

RICHARD COBDEN, EDUCATIONIST, ECONOMIST
AND STATESMAN.

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Summary

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The aim of the thesis is to show that Richard Cobden (1804-1865) deserves to be given a significant place in the history of political, economic and social thought and also full credit for a range of statesmanship which went far beyond his well known part in the repeal of the Corn Laws and the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1860. Historians have not sufficiently recognised that Cobden sought to make fundamental changes in British society and that he tried to initiate them by piecemeal constitutional methods. He also believed that the British example would have a powerful influence on other countries and thus contribute to a new world order.

Cobden had a coherent, although unsystematised, philosophy, based on certain major assumptions. They were, firstly, that social progress depends on the interaction of economic, moral and religious and educational factors; secondly that progress towards a real political democracy depends on progress in the former areas. A special problem in explaining Cobden's philosophy is the fact that the ideas of two important thinkers with whom he was associated, George Combe (1788-1858), phrenologist (psychologist) and Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850), economist, have been belittled and neglected since Cobden's death. Therefore, the analysis of Cobden's thought necessitated an effort to "rehabilitate" these two thinkers.

Cobden's efforts to transform British politics and

society were only partially successful in Britain's adoption of free trade, a policy not properly understood by most statesmen and commercial men. His work for common schools, international schools, lyceums and educative popular newspapers was a failure and soon forgotten; his efforts to reform British foreign policy and implement arms control also failed. After his death, his followers failed to develop satisfactorily his ideas for application to social and international problems. These ideas still have considerable potential.

Abbreviations

C	Richard Cobden
Morley	J. Morley: <u>Life of Richard Cobden.</u> One volume edition of 1906.
<u>Speeches</u>	J. Bright and J.E.T. Rogers (eds.) <u>Speeches by Richard Cobden M.P.</u> (2 volume edition, 1870).
<u>Political Writings</u>	<u>The Political Writings of Richard Cobden.</u> One volume edition of 1886.
<u>Parl. Debates</u>	<u>Parliamentary Debates.</u> Hansard.
H. of C.	House of Commons.
H. of L.	House of Lords.
Ref.	Reference.
BFSS	British and Foreign School Society.
BL	British Library (London).
BLEPS	British Library of Economic and Political Science (London).
CP	Cobden Papers.
ICST	Imperial College of Science and Technology (London).
JSSL	Journal of the Statistical Society of London.
ME	<u>Manchester Examiner.</u>
MET	<u>Manchester Examiner and Times.</u>
MG	<u>Manchester Guardian.</u>
MRL	Manchester Reference Library.
MS	<u>Morning Star.</u>
MT	<u>Manchester Times.</u>
NLS	National Library of Scotland.
TRC	Thorold Rogers Correspondence.
UCL	University College London.
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles.

Photographs

1. George Combe. Between pages 40 and 41
2. Richard Cobden. 84 and 85
3. Frederic Bastiat. 237 and 238
4. Bastiat's monument. 237 and 238
5. Richard Cobden junior. 390 and 391
6. Bright, Cobden and Chevalier 463 and 464
7. Cobden, wife and eldest daughter 515 and 516

Preface and Acknowledgements

This thesis has its origins in a long essay for the Department of Education at the University of Oxford in 1960. It concerned the influence of Horace Mann and the American common school system on British educational reformers in the mineteenth century. Afterwards, I developed the theme for a Master of Arts thesis of the University of Liverpool. During my research, I became very interested in Cobden and came to realise that his ideas for educational reform were part of a wider social philosophy which deserved to be fully investigated. Hence the present thesis for the University of Sheffield. This has taken many more years than I anticipated, due partly to the pressure of teaching commitments at Kingston upon Hull College of Education (later re-named) and partly to the complexity of the subject.

During the entire period, I have been, at various times, helped and encouraged by many people: Mr. John Lello (Department of Education at Oxford University); Mr. Harry Pitt (Tutor in Modern History at Worcester College, Oxford University); Dr. James Murphy (my supervisor at the University of Liverpool); Professor J.C. Messerli (biographer of Horace Mann); Mr. Charles H. Taquey (French biographer of Cobden); Professor J-B. Duroselle (Sorbonne); Mr. S.W. Alexander (who revived the Cobden Club in the 1960's) and Mr. Oliver Smedley; Dr. M.A.T. Rogers; Mr. P.L.V. Mallet; Professor W.H.G. Armytage (my supervisor, before his retirement, in the Division of Education, Sheffield University). Mr. Peter Lucas, my present super-

visor in the Division of Education, appreciated my need for continuous encouragement, for which I am very grateful.

Many libraries have been very helpful, especially those overseas or inconvenient to visit often, chiefly University of California Los Angeles, Newberry Library (Chicago), Duke University (Durham, North Carolina), National Library of Scotland, West Sussex Record Office (Chichester), Manchester Reference Library. The Reverend Peter G. Hayman, former Principal of Dunford House, Cobden's old home, was helpful in giving access to certain books and records in his keeping. Dunford has been managed by the National council of Y.M.C.A.'s since 1952.

Mrs. Judith Blackmore typed the thesis cheerfully. My wife Barbro also helped with typing and correction. But, more important, she has been the rock on which everything rested.

Hessle, North Humberside,

May 1987.

PART ONE

AN ANALYSIS OF COBDEN'S IDEAS AND
THE FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

CHAPTER 1An introductory analysis of Cobden's social philosophy
and political activityThe unknown social philosopher

Richard Cobden (1804-1865) is buried in a simple grave in a Sussex churchyard but his thought and achievement lie buried deep under layers of misconception, bias, ignorance and preconceived ideas. He is quite unknown as a great social philosopher and social reformer. His achievements as leader of the Anti-Corn Law League (1839-1846), the powerful pressure group for free trade, and as one of the chief negotiators of the Anglo French Commercial Treaty of 1860, are acknowledged. But there are contrary and usually superficial appreciations of the ideas which lay behind his political actions. Sometimes he is depicted as the shrewd propagandist of the manufacturing class, fighting for cheaper food and lower wage costs, and wider markets overseas. At the other extreme, he is held to be an impracticable visionary who believed the widespread adoption of free trade would automatically ensure world peace.

Cobden's true standing as a social philosopher was glimpsed but not investigated in John Morley's biography published in 1881. Morley had the advantage of speaking to Cobden's wife and family and to a wide range of friends and relatives, so forming a unique impression of him as a man and a thinker. Morley wrote that "he never ceased to be the preacher of a philosophy of civilisation; and his views on trade

were only another side of views on education and morality...

In his intrepid faith in the perfectibility of man and society, Cobden was the only eminent practical statesman that this country has ever possessed, who constantly breathes the fine spirit of the French school in which the name of Turgot is the most illustrious¹.

What Morley vaguely perceived was that in Cobden's thought, economics, moral philosophy, psychology, education and politics formed parts of a grand whole. Religion, which Morley underrated in Cobden's case, should also be added to it. Later writers - J.A. Hobson, W.H. Dawson, I. Bowen, C. Taquey, D. Read - did not succeed in enlarging upon Morley's clues, although they shed light on some aspects of Cobden's thought and activities.²

There are a number of factors which largely explain the paradox of an unknown social philosopher. Firstly, Cobden's thought embraced the work of two men who had, in their specialist areas, developed new approaches to knowledge - George Combe (1788-1858), the Scottish phrenologist and moral philosopher and Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850), the French economist. Both have been generally belittled and neglected since their deaths, so contributing to the obscurity surrounding Cobden's ideas.

Secondly, Cobden's ideas about social change could not be easily systematised, even if he had wished it. Like Karl Marx's ideas, they presupposed the historically conditioned nature of society and the inevitably irregular course of progress. In fact,

Cobden believed that the systematic presentation of ideas was incompatible with the successful pursuit of reforms in Britain. He summed up his approach very neatly when he quoted Bacon in saying "If you have a handful of truths, open but one finger at a time".³

Thus it is not surprising that Cobden rarely mentioned general ideas of a philosophical nature in his letters or in his diaries (only kept on journeys abroad). To read the letters is to see an ingenious political mind at work on practical and not theoretical objects. He was disarming not only in the modesty of his manner but in his practical political discourse. Another fact adding to the inherent difficulty of systematising such a wide range of ideas was the progressive nature of the component disciplines. Cobden encouraged pioneering research and scholarship, for example, that of J.E. Thorold Rogers in political economy in the 1860's.

Finally, a particular feature of Cobden's thought contributed to the underestimation of its breadth and complexity: the conviction that reforms in British society depended on fundamental changes in international politics and the world economy, very inadequately summed up as free trade and non-intervention. He seems to have believed that there was no one else who could get these changes properly under way. Therefore the most sustained efforts of his life were made to achieve this aim. Hence his public persona as the man of "one idea", the "apostle of free trade".

Marx wrote of the necessity for a philosopher not simply to interpret the world but to change it. No man strove to do this more earnestly than Cobden, to the detriment of the philosophy which will be outlined as a framework for the detailed examination in the following chapters.⁴

2. Human nature, society and education

Cobden's view of human nature was the very core of his social philosophy. The philosopher who most clearly articulated his views was George Combe. Combe's theory of human nature has been almost totally unrecognised because it was linked to a belief in phrenology which was steadily rejected by scientists from the middle of the nineteenth century. J.S. Mill, in his Autobiography, asserted that the school of Experience and Association, which held that the main differences between individuals and races were the result of environmental factors was opposed by the school of Intuition which held that marked distinctions of human character are innate. Mill believed that the ideas of the Intuitionists were a great stumbling block to human improvement, without observing that Combe's philosophy could stand independently of phrenology and that it had a powerful potential for human progress.⁵

For Combe - and Cobden - man as an individual and as a member of society was part of a universe with design and purpose created by God. Man realised his potential in seeking to understand his purpose and in fulfilling it. Only through society could he

realise his individual potential because this required the fruits of co-operative efforts - food and material comforts, leisure and education. The true "nature" of society was defined as it was by Aristotle - what it is when its potential is fully developed. The challenge for mankind was to develop the natural environment and resources of the world in ways beneficial for all the inhabitants of every country.

Man was a creature of reason, moral capacities, instincts and emotions as complex as any depicted in the works of Shakespeare. The mind had three divisions: the intellectual faculties, the moral sentiments and the animal propensities. The intellectual faculties included the knowing, reasoning and reflective faculties; the moral sentiments included those of benevolence, conscience and veneration - the latter including a capacity to love God. The animal propensities included self-love, sociability, acquisitiveness and fear. None of the propensities were "bad" in themselves; they were subject to the guidance (or lack of guidance) of the enlightened intellect and moral sentiments. Nature intended that the propensities be controlled and directed to operate in ways mutually beneficial to the individual and society.

Nature attached "pleasure" and "pain" to the use of the mental faculties. Individuals whose conduct was based on a wise use of the faculties would be likely to find lasting happiness and prosperity, whereas those whose propensities became predominant would suffer in one way or another.

Equally as important as the behaviour of the individual for the good of society, was the collective behaviour of men in groups, whether in local communities, social classes or nations. The characteristics of human nature were reflected in society's value systems and political and social habits. The individual's self-love and fear are projected in concern for national security, self-esteem becomes national pride and acquisitiveness is shown in the effort to enrich the nation. These propensities were capable of ugly development as in the individual: national arrogance and aggressiveness, imperialism and the quest for wealth and security by warlike means.

National behaviour was rewarded or punished in the same way as in the case of individuals, but sometimes over long periods of time. The establishment of empires, the subjection of other nations, selfish class laws, led to "retribution" in the form of the destruction of war, economic disaster, man-made famines, the moral corruption of society.

Cobden's philosophy of education - and indeed his social philosophy as a whole - rested on these facts of individual and social psychology. To move mankind towards an ideal society, education must act at two levels. Firstly, the individual must understand and develop his physical and mental faculties in order that he applied his talents for his own good and that of society. Secondly, society must implement policies which create the conditions and opportunities for individuals to develop their talents and to live a civilised life. This responsibility included foreign policy: the establishment of a system of inter-

national relations conducive to peaceful competition in commerce by private traders of all nations and the development of a dynamic world economy.

Cobden envisaged an ascending order of education from infancy to the level of public opinion and government. First came infant schools with a special emphasis on moral education. Schooling for the whole community ~~continued~~ ^{should} up to the age of fourteen in common schools (comprehensive) with a broad curriculum. Then pupils might have further schooling and go on to colleges and universities according to talent or inclination. Cobden wanted a wide range of new subjects such as modern history, political economy, natural science available in these institutions. For those at work, he wanted mechanics institutes and Colleges of Design for vocational courses and Athenaeums, Lyceums and public libraries for more general education, intellectual entertainment, and recreation.

Finally, and for Cobden personally the most challenging and important area of all - the education of society's decision makers: members of Parliament, civil servants, merchants and manufacturers, indeed all who had - or sought to possess - the vote. In this diffuse and complex field, Cobden hoped to instil new ideas through pamphlets, newspapers, works of scholarship, and the awakening of the public mind on particular issues through "agitation". This did not mean demonstrations in the streets, but meetings, petitions, deputations, and circular literature.

Cobden did not expect to achieve such a truly comprehensive system of education from infancy to adulthood in his lifetime, although he made considerable efforts

to achieve it. He realised that much depended on society itself approaching a "higher level of civilisation", as he would put it. Schools and education reflected society. Even a modest standard of education required big changes in living standards and attitudes. Working people needed wages high enough for them to forego the paid labour of their children; a generation of parents who appreciated the value of education was wanted. The government must be made to realise the importance of education for developing science and industrial resources as well as for making skilled workmen. The churches must see the need to co-operate with government in the task of education. Thus the main thrust of Cobden's work for thirty years was to create the economic and intellectual climate in which the real education of the people could begin.

3. Economic growth and social progress.

Cobden's view of economic growth and social progress was derived from Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations and was, after 1845, partly systematised by Bastiat. It should now be recognised as a new paradigm of political economy, distinct in many features from the "Classical Economists" of the Ricardian school.

Cobden believed that continuous economic growth throughout the world was the means of freeing humanity from poverty and starvation and of creating a civilised life in which man's moral and religious potential would be gradually realised. The source of this conviction was the idea that Christianity was "progressive", that understanding of the revalation of the Bible was deepened by the increase of knowledge about human nature and the

environment and the means of mastering it. The industrial revolution pointed the way forward to an integrated world economy and the true brotherhood of mankind.

The religious source of Cobden's beliefs explains his conviction that the economic order must foster individual choice and responsibility. Otherwise, there is no moral and religious development in the individual. The private ownership of property and capital and the freedom of the individual to exchange his labour and products for what he needs were fundamental. Thus the acquisitive instinct per se was not in conflict with Christian ideals, but a means to moral ends if the individual was made morally aware. Education must make the individual capable of choosing courses of action which are in his best self interest - generally those in which his interest promotes the general good of the community.

Competition in the economy indirectly encouraged good service to the community by reason of the choices which consumers made in the market. This was the most basic "school" of best self-interest. Also, really free and unobstructed competition in wide markets was a big check to the growth of monopolies, the product of sectional and anti-social interests.

The greatest material advantage of an economy based on a completely free exchange of goods and services was that it would become infinitely expansive, as standards of living rose in Britain and other countries within the free trade system. Expansion caused demand for goods and for the labour to make them. A strong and continuous demand for labour was one of the chief determinants

for high wages, and the best guarantee of steady employment. The workers in industry and agriculture had a huge stake in the creation of an expanding economy.

Free trade, besides being a major stimulant of economic prosperity, had the eventual effect of making war more difficult. By creating an international division of labour free trade made national economies inter-dependent. War for commerce or territory would cease to have any relevance for national self-interest. Countries like individuals would be drawn to a true perception of their interests, which were identical with those of Christian morality.

4. The responsibilities of government

Cobden's attitude to government is usually quite misunderstood. It is regarded as being "negative", mainly, it seems, from the fact that he was opposed to legislative restriction of the hours of labour of adults in mills and factories. In fact, he shared Bastiat's view that a science of government could only be gradually developed on the basis of much further study of political economy, when the effects of state intervention or non-intervention could be more clearly understood.⁶

Briefly, Cobden's attitude to legislation restricting the hours of work of adults reflected his belief that it was the wrong way to remedy the problem of excessive hours. In the 1840's, he thought that the depressed economy had driven masters and employees (parents and children) to work long hours to try to increase meagre profits and meagre wages. The true remedy lay in measures to create steady prosperity and employment, good profits and higher wages.

Far from denigrating government, Cobden was convinced of the need to work gradually for the achievement of government which was free from class or sectional prejudices, subject to the scrutiny and control of a Parliament elected by the universal suffrage of a well educated and prosperous people. Government had to implement the responsibilities of promoting education and flourishing economy. On the other hand it had to exercise restraint, particularly in foreign policy; to be free from national prejudice and jealousy, the desire for political or military supremacy over other countries, and the itch to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries. For only in such a pacific international order could free trade create a dynamic world economy.

The problem which Cobden grappled with for over thirty years was how to get the transformation of political opinion - the educated and prosperous electorate - before which there could be no real construction of government.

5. Class, ideology and political strategy

Cobden's political career is a paradox. He was an M.P. from 1841 until his death in 1865, with a two year break on 1857-59, and yet he never attempted to make a career within any existing party, refused offers to serve in Cabinets and did not seek to form another party. The so-called "Manchester School" was only a grouping of M.P.s with broadly similar ideas but without defined policies or discipline. Cobden thought that a new party was needed to challenge the Tories and Whigs - indeed, he had high hopes of Sir Robert Peel in 1846 - but he saw his own role as a grand strategist, transforming the very context of

British politics. To do this, he had to be free from party constraints.

Cobden recognised that Britain's political system reflected the hard facts of the social structure, the distribution of property and wealth and the dominant political culture. The greatest obstacle to change was the inertia of ideas: the tendency for the ideology of the ruling class to remain fixed by habit without responding to changes in society and the economy and also its power to dominate, by snobbery and tradition, the outlook of new social contenders for power and status. Cobden was acutely aware of the problem of "false consciousness" as Marxists called it.

The landed aristocracy had been forced to make some political concessions to the middle class by the Reform Act of 1832 but the latter had failed to make much practical use of them. The two aristocratic parties, the Tories and the Whigs continued to share political power, ever ready to absorb persons of industrial wealth into its ranks. The general outlook of the aristocracy, ill-educated to understand the social changes brought by the rapid development of manufacturing industry, was fearful of further loss of privileges.

At the bottom of the social scale, the working class had no vote. It was propertyless, poverty-stricken, and largely uneducated in the formal sense, except for a small section of skilled workers. In the industrial areas it was uncertain about the benefits of machine industry. The working class attitude to the middle class manufacturers was suspicious, since it was not clear that there was any

identity of interests between them.

