Tenant and landlord, interests of, divergent, 204.

Tenant-at-will, how he votes, 192.

Tenant-farmer, franchise of, 192.

Tenant-farmers, good manners of, and absence of vulgarity in speeches of, 65; distressed in 1844, and why, 115; should not look to Dukes and Acts of Parliament, 116; should meet as one community, 229.

Tenants, made servile and dependent, and afraid of landlords, 136; will not pay in rent, game, and votes, 207.

Terror, Reign of, cause of foreign intervention, 469.

Texas, prize in American civil war, 491.

Thames Embankment, attempt to sacrifice interests of many to foolish and blind convenience of the few, in constructing, 447.

Thiers, M., why in 1846 he voted for augmentation of French navy, 264.

Thompson, Colonel, his comparison of Corn-laws to a spiral spring, 166; his protest against Tithe Commutation Act, 184; his services and sacrifices to Free-trade, 201.

Thorn, three or four have been to side of Government, 342.

‘Three ways,’ a phrase of Sir Robert Peel, 150.

Thurlow, Chancellor, his unnecessary pains to describe bribery in the House of Commons, 48.

Timber, reduction of duties on, 21.

Time and truth against all the world, 49.

*Times*, the, its opinion of Corn-laws, 13; its report on Welsh farmers and labourers, 84; a fair challenge by, 150; admirable article of, 151; its power and its opinion on naval [658] expenditure, 268; Correspondent of, on Crimean army, 328; character of, 338; said Lord Palmerston had been ‘boots’ to every administration, 339; its gross falsehoods and calumnies, 343; origin of its attacks on the speaker, 347.

Tithe commutation, protested against by Colonel Thompson, 184.

Tobacco, indirect effects of tax on, 285; adulteration of, 286.

Tocqueville, De, on the political morality of the English, 366.

Toleration, danger of retracing a single step in, 535.

Tories, broken by disruption of leaders, 180.

Tory, Whig and, extinct with Corn-laws, 169; Lord Palmerston as good as any, 456; Lord Palmerston the staunchest, 476.

Tory party, its motives not to be extravagant when in office, 476.

Toulon, occupation of, 315.

Towns, large, their sympathies with Free-trade, 190; no right of agriculturists to lay a tax on, 271.

Tract, published by the enemy, with a quotation from Henry Clay, its moral, 116.

Trade, revival of, no refutation of Free-trade principles, 33; not increased by violence, 383; not promoted by war, 518.

Trade disputes often originate in ignorance, 615.

Trader, how affected by Corn-laws, 61.

Trades-unions, their effect on legislation, 583.

Traffic with China, exceptional, and detrimental, 381.

Transit, cost of, important to get information on, 72.

Transport, difficulty of, in case of large army, 511.

Travellers, all attest decline of Turkey, 317.

Treasury, scanty control of, 295.

Treasury Bench, declamatory, balderdash and verbiage of, 322.

Treasury notes, Russian, issued in Hungarian war, 408.

Treaty, argument against, from its breach under a state of war, examined, 392.

Treaty, commercial, often obtained by force or fraud, 518.

Treaty of Paris, 1856, attempts made at, 450.

Trelawny, Mr., objections of, to secular education, 602.

*Trent*, affair, possible consequences of, 457.

Triennial Parliaments, propriety of, and a substitute for, 547; argument for, 559.

Trollope, Sir John, on the temper and spirit of tenants, 138.

Tropical countries, resolution of House of Commons on extending territories in, 500.

Trover, action of, how decided, 19.

Truth, benefited by lapse of time, 49.

Tudors, monopolies of, 58.

Tulloch, Col., his report and Lord Palmerston's conduct to him, 341.

Turk, the, statement of treaty with, false, 311.

Turkey, trick in, on the bakers, 117; Russia has abandoned her designs on, 312; no administrative authority in, 317; absurdity of maintaining independence of, 324; hypothetical case of Russian demands on, 382; defence of, supposed duty of England (1850), 407.

Turkish empire, condition of, and reforms in, 315.

Turks, the, degraded during the Crimean war, 316.

Turner, Mr., on distress of Devonshire farmers, 133.

Turner, Mr., Aspinall, his candidature, 342.

Turnpike-keeper, at Exeter, would not take toll from General Briggs, 95.

Tyrell, Sir John, says Corn-Jaw gives plenty, and security for plenty, 162; his cheers for Lord John Russell ominous, 535.

## *U.*

'Ugly rush' of sagacious old Conservative, 368.

### [659]

Undergraduates, ignorance of, 491.

Un-English, absurdity of calling the ballot, 547.

United Kingdom, must depend on foreign countries for supply of corn, 13; evil of being subject to different modes of taxation, 270; bound to relieve Lancashire distress, and why, 463.