The middle class had failed to throw its weight into the political arena. A large section possessed the vote but was inclined to cast it in favour of Tory or Whig landowners. The bulk of the middle class was in the ideological and cultural thrall of the aristocracy. The industrialists received a generally narrow education. Their business interests forced an appreciation of economic matters but they failed to see that the rise of manufacturing industry required a new set of national policies.

Cobden's strategy of reform was based on this analysis. He rejected the Chartist argument that universal suffrage was the key to all other reforms. If achieved (and he thought it unlikely without violent revolution since the middle class would combine with the aristocracy to prevent it) it would simply create a huge and uneducated electorate. The way forward was to get reforms which could be shown to be in the best interests of the middle class and aristocracy and wait for these to undermine the system from within. Cobden was convinced that the industrial middle class was, despite its faults, potentially the spearhead of reforms if awakened to its real interests. Its task was to challenge aristocratic control of the political machine, implement reforms in the economy, in education and foreign policy and conciliate the working class.

Asa Briggs has suggested that Cobden's leadership of the Anti-Corn Law League was "middle class Marxism". This

is an appropriate analogy in so far ~~that~~^{as} Cobden held that the middle class had a liberating mission like the proletariat in Marx's philosophy. But there the similarity ends, for Cobden did not advocate "class war". The task of the League was to show that the true interests of all classes were identical, although Cobden accepted that pressure needed to be applied to the aristocracy. In Marx's case, the Communist party had to show that the interests of the working class and property owning classes were antagonistic and "class struggle" was inevitable.⁷

By the late 1850's, Cobden became disillusioned with this form of middle class strategy. The middle class, after the repeal of the Corn Laws, did not bring about the transformation of the British political scene. Middle class radicals remained a minority in Parliament. Cobden concluded that the middle class needed the pressure of working class voters to perform its reforming mission. Consequently, in the last five years of his life, Cobden urged other radicals to work for a Reform Bill enfranchising a substantial section of the working class. This course no longer held out the dangers of the 1830's and 1840's, since there had been much working class self-education over twenty years and working class leaders were moderate and practical in their outlook.

6. An overview of Cobden's reform activities

Cobden's career presents a formidable pattern of activities which may be arranged in six categories for the sake of better understanding. His choice of activity partly reflected what he thought would be most effective in any given political and economic situation and partly

the enthusiasm of reformers in any particular field to shoulder the work of agitation. He worked on the assumption that one could observe the ripeness of an issue for agitation by the stirrings of public debate. There was often overlap in agitations. Only during the Anti-Corn Law League (1839-1846) did he concentrate on one issue to the exclusion of all others.

The first category is work in Parliament between 1841-57 and 1859-65. Cobden concentrated in the debating chamber and in committees on the issues of the economy, finance, foreign policy and education.

The second category is that of pressure groups to mobilise public opinion in favour of specific reforms. In 1836, he initiated efforts in Manchester to agitate for national education. From 1837 to 1839, the Manchester Society for the Promotion of National Education urged legislative action by Parliament. In 1837 and 1838 he fought successfully for elected municipal government in Manchester. From 1839 to 1846, he master-minded the campaign against the Corn Laws and laid the basis for mid-Victorian prosperity. He did not take an active part (for tactical reasons) in the Lancashire Public School Association formed in July 1847 when he was abroad. But he did take a leading part in its successor the National Public School Association from 1850. Both the LPSA and NPSA aimed to establish a system of rate-supported comprehensive schools in Britain.

From 1848 he supported the Liverpool Financial Reform Association and from 1849 the Metropolitan Financial and Parliamentary Reform Association. From 1851 he was

prominent in the Society for the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge. This was in effect a campaign to establish a cheap daily press, regarded by Cobden as an important means of educating public opinion.

The third category is that of voluntary efforts in school and adult education. In 1835-37 and 1840-41 he opened infant schools for the children of his workers at Sabden (near Burnley) and Crosse Hall (Chorley) in Lancashire. In 1835-36, he was one of the chief promoters of the Manchester Athenaeum, an institution designed to cater for the intellectual and physical recreation of managers, clerks and others in commercial life. Then, in 1838, the Society for Promoting National Education opened two schools partly to serve as examples for a national system. Also in 1838-39, Cobden and others established three Lyceums - Mechanics Institutes of a new type - catering for the leisure interests of the working class as well as providing classes in basic education. In 1853-54, Cobden helped to establish the Manchester Model Secular School, a free school partly intended to challenge the Privy Council regulations permitting grants only to schools in which the Scriptures were read daily. Finally, in 1862-65, he was a leading promoter of the International Education Society which aimed to establish linked schools in Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

The fourth category is efforts to influence the general climate of political opinion. This includes Cobden's seven pamphlets, articles in journals such as Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, and the establishment of newspapers advocating his ideas - the Manchester Examiner (1846)

and the Morning Star (1856). Other forms of influencing opinion were private talks with foreign statesmen (e.g. continental tour of 1846-47) and the Peace Congress movement.

The fifth category is Cobden's private negotiation - at least in the early stages - of ventures which required great delicacy and tact. Good examples are Sir John Pakington's Education Bill of 1857 and the Commercial Treaty with France in 1859-60.

The sixth category is Cobden's encouragement of land ownership: the freehold land societies from 1849 onwards, and the land development scheme of the Illinois Central Railroad.

Summary

This chapter argues that COBden's pursuit of practical reforms in domestic and foreign policy was underpinned by a profound social philosophy of human progress. The reasons why this philosophy was almost entirely hidden from view to contemporaries and to historians are explained.

The main elements of Cobden's philosophy, strategy of reform, and specific reform activities are then outlined in order to provide a framework of understanding for the detailed analyses of subsequent chapters.

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CHAPTER TWOCobden's character and formative years1. The paradoxes of Cobden's early life.

There are two paradoxes in Cobden's early life.

Arriving for a holiday in the United States in June 1835, he mentioned in a letter to his elder brother Frederick, "those dreams of human exaltation, if not of perfection, with which I love to console myself".¹ And yet there is scant evidence in his letters, or in the memoirs of those who knew him, of the scope of his ambitions to promote revolutionary change in the world. The best evidence is his two pamphlets England, Ireland and America (1835) - published on the eve of his departure for the United States and Russia (1836), two seminal works badly neglected by historians, perhaps because they appear to be ephemeral pamphlets about foreign policy. The second paradox is that despite writing the first pamphlet, he did not at the time have any intention of actively participating in politics. Even when the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 brought him national fame, he nearly retired from active politics. He never pursued a conventional political career.

An explanation of these paradoxes may be found in his character and early life. Alcide Fonteyraud, a young Frenchman converted to free trade, who met Cobden at a League meeting in 1845, described him thus:

"Cobden is at the height of his powers, if power is the right word to apply to a person whose lively intellect is housed in a delicate constitution. His calm and meditative features, furrowed over by the deep lines of meditation and reflection bear witness to his efforts

and struggles. He might be mistaken for a hermit, if the ardour that sparkles in his eyes did not mark him as the leader of a party. It is from the mildness of his manners and his simplicity, worthy of Franklin, that Cobden has obtained the sympathies by which he is surrounded".²

All descriptions, British as well as foreign, attest to Cobden's modesty - almost self-effacing - his genial and friendly manner with men and women of all conditions, his lack of prejudice, and single-heartedness. But Fonteyraud's sketch is the most penetrating in that it suggests that behind the mask of a genial and practical politician was a man who liked to be by himself - a solitary thinker, in fact. This hypothesis of two sides to Cobden's nature - one deeply studious and intellectually reflective, the other an energetic and outgoing personality - seems to be the key to understanding his development.

Until roughly 1835 - aged 31 - there was no interplay between the two. But when his pamphlets - significantly anonymous - aroused widespread interest, he was pushed by his friends into active politics. Then the energetic and practical man drew on his great store of knowledge about politics, history and economics in a very unique way.

2. Cobden's family and upbringing.

The Cobdens were a family of yeoman stock in Sussex. Richard was born in a farmhouse called Dunford near Midhurst on 4 June 1804. The farm belonged to his grandfather Richard. When he died in 1809, the farm was sold in order to divide the estate between his son William and four daughters. William took his wife and seven children - later eleven - to a similar farm not far off. Richard -

the second son and fourth child - went first to a private school in Midhurst run by Philip Knight. Cobden's biographers have been much confused about this school. Mr. Gilchrist (1865) spoke of the "grammar school", Morley (1881) of a "dame school", and W. Robertson (1884) of "Midhurst Grammar school under the mastership of Mr. Philip Knight". Cobden himself once referred to "little Knight, my old schoolmaster", but it is evident that Knight had his own small school not connected with the Grammar School.³

In 1814, William Cobden fell into debt, sold his farm and for the next few years moved from house to house with his large family, always hard up. Richard's education was saved by his mother's brother in law (not uncle, as biographers describe him) R.W. Cole, who managed a warehouse in London in partnership with Partridge. Cobden was sent to Bowes Hall owned by Mr. George Clarkson, at Bowes in the North Riding of Yorkshire. There were three other boarding schools in the village, one of which, W. Shaw's Academy, was visited by Dickens in 1837 when he was gathering material for his description of Dotheboys Hall in Nicholas Nickleby. All these schools offered poor or indifferent parents the advantage of "no vacations". Cobden spent five years at Bowes Hall during which time he apparently did not go home.

An advertisement for the school promised that "young gentlemen are plentifully boarded and carefully instructed by Mr. Clarkson and able assistants in the English, Latin and Greek languages; Writing and Arithmetic, Book-keeping, Mensuration and the most useful branches of Mathematics;

the French language taught by a native of France".⁴

Some of Cobden's letters show that the realities of life in the school were harsh, and not unlike "Dotheboys Hall". It is difficult to estimate the influence of the school, since there is no record of Cobden referring to it in later life. But it is certain that he strongly disliked the narrow curriculum and Gradgrind teaching. Cobden, who read the works of Pestalozzi and de Fellenberg in the 1830's, if not earlier, sent his son Richard in 1852 to what he regarded as the best progressive school available, Dr. Heldenmaier's Pestalozzian Institution at Worksop.

In 1819, Cobden became a clerk at his benefactor's muslin and calico warehouse in London - Cole and Partridge. Until he was sent out as a traveller in 1825, his duties were confined to London. He developed a love of reading, saving up to buy books and also borrowing from the library of the London Institution. Unfortunately, his letters to his family up to 1834 do not throw any light on his intellectual development. But that period was crucial for every aspect of his mind and personality. The outgoing side of his nature was given the first real opportunity to grow and he nurtured the ambition to go into business on his own account. Ambition also showed itself in the quiet studious side: first as a playwright and secondly as an anonymous political writer. It was only after the success of his first pamphlet in 1835 that he was pushed by his friends into active politics and the two sides of his personality became complimentary.⁵

To help understanding, it is useful to divide this ten years into three shorter periods: 1825-28, 1828-35. In 1825, Cobden became a traveller for Cole and Partridge

(Partridge and Price from 1826). He went as far as Ireland and Scotland. His family letters show many of his likeable characteristics: his pleasure in good company and tolerance of bores and "low brows", his appreciation of landscape and love of poetry - especially Burns - and literature. He was deeply inspired by the Romantic movement. Most significant of all, is the acuteness of his occasional observations of social and economic conditions. In Ireland he deplored the poverty of the people but did not attribute this to fecklessness as it was hardly their fault. He noted misrule, lack of education, and the absence of a middle class.

Another letter reveals, very unusually, some of his reading. On top of a stage coach in Scotland, he sat next to a young Irish lady: "a most determined blue-stocking... Well, we ranged from Walter Scott to Burns, from thence to Cobbett and O'Connell, then to Spurzheim and the phrenologists, not to mention Voltaire, Rousseau and all the English dramatists".⁶

The reference to phrenology is especially interesting for about 1825 he wrote a play called The Phrenologist which he first sent to the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden with a note stating that "I have introduced but little of phrenology and in that little I have not lectured upon so dry a subject but aimed principally at burlesque".

Rejected by the proprietor, Cobden sent the play to Drury Lane and to the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, without success. Each time, he wrote under the pseudonym "Robert Crawford". The whole correspondence covers eighteen months, until January 1828, a persistence which shows ambition to become a playwright. Events fifteen years

later give this episode a curious perspective, when he took the leading part on the stage of Drury Lane and Covent Garden in the great meetings of the Anti-Corn Law League.⁷

3. Cobden's religion.

In September 1828, Cobden established his own business partnership with two others, Gillet and Sheriff. They made an arrangement with Fort Brothers, a Manchester firm of calico printers, to sell goods on commission. It was a decision which eventually changed the course of Cobden's life, for it led in 1832 to the purchase of one of Fort's mills at Sabden, 28 miles north of Manchester, and Cobden's identification with the cause of Manchester manufacturers.

It is probable that the most important development in his thinking in the years 1828-32 was a belief that Christianity was progressive. His friend later in life, Michel Chevalier, the French economist, pointed out in his obituary of Cobden:

"Richard Cobden fut rallié à la liberté du commerce par la politique et par le sentiment religieux par excellence, l'amour des semblables, et non par l'économie politique."

His biographer J. Morley quite underestimated the strength of Cobden's religion. He noted that Cobden had by his own declaration a strong sympathy for all who acted on religious beliefs, but says that Cobden's own religion had little "spirituality" in it. If by this is meant that Cobden's religion was concerned more with this life than the next, it is correct, but this cannot rule out a

powerful belief in God's presence in the affairs of this world. A significant indication of this is shown in a letter Cobden wrote during his younger brother Miles' fatal illness in 1830:

"Without possessing the slightest trait of superstition or even enthusiasm in my religion, I must say it is my conviction and ever will be so, that this dear boy was assisted last night by an especial interposition of the divine spirit".⁸

There are two more important pieces of evidence about the nature of his religion. He wrote in 1846 that he was resolved "to adhere to the religion of my mother, who was an energetically pious woman.". Cobden was brought up in the Church of England and attended services of that Church throughout his life. Characteristically, he avoided discussion of theological matters, and worked easily with men of all religions and none. But his unobtrusive religion (a matter of both temperament and political wisdom) comprehended very powerful and radical ideas. His wife Kate recalled:

"Soon after we were married (in 1840) I was very much struck by a remark of his in talking over the errors and bigotry of the different Churches. He concluded by saying "Well, well, after all, the mere acknowledgement of the Christian creed is a mighty gain to humanity and we must not forget that it is progressive."⁹

In a surviving part of Cobden's library there are two books which show that he was concerned with the question of progressive revelation in men and nature. The first is by Thomas Erskine: Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion (7th edition, 1823)

and the second is by P.N. Shuttleworth: The Consistency of the Whole Scheme of Revelation with Itself and with Human Reason (1832). It is probable that the Quaker view of man as having within him an "inner light" - the spark of Christ - comes nearest to Cobden's essential faith. Some of his closest friends were Quakers who applied their religious principles to social problems - Henry Ashworth, Joseph Sturge, and Thomas Thomasson.¹⁰

A book by George Combe had a most profound influence: The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects (1828). Not only did it completely change Cobden's attitude towards phrenology - he no longer saw it as a "parlour game" to be made fun of - but it also led to a lifelong friendship with Combe from 1837. Combe's influence will be fully examined in Chapter Three and it must suffice here that the central message of this book was that God intended mankind to develop the world's resources for the happiness of all and the education of the whole community was the prerequisite for this.

Cobden valued the Bible for its moral teaching rather than its account of creation. Some entries in his American diary of 1835 show that he saw no incompatibility of the discoveries of physical science with religious belief. At the Niagara Falls he wrote some verse in the visitors' book including the line "God's Majesty is imaged here" - and also mused on how the seven mile gorge had been formed. "What countless ages must have elapsed during such an operation!" Then, three weeks later in the Hudson valley: "Will geology ever discover the secrets of the earth's past changes? Why not?"

On a second visit to the Niagara Falls in 1859, after 25 years of politics which might have turned him into a cynic at least, he could still write in his diary:

"It is a spectacle suggestive of ideas of eternity and omnipotence. One is almost brought to kneel and pray. I wish Byron had seen this the most sublime of moving scenes that he might have given us a companion verse to his description of Mont Blanc which is sublimity in repose".¹¹

For Cobden, Christianity housed all the sciences, moral social and physical, for they were all concerned with the investigation of a potentially beneficent order of nature. Religion did not provide a justification for poverty and war. On the contrary, it pointed to the sciences as instruments for discovering wherein lay the welfare of mankind.

4. The "open university" of Manchester.

In January 1832 Cobden took up residence in Manchester where he was in charge of the main office and warehouse. George Foster, the manager of the print works at Sabden under the previous owner, was confirmed in his position. Cobden's other partners, Gillett and Sheriff, stayed in London to manage the warehouse there. Cobden determined to make a success of the business but his intellectual and religious insights had raised large questions in his mind which were no longer containable as a leisure pursuit but demanded his whole commitment. This must be the meaning of the enigmatic statements in letters to his brother Frederick in 1832 which say he is imbued with a "Bonapartian" spirit and "full of ambitions, hopes and

schemes almost boundless... and yet if I ask what is all this yearning after? I can scarcely give myself a satisfying answer. Surely not for money...". The ambition which he settled on, certainly by 1834, was to conquer Europe and the world not with the sword but with ideas.¹²

Lacking any personal record by Cobden, or by anyone who knew him at that time, it is difficult to be absolutely certain about all the major influences on him. It is necessary to make reasonable deductions about his reaction to the Manchester environment and local politics. There is also the very important matter of his reading.

Manchester was a perplexing city, both exciting and depressing. The city of 200,000 people was the chief centre of the new age of steam driven machinery and large factories, with tremendous potential for lightening the load of physical toil and raising the standard of living. But there was no sense of direction in the community. There was no concerted thought or action about reforming local government, educating the people in environmental improvement, or pressing the needs of industry in Parliament. Lacking a town council, the city was administered according to mediaeval manorial custom and ad hoc committees. The city only obtained representation in Parliament in 1832 and although the two seats were won by the liberals, the Tories had a strong base in the electorate. Half the merchants and manufacturers voted Tory and at least a quarter of the operatives and artisans possessing the vote (16% of the electorate) also voted Tory. Politics centred on the rivalry of the two factions for local influence

rather than on issues concerning the future of Manchester and the welfare of the whole community. The quarrels of the Church of England (Tory) and the dissenting chapels (Liberal) about parochial and narrow religious issues were another dominant feature.¹³

The myopia of most of the so-called educated and propertied class was however qualified by the existence of a very small but highly progressive intellectual community centred on the Literary and Philosophical Society, the Statistical Society (established in 1833) and the Cross Street and Mosley Street Unitarian Chapels. The Statistical Society addressed itself to major issues such as working class living conditions and education, and one of its members Dr. James P. Kay (later Kay-Shuttleworth) had published in 1832 a stimulating pamphlet On the Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Class Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester. Cobden was not elected a member until 1835 but he undoubtedly met members in the course of business and knew about their ideas and activities. They were an energetic group of men with whom he co-operated closely from the autumn of 1835.

Cobden's understanding of his own country was deepened by contrast with what he saw abroad. In 1833 he went to France and 1834 to Switzerland to search for better designs for calico prints. These were the first of many journeys about which Cobden later commented: "I have travelled much, and always with an eye to the state of the great majority, who everywhere constitute the toiling base of the social pyramid." The Swiss visit made a special impression: "The people of this country are, I believe, the best

governed and therefore the most prosperous and happy in the world". The chief explanation was the free trade policy of Switzerland which encouraged manufacture of high quality and cheapness in a country with meagre natural resources. Also he noticed the prevalence of educational institutions especially in the Protestant cantons - a fact which he thought was very significant and which will be discussed in Chapter Five.¹⁴

Complimentary to all that he witnessed and heard, is his reading. This was a matter of private study and there is no evidence that he was in any way guided or directly influenced by anyone else. He did not join any societies in Manchester until 1835, nor did he have any friend or relative who was capable of influencing his intellectual development in the way that James Mill influenced his son. But far from Cobden's "hermit" reading exerting a narrowing influence on him, it may well have been the decisive factor in producing the unique quality of his philosophy. His thinking was free of the constraints which are often unconsciously placed on a student's development by fashionable schools of thought which are often prevalent in universities or particular intellectual circles. Cobden was thus free to pursue his reading and lines of thought as he found fruitful. He had no commitment to produce something acceptable to an academic community or any group of intellectuals. For example, he did not have Ricardian economics drummed into him like John Stuart Mill, who never succeeded in shaking off the influence.

It is impossible to read his pamphlets, especially the first two, without being struck by the truth of his

own remark in England, Ireland and America: "we who are fond of digging deep into the foundations of causes...". This cast of mind, in one who studied society, made him attach the highest importance to history, and indeed all his pamphlets deal with contemporary problems in a historical context. Amid the numerous authors mentioned or quoted in the pamphlets of 1835 and 1836, the names of Adam Smith, Burke, Hume and Montesquieu are significant, for they are all writers with a philosophical and yet earthy grasp of the historical development of society. In a speech of 1844, he spoke of "Adam Smith, Burke, Franklin, Hume and others, the greatest thinkers of any age".¹⁵

But the full extent of his reading in the years 1832-35 cannot be judged from the large number of writers mentioned in the first pamphlet. There were thinkers whom he never mentioned in any speech or publication because he knew that many people were prejudiced against them, particularly on religious grounds. George Combe was one of them. Cobden mentioned him once in a speech only because Combe was on the same platform. His reasoning was not intellectual cowardice, but shrewd politics. His concern was always to present the most convincing arguments and especially those which were difficult to attack. To mention names or ideas which simply gave opponents the opportunity to deliberately misinterpret or sidetrack arguments was foolish. Cobden put it like this: "I am cautious to a fault and nothing will be done by me that has not the wisdom of the serpent, as much as harmlessness of the dove in it".¹⁶

A political movement of the greatest importance for the development of Cobden's thought, of which there was no mention in his letters nor in his pamphlets, was the Saint Simonian movement. Count Henri-Claude de Saint Simon (1760-1825) was a French philosopher and reformer who advocated the fundamental reorganisation of European society. The most central idea is that the chief business of government in all European states is the development of the natural resources of Europe on a co-operative basis for raising the standard of living of the masses, material and cultural. He also believed that his policy needed a driving force, a "new Christianity" to replace traditional Christianity which seemed incapable of accepting modern science and radical social change. The movement continued to evolve after Saint Simon's death culminating in the formation of a "church" under "Le Père" Enfantin. Finally it was suppressed by the French government in 1832.

The Saint Simonians sent two missionaries, Charles Duveyrier and Gustave d'Eichthal to Britain for three months in 1831-32, where they met many reformers and intellectuals. They planned to visit Manchester but there is no evidence that they did so. But they sent their literature to many libraries including those in Manchester. Saint Simonism was widely discussed in periodicals and newspapers. Generally, it was severely criticised for its rejection of the established Christian churches and of revealed religion, for advocating female emancipation and "immorality", and for authoritarian plans for "regimenting" society and interfering with free commercial activities. Ideas about European political and economic

reform were usually ignored.¹⁷

It is inconceivable that Cobden did not study their ideas and progress while instinctively sorting out what he believed to be the most valuable ideas. It is especially important to note that Michel Chevalier, a leading Saint Simonian who remained in Paris during the British tour, contributed, in January and February 1832, a brilliant series of articles in Le Globe, the weekly paper of the movement which was distributed gratis in Britain. They were entitled: "La paix est aujourd'hui la condition de l'émancipation des peuples." In one of them, Chevalier described how Europe and indeed continents could be knit together by railways, steamships and canals, so that their "material interests" became identical.¹⁸

Not only in Chevalier's articles, but generally permeating Saint Simonian literature, were two ideas which must have struck Cobden as fundamental. The first was that the development of industrial resources and trade on a world scale was the precondition of a civilised life for all. The second was that such economic expansion could only be achieved in a world rid of war and the threat of war. In other words, economic prosperity depended on government action in promoting international peace and co-operation.

Whether or not Cobden was directly influenced by the Saint Simonians in the early 1830's, there was a close similarity of outlook which manifested itself in the 1840's. The campaign of the Anti-Corn Law League found a response in France from former Saint Simonians. Chevalier, Duveyrier, and Arles Dufour were converted

to free trade as the best means of fostering peace and economic growth. Cobden met them when he visited France in 1846 and they became life-long friends. Without Cobden's friendship with Chevalier, the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1860 would certainly not have been made.

Thomas Hodgskin (1787-1869) was an unorthodox economist whom Cobden knew possibly as early as 1828-30 in London, where Hodgskin, lectured at the Mechanics' Institution. Certainly in 1857, Cobden described him as "an old literary acquaintance of mine". There is much in Hodgskin's two main works on economics which Cobden would approve, not least the quotation from Milton which ends Popular Political Economy (1827): "The science of political economy.... will be found when perfectly known, if I may apply to it the language of our most sublime poet, to "Justify the ways of God to man".

But some of Hodgskin's ideas were regarded as dangerous by the propertied class, for which reason he was later labelled a "Ricardian socialist", despite his belief in private property legitimately acquired. So there is nothing strange in the fact that Cobden did not refer to Hodgskin's ideas in public.¹⁹

Immanuel Kant was another thinker never mentioned by Cobden whose work in translation (Cobden read French but not German) must have influenced him, particularly Perpetual Peace (1795). It seems more than a mere coincidence that one of the key ideas of England, Ireland and America coincides exactly with Kant's thesis that the competitive instincts of men, refracted through national policies, will lead to the peaceful integration of nation states, if their rivalry can be directed away from war into

commercial channels. Cobden agreed with Kant's argument that mankind may be led by its instincts, without consciously willing it, towards an end which is mutually beneficial. It is interesting to observe Kant, like Cobden, quoting in support of his theory of politics: "Politics says Be ye wise as serpents; morality adds, as a limiting condition, And guileless as doves."²⁰

5. Cobden's genius

Cobden's genius lay in the high quality and particular cast of his intellect combined with a genial and unassuming character. There was superb judgement in the way he picked out and digested writings which had the most effective explanation of how man, in the use of his faculties and in the economic mechanism of society, may develop civilisation in ways suggested by progressive Christian revelation. He saw how the relevant ideas complemented each other so as to form a comprehensive social philosophy. Then, possibly from reading Rousseau and Burke, he grasped the fact that man's perception of himself and of his potentialities is conditioned by the historical development of the society in which he lives. He had a vision of a higher civilisation which he knew could not be achieved in his lifetime. Therefore he aimed at giving society a push in the right direction.

Cobden's political strategy necessitated great caution in speech, both public and private, and in letters. It was essential not to appear an impractical idealist or too intellectual. Interestingly, J.S. Mill had warned the Saint Simonians about this in 1831, and summed up his views in an article in the Monthly Repository in November

1833 under the title "Comparison of the Tendencies of French and English Intellect".

Cobden cannot be properly classified as either a reformer or a revolutionary as these words are usually applied. A reformer implies limited aims and perhaps a pragmatic philosophy; a revolutionary implies a wish to radically change society quickly and with force if necessary. Cobden fits neither definition since he hoped that the pattern of reforms he believed possible in his time would eventually culminate in a radical transformation of society. He believed that fundamental change would only come slowly and peacefully. Echoing a phrase Chevalier used in his obituary of Cobden, Charles Taquey called him "*le révolutionnaire pacifique*". This is near the mark.

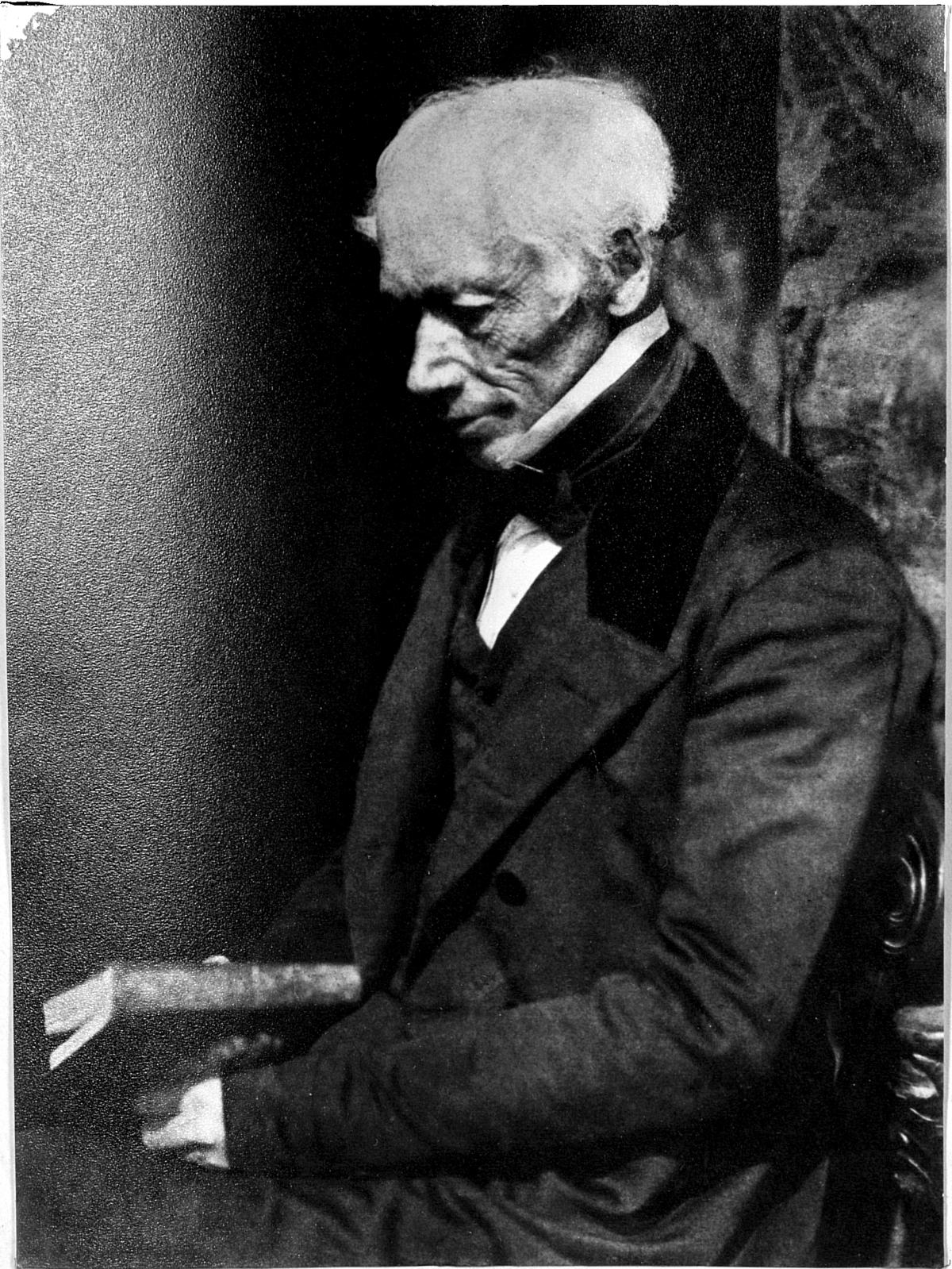
Summary

This chapter explains Cobden's dual self-development in the formative years up to 1835. Firstly, he studied and mastered a wide range of political, social and economic ideas but without any intention of personally entering political life, Secondly, he established a successful calico printing business. The various influences upon him are discussed - schooling and upbringing, religion, residence in London and Manchester and sources of intellectual stimulus. Finally the nature of his genius is assessed.

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1. George Combe. Photographed by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson about 1845. Combe would be aged about 57.

CHAPTER THREECobden's religious, moral and educational philosophy1. An introduction to Combe's career and ideas.

Cobden's philosophy must be explored through George Combe (1788-1858), the Scottish phrenologist, philosopher and educationist, whose ideas about religion, morality and education he shared nearly completely, differing mainly about how they were to be implemented. Combe's philosophy formed the bedrock for Cobden's economic and political philosophy. Cobden testified several times in letters about what he owed to Combe. To William Tait, editor of Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, he wrote in 1836: "You must be a phrenologist not a bumpologist - but you must know the moral philosophy which is emanating from it. It is the germ of a mighty moral revolution". To Combe he wrote in 1848: "You must content yourself with being a teacher of teachers. You have been to an extent that nobody can estimate. Who for instance can ever say how much I have been under the influence of your principles in all my public teachings". Again, to Combe in 1849: "Your definition of education is the only one deserving of the name".¹

Combe was born in Edinburgh in 1788, the son of a brewer. He went to Edinburgh High School and to Edinburgh University for two years, then started a law business in 1812. In 1815 he attended the lectures of J.C. Spurzheim (1776-1832) and was converted to phrenology. Phrenology taught that the mind was composed of particular groups of organs (faculties) which were located in specific parts of the cerebellum. From the start, he was interested in

the application of phrenology to social questions. He published Essays on Education in 1819 and was very interested in Robert Owen's school at New Lanark. His brother Abram (1785-1827) helped to establish the ill-fated community experiment of Orbiston, a venture which Combe did not approve of as it was based on Owenite ideas. In 1820, he founded the Edinburgh Phrenological Society and in 1823 shared in starting the Phrenological Journal which became the national publication. Combe quickly became the leading exponent of phrenology in Britain. His major work The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects (1828) was followed by Lectures on Popular Education (1835) and Moral Philosophy or the Duties of Man Considered in his Individual, Social and Domestic Capacities (1840). Afterwards, he published several works including pamphlets on education and On the Relation Between Religion and Science (1847).²

The Constitution of Man is a many sided work, unjustly neglected and with diverse intellectual origins. Both the origins and the neglect are best discussed after an examination of the book's main ideas. First, a general survey before a detailed analysis of Combe's theory of nature and moral philosophy. The book seems to be directed at the general reader and was written in an uncomplicated style. Certainly its many editions attest to good sales. The most useful way to understand it is to see it as written with two main purposes in mind which influenced the general thrust of the work. Combe's first concern was to give a clearly comprehensive description of phrenology as the science of mind (psychology as it was later called), the

key to understanding human behaviour. He wished everyone to understand that phrenology was the basis for a new science of education which would enable all to lead happier and more useful lives. Combe also wished to show that his view of human nature was not irreligious because it denied that man was inherently sinful, being "saved" only by the truths of revealed Christianity. On the contrary, his doctrine reflected "natural religion", the true religious interpretation of the world.

The second concern was to present an entirely new moral philosophy which in fact was an integrated religious and social philosophy. Phrenology was only part of a total view of nature.

2. Combe's theory of nature and moral philosophy.

Combe viewed man and the natural world as constituting a single interrelated whole. There was a physical and moral order in man - body and mind - and in the external world. God had given the world a benevolent design but it was in embryo only: it was the destiny of man to co-operate with God in creating that design by obeying the natural laws. There were four natural laws - physical, organic, intellectual and moral - discussed below. Thus to describe Combe's theory of nature is also to describe "natural religion". It was not eighteenth century deism, since creation and revelation were not accomplished facts from which God stood apart, but something gradually achieved in the present and future. God's purpose and government of the world were discoverable by reason but Combe's assumptions were articles of faith in that only the future development of society could fully prove them. Combe did

not of course state this explicitly, but inferred their truth from what he regarded as the already well established science of phrenology.

The articles of faith were three, at least. Firstly, the belief that it was possible for the whole of manhood to live in peace and with reasonable comfort and leisure. Secondly, the belief that the faculties of the mind were the tools given by God for recognising and obeying the natural laws. Thirdly, the belief that among these laws, the moral law was the supreme factor in individual and social life and manifested itself whether or no man recognised the fact.

Combe's doctrine of the mental faculties will be described first and then the natural laws. The brain was composed of 37 organs, each located in a specific part of the cerebellum. The strength of individual endowment was indicated by the size of each organ which pressed closely against the skull and affected the shape. The faculties formed three groups according to their function. The first group is the animal propensities: love of life, instinct of food, sex, offspring, love of home, society, combativeness, cautiousness or fear, destructiveness, secretiveness, acquisitiveness, self-love, desire of approbation. The second group is the moral sentiments: benevolence, conscientiousness or justice, veneration, hope, wonder, capacity to grasp ideal perfection, imitation and humour. The third group is the intellectual faculties, divided into knowing and reflecting.

In accordance with Combe's belief in the potential

value for goodness of all Creation, Combe taught that all the faculties have a legitimate place in behaviour. No faculty was naturally good or bad; they all had a potential for proper or improper use. For example, combativeness is the spring of courage to meet danger or overcome difficulties or, improperly, the source of aggressiveness. Acquisitiveness is the essential drive for man's material comfort; improperly directed it becomes greed, self-love is properly a concern for our wellbeing but it may degenerate into selfishness and love of power. Veneration is the spring of love of God, of what is morally good; misdirected, it leads to idolatry, superstition and religious intolerance.