United States, abundance of, 130; their navy and army, 220; their quarrels with England and France, 250; expense of diplomatic service of, 256; convention with, in respect of lakes, 267; collection of direct taxes in, 287; preponderance of, in Gulf of Mexico, 330; Foreign Enlistment Acts of, have gone counter to sympathies of American people, 353; power given to Government of, in 1838, 354; general belief in final separation of, which speaker

does not share, 360; should not be divided, 363; England three times on verge of war with, 379; would not take part in the affair of the *Arrow*, 387; treaty with, in 1794, and in 1814, 391; convention with, in 1818, about captured negroes, *ib.*; difficulties in, their probable effect on cotton prices, 436; their attitude at Treaty of Paris, 450; the great neutral Power among nations, 451; war with, in 1812, 1813, and exports of cotton, 457; speaker's experience of, 467; various opinions about civil war in, 487; elections in, 489; finance of, unexpected, and why, 494; treaty with, about the lakes, 513; toleration in, 533; constitution of, unfit for England, 567; amusement of, at English alarm of France, 573; suffrage in, various, 582; education in, why general, *ib.*; operation of ballot in, 586; their educational system, 592; education in, advocated, 608; commission to inquire into mechanical arts of, 616.

Urquhart, Mr., his passion for tacking on amendments, 396.

Utopia, peace question not a, 510.

Utrecht, Peace of, and Dunkirk, 315.

## V.

Vatican, Easter ceremonies in the, 536.

Vauban, builder of Dunkirk fortifications, 315.

Venice, aristocracy of, 13.

Veracity of soldiers and sailors, high, 380.

'Vicar of Wakefield,' cited to show what Protection is like, 64.

Vice, often springs from ignorance, 614.

Vices, social, indescribable, of Turks, 316; and weaknesses, inseparable, 362.

Vicenne, M., his speech at Rouen, 236.

Vienna, mixed commission at, 316; representation of, 546; Treaty of, torn to tatters, 364.

Villiers, Mr. C., his labours on behalf of Free-trade, 3; his complaint of the irrelevancy of speakers, 8; his services to Free-trade, 97; intention of not speaking on his motion, frustrated, 148.

Violence, charged against Free-traders, 65; will not be repaid by increased commerce, 388; does no good, 554.

Virgil, responsible for covenants in leases not to grow flax, 143.

Virtues and forces go together, 362.

*Vixen*, case of the, 395.

Voters, county, number of, in 1847, 555.

Votes, creation of, by League, how effected, 183; price of, as four o'clock approaches, 567.

Votes of money, never reduced, 495.

Vulgarity, coroneted, among monopolists, 65.

## W.

Wadsworth, Mr. (of New York), on English agriculture, 53.

Wages, abolition of Corn-laws said likely to reduce rate of, by Lord Stanley, 3; precisely contrary effect to be predicted, *ib.*; regulated by price of food, an opinion in 1814, 9; low, a sign of unprofitable manufacture, 10; cannot be kept at a fixed amount, 12; are not made low by low price of [660] food, 53; said to be regulated by price of corn, but not so, 60; high in Lancashire, when corn is cheap, 61; when do they vary with price of food? 62; large portion of labourers', spent in food, 76; fall of, between 1790—1844, 79; low, farmers not responsible for, 82; reduction of, by Free-trade, a fair clap-trap of Protectionists, 194; how far reduced by Free-trade, 205; increase of, test of national prosperity, 224; loss of weekly, by cotton famine, 562.

Wales, condition of farmers in, and labourers, 84.



Walker, Mr. Secretary, on Free-trade in America, 184.

Walker, Mr. Chas., proposed scheme for buying freeholds, 553.

Wallachia and Moldavia, protectorate of, 325.

Want, who are the best judges of, rich or poor? 13.

War, revulsion after its cessation, 209; a damnable trade, 234; use of Government establishments in time of, 306; demoralises representative system, 310; is it a luxury? 314; of 1812, character of, 318; two classes who abhor, 390; Jeremy Bentham's definition of, 398; happily, self-destroying, 404; effects of, on commercial intercourse, 433; serious, with what country possible, 455; in time of, ports should be as open as possible, 459; no place for reason and argument during, 466; disinclination to, in 1864, 482; cannot be made profitable, 485; profession of some men, 516; never without declaration, 521.

War, defensive, justification of, 390.

War, vessels of, fifteen sent to collect 6,000*l.*, 418.

War Secretary, most extensive tailor in the world, 303.

Ward, Mr., his Committee on special burdens on land, 148; on increase of navy in France, 265.

Wars, how they generally arise, 392; English, continual, 492; for the future, must be short, and why, 577.

Washington, his efforts to enforce international law, 352; policy of, adopted by United States, 451.

Waste, public, effects of, 249.

Watchwords of Whig party, according to Lord Grey, 421.

Waterloo, India annually costs a couple of battles of, 366; battle of, old soldier who showed model of, did not know what it was about, 392.