The key to the proper use of the faculties was the potential supremacy of the moral sentiments and intellect. The propensities were a great force in behaviour but were capable of being governed in their exercise by the higher faculties, given that the latter had been fully educated. The full potential of the individual's faculties were realised only when they all acted in unison, properly directed as the result of education.³

Combe taught that there were four main fields of knowledge about which it was essential for the individual to be educated. They were natural science and the physical environment, the human body and living and organic life, society and the moral order. Within these fields, physical, organic, intellectual and moral laws operated. Combe used the term "law" because God had implanted a constitution of cause and effect in each of these fields. The laws of say, chemistry and the circulation

of the blood are easily comprehensible but the intellectual and moral laws have been a source of puzzlement for most commentators on Combe. The intellectual law referred to man's duty to use his reason in understanding himself, society and the moral law. The chains of cause and effect in the intellectual and moral laws were to be found in the happiness and prosperity - or the opposites - in the life of the individual and of society.⁴

The moral law is the most complex feature of Combe's philosophy. It was a moral imperative that enjoined the supremacy of the moral sentiments and intellect. The definition of moral virtue was neither that of the established utilitarian nor "moral intuition" schools of Combe's day but a unique combination of both. Like the utilitarians, Combe thought that pleasure and avoidance of pain were motives of behaviour but he differed from them in stating that these consequences were attached to particular courses of conduct. The utilitarians denied the doctrine of innate moral order. Combe followed the moral intuitionists in asserting an innate moral sense capable of perceiving virtue, but he did not suggest that the individual desired a virtuous object without any regard for personal interest. Rather, Combe implied that the individual could appreciate that the "reward" for such behaviour was perhaps distant in time, or a gain for society of which he was a part.⁵

As can be seen from the above argument, Combe held that the moral law was not defined simply as an ideal code of values. It was a force which manifested itself in the life of the individual and of society, whether

or no its existence was recognised. It tied the individual to society and both the individual and society to God. Co-operative effort is required to exploit nature, develop science and build up civilisation. There is no clash between the true interest of the individual and the general good of society. In other words, morality and true self-interest are identical. The same is true of society organised as a state in its relations with other states. Combe preferred not to write of "self-interest" but of "duties", probably because the former was identified too closely with the propensity of self-love. What Combe sought was self-love directed away from selfishness (an abuse of the faculty) by the moral sentiments and intellect.

The adverse side of the moral law was manifested whenever the individual and society ignored, wilfully or through ignorance, the proper balance or harmony of factors required for happiness, prosperity and civilised life. In the individual's life, for example, excessive concern for wealth at the expense of proper leisure and relaxation could lead to mental stress - "painful feelings in the mind", Combe called it - or have social effects such as contributing to speculation and unsound finance. Society's "corporate" transgressions of the moral law, such as attempts to grab at wealth or territory at the expense of others, would lead to war, slumps, financial crises and attendant evils. In public affairs, the gap between action and penalty may be extended over a long period and must be traced through a complex causal chain of events.⁶

The grand truth to which Combe pointed was that the study of the moral law was not an abstract or metaphysical one. It was an inherent part of the study of social science, economics, politics and history. For example, economics was not a science to be studied without reference to the moral purposes of economic activity as was characteristic of Ricardo and his school. Combe wrote:

"It is the business of the political economist to unfold the kinds of industry that are really necessary to the welfare of mankind and the degrees of labour that will meet with a just reward. The leading object of political economy, as a science, is to increase enjoyment, by directing the application of industry.... Political economists have proceeded on the notion that the accumulation of wealth is the *summum bonum*".⁷

Combe summed up his vision in another passage which also represents the heart of Cobden's social philosophy:

"If the Creator has constituted the world in harmony with the dictates of the moral sentiments, the highest prosperity of each particular nation should be thoroughly compatible with that of every other; that is to say, England, by sedulously cultivating her own soil, pursuing her own courses of industry, founding her internal institutions and her external relations on the principle of Benevolence, Veneration and Justice, which imply abstinence from wars of aggression, from conquest, and from all selfish designs of commercial monopoly, would be in the highest condition of prosperity and enjoyment that nations would admit of.... According to this

principle, also the Creator should have conferred on each nation some peculiar advantages of soil, climate, situation or genius, which would enable it to carry on amicable intercourse with its fellow states, in a beneficial exchange of the products peculiar to each; so that the higher one nation rose in morality, intelligence and richness, it ought to become so much the more estimable and valuable as a neighbour to all the surrounding states."⁸

3. Combe's theory of education and implementation of his ideas.

Combe's "definition" of education in What Should Secular Education Embrace? (1848), which Cobden accepted, was:

"Instruction in the qualities, modes of action, relations, and purposes of the things and beings by means of which the government of the world is maintained; and also training of the whole faculties, animal, moral and intellectual, to action in conformity with the order of Providence".⁹

In fact, Combe did not write a full scale treatise on education dealing in detail with the curriculum and methods of teaching. He confined himself to pamphlets and lectures urging the need for a complete reform of education, to encourage the establishment of "model" schools and to working for the establishment of a national system. He was satisfied to leave most of the details to friends and followers who believed in phrenology or whose educational practice was compatible with it. His close friend James Simpson (1781-1853), an Edinburgh lawyer

published The Necessity of Popular Education as a National Object in 1834 and revised it in 1836 under the title The Philosophy of Education with its Practical Application to a System and Plan of Popular Education.

This gave a full account of phrenology and its application to the curriculum and methods of teaching. With regard to infant education, Simpson recommended the manuals and practical work of Samuel Wilderspin (1792-1866) who was influenced by phrenology. Later, Combe approved the manuals of David Stow (1793-1864), the Glasgow educationist, and the books of William Ellis (1800-1881) on "social economy" used in the Birkbeck Schools established by Ellis in London.¹⁰

Simpson's book is probably the most useful statement of aims and methods and it is significant that an appendix contains a report of speeches by Simpson and others at Manchester in 1836 with an introduction by Cobden.

Simpson described a course of education for the whole community from the age of two to fourteen. The education advocated was a complete rejection of the standard types of education received by all classes. The upper and middle class education rejected was that consisting mainly of the 3'R's, Greek and Latin, Classical History, and the Scriptures. The working class education rejected was the even meagre fare of the 3'R's and Scriptures.

In neither case was the course of education based on a philosophy of human nature and human needs. Knowledge was mainly imparted by rote-learning without any attempt to develop reasoning powers. Nor did the reading and learning of the Scriptures amount to a serious moral

education.¹¹

Simpson argued for physical, moral and intellectual education aimed to develop all the faculties and to provide basic knowledge of the world in which pupils had to earn a living. In the infant school from two to six years of age, moral and physical education must have special emphasis. This was the crucial age for the formation of good habits and attitudes, and the play-ground (under the teacher's eye) was as much the place for this as the classroom. Cobden asserted in his introduction - mentioned above - that "from the age of two to ten years, by means of the infant school discipline, the moral character may be determined for life".¹²

Learning in the classroom was very disciplined by present day standards but its nature was very different from rote-learning. The object was to develop powers of observation and reasoning, and also direct feelings of wonder and veneration towards the marvelous order and complexity of nature. Simpson highly recommended the Pestalozzian Lessons on Objects taught by Dr. Mayo at the Cheam School, Surrey. These lessons would also serve for the incidental teaching of reading, grammar and vocabulary formation. In the next stage of schooling, up to fourteen, object lessons and arithmetic were continued and about the age of twelve, elementary chemistry, mechanical science, political economy, the "political state" (the British constitution) were introduced. Another new subject was "knowing about ourselves", which was composed of elementary phrenology and physiology. Geography was another subject but history and languages other than

English were considered suitable only for pupils continuing their education beyond fourteen. Training of the moral sentiments continued incidentally under the title of natural theology. Neither Simpson nor Combe were hostile to the children being taught sectarian Christianity but they insisted that it be done by pastors of the Churches concerned on Sundays and (say) one half day of the week set aside. Cobden's view will be summarised later in the chapter.¹³

The schools up to fourteen - the minimum desirable age of leaving school - were for all social classes. This was also the stated aim of the common schools advocated by the Lancashire (and afterwards National) Public School Association, supported by Combe, Simpson and Cobden. In a speech in 1851, Cobden declared his hope that the children of all classes should be taught together. Despite such facts, some commentators tend to suggest that Combe and his friends were interested in a particular type of education for the working class.¹⁴ This probably derives from incorrect interpretation of several facts taken together. Firstly, the phrenologists believed that as individual abilities varied, there would always be persons for whom unskilled work was most suitable. Secondly, the national debate about education until the late 1850's concerned working class education. The upper and middle classes were satisfied with private schools and the issue debated was that of state assistance for schools for the poor. Therefore those agitating for a national system such as Combe and Cobden found themselves debating the issue within bounds given to it by public opinion.

Thirdly, the model schools set up by Combe and his friends in Edinburgh, London and Manchester were partly aimed to show the working class (in the absence of a compulsory law) the solid benefits of schooling up to fourteen. The curriculum was not intended to "control" the working class in the pejorative sense popular among some recent historians. On the contrary, Combe believed that his education directly challenged the schooling which really "kept down" the working class, namely the minimal 3'R's taught in church and factory schools.¹⁵

Fourthly, critics assume that the political economy - or "social economy" as William Ellis called it - in the curriculum enjoined Ricardian or "laissez-faire" principles e.g. strikes cannot permanently raise wages. Whether political economy was necessarily subservient to the interests of the propertied and employing classes will be discussed in the next chapter. It is pertinent to note that Cobden, after observing a class being taught social economy at one of the Birkbeck Schools in 1851, remarked that half the Members of Parliament would benefit from the instruction. William Lovett, the former Chartist and no sycophant of the middle class, also taught the subject at the National Hall School, Holborn, which he opened in 1848.¹⁶

4. Combe's place in intellectual history

Combe's achievement was to base a theory of progress on a clear and distinct account of human nature. It was also a realistic account holding that man was as much an emotional and religious being as a rational one. As such, it is probably unique as a theory of progress. Combe demolished the age old argument that mankind could never

change for the better because of "human nature" - "the old Adam". On the contrary, he showed that behaviour only need be changed, without requiring the least alteration of human nature. Nor was any change required in the fundamental structure of society such as abolition of a free economy based on private property and competition. He also supplied an intellectual basis for the alliance of religion and science, the conflict between which became a major feature of Western civilisation.

Yet despite the enormous potential of his philosophy, it was never generally recognised in his lifetime and sank without trace within ten years of his death. He was labelled as a second rate thinker and this has hitherto not been seriously challenged. It is time to give Combe a just place in intellectual history and important to do so as much of Cobden's thinking was built on his moral philosophy. The explanation of Combe's low rating probably lies in two factors. The first is that his philosophy was unique and did not fall into any established school of thought. The second is that inability to accept phrenology proved a stumbling block to further examination of Combe's philosophy.

The work which most clearly influenced Combe was that published in 1736 by Joseph Butler: The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature. There are long quotations from it in the Constitution of Man and to read Butler is to be constantly reminded of Combe. Butler has the familiar concepts of the moral government of the world by "general laws" and the importance of exercising the faculties in

order that "active habits" of good behaviour be formed.

In a more general sense, Combe owed much to the intellectual climate in which he grew up - the "Scottish Enlightenment" as it is now called. Philosophers such as David Hume, Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, and Adam Ferguson taught that a theory of human nature was the core of any theory of social progress. They also emphasised that society was an institution of historical growth.¹⁷ But Combe distanced himself from the Scottish metaphysicians who refused to accept phrenology. He asserted that their classification of the faculties was unscientific and that their philosophy did not show any demonstrable means of bringing about moral progress. Unfortunately, Combe lost an opportunity to influence Scottish scholarship when his bid for the Chair of Logic at Edinburgh University failed in 1836.¹⁸

A gulf also separated Combe from what was becoming the dominant intellectual school in Britain - the Utilitarians, notably J.S. Mill. Combe's postulates of innate moral faculties and of a religious design in the world were anathema to this school. It is not surprising that Mill told Auguste Comte in 1842 that in Britain phrenology was studied by men of mediocre minds. That Mill ever studied Combe's writings in any depth seems unlikely.

Phrenology always loomed large in the eyes of critics who seemed unable to look beyond it at Combe's philosophy. Combe left himself vulnerable to attack by his failure to more fully articulate and define his philosophy, partly the result of his concentration on teaching phrenology and its educational and medical applications. Even

Harriet Martineau, who was sympathetic to phrenology made a devastating criticism of Combe in her Biographical Sketches published in 1869. She blamed his "unprogressive character of mind" for harming phrenology as a science, meaning presumably that he did not respond constructively to criticism of phrenology by others who sought to base psychology on a physiological basis, such as Alexander Bain. She praised the effect of the Constitution of man at the popular level in stimulating self-education and improving healthy living but did not perceive Combe's concern to establish a new moral philosophy. This "sketch" did much to set the tone for anyone needing a quick introduction to Combe. It is significant that John Morley, a rationalist and an agnostic, felt obliged, in his biography of Cobden (1881), to apologise for mentioning phrenology as an influence on Cobden. The general tenor of his remarks about Combe suggests that they derived from Martineau.¹⁹

Combe not only offended many rationalists and atheists, but a large section of the religious public. For his natural religion rejected supernatural revelation and held that belief in salvation and life after death were acceptable only as "optional extras" for those who needed them. There was however a small uninfluential group who believed that phrenology "proved" events in the Bible.

Thus Combe's ideas were squeezed out in an intellectual field which had little place for a doctrine which did not maintain that man was fundamentally a rational being in an amoral world or, on the other hand, a religious being

in the traditional sense. The general discrediting of phrenology in the 1860's and 1870's also knocked away the main prop of Combe's thought. Apart from W. Jolly's selection of his writings, Combe did not receive any serious study until A.C. Grant's unpublished Ph.D. thesis (1960) based on Combe's private papers. Since then there have been a number of articles on phrenology, education and social reform, and notably Conquest of Mind: Phrenology and Victorian Social Thought (1975) by D. de Giustino. But none of these works recognises Combe's attempt to establish a "scientific" moral philosophy nor how Combe's religion differed from a mechanistic deism. Giustino does not discuss Combe's natural laws and classes him as a rationalist. Both Grant and Giustino emphasise Combe's practical work for education but Giustino, following the "social control" interpretation, concludes that it was limited in its aims as regards working class emancipation.²⁰

5. Cobden's application of Combe's ideas.

Cobden's friendship with Combe began as the result of Cobden's inviting Combe to give a series of lectures in Manchester in April 1837. Cobden was deliberately trying to arouse interest in phrenology which had not made any general impact in Manchester. He joined the Manchester Phrenological Society (formed in 1829 not 1835 as J. Morley states) in 1835 but found it small and inactive.²¹ But he thought that despite prevailing religious prejudice, the industrial and scientific community presented a fertile field. Combe gave well-attended lectures which helped to stimulate an education

movement in Manchester, but it appears that the impact was short-lived. In 1841 Combe offered 25 copies of an American school edition of the Constitution of Man.

Cobden replied, asking for six::

"I do not ask for more because I am not certain that in this age of bigotry I shall be able to bestow them in the useful manner you did. What you say of the intolerance of Scotland applies a good deal to Manchester also. There is but one place in the kingdom in which a man can live with perfect freedom of thought and action and that is London."²²

Cobden was obviously disillusioned about the spread of phrenology and never again tried to encourage it by public lectures. But remained faithful to phrenology throughout his life, valuing the evidence which it gave of personal character and talent. In 1851, he had his son Richard examined by E.T. CRAig, to assist his education at the Pestalozzian Institute at Worksop. Combe examined Cobden in 1837 and reported his findings to his brother Andrew:

"I examined Mr. Cobden's head. It is of an average size. The temperament nervous and biliary. The propensities are moderate. The anterior lobe large and the lower region predominating, and the sentiments are large. Concentrativeness is only rather full. Benevolence is very large, Veneration large, and Conscientiousness and Firmness only full. Combativeness is only full. Cautiousness and Secretiveness are large, the latter at least is so, and Cautiousness a little less. The person is slender, lungs narrow and his aspect refined and

intellectual. He had read the Constitution of Man before he wrote his pamphlets and said that it seemed to him like a transcript of his own familiar thoughts.²³

Combe's assessment corresponds very well with the impression of Cobden formed from the study of his life and works, Secretiveness is of special interest. It was a faculty whose abuse was deceit but whose proper mode of action might be, for example, concealment of ideas and plans until fit occasions. Cobden seems to have been pleased with the assessment and it probably strengthened his political resolves.

Without in any way questioning natural religion, Cobden's attitude to orthodox Christianity and the churches differed from Combe's. Cobden chose to excuse it on his large Veneration, which proved convenient in obviating theological argument which he disliked. In 1846, Cobden told him:

"I was much struck with your remark, when you mapped my head eleven [sic] years ago. "Why, if you had been born in the middle ages, you would have made a good monk, you have so much Veneration!" That was a triumph for phrenology, for you could have formed no such notion from anything you had seen or heard of me, I have a strong religious feeling - a sympathy for men who act under that impulse. I reverence it as the great leverage which has moved mankind to powerful action... It is fortunate for me, that, whilst possessing a strong logical faculty, which keeps me in the path of rationalism, I have this religious sympathy, which enables me to co-operate with men of exclusively religious sentiment."²⁴

At the bottom, the difference of the two men may be explained thus. Combe believed that the old religion was redundant and that the churches, particularly the evangelicals, with their harping on original sin and excessive concern for spiritual as compared with material welfare, were obstructing social progress. While being perfectly tolerant about people's right to worship freely, he felt that co-operation with the churches as organised bodies was encouraging error. Cobden's view was that natural religion and a good part of conventional Christian worship were not in conflict. Cobden attended Church of England services regularly and probably would have argued - there is no record on this point - that the majority of mankind needs a personal God and symbols of the divine order.

Cobden's attitude to the churches in public affairs was based on shrewd common sense. If religion was a powerful lever of human action, then to ignore the churches as allies in social reform was stupid. The churches should be coaxed away from excessive preoccupation with their sectarian interests and made socially aware of evils such as the Corn Laws, and sectarian education which prevented a proper system of national education from being established. As regards religion in rate-aided schools, he favours Bible teaching of an unsectarian nature, with a conscience clause for Catholics, Jews and others.

Cobden simply had a more tolerant and realistic view of "progressive revelation" than Combe. He summed up his view of the churches to Combe as follows:

"Gradually and imperceptibly to themselves they are catching the spirit of the age, so far as to recognise the moral laws as a part of our natural organisation. They do not accept your views to the superseding of their own, but, like geology, your science is forcing its way alongside of preconceived ideas, and they will for a long time go together without perceptibly clashing".

Cobden had a more profound insight into historical change than Combe. He realised that Combe's programme for a better society would only become acceptable after many other changes had been made first. There had to be a general shift in society's attitudes and priorities in domestic and international affairs. The seeds of education would have to be sown in many forms. It was this "dialectical" insight which informed these sober comments to Combe in 1846 and 1852:

"I do not look for very great advances in our social state during our generation... I am afraid the animal is yet too predominant in the nature of Englishmen, and of men generally, to allow us to hope that the higher sentiments will gain their desired ascendancy in your life-time or mine".

"Enter one of the latter [private schools of the middle class] with your "Constitution of Man" or your "Moral Philosophy" in hand and question the scholars upon the simple but omnipotent laws by which our social and individual existence is governed and you will find that they will stare nearly as vacantly as the children of our British and National Schools... I have as full a

faith as yourself that the day will come when every moral and physiological truth contained in your works will be regularly taught in our schools as spelling and cyphering are now. But I may not be so hopeful as yourself as to the time when this will be done".²⁵

This logic prevented Cobden from sharing Combe's belief on school education as the essential starting point of social progress. His pamphlets of 1835 and 1836 focussed on bringing about a new type of statesmanship which would make issues like education of the people more important. Although Cobden engaged in agitation for a national system between 1836-1839, and 1850-1857, it was not the first priority of his programme. In both periods, he responded to groups of people who had initiated agitations for national education. Combe's constant refrain in his letters to Cobden between 1846 and 1855 is urging him to fight for national education, to which he generally received excuses for inactivity or arguments for compromise over the "religious difficulty". But their friendship was never broken.

Summary

Cobden absorbed and applied the moral and educational philosophy of George Combe, which he believed was consistent with Christian revelation interpreted in a progressive way. It is necessary to examine Combe's philosophy in some detail as it has been consistently underrated since his time. One of the main reasons for this was Combe's attempt to give it a foundation in phrenology. The later discrediting of phrenology obscured Combe's other ideas. Combe's educational ideas were worked out by James Simpson and were influential in Cobden's thinking.

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CHAPTER FOURCobden's approach to economics1. Economics as the foundation of politics

Cobden's political career cannot be understood without an appreciation of his approach to economics or political economy as it was then called. Cobden believed that economics was the fundamental base of the new form of politics which he strove to introduce in Britain. If it was correctly understood, it was the means of bringing about a good standard of living for the whole people, of providing leisure for education and civilized life and a means, through extended commerce, for promoting peace among nations. Cobden's task in the political field was a complex one. He had to identify the correct premisses of economics and prevail in governments to implement the relevant policies; to encourage the development of the science on the right lines and to promote an understanding of basic economic principles among employers and workers, so as to bring about industrial co-operation.

Having set himself these aims, he did not attempt to produce any scientific work himself. But it would be quite wrong to assume, as is usually done, that he was simply the propagandist of certain doctrines of the Classical economists, especially free trade. On the contrary, the scope of economics in his thinking was extremely wide and original and deserves to be recognised as a quite different paradigm from that of the orthodox economists of the Ricardian school. Cobden knew three economists intimately,

Frederic Bastiat and Michel Chevalier in France and J.E. Thorold Rogers in England, thoroughly understood their thinking and contributed to the work of Bastiat and Rogers. Unfortunately, these economists never constituted a "school" in the sense that they met regularly or worked on agreed problems; Bastiat died in 1850, long before the other two. But their work can be seen as parts of a greater whole present in Cobden's mind.

Cobden declared political economy to be "the highest exercise of the human mind, and that the exact sciences require by no means so hard an effort". By this, he meant that the observation of the economic order of society, domestic and international was infinitely complex and constantly changing. There were difficulties in distinguishing the more permanent from temporary features; in assessing the effects of past policies in determining the present situation; and difficulties in getting them right and in applying the best policy based on it.¹

2. The influence of Adam Smith

The major influence on Cobden's economic thinking was Adam Smith's An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776). He held this work in such high esteem that, in 1835, he urged the formation of societies in every commercial town to study its "beneficent truths". Throughout his life, he praised Smith as "the great master" and it is clear that he regarded that work as vastly superior to anything written by Ricardo, James Mill, J. McCulloch, N. Senior or J.S. Mill. He did not leave any detailed appraisal of the Wealth of Nations,

but it is not hard to discern the features which impressed Cobden.² Firstly, Smith believed that government had a very positive responsibility for the welfare of the people:

"Political economy, considered as a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator, proposes two distinct objects: first, to supply a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or, more properly, to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and secondly, to supply the state or commonwealth a revenue sufficient for the public services. It proposes to enrich both the people and the sovereign". M. Blaug, the economist, has commented that this definition of political economy is "in violent opposition to the whole tenor of the Wealth of Nations". This opinion stems from a great misunderstanding of that work, which does not seem to have been properly dispelled by any of the books about Smith which have appeared in recent years. Concern for the welfare of the people as conceived by many mid-twentieth century thinkers seems to imply "intervention" of various kinds - redistribution of income by taxation, state expenditure on social services and on industrial enterprise, for example. Smith is conceded as allowing state expenditure on the armed forces, law enforcement, education and public utilities such as roads and bridges, but beyond that he is said to have believed in "laissez-faire" or allowing the economy to develop as private entrepreneurs willed it.³

What has been quite unappreciated is that the Wealth of Nations, taken as a whole, is about how the economy should be encouraged to develop in order to ensure a

higher standard of living for all inhabitants. The greatest responsibility of government was not "intervention" but guiding the economy by preventing monopolies by producers, by abolishing laws maintaining injustices (laws of primogeniture, corn laws, foreign trade monopolies) and by creating a pacific international economy. The latter required an end of colonial empire and wars to protect commerce. All this is often dismissed as "keeping the ring" by a framework of law and order, with the implication that the state is unconcerned about the general direction and results of economic growth.

On the contrary, Smith believed that government should have definite principles of economic growth in view, although he fought shy of being explicit in any particular chapter in the Wealth of Nations. Here are quotations from Smith and Cobden which define their high standards of statesmanship:

"The science of a legislator, whose deliberations ought to be governed by general principles which are always the same" contrasts with "the skill of that insidious and crafty animal, vulgarly called a statesman or politician, whose councils are directed by the momentary fluctuations of affairs" (Smith); Metternich "is probably the last of those state physicians who, looking only to the symptoms of a nation, content themselves with superficial remedies from day to day, and never attempt to probe beneath the surface, to discover the source of the evils which afflict the social system" (Cobden, 1847).⁴

The second aspect of the Wealth of Nations which impressed Cobden was Smith's profound understanding of

the conditions which enable the mass of the people to enjoy a comfortable standard of living. In taking his ideas from Smith, he was rejecting the thinking of most leading British economists of the 1830's who looked to D. Ricardo's Principles of Political Economy and Taxation (1817) as the master work. Ricardo held the "factors of production" - land, capital and labour - as each subject to economic "laws" which had an adverse effect on the distribution of wealth as far as the capitalists and working class were concerned. Land was subject to the law of diminishing returns in food production as a rapidly increasing population made greater demands upon it. The capitalist in industry was subject to ever higher rents as the result of increasing competition for scarce land and higher wage costs as food prices rose. Capitalists' profits were destined to fall steadily. The working class, as their numbers increased, flooded the labour market and kept wages to a minimum by fierce competition for jobs. Employers also became less able to pay more than subsistence wages.

Smith, by contrast, did not hold land, capital and labour to be subject to "laws" (a term he never used) but that each was conditioned by a variety of factors capable of altering substantially the relationship of the "factors of production". According to the nature of the relationship, variable levels of consumption of goods and services were enjoyed by a country's population.

The key factors are the conditions of exchange: whether the market for goods and employment is large or small (domestic or international), whether it is hampered

by restrictive laws and monopolies, whether the working man is skilled or educated. Smith did not lay down an "iron law of wages" or a finite "wages fund" but taught that in an "advancing state" (dynamic economic growth in modern parlance) the workman will receive good wages partly because of the high demand for labour. Cobden was fond of illustrating the point by saying that it was desirable that two employers compete for one workman, not two workmen compete for one job.⁵

The third attractive aspect of the Wealth of Nations was the range of Smith's methodology - analytical, historical and comparative. The last two flow from a grasp that society is constantly in movement and that the analysis of the economy must take account of its past growth. Also, countries have different experiences, so comparative knowledge is also valuable.

A fourth aspect of the Wealth of Nations which impressed Cobden was the theory of economic development which is discussed in Book 3: "The different progress of opulence in different nations" and in Book 4: "Systems of Political Economy". Smith taught that a flourishing agriculture (with widespread land ownership) is the essential basis of a sound economy and that manufacturing and foreign trade are best developed in such an environment. In support, Smith made some important historical and comparative analysis. In England the natural course of development had been reversed by the persistence of the feudal system and urban manufacturing had struggled into existence in an adverse rural environment. In the

British colonies in America, a widespread land ownership and flourishing agriculture was the cause of a much higher standard of living for the majority of people than existed in England. Smith was not ruling out the development of manufacturing in America but simply pointing out the magnificent conditions which would eventually promote such a development.

The general impression of Cobden which persists is a man concerned with the fortunes of British cotton manufacturers. In fact agriculture was central to Cobden's thinking. From the Anti-Corn Law League until his death, he sought to reform the system of land ownership in Britain, which forced too many labourers to seek their fortune in the towns and swell the numbers of the unskilled seeking work in industry. A casual reader of The League (the weekly newspaper of the League), might easily mistake it for a journal about agricultural improvement and land tenure.

Cobden's appreciation of Smith's theory of development may be seen in the case of two "under-developed" countries. When he visited Egypt in 1836, he was appalled to find agriculture and the peasantry who lived by it in a deplorable state. Mehemet Ali, the despotic ruler, had squandered precious capital in an attempt to force industrial development. Cobden saw pathetically under-used mills and calico printworks. He discussed this situation at length with Mehemet Ali who was astonished that Cobden was not trying to make him give up manufacturing as a threat to British industry but was genuinely concerned for the prosperity of Egypt and its people which would

be best sought initially by exporting raw cotton.⁶

Later, in the 1850's, Cobden invested in the Illinois Central Railroad which was in effect a land development company. Ever since his visit to this mid-West region in 1835, Cobden believed that it had vast industrial potential, there being huge coal reserves. But it is significant that he thought of the primary establishment of agriculture on the basis of small farms.⁷

The final aspect of the Wealth of Nations to be considered was Smith's insistence that the international economy was inter-dependent in that the prosperity of one country was assisted by the prosperity of all its trading partners. The Wealth of Nations was an attack on the conventional policies of Smith's time which assumed that countries must compete for limited resources and try to monopolise as many of them as possible. Smith believed that the desirable international policy of free trade was Utopian, so deeply-rooted were traditional attitudes. Cobden rejected this pessimistic view, but saw that it was necessary to attack traditional policies of the balance of power and protection of commerce which were a block to the acceptance of free trade. In other words, it was essential to get changes in traditional ideas about international policies before it was possible to get fundamental changes in commercial policies.⁸

3. The development of economic analysis by the Anti-Corn Law League.

Cobden's understanding of economics, based on reading and observation of industry and agriculture during his business travels, was greatly sharpened and extended

by the experience of the Anti-Corn Law League of 1839-46. It was the only period in his political career in which he devoted his entire attention to the condition of the British economy. The League was the child of the great depression of 1838-42 which caused widespread unemployment, misery and social unrest. Workers lost their wages and employers their profits and, in many cases, their businesses which went bankrupt. The League headquarters at Manchester soon became a huge clearing house of facts bearing upon industry, agriculture and employment. The periodical publications of the League, the Anti-Corn Law Circular, Anti-Bread Tax Circular and The League were primarily aimed to argue the case for abolition but in so doing they covered a wide range of issues including explanations of industrial and agricultural depression. Cobden was a regular contributor but articles were unsigned.

From 1841, he had a voice in Parliament:

"What can be thought of a country which produces so much and where the great mass of the inhabitants possess so little? Does it not show that there is some maldistribution of production? It is because we have lost sight of the science which teaches the right distribution of wealth.... We have lost sight of the great philosopher who was contemporary with Watt and who told us how the wealth to be acquired by the steam engine was to be distributed.... As legislators you have the charge of giving employment and sustenance to the people".⁹

His speeches were models of lucid and persuasive argument. The Corn Laws prohibited imports of corn until domestic prices rose to a high level (to protect agriculture) causing sharp swings of corn prices according to whether the home harvest was plentiful or not. Bread was a very important part of the working class family's

diet and high prices left little of wages to buy luxuries such as clothes and other consumer goods. The poor harvests of 1837, 1838 and 1841 caused a downswing of industrial activity in two ways. Firstly, by reducing consumer demand for goods and services and secondly by causing higher interest rates and tight credit by reason of the outflow of specie to pay for sudden corn imports.

The Corn Laws also helped to keep tenant farmers and labourers poor through high rents and low wages. This kept the agricultural districts poor markets for manufactured goods. The migration of labourers into the towns contributed to poverty there by flooding the labour market. The League argued that repeal would stabilise bread prices and open up markets for our manufacturers in exchange for corn. It would also encourage a more efficient and diversified agriculture.

It was a minority view which had to struggle against prevailing views of politicians of all parties and some economists. There were those who believed that the slump was due to "over-production" caused by machinery; others argued (from the position now generally known as Say's Law) that the economy would right itself automatically and that nothing could be done but wait. Many asserted that the manufacturers only wanted to cheapen food in order to lower wages - a charge which was disproved when manufacturers generally raised wages when bread prices fell and trade picked up after the good harvests of 1842 and 1843. These issues will be discussed more

fully in Chapter Ten.¹⁰

The abolition of the Corn Laws removed poor British harvests as a cause of high bread prices, since foreign corn could be imported without restriction. But Cobden continued to be concerned about other causes of economic instability, especially the currency. He was a strong opponent of paper money - "the alcohol of the nations", he once dubbed it - which caused inflation and artificial prosperity leading to eventual slump. He supported the Bank Charter Act of 1844 which restricted issues of bank notes. In 1858-9, worried that the influx of gold on world markets would cause inflation, he translated Michel Chevalier's On the Probable Fall of the Value of Gold.

It must also be remembered that his efforts to get free trade adopted by other countries, disarmament and a British foreign policy less inclined to exacerbate international tensions, were all aimed at producing international stability and economic growth.¹¹

4. Bastiat, Chevalier and Thorold Rogers.

The gulf in principles and method between Cobden and the Ricardian school of economists was deepened by the League's campaign to put industry and agriculture upon a more prosperous and stable basis. There was very little shift in the thinking of the Ricardians. In response to gibes about the "dismal science" made by critics such as Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill tried to modify and humanise Ricardian theories in his Principles of Political Economy (1848), but he did not

fundamentally alter them. It seems that Malthus' law of population was too embedded in his thinking to permit it. He conceded that the repeal of the Corn Law in 1846 would stimulate employment and increase wages but only temporarily. The workers would simply be able to feed larger families and eventually overstock the labour market, bringing down wage rates. Mill could not see any remedy apart from the practice of family limitation by the working class, the slowing down of population growth and the achievement of a "stationary state" - a halt to economic growth.¹²

There was little in this work - except Mill's praise of small holdings in agriculture - which Cobden could admire. Certainly, Cobden disagreed with Mill's assertion that political economy was not part of "the general theory of progress". It is therefore a pity that the League's penetrating analysis of the economy was never put into a scientific treatise in Britain for it was later quite forgotten. Archibald Prentice's History of the Anti-Corn Law League (1853) was a plain narrative account of the League's activities. But much of the League's thinking was reflected in the writings of Frederic Bastiat. He, together with Michel Chevalier and J.E. Thorold Rogers, were the economists with whom Cobden was closely associated after 1845.¹³

Bastiat, like Cobden, believed that the new age of machinery and fast communications opened up the possibility of mass production of goods for the whole community; that low prices (but not necessarily poor profits) and high wages would become, if governments

and peoples so willed it, the norm in the future; that a high standard of living would provide leisure and an opportunity for civilised life. It was an economic order regulated not by producers but by consumers, who represented the general interest. The result of Cobden's collaboration with Bastiat, and his efforts to disseminate Bastiat's ideas, are discussed in Chapter Eleven.

Michel Chevalier was another French economist with whom Cobden associated. He had been very active in the Saint Simonian movement in the early 1830's but from 1840 to 1852 he taught political economy at the Collège de France. Very much in the mould of J.B. Say (1767-1832) who had formalised most of the theoretical parts of Smith's Wealth of Nations. He was converted to the free trade gospel by the example of the League and by Bastiat's writings. Cobden probably thought that Bastiat's works were more comprehensive than those of Chevalier. At any rate, he did not try to popularise Chevalier's works as he did Bastiat's, with the exception of the book on gold mentioned earlier. But he appreciated Chevalier's belief in the positive rôle of government in promoting economy, including state education. As will be shown in Chapter Nineteen, Cobden's association with Chevalier was mainly on the political level of creating an "entente cordiale" between Britain and France by getting France to adopt free trade and both countries to reduce their fleets.

Cobden's association with J.E. Thorold Rogers, a professor of political economy at both London and Oxford Universities, is discussed in Chapter Twenty-one.

Suffice it here to say that Rogers' work was devoted to developing the historical approach which Adam Smith had adopted in Book Three of the Wealth of Nations. Smith had established that the present distribution of wealth was effected by the actions of governments in the past as well as the present. Rogers applied statistical methods to records of estates in England to establish a record of wages and prices over six centuries. He then examined the causes of fluctuations in wages and prices in order to reveal how natural disasters or mis-government had been responsible. An important conclusion of Rogers' research was that the effects of misgovernment, even quite distant in time, continued to have an influence on the standard of living of workers for a long time even after the original cause had been removed.

Rogers believed that historical analysis of this kind would render the deductive theorising of conventional economists quite redundant. It was a bold and original experiment which was neither properly understood by other scholars nor successful in making converts.

5. Cobden in perspective

It is not less than an intellectual tragedy that the body of economic ideas which Cobden and his friends developed, was, apart from a rather simplistic view of free trade, almost entirely forgotten. Bastiat, Chevalier and Rogers each failed to establish a "school" to develop their ideas. It was to take nearly a century after Cobden's death for some of the main elements of that body of thought to be re-discovered by economists in

ignorance, it seems, of what had been lost. This will be discussed in the last chapter.

It is fine that justice was done in histories of economics in which, at the present day, the names of Cobden, Bastiat, Chevalier and Rogers are mentioned either in passing or not at all. The classical economists have been given a refurbished and more positive image by D.P. O'Brien, partly by shifting the slur of "laissez-faire" on to the "Manchester School".

Cobden deserves to be recognised not only for his surprisingly modern interest in the dynamics of economic growth but for his appreciation, as a social philosopher, that transformed material conditions and social relations do not necessarily, as Marx and Engels asserted, change "man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness". Neither Marx nor Engels provided any theory of psychology or philosophy of education, presumably because they did not think these had any importance in what would be an inevitable revolution in property and power relations in capitalist industrial society.¹⁴

Summary

Cobden believed that political economy was the foundation of a new form of politics. He did not attempt to become a scientific writer of economics but devoted his efforts to (1) identifying the economic policy which would best promote the well-being of the British people and other nations; (2) getting this policy implemented by the government; (3) encouraging original research by economists.