Watt, J., his saying to George III., 132.

Weaker State, not always in the right, 314.

Wealth, cannot be increased by legislation, but may be destroyed, 197; does not pay taxes, but industry does, 261; taxation has increased more than, 439.

Weavers, handloom, petition of, to House of Commons, 12; of damask, also designers of patterns, 612.

Webster, Daniel, his speeches, 117; on American education, 609.

Well-being of community, only effected when all are considered, 578.

Well-doing, plenty and cheapness promised reward of, 94.

Wellington, Duke of, his opinion on public questions, 6; his attitude on Corn-law, 166; on taxation, 198; his letter, its causes and effects, 234; never mentioned in Spain, 248; on Canadian lakes, 266; cost of armaments in his day, 343; Yeh's letters as sententious as those of, 385; public expenditure during administration of, 471; alarms felt about his administration, 562.

Wesleyans, schisms among, 593; body of, torn in twain, 603.

West Riding, made Liberal by freeholders, 553.

Western States, rule the Union, 469.

Whampoa, rapidity with which trade is carried on at, 382.

Whately, Archbishop, his 'Historic Doubts' cited, 441.

Wheat, prices of, in 1843, 25; prices of, in 1839–42, 34; high price of, followed by declining revenue—low, by rising, 42; prices of, 70; quantity of, grown per acre on a farm, 75; price of, in 1839, 103; sources of imported, in one year, 152; effects on price of, by [661] immediate abolition of Corn-law, 185.

Whig and Tory, extinct with Corn-laws, 169.

Whig party, course always taken by, 254.

Whigs, peace, non-intervention, and retrenchment to be watchwords of, 441.

Whippers-in, functions of, 481.

Whitbread, Mr., on Lord Castlereagh's powers as ambassador, 392.

Whitworth, Mr., his gun, 297.

Widow, claim of, to vote, if franchise a natural right, 544.

Wigwams, better than homes of agricultural poor, 81.

Wilderspin, Mr., advice of, on schools, 613.

Wilkinson, Mr., loose and trite charges of, 321.

William IV. and Dr. Dalton, anecdote of, 465.

Williams, Mr., his statistics of county voters, 555.

Willis's Rooms, compact at, 470.

Willoughby d'Eresby, Lord, his price of corn, 11.

Wilts, operation of New Poor-law in, 82; wages in, 83; compared with West Riding, 545; rents paid for small holdings in, 551.

Wiltshire, Mrs., her evidence as to agricultural labourers, 78.

Winchester, price of wheat at, 1839–43, 71.

Window-tax, agitation against, 275.

Wine, advantage of commercial treaty as regards, 427.

Wiseman, Cardinal, has not attacked the prerogative, 534.

Witchcraft, burning of old women for, as absurd as saying that agricultural labourer is benefited by high prices, 76.

Wolf, to get kid out of maw of, like extracting repeal of Corn-law from landowners, 131.

Women, Commission about such as were employed in agriculture, 76; would make better use of the franchise than their husbands do, 132; out-door employment of, in consequence of the conscription, 516.

Wood, Sir Charles, on taxes levied on land, 216.

Wool, inferences from price of, 73; abolition of duties on, 90; reduction of duty on, 131.

Woolwich, growth of factory at, 296.

Working class, not deluded about the effects of Corn-law in 1815, 9; taxation of, 289; good of, must be considered to effect the general good, 579; why existing electors should admit them, 580.

Working men, know the enormous falsehoods of monopolists, 128; their interests in diminished taxation, 343; praise given to, for their conduct, but to be expected, 465; not safely excluded from the suffrage, 496; silence of working men on suffrage, significant, *ib.*

Workmen, likely to be thrown out of employment in dockyards, and why, 305; English, driven out of France, 379.

Wormwood Scrubs, duels on, 565.

Worsley, Lord, his differences with the speaker, 18.

Wrexham, size of, and argument from meeting at, 509.

Wrightson, Mr., on trade with foreign countries, quoted, 53.

Writers, some, who merely worship success, 466.

Writers for press, defence of Czar by, ought to be well paid for, 408.

Wyse, Mr., negotiations of Baron Gros with, 414; his efforts for education, 592.

Yarmouth, practices at, in 1835, 47.

Year to year, no proper farming investment on such a tenure, 136.

Yeh, Governor, his answer to Sir J. Bowring, 371; reasoning of, instinctive, 374; his qualifications, 376; his letter to Sir J. Bowring, *ib.*; sententiousness of his letters, 315; letter of, *ib.*

**[662]**

Yeomanry, country gentlemen would call out, 495.

Yorkshire, prosperity of, due to cheapness of food, 213; West Riding of, compared with Wilts, 545.

Young, education of, the chief matter, 617.

Young men, should deal with great questions of policy, 461.

1815, legislation of, and price of corn intended to be guaranteed by, 70.

1835, taxation of, 242.