The important influence of the Wealth of Nations on

Summary Continued

Cobden is examined. Then, in order to give an impression of the scope of Cobden's thinking, a general view of developments dealt with in detail in later chapters is provided. These developments were the analysis of the trade cycle by the League and Cobden's association with Bastiat, Chevalier and Thorold Rogers. Finally, it is argued that the ideas of Cobden and his economist friends constitute a different paradigm from that of the classical school and deserve historical recognition

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PART TWO

THOUGHT AND ACTION 1835-1865



2. Richard Cobden. Photographed by the London Stereoscopic Company established in 1854. It is the youngest looking photograph of Cobden which the writer has found, perhaps taken in 1854 when he was 50.

CHAPTER FIVEThe pen of "a Manchester Manufacturer"1. The importance of the pamphlets.

It was characteristic of Cobden's caution and painstaking methods of work that his first publications were the fruit of several years of private study and reflection in which general ideas were absorbed and recomposed into comprehensive but practical policies for governments to implement. England, Ireland and America (1835) and Russia (1836) were called pamphlets because they were published deliberately as "paperbacks" but both were over a hundred pages, really short books.

Significantly, he chose to identify himself on the title page not by name but as "a Manchester Manufacturer". He aimed to jolt the reader, particularly in London and the south of England, by the assertion that a Manchester manufacturer could be sufficiently educated as to have important things to say about national policies. He also wished to broaden the political awareness of the manufacturers and merchants of the north, many of whom were indeed too busy in the counting house and mill to have considered any original opinions about national politics.

But Cobden thought all this could be done without personally taking part in political life. Keeping his name off the title page was an aspect of this. Ridgeway, his publisher in London, was evidently puzzled and in reply to an inquiry about his personal aims, Cobden replied enigmatically that it was "in dim and distant perspective". But it may be safely guessed to be that

"dream of human exaltation" which he confided to his brother Frederick a few weeks later, and to which he alluded on the last page of Russia (1836) - "the true interests of mankind to emancipate our moral and intellectual nature from the domination of the mere animal propensity of combativeness".¹

The first pamphlet was published, perhaps not accidentally, on 2 May 1835, the day after Cobden left Manchester for Liverpool to embark for the United States. When he returned home in August, he found that it was talked about in Manchester. It went through several editions and was noticed by The Times in London shortly before Russia was published in July 1836. The pamphlets greatly impressed Lord Durham, the British ambassador at St. Petersburg, and Joseph Parkes, a radical politician with extensive contacts including Henry Coppock, the town clerk of Stockport. He found it impossible to resist the pressure of an ever growing circle of friends in Manchester urging him to accept the invitation to stand as a Parliamentary candidate for Stockport.²

This had a very decisive influence on the nature of his writing. After 1836, he never again indulged the public with the comprehensive views of world politics and social change which can be discerned in the pamphlets of 1835 and 1836. Yet even these, revealing so much of Cobden's philosophy, also bear the characteristic stamp of his mind: that general ideas must be presented to the public apropos of current issues of politics. But such was the sheer pressure of ideas that much of their richness

and subtlety burst through the framework of practicability which he had formally imposed on himself. Retrospectively, it is surely a tragedy that Cobden later only fashioned intellectual arrows for specific targets of foreign policy instead of exploiting his wealth of knowledge and experience in works capable of conveying the core of his philosophy to future generations.

The pamphlets of 1835 and 1836 not only reveal many of Cobden's major ideas about social change but also his belief that Combe's psychology and moral philosophy had a direct application to bringing about the desired changes. For the purpose of analysis, the pamphlets will be turned inside out, examining the general ideas first and then the "social psychology" (as it might be called today) which Cobden drew on to group those ideas around pressing world and domestic problems.

2. General ideas: economic growth; national rivalries; the importance of history.

One of the most fundamental ideas is that social progress depends on a great expansion of manufacturing industry and agriculture not only in Britain but throughout the world. What is now called "economic growth", Cobden refers to as "commerce" and "labour and improvement".

"Commerce is the grand panacea, which, like a beneficent medical discovery, will serve to inoculate with the healthy and saving taste for civilisation all the nations of the world". By this Cobden meant that commerce requires a peaceful international order, swift communications, a system of law and public order, respect for contracts and

obligations, only possible with the acceptance of a common code of morality.³

Cobden asserted that economic growth must be world wide and that a peaceful international economy, based on free trade, would stimulate growth most effectively.

"May we not with safety predict that the steam engine... will at no distant day produce moral and physical changes, all over the world, of a magnitude and permanency, surpassing the effects of all the wars and conquests which have convulsed mankind since the beginning of time!"

Cobden means by moral effects, the raising of taste and expectations, of desire for education, knowledge and civilised life.⁴

Cobden did not pretend that the factory system in Britain was at present dispensing all the benefits for the mass of the workers that it was destined to. It was not his purpose in the pamphlets to go into the complex reasons for this. The evil of child labour which he spoke about in Parliament in the 1840's, was due to the poverty of parents, partly the result of the effects of the Corn Laws on the level of employment and wages. His comment in 1835 was that "it only remains for us to mitigate, as far as possible, the evils that are, perhaps, not inseparably connected with this novel social element."⁵

A second major idea is that national rivalry is a powerful force in trade and economic development. This was expressed by European countries in terms of getting monopoly sources of supply and monopoly markets: colonies, chartered companies and spheres of influence; home

industries protected from foreign competition by tariffs; naval forces and overseas bases to "protect commerce"; a general obsession with the "balance of power".

Despite these facts, Cobden believed that nation states - peoples of common language, culture and history - were a natural development of mankind and had a part to play in human progress by the stimulus to effort which the competition provoked. He believed, like Kant, that the rivalry of states, if properly directed into peaceful channels, would gradually lead to the interlocking of their economies in such a way that war became almost impossible.⁶

This theory is the basis of Cobden's plan for transforming British politics: reform of foreign policy is the key to reform of domestic politics. But he was far from believing that economic forces and nationalism "automatically" brought international peace and prosperity. Statesmanship of a high order was required, which could draw on knowledge of history and economics, the roles of religion and of education. A discussion of these major ideas will complete the survey.

Cobden took for granted that the outlook and traditions of states have been moulded by history and that prevailing ideas are extremely tenacious especially when the ruling class believed they supported their political and economic interests. Cobden saw that a new industrial order and a world economy were emerging but unmatched, in Britain at least, by any serious adaption of statecraft. His sense of history told him that a revolutionary change of opinions was unlikely in the foreseeable future and that progress

must take place by new ideas infiltrating their way alongside the old.

Cobden believed that only by "digging deep into the foundations of causes" could the roots of current social evils be uncovered. His method was inspired with "that indifference which we believe with Locke is the indispensable prelude to the successful search after truth". The pamphlets were saturated with historical facts of the countries which he was investigating. There were references to many historians and philosophers, the most important being Burke - "this great genius" - David Hume, Gibbon, Montesquieu, Vattel, Gentz, Heeren, C. Ruhière. He used historical examples to point up the fate of countries which fell into decline through over-extended empires and poor statesmanship - ancient Rome, modern Spain. Cobden noted astutely: "nearly all the revolutions and great changes in the modern world have had a financial origin".⁷

3. General ideas: religion and economic growth.

The fourth major idea is the influence of religion on social and economic change. Cobden was one of the first writers to emphasise this connection and his comments on it were apparently unknown to Max Weber when he published The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904-1905).

Unlike Weber, who sought to show the primacy of Protestantism in stimulating capitalist enterprise, Cobden showed a clear grasp of the interacting influence of religion and the economic order. Cobden believed that a society which practised religious toleration was the most conducive

to commercial enterprise, and he pointed to Holland in the seventeenth century and to the Protestant cantons of Switzerland (as compared with the Roman Catholic ones) to prove the point. He also used Catholicism in Ireland and the religion of Islam in the Near East to show how intolerant religions blocked commercial enterprise by the conservative institutions and ideas they supported.

Cobden did not name any Protestant sect as representing his ideal but spoke of "true religion" by which he meant a tolerant form of Christianity fostering the virtues of individual self-discipline, responsibility and initiative. He did not explicitly discuss whether "true religion" or a commercial society had primacy in promoting a prosperous economy but both were mutually reinforcing. He suggested that the economic development of Ireland would greatly assist the growth of the Church of England if the latter was disestablished and competed freely with Catholicism.

Again, he said that the development of Constantinople as a commercial port under Russian instead of Turkish, rule would ultimately favour "true Christianity" by the same process of competition. The Greek Orthodox Church which the Russians would support in Constantinople, although a "corrupt branch" of Christianity, was better than Islam and would eventually give way to "truer" and more tolerant forms of Christianity.

4. General ideas: education

The fifth major idea is the importance of education for industrial progress. Again, as in the case of religion and economic activity, Cobden is one of the earliest writers to emphasise this aspect of education. Adam Smith

made a passing reference to the special skills of a workman being of value not only to himself but to society, but then he wrote before the implications of science for industry were manifest. But even by the 1820's leading economists such as Ricardo and James Mill seemed unaware of the importance of this matter.¹⁰

Cobden wrote:

"The deficient education of a people is, no doubt, a circumstance that must tend, in these days, when the physical science and the arts are so intimately blended with manufacturing industry and when commerce itself has become a branch of philosophy, to keep them [Catholic countries like Ireland] in the rear rank of civilised nations... Those swiftest strides towards power which are making by nations excelling in mechanical and chemical science, industry, education, morality and freedom... If knowledge be power, and if education give knowledge, then must the Americans inevitably become the most powerful people in the world."¹¹

Cobden gave details of the assistance given to education by the state governments in the United States - the allotment of public land for schools and colleges in newly settled areas, the large allocation of funds for common schools from taxation in New York State. But he did not praise education simply for its effects on national wealth but also for its beneficial effects on morality and on the capacity of the people to support a free political system. "The people that are the best educated must, morally and religiously speaking, be the best"... "The very genius of American legislation is opposed to

ignorance in the people, as the most deadly enemy of good government". He emphasised the encouragement given to a cheap press in the United States by the fact that newspapers, advertisements and paper were not taxed. Cobden regarded a cheap newspaper press as a vital means of educating public opinion and he took a leading part in the campaign to get these taxes abolished in Britain.¹²

Cobden's comments on education in the pamphlets did not, of course, represent his full view of the value of education. He was deliberately framing realistic arguments for "hard headed" statesmen who may have no belief whatever in the moral progress of humanity. But he let slip the occasional hint of this, for example, in mentioning "the tranquil and unostentatious educational reforms in Switzerland" - a clear reference to the work of Pestalozzi and de Fellenberg. Nor must the underlying aims of the pamphlets be forgotten - "peace, economy and a moral ascendancy over brute violence, as well as deprecating national antipathies".¹³

5. The application of Combe's psychology and moral philosophy

The form in which Cobden cast these ideas for public consumption was decided by three factors. Firstly, that it was unwise to present a too theoretical scheme of politics seemingly divorced from real problems facing the country; secondly, that change in foreign policy was the key to domestic reforms; thirdly, Combe's psychology taught the importance in improving behaviour of directing the animal propensities to proper objects. Cobden did not mention Combe but there are many references to the propensities e.g. combativeness, self-preservation, fear, inhabitiveness (patriotism) as well as to the moral law and retribution.¹⁴

Judging by Cobden's conception of the true interests of Britain and of all countries in an inter-dependent world, Britain's foreign policy revealed a gross misdirection of the propensities. Combativeness and fear informed the current alarm about Russia's threatened encroachment on Turkey and the Dardanelles; the speeches of politicians were full of the need to maintain the "balance of power", to "protect commerce", which required armed forces ready to be despatched to any danger spot and naval and military bases around the world. Acquisitiveness - the increase of the nation's wealth - was wrongly served by current belief that a colonial empire, tariffs and imperial preferences, were the essential prerequisites of prosperity. Patriotism and national vanity were conceived in an undefined superiority over foreigners and in a generally belligerent attitude.

Redirecting the propensities required enlightening the minds of statesmen and leaders of opinion as to the real facts of the international economy and wherein lay the true sinews of power in the new industrial era. The proper use of combativeness - that which accorded the moral law - was in peaceful competition in trade and in developing the nation's human and material resources. Cobden decided to make an analysis of Britain's position vis-à-vis Russia and the United States the main thread of his argument. All arguments for economic growth, morality, religion and education were subordinated to this theme.

The United States - and Cobden excluded the southern slave-holding states - was Britain's true rival in power

evaluated in terms of manufacturers, railways, general education, an alert newspaper reading public, responsible government, economy in taxation, small armed forces and a peaceful foreign policy. Britain should be competing with the United States in this economic and social development and not with Russia in terms of the outmoded game of the balance of power and spheres of influence. Hostility to Russia was ill-conceived. The expansion of her territory simply added to her weakness if peoples of non-Russian race and language were ruled. British support of Turkey against Russia, supposedly to safeguard our commerce in the Near East, operated against her true commercial interests and the spread of Christianity.

Turkey was a backward and declining empire and a poor trading partner as compared with Russia. The fact that Turkey had no tariffs, whereas Russia had, was irrelevant to the fact of the growth of British trade with Russia. In fact, Russian control of Constantinople and the Dardanelles would help this area to become a great centre of trade, mutually beneficial to Britain and Russia.

Cobden urged that Britain should take a lesson from the United States about the power of example. For when Britain was fully aware of how the United States was advancing, she would surely follow suit. Cobden realised that in his time much of the argument had to be based on an appeal to morality on grounds of material self-interest rather than those of the higher ends of human existence. "States will turn moralists in self-defence". He hoped that statesmen would become convinced that British influence in the world would be best served by setting an example

of pride in domestic achievements and a foreign policy which set out to make all countries peaceful trading partners.¹⁵

Cobden also used Switzerland as an example of a small country poor in natural resources which managed, by a policy of free trade, education and efficient industry to export calico prints in competition with states with good natural resources, including Britain.¹⁶

Cobden discussed certain domestic problems as an integral part of his argument about competing commercially with the United States and other countries. Two problems were the most dangerous and pressing: the misgovernment and poverty of Ireland and the effects of the Corn Laws on Britain. Ireland was a "cancer in the side of England". Its impoverished and starving workers poured into England, flooding the unskilled labour market in rural areas and in some cities like Manchester. The Irish workers tended to depress the wage levels of unskilled English workers. Ireland needed just and positive government by Britain which encouraged the investment of capital in railways, industry and agriculture, so making the country an asset instead of a liability to Britain.¹⁷

Cobden did not complain of mass poverty in Britain apart from mentioning the "scanty wages" of agricultural labourers and the Irish in Manchester. During the years 1834 to 1836 in which he wrote the pamphlets, England enjoyed an industrial boom and there was steady employment in the manufacturing towns. But he was aware of just how precarious the boom was, depending as it did on good harvests which kept bread prices low. The "iniquitous

Corn Laws... often starved our artisans in the midst of idle looms" by the economics of effective demand and consumption outlined in Chapter Four and not elaborated by Cobden in the pamphlets.¹⁸

Cobden asserted that the "suicidal" Corn Laws had also operated to slow down the expansion of manufacturing industry in Britain and had subjected the country to bouts of boom and slump. The abolition of the Corn Laws was essential if Britain's industry was to expand to compete with other countries and earn enough to pay off the huge national debt.¹⁹

He deliberately framed the arguments in terms of state necessity. He exercised considerable restraint in not presenting arguments which suggested "social revolution". What he refrained from saying is significant not as an indication of his inner beliefs but of his ideological tactics. He is silent about land reform (while making plain his dislike of primogeniture and "feudalism"), extension of the franchise and specifically rejects American republican institutions as unsuitable for Britain.²⁰

Twelve years after Cobden's pamphlets, Marx and Engels wrote The Communist Manifesto (1848) which had the identical theme of the world expansion of capitalism. They predicted that capitalism would bring lower living standards to the masses and would collapse by the force of its own contradictions. Cobden predicted the beneficial effects of capitalism, if statesmen created the right conditions in Britain and the world. One hundred and fifty years later, his pamphlets are almost forgotten,

while The Communist Manifesto of 1848, predicting the collapse of capitalism, is very well known to students of history and politics.

Summary

The two pamphlets of 1835 and 1836 were unique in Cobden's career in that he gave in them much fuller indications of the philosophy and statecraft of politics aimed to transform the destiny of humanity than he ever did again. The reason for this was that after he became personally engaged in political life, he realised the need to restrict his public discussion to immediate issues.

The main strategy of the arguments - pointing out where Britain's real dangers lay, the best way to enrich the country - was based on George Combe's theory of psychology and moral philosophy.

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CHAPTER SIX

Education for Cobden's Workpeople

1. The calico printworks at Sabden and Chorley

The aim of this chapter is to give an account of Cobden as the major employer at Sabden, a small village, and also at Crosse Hall, on the outskirts of Chorley.

As this covers 1832-39 at Sabden and 1838-47 at Crosse Hall, it ranges from the time before Cobden entered active political life to the period of the League.

Knowledge of his activities in Manchester and in national politics is necessary for a complete understanding of his local work, but this is best dealt with separately in following chapters.

Cobden's business from 1832 to 1839 was a partnership with Sheriff, Foster and Gillett. George Foster was in charge of the printworks at Sabden and Cobden managed the Manchester office and warehouse. In August 1838, Cobden leased a printworks at Crosse Hall, Chorley and in May 1840 entered into a partnership with his elder brother Frederick. The Sabden partnership was terminated in August 1839. Unfortunately very little material survives on which to build up a continuous and detailed picture. No detailed description of the printworks at either place or of the schools built by Cobden has been found. There are only some financial records of the business.¹

Sabden was (and still is) a village close by Pendle Hill, about 28 miles north of Manchester. With a population of 1,200, it had three shops, two public houses and two beer shops. There was not any post office nor

substitute for one; the nearest was at Blackburn, eight miles away. A Baptist chapel was the only church. There were no daily schools except a number of "dame schools". The printworks had the appearance of a cotton mill, for it was built as one but became a printworks from 1794. Cobden's firm employed 600 people which is half the population of the village.²

The calico printing industry was in the midst of technological transition in the 1830's. Traditionally, the cloth was given patterns by a laborious process of block printing by hand. Power driven cylinder machines were being introduced but their use was limited by the fact that they could not print intricate patterns. There were nine machines at Sabden in 1840. The machines were used to print outlines and stripes; the rest had to be done by hand. The highest quality of delaines - for which the firm was noted - needed much hand printing.

The block printing was done at tables. There were 190 tables in 1840; significantly, the number had dropped to 135 in 1846.³ The cloth, having been bleached or dyed, was wound on to the table. The printer was assisted by a teerer (usually a boy aged between eight and fourteen) whose job it was to have the colour ready for each application of the engraved block by the printer. The teerer had a wooden drum topped by a floating sieve on which a woollen cloth was stretched. The teerer spread the colour evenly with a brush and the printer placed his block on it. The block was then applied to the cloth, the printer striking the block with a mallet. To print a piece of cloth 28 yards long and 30 inches broad, no

less than 672 applications of a block 9 inches long and 5 inches broad are requisite for each colour; so that if there are three colours, 2,016 applications will be necessary.⁴

There is no record of the sex and age distribution of the work force before 1843. It was then as follows:

Adult males (over 21)	336
Adult females	16
Young persons (13-18 years) male	147
" " " " female	33
Children (under 13) boys	102
" " " girls	<u>67</u>
Total	701

This statement does not tell us how young the children could be. But luckily a detailed breakdown was made by T. Hyland, Cobden's manager at Crosse Hall, in February 1845. There is no reason to doubt that it was any different from the age range at Sabden in the 1830's.

Married men above 21 years	299
Single " " " "	115
Married women " " "	2
Single " " " "	9
Boys above 13 and under 21 years	112
Girls " " " " "	34
Boys above 10 and under 13 years	118
Girls " " " " "	48
Boys and girls under 10 years and above 7 years	<u>80</u>
Total	817

"We have seen very few under 8 years. 111 teerers have fathers working here; 3 tier for their mothers. I merely state this to show that the young hands are not very likely to be ill used when they have fathers with them".⁵

The employment of very young children was normal in calico printing. J. Kennedy, the Sub-Commissioner investigating printworks in 1843, found that nearly two-thirds of children began work between the ages of six and nine. The fact is shocking to the modern mind and may seem to jar with the ideals for which Cobden stood. But the fact illustrates the harsh realities of life for the working class with which Cobden had to deal as an employer. Life for the worker and his family was almost completely absorbed in work, which began as soon as the child was old enough to do something useful at six or seven. The child contributed to the family's income.

T. Hyland, in the statement quoted above, noted that the total wages for the previous week at Crosse Hall had been £636. 15s. 2d., giving an average of 15s. 7d. each. This average hides the wide range of wages actually paid. No wage book for Sabden or Crosse Hall survives but at various times Cobden mentioned Crosse Hall rates. The skilled men (block printers and cutters) earned 20s. to 30s. per week; unskilled men got 12s. and children 3s. The top wage compared favourably with a skilled man's wage in a textile mill. The lower wages were better than those obtained by an agricultural labourer or a handloom weaver, who often got no more than 7s. Wages in calico printing in Lancashire were in fact fairly standard, as

Sub-Commissioner J. Kennedy reported in 1843.⁶

The number of skilled men at Sabden was about 150 printers and 70 cutters - 220 out of the total force of 600. In 1838, Cobden said the Sabden works paid out £20,000 to £22,000 annually. Calico-printing was subject to sharp seasonal fluctuations in demand, necessitating periods of intense work and also of slack work. Pattern could change up to 70 times in one season. These factors affected weekly wages. Taking Cobden's annual wages bill and assuming an average wage of 15s., it would appear that standard wages were earned in at least 44 of 52 weeks.⁷

The normal working day was 12 hours from Monday to Friday and 9 hours on Saturday. Night shifts were operated in peak periods but they were kept to a minimum by the best employers. Cobden stated in 1842 that during the last 18 months he had employed 20 men at night, mostly men who had been unemployed.⁸

There is little evidence as to what the diet of the people was. It must have depended on whether the adult worker was skilled or not; whether working full time or not; the number of non-working children in the family; the price of basic foods. Bread was subject to sharp fluctuations of price under the Corn Laws. For example, a 4lb. loaf cost about 7d. in 1835 and 1 shilling in 1839. As can be seen from the wages quoted above (which remained unchanged at Sabden) an unskilled man's family was terribly vulnerable and could afford only the cheapest food. In 1897, J. Bennett, who worked as a teerer in Sabden in the 1830's remembered that the principal food of the village was oatmeal but it is difficult to believe that this was true every year except for the lowest paid

or largest families.⁹

In these circumstances, one can appreciate that full time education made little sense to parents who not only desperately needed the pence the child earned but expected him to spend his working life at the printworks. The managers of the Baptist Sunday School in Sabden found it necessary to give the children a penny each to encourage attendance.¹⁰ Cobden deplored the necessity for children to work instead of being educated. It was the duty of the state to establish a proper system of national education and to foster a higher standard of living which would lessen parental need for child earnings. To forbid employment of young children was a hardship on parents unless it could be shown that the work was injurious to their health. Cobden believed that work in textile mills was so, and fully supported the Factory Act of 1833 which forbade employment of children under nine and limited the hours of children under thirteen to 48 per week. He also supported the Mines Act of 1842 which forbade employment of children underground before ten years of age. But he asserted that labour in the printworks was not unhealthy.¹¹

There was one option which Cobden did not adopt - the plan of combining education with the day's work which had been written into the 1833 Act. Factory owners were forbidden to employ a child under thirteen without a certificate that the child had received at least two hours education per day the previous week. While this encouraged some employers to establish good schools on their premises many were content to observe only the letter of the law. For Cobden, not only were the latter bringing

education into disrepute but it was in any case tacking education onto the day's work and simply adding to it. He saw this done at a printworks in Chemnitz (Saxony) in 1838 and noted his rejection of the plan.¹²

In the absence of national education, the best way forward was not to force education - good or bad - on to children but to provide a school of such quality that it attracted the parents to send their children to it. First the carrot and then a little stick in the shape of rules of employment at the printworks.

2. The Reading Room and school at Sabden

It took four years to establish a good school in Sabden. Cobden began by providing facilities for the self-education of young people and adults. Cobden was inspired by the practice of the best employers in Lancashire and Cheshire and by the ideas and work of the exponents of infant education. Samuel Robinson, a Unitarian cotton spinner, had established in 1833 a Village Library in Dukinfield near Ashton-under-Lyne. At Turton, near Bolton, Henry and Edmund Ashworth, Quaker cotton spinners, had established a school for under nine year olds and an evening and Sunday school. Similarly, at Hyde, Cheshire, T. Ashton, a Unitarian cotton spinner, had a day, evening and Sunday school. At Quarry Bank, Styal, Cheshire, Samuel and William R. Greg, Unitarian cotton spinners, had built a school.

There were also four very active advocates of infant education: Samuel Wilderspin (1792-1866) who periodically toured the country lecturing and opening schools; David Stow (1793-1864) who managed a Model Infant School in

Glasgow; James Simpson (1781-1853) the phrenologist and friend of George Combe; and Archibald Prentice (1792-1857), the editor and proprietor of The Manchester Times. Prentice had published a pamphlet Remarks on Instruction in Schools for Infants and frequently lectured in Lancashire. In 1832, he helped to start T. Ashton's school at Hyde. Wilderspin was busy in Bury, Lancashire, in April 1835, just before Cobden left for the United States.¹³

Cobden could not implement any plans for education at Sabden without the consent of his partners. Luckily, George Foster, his partner at Sabden was equally committed to the cause of education. Foster taught at the Baptist Sunday school. There is no record of opposition by Gillett and Sheriff, the London partners. It was fortunate that the years until 1837 were very prosperous for the business. In 1836, the profits were £23,000.¹⁴

The Pendle Hill Library and Reading Society was opened on 21 July 1834, in a small room at the printworks. Sheriff and Gillett, among others, were present when Cobden made a little speech. It became "night school" and at least three educated young men, John Hyland, Robert Hindle and Benjamin Laycock, taught voluntarily. By 1838, when it had a room in the new school, the Sabden Reading Society (as it became better known) had 72 members, 309 books and a set of maps. Reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar and geography were taught. The entry fee was four shillings and the quarterly subscription was one shilling and six-pence.¹⁵

Cobden's next step was in co-operation with Rev.

John Jones, who became minister of the Baptist Chapel in 1833. In the autumn of 1834 the Chapel was enlarged by the addition of school rooms at a cost of £400. Cobden and his friends contributed handsomely to the cost. This was probably to extend the work of the Sunday school and provide temporary room for the evening classes. The daily school for infants does not seem to have begun before the Spring of 1836.¹⁶

In New York, on 10 July 1835, Cobden made an important entry in his travel diary:

"Then we walk to see an infant school - Oh! the happy sight pregnant with hopes of the exaltation of the character of future generations! I hereby dedicate myself to the task of promoting the cause of infant schools in England whereby they may become an instrument for ameliorating the fate of the children working in the factories whose case I fear is beyond the reach of all other remedies."¹⁷

This resolution marks an important watershed in Cobden's life when the "hermit intellectual" begins to merge with the genial and resourceful man of business. Cobden did not yet envisage entering political life to support the comprehensive programme of England, Ireland and America, the reviews of which he read only when he returned to England. But he evidently believed that he could lend a hand in the infant school movement. The first necessity was to establish an infant school at Sabden which could serve as an example to others.

On 28 August 1835, twelve days after docking at Liverpool, Cobden wrote to Archibald Prentice asking if he could, when visiting London, recommend a teacher to take charge of an infant school at Sabden:

"An individual who was competent to instruct children upon Wilderspin's principle and who was able and willing

to teach adults in the evening, - here is the kind of man we (my partner and I) have long felt to be desirable at Sabden - and if such an individual could be recommended by you it would be conferring a blessing upon a community of upwards of 1200 souls. The remuneration we shall, as occupiers of the print works, undertake to secure to the teacher, will be liberal. Will you be kind enough to drop me a line to say what probability there is of you meeting my wishes.

Yours very truly, Richard Cobden

P.S. I have been recommended to read a pamphlet by D. Stow of the firm of Stow & Wilson upon Infant Schools - the writer resides at Glasgow.¹⁸

The next surviving piece of evidence as to the beginning of the school is a letter to George Foster on 14 April 1836 congratulating him on "the movement you announce to have begun in behalf of infant schools in Sabden," Cobden had arranged for a bus load of children to be sent from an infant school in Manchester to be exhibited at Sabden as an example to working class parents whose attitude, as Prentice recorded, was often indifferent or suspicious. Such exhibitions were a favourite device of Wilderspin. Cobden's hope was that soon Sabden would be sending its own "volunteer corps of infant troops" to enlighten nearby Clitheroe and Padiham.¹⁹

One story has survived from this time that Cobden made a regular compensation to at least one of the ladies - Mrs. Conner - who taught up to ten children in her home and might expect to lose this livelihood with the opening of the day school.²⁰

A new school house was built at a cost of £700 to Cobden's firm and opened on Whit Monday 15 May 1837 with a public examination of the children who had been taught by Mr. and Mrs. Pashley. Besides the school room, it had a library room, lecture room and a house for the teacher

attached. Cobden spoke but there is no record of his remarks nor of the other speakers. It was a considerable tribute to Cobden's and Foster's reputation and tact that both Church of England and dissenting clergy attended:

Rev. J.C. Adamson (vicar of Padiham), Rev. Dr. W. Powell (Headmaster of Clitheroe Grammar School) Rev. Richard Noble (vicar of Whalley), Rev. William Fraser (Baptist minister at Bolton), Rev. J.H. Anderton (vicar of Clitheroe) and Rev. Joseph Wadsworth (Independent minister at Clitheroe).²¹

On 1 January 1838, 250 workpeople sat down in the school room for a celebration supper. The reporter noted that the walls were adorned with these mottos: "Education, honour and happiness"; "Intelligence and Liberty"; "Industry, economy and independence"; "Education, the birthright of man". Early in 1838, a new young teacher was appointed, Thomas Hudson. He had trained at Borough Road School in London, the model school of the British and Foreign School Society, for probably the usual period of three months. He had previously taught for three months at the Lancasterian School in Bristol. The subjects taught at Borough Road were arithmetic, writing, outline drawing, elements of geometry, geography and natural history. Reading was taught from Bible extracts. The testimonial of the Headmaster at Bristol referred to his keen temperance principles - principles on which Cobden and Foster placed great stress - in Sabden.²²

Unfortunately, there is no description of the teaching or apparatus at the school. A speculative picture may be based on the declared aims of Wilderspin's system and on

Cobden's descriptions of infant schools which pleased him. Wilderspin advocated an education for infants which, in its essentials, pointed towards modern practice. His system drew on Locke, Pestalozzi, Swedenborg and the phrenologists. It aimed at developing the mental and physical faculties and harnessing the curiosity and liveliness of the child. Understanding, not inert knowledge, was the aim. By the time the child left school at the age of six or seven, Wilderspin expected the following attainments: four rules of arithmetic, simple reading, some knowledge of geography, natural history and of everyday things, the main principles of the New Testament and their expression in everyday behaviour, such as unselfishness and kindness. A well-equipped playground had a very important rôle not only as a needed interval for recreation, but as a place of behaviour training. Stow, who adapted Wilderspin's ideas, called it the "uncovered schoolroom".²³

Just how far the Cobden school reached Wilderspin's ideal will never be known, but Cobden must have striven for it. When Cobden toured the German states and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in September 1838, he visited several schools and made detailed notes of two infant schools, one in Prague and one in Vienna. He noted that Wilderspin's plan is pursued in the Vienna school, but it is clear that it was equally the case in Prague. Wilderspin's ideas had been popularised in the Empire by J. Wertheimer during the previous twelve years. Cobden described the Prague school as follows:

..."Then proceed to the model infant school which I found to be superior in arrangement to any I had seen

before. The master showed us through. Has 240 children and there are five in Prague - four for Christians and one for Jews. The furniture and ornaments of the school were of this character - bunches of ripe corn in ears such as wheat, barley, oats etc. Beside these hung a miniature flail - about 20 little vials hung against a board which was moveable containing corn of every sort - peas, pears etc. as well as flour, bran, oatmeal etc. Under these were hung the measures of the country in little tin cans. On one side stood a pair of scales. And near to these I observed little models of agricultural implements of all kinds - such as harrow, plough, wagon, horse in harness etc. Then there was a complete model of a corn mill. In a glass case amongst other little models or toys were those of a weaver and spinner at work."

Cobden continued his detailed description of the display boards, noting "the only thing to displease and which the master himself confessed he did not approve was a collection of little wooden imitations of guns which the children were accustomed to use in their martial exercises".

"There is a playground behind the school of perhaps three-quarters of an acre, divided into two parts. The inner one contains a sort of dell closely planted with trees into which the children go to walk or play in the cool shade during the heat of summer. In this garden are all kinds of flowers, fruits etc. In the front is the school garden where all kinds of grain and vegetables are sown by the master in the presence of the children and the whole is afterwards explained as it grows and when ripe gathered by the little ones for use.

N.B. This is a model school to which even the Jews send their masters for examination. There is not I believe such another institution in the world!"

Cobden intended to make full use of his notes. Even from Germany, he wrote to William Neild, Quaker calico printer and President of the Manchester Society for Promoting National Education, that he would describe all the particulars on his return.²⁴

When the new school at Sabden was established, Cobden followed the example of James Thomson, at the Primrose Printworks near Clitheroe, who had sometime before May 1837 adopted the rule that no boy of 14 would be allowed to become an apprentice to blockprinting or other skilled

trade unless he could read and write. From 1 January 1838, the following rules came into operation at the Sabden printworks:

"First. With the exception of existing engagements, no young person can in future be permitted to learn the respective businesses of pattern-drawing, block-cutting, block-printing or machine-printing, who may not be able to read and write with tolerable correctness, and who may not also know something of accounts.

Second. As a motive to self-improvement in those young men that are already employed in the above businesses, any one of them that may complete his term of seven years after December, 1838, and who may not have in the meantime gained for himself a tolerably correct knowledge of reading writing and arithmetic, cannot have the promise of employment after the expiry of his term of seven years, except in such cases where the attainment of such knowledge can be proved to have been impossible."²⁵

It should be noted that these rules required minimum educational attainment and not simply school attendance as was required by the Factory Act of 1833. Dr. James P. Kay (later Kay-Shuttleworth), Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, referred with approval to this system which made proof of education the parent's responsibility, when giving evidence on 26 February 1838 to the Select Committee on the Education of the Poorer Classes in England and Wales. The Whig government was sufficiently impressed to introduce a bill on these lines on 9 April 1838 but it failed to get support and was abandoned.²⁶

In retrospect, Cobden believed that it "worked exceedingly well". There is no record as to how good an attendance was achieved, but it is probable that it was highest during periods of slack work (the summer particularly) at the printworks. There was a charge of 2d. per week.²⁷

3. The printworks, Reading Room and school at Chorley

In August 1838, Cobden leased the printworks at Crosse Hall, Chorley, 19 miles from Manchester. He did not leave the Sabden partnership for another year. The printworks were established in 1786. When Cobden took over, they had been unoccupied for two years. It was Cobden's plan that his brother Frederick should take over as the leading partner, leaving Cobden with more time for political activities. If times had been stable and prosperous, Frederick, who lacked Cobden's flair for business, might have succeeded as general manager. But in the Spring of 1839 the National Anti-Corn Law League was founded and Cobden was caught up in the seven years' struggle which left him little time to assist Frederick and his younger brother Charles who was also brought in.

The business was soon struggling in the industrial depression of 1839-1842 and even afterwards it seems that calico-printing was subject to big market and financial stresses. In August, 1845, the business was on the point of financial collapse, and it was saved only by the quick action of Cobden's friends, who were afraid that he would give up the leadership of the League.²⁸

The works which Cobden took over were on Cowling Brow Road and 200 yards north of Cowling Bridge over the Leeds and Liverpool canal. The buildings at Crosse Hall, a third of a mile away, had previously been part of one scattered printworks, but although now unconnected with Cobden's firm, it was evidently thought convenient to keep the name. The Cowling Brow works were enlarged with a new building to house five cylinder printing machines.

This was situated on the east side of Black Brook and was nearer the canal from where the coal for the engines was brought.

By 1846, the number of machines had been increased to ten. This was a big capital outlay which brought its own problems. In April 1845, Cobden told Frederick to make sure that the machines were used as much as possible in the slack periods. Fewer block-printers and teerers were needed. It was Cobden's opinion by 1847 that the blockshops should be closed and parents urged to put their children into different employment. To provide a basis for flexible employment was one of the purposes of schooling which Cobden tried to impress on parents.

The educational policy followed the Sabden pattern. On 8 January 1840, the Crosse Hall Library and Reading Society was established. A school was opened soon afterwards. Nothing is known about it but in 1846 Leonard Horner, the Factory Inspector, mentioned it as one of the good schools attached to printworks in Lancashire.²⁹

Cobden, by all accounts, had a reputation as a good employer in Chorley and the fact is pointed up by the pathetic attempt of the Tory Protectionist MP W.B. Ferrand to prove the contrary. In 1842, during a debate on the truck system - the payment of wages in kind instead of money - Ferrand accused Cobden (in Parliament from 1841) of indulging in this practice by forcing his workpeople to buy milk. Cobden denied this - he stated that wages were paid weekly - and shortly afterwards the matter was taken up by the Select Committee on Truck. Mr. Oldfield,

a witness, and clerk to a firm of solicitors in Chorley, said that there were only four cows at the printworks and that they were rented out. Oldfield asserted that Cobden was one of the best masters in that part of the country.

"The only thing I have ever heard against Mr. Cobden is that he employs too many Scotchmen." If this was so, it was the result of Cobden's difficulty in finding men with a good basic education to undertake responsible jobs.

The parochial schools of Scotland achieved this to a far greater degree than any in England.³⁰

The fund raising lists of the League show that Cobden received support from his printers. There was genuine rejoicing when the Corn Laws were repealed, holding out the prospect of lower average bread prices. The event was celebrated by the firm at Crosse Hall by sending the entire workforce to Fleetwood on a day's outing - Wednesday, 15 July 1846 - wages paid and tickets and entertainment provided. With wives and relatives, the total party numbered 1,400 and travelled 20 miles by train, in open carriages, at a speed of 15 m.p.h. The Crosse Hall Band played at the head of the procession in Chorley and again at the Fleetwood Arms Inn during the dinner, which had several sittings. Every employed person received a fine medallion bearing Cobden's bust on one side and a scene depicting free trade and full employment on the reverse.³¹

One letter of Cobden's shows his deep concern for the welfare of his workpeople. Reading newspapers forwarded to him at Genoa in January 1847, he read of the distress amongst blockprinters at Chorley. He instructed Frederick

to ensure that any cases of poverty be relieved out of his (Cobden's) account. "Do not let anybody be perishing with want in this cold season".³²

4. The Calico Printworks Act, 1845

In 1843, the Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission was published, which contained Assistant Commissioner J.L. Kennedy's findings about the printworks. Kennedy urged the need for the enforcement of education by law but noted that the employment of children was unavoidable. There were no satisfactory power machines which could dispense with the work of teerers. At Thomson's and Cobden's printworks, fine work was done that could not be done by machines.³³

Lord Ashley responded to the report by bringing in a bill in the Commons on 18 February 1845 with provisions including the limitation of the hours of children under thirteen to eight per day or thirteen hours on three alternate days in the week; the first system to be accompanied by two hours of compulsory education daily, and the second system by three hours on the non-working days. Cobden did not wish to become too publicly involved in a matter which was a distraction from the paramount issue of the Corn Law, but he advised James Thomson, one of the leading calico printers of Lancashire, on how to keep Sir James Graham, the Home Secretary, informed of the particular features of the industry.

Cobden spoke in the Commons debate on 18 April after Sir J. Graham who had already pointed out the great difficulties of legislating for an industry in which the majority of workers were not operating machines and which

was subject to seasonal fluctuations of work. Lord Ashley was eventually obliged to accept the amendments of Peel's Conservative government which injected realism into the bill, passed without a division in June 1845. The employment of children under 8 years of age was forbidden. No child between 8 and 13, nor any woman, was to be employed at night. Apart from this clause, there was no restriction of hours of work. The education clauses required a certificate of school attendance to be shown before employment and made attendance compulsory for at least thirty days in each half year. This clause was to enable school attendance to take place during slack periods at the printworks.

The act must have made little difference at Crosse Hall except to bring children up to thirteen years of age into the school for erratic weeks. Messrs. Hargreaves, calico printers of Accrington stipulated that preference for employment in slack times would go to those who had spent the longest periods in school. It is possible that Cobden adopted a similar rule but there is no surviving evidence.³⁴

Cobden's acquisition of a private income as the result of a huge donation for his labours for the League brought an end to his days as an employer. In 1849 the works were sold to John Sale, his brother-in-law. Cobden bought his birthplace at Dunford, Sussex, and lived there for the rest of his life.

Summary

The chapter has given a picture, as far as is possible from scanty surviving evidence, of Cobden as an employer at calico printworks at Sabden and Chorley. The block-printing process is described and the age range of the workforce, the rates of pay, hours of work and standard of living. Cobden's efforts to raise the educational level are described: the adult evening schools, and the regulations about basic education.

The problems raised by Lord Ashley's bill to restrict hours in printworks and Cobden's "behind the scenes" efforts to get practical modifications are outlined. The last years of Cobden's career as a manufacturer were concerned with the implementation of the Calico Printworks Act of 1845 and the declining need for blockprinters.

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CHAPTER SEVENAwakening Manchester 1835-1836.1. Cobden's entry into public and political life in Manchester.

In 1835, Cobden was drawn into public life by the pressure of his many friends. Until 1841, when the economic depression overwhelmed it, he engaged in a vast educational drive. It had several main facets: to awaken the industrialists and merchants to full awareness of their true political, social and economic interests and to promote reforms in local and national life; to provide means for the lower middle class of clerks and shopkeepers to improve their level of education and to exert an influence in politics; to provide means for the working class to get education for themselves and, ultimately, take their place in political life. The examination of this occupies the present and two following chapters. Before beginning, it is necessary to look at the steps by which Cobden entered public life, review the national political scene and also the state of Manchester society.

The first society which Cobden joined was the Manchester Phrenological Society, probably in March or April 1835. The Society had been formed in 1829 by Jonathan N. Rawson, a Unitarian manufacturer. George Wilson (1808-1870), a starch manufacturer and member of the Church of England, was the most important member of this society so far as Cobden's future career was concerned. For a while he was President of the Society, following Rawson, until December 1834 when Daniel Noble, a surgeon, was elected. In 1832, Wilson served on the committee which secured the election

of C.P. Thomson as one of the two Liberal MPs for Manchester after the Reform Act. In 1836-38 he assisted Cobden in the educational movement and in the incorporation struggle. More famously, Wilson was the Chairman of the Anti-Corn Law League. Wilson proved to be a fine "organisation man" and party manager.¹

In 1834, the Phrenological Society gave a course of public lectures on phrenology in the Society's rooms in the Mechanics Institute, followed by one on infant education by Archibald Prentice. Almost certainly, Cobden's object in joining was not to indulge in "bumpology" but to guide the members' energy towards promoting infant education. He probably thought of this involvement as public but not essentially political work.²

It was the publication of England, Ireland and America "by a Manchester Manufacturer" on 2 May 1835 which gradually drew him into direct involvement in politics. As Cobden was sailing for the United States from Liverpool the day before publication, he sent in April a number of "pre-publication" copies to manufacturers in Manchester. Evidently, he signed these, for some "cotton lords" called to compliment him. It cannot be doubted that they all suggested that he enter politics.³

After returning from the United States in August 1835, he asked for Prentice's help in finding a teacher for Sabden, as related in the last chapter. Perhaps Prentice thought that Cobden could help him in return. At any rate, probably in September or October, Prentice invited him to speak in favour of the incorporation of Manchester at the Cotton Tree Tavern, Ancoats. The result only proved what Cobden

had learnt at Sabden - that he was a very nervous public speaker and apparently unfit for political "hurly-burly". But he improved his performance by joining a private Literary and Debating Club in December 1835 - of which he was Vice-President by March 1836. Cobden's leading part in establishing the Athenaeum in October 1835 led to his election to the Manchester Statistical Society in November 1835 and to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society in April 1836.

Apart from the pressure of friends, Cobden was probably forced into recognising the need to personally enter the political arena by a growing contempt for Lord Melbourne's Whig government, in office (with a brief intermission in 1834) since 1832. He regarded the Whigs less respectfully than the Tories, for the Whigs talked a great deal about "our glorious constitution" and about liberty but in fact lacked political honesty and often truckled subserviently to the Tories. They were only a wing of the landed aristocracy. The so-called Radical MPs tagged along with the Whigs helping to keep them in power but were not otherwise very effective. Cobden thought that several Radical MPs in Lancashire were "soulless louts" who lacked ability to sustain any intellectual conversation. The only valuable achievement of the government was the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 the household voting qualification of which held out a promise of more popular local government than existed at Westminster. Otherwise, the Corn Laws, primogeniture, the corrupt electoral system lacking the secret ballot and a huge national debt remained intact.⁴

The education of the people had been disgracefully

fobbed off with a miserly £20,000 per annum grant to the National Society (Church of England) and the British and Foreign School Society (non-denominational but mainly supported by Protestant dissenters). This grant for 25 million people compared with the £200,000 spent by New York State on the education of 2 million people.⁵

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which Cobden supported in principle, should have been enacted after the repeal of the Corn Laws. In other words, a prosperous and soundly based economy would produce fewer paupers and the Act would not have appeared as harsh and unjust as it had done.⁶

Cobden believed that very little good would come out of Parliament without concerted pressure by public opinion in favour of specific reforms. The problem about achieving this was that "such as the tail and the body are, such will be the character of the head". The kind of public opinion which Cobden longed for, could only be the result of a long and slow process of general education and of political education. It was his aim to give Manchester a powerful voice. His entry into active politics was a recognition that simply publishing two pamphlets would not do it.⁷

Of the greatest significance for his future career was his speech on 24 February 1836 at the celebration dinner of the new Stockport Corporation. Cobden spoke on the destiny of commerce to bring peace and noted that it already had one triumph - the invention of the infant school by Robert Owen, a cotton spinner. Soon afterwards he was adopted as the Reform candidate for Stockport but he failed to get elected in the general election of 1837. He repre-

sented the borough from 1841 to 1847.⁸

2. The Condition of Manchester: Industry, Housing and Education.

The problems to be overcome in Manchester were formidable. It was a very divided city in many senses, in wealth and poverty, in education and ignorance, in politics and religion. The population of the borough of Manchester - the central township and the surrounding "townships" or suburbs - was 200,000. The working population was about 71,000. This was composed of 20,000 factory workers; 3,000 handloom weavers; 7,000 warehouse workers; 7,000 in various manufacturing trades; 4,500 in building trades and 6,000 in clothing trades. There were about 123 cotton mills with an average workforce of 290 men, women and children. Only three mills had over 1,000 workers. The largest was McConnel & Co. with 1,500. The range of wages at McConnel's was much the same as for Cobden's people at Sabden. Skilled men got about 27s. per week on the average at one extreme and 13 year olds 4s. In 1836, the clause of the Factory Act of 1833 came into operation which laid down an 8 hour day for children aged 12 in cotton mills; this already applied to 9 to 12 year olds.⁹

The worst paid adult workers in Manchester were the handloom weavers and probably many in the building and clothing trades. The labour market was glutted by immigrant workers from the English countryside and from Ireland. For the Irish, the lowest wage in Manchester was better than what they got in Ireland.

The districts of Manchester reflected the incomes of the population. The township of Manchester, now the

centre of the growing conurbation which was the parliamentary borough, was divided between the commercial quarter, a small wealthy residential area on the west side, and slum areas on the east and south sides. The latter included "Little Ireland", an appalling slum on the north side of the Medlock stream. It was probably this area which the French visitor de Tocqueville described horrifically in 1835. F. Engels also graphically described the inner city slums which he saw in 1843 and 1844.¹⁰

Around the central township, there were townships which housed the better paid workers and the lower and upper middle classes. Salford, an enclave on the west, was a separate borough. Broughton to the north-west was mainly an upper middle class suburb. It was free from the prevailing smoke laden atmosphere of central Manchester. Cobden moved here from Quay Street in the centre after his marriage in 1840. To the east there was Ancoats, mainly working class, and the south-east and south, Ardwick, Chorlton and Hume. The latter had working-class and middle class housing.

The abysmal educational level of the majority of the working class reflected the fact that most children over the age of seven or eight were in employment. The Manchester Statistical Society made a survey of schools in Manchester in 1834 and 1835 and concluded that out of a total of 50,000 children between the ages of 5 and 15, two-thirds received some instruction and one third none at all. For two-thirds of those receiving instruction it was simply attendance at Sunday School, where reading was usually the only subject taught. A few Sunday Schools taught

arithmetic and writing. The remaining third, apart from Sunday School, irregularly attended several hundred private dame schools, common day and evening schools, and also 21 endowed and charity schools. The dame, day and evening "schools" were either childminding groups or rooms where the 3 R's were taught.

The endowed and charity schools included some that gave a good education. There were five infant schools conducted on Wilderspin's system, three attached to dissenters' chapels, one to the Society of Friends (Quakers) and one public subscription. The largest school was the Lancastrian School (British and Foreign School Society) with 721 boys and 320 girls; the Granby Row National School (Church of England) with 280 boys and 150 girls; the Mechanics Institute Day School with 210 boys and 110 girls.

The last school and the Scotch Church Day School gave the best education in that they both had a wide curriculum and used the "explanative system" of the Edinburgh Sessional School. This system was a break with monitorial and rote systems of learning, aiming to develop the pupils' reasoning faculties.

The Statistical Society report did not specify which schools the lower middle class and better off sections of the working class attended but it may be guessed that the 114 "superior private and boarding schools", the Free Grammar School and the Mechanics Institute Day School took a good proportion.¹¹

3. The condition of Manchester: local government and political rivalries.

De Tocqueville very perceptively described Manchester

as "a medieval town with the marvels of the nineteenth century in the middle of it", meaning by "marvels", the "huge palaces of industry" with power-driven machinery. Much of the unmade roads and filth of the slum districts was due to the fact that Manchester had indeed a medieval form of town government, and could adopt no other except by public petition according to the Municipal Corporations Act. The government of the Township of Manchester was in the hands of the Boroughreeve and two Constables, elected at the Courtleet of the Lord of the Manor, Sir Oswald Mosley, by a Jury of the most influential inhabitants, summoned by the Deputy Steward of the Manor.

The Constables were responsible for the day police, numbering 30 men. The Police Commissioners, another quite separate body, elected by ratepayers under a high qualification, were responsible for the night police force of 125 men. There were also Improvement Commissioners and Surveyors of Highways. De Tocqueville commented: "everything in the exterior appearance of the city attests the individual powers of men; nothing the directing power of society".

The municipal "government" was in the hands of Tory manufacturers and merchants, such as the Birley family. There was no resident "gentry" in Manchester. The Mosleys lived in Staffordshire. But the two MPs were Liberals - C.P. Thomson (President of the Board of Trade in the Melbourne government) and Mark Philips, a cotton spinner. The electorate was about 8,000 only. Recent research has shown that roughly half the manufacturers and merchants voted Tory in 1832 and 1839 which should demolish the

persistent belief that the Manchester middle class was solidly "Liberal". It is important to note that the Liberal campaign in 1837-38 to incorporate the town was bitterly opposed by Tories and by many working class supporters.¹² Five newspapers, all weekly except for one, represented the political interests of Manchester. The Courier and the Chronicle were Conservative; the Guardian appearing twice weekly was Whiggish; the Times, edited by Cobden's friend Prentice, was Liberal; the Advertiser tended to support working class Radicalism but was not sharply different from the Times. The Guardian had the highest average circulation at about 6,000; the Chronicle and the Advertiser had the lowest, about 2,000 copies.

4. The condition of Manchester: religious divisions and the Unitarian-Quaker group

The religious divisions were as deep as the political and were closely allied in that Church of England members tended to be Tories and dissenters of all kinds tended to be Liberals or Reformers. A large section of the working class did not attend any church. Cobden found that denominational commitment rather than business occupation influenced the political outlook of the middle class. He told Combe in 1836: "the High Church party stands sullenly aloof from all useful projects and the severer sectarians restrict themselves here, as elsewhere, to their own narrow sphere of exertion, but the tone of public opinion in Manchester is superior to the influence of either of these extremes".

Cobden's faith in the destiny of Manchester to transform British politics lay in two small groups with similar

religious and social outlooks: the Unitarians and Quakers. Whether their optimistic view of human nature, their view of the progressive nature of Christianity, their special cultivation of education, philosophy and science was the cause of their social isolation from the English aristocracy and the seats of political power or whether the causation is vice-versa is a fascinating matter for investigation. Their freedom from the value systems of the governing class, the Established Church and the evangelical dissenters - Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists - permitted a vision of a new society for which they have not received general recognition.

The values of the Tory Whig aristocracy supported a hierarchical, conservative view of society, and this was supported by the Church of England in its corporate capacity. The evangelical dissenters were anti-establishment but their emphasis on the innate sinfulness of man and the comparative unimportance of life in this world compared with that after death, led them to attach greater importance to religious, rather than secular education. There were, of course, many individual exceptions among Anglicans and dissenters to these general attitudes.

In Manchester, the most influential Unitarian chapel was in Cross Street, to which belonged the Potter, Heywood, Philips and Henry families, William Langton and John B. Smith. To the Mosley Street Chapel belonged the Greg family, George W. Wood, Peter Ewart, Henry and William McConnel, John and James Kennedy, and Edmund Potter. These families were all engaged in the cotton industry or in banking as in the case of the Heywoods. Several were connected by

marriage. They had strong common interests and unity of outlook. Unfortunately, just at this time when Cobden was looking for co-operation among the educated class in Manchester, the Unitarians were put at loggerheads with the evangelical dissenters by a legal controversy over the Cross Street Chapel property.

The Quakers were smaller in number and more scattered, but an equally united body. Among influential Quakers, were William Neild, cotton spinner, Charles Cumber, Joseph Crewdson, Henry and Edmund Ashworth, cotton spinners of Bolton, and Jacob Bright, cotton spinner of Rochdale. Holding similar beliefs about the nature of man and society, they were prepared to co-operate with the Unitarians.

By 1835, the Unitarians had done much to promote the pursuit of knowledge in Manchester. They were the predominating group in the Literary and Philosophical Society, in the Mechanics Institute (established 1824) and the Manchester Statistical Society. The latter was established in 1833 by the initiative of Dr. James P. Kay (Congregationalist) and William Langton, Chief Cashier of Benjamin Heywood's bank. The title of Kay's pamphlet of 1832, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester, foreshadowed the main concern of the Statistical Society. The Society conducted pioneering surveys of education and housing conditions, showing a clear understanding that the improvement of both must go together. In their anxiety to present "scientific" data which they thought would be more influential than a political presentation, the Society has unwittingly given to modern commentators the impression of being socially

conservative, of wishing to create "a virtuous and quiescent working class", inoculated against dangerous ideas of agitation. The nature and purpose of the education which the Society wanted has been misunderstood. The "progressive" education intended is shown by the schools established by the Manchester Society for the Promotion of National Education, described in Chapter Eight.

The members of the Statistical Society, most of whom were manufacturers, certainly wanted a sober and reliable workforce but also one educated to exercise initiative and responsibility. These manufacturers believed that a good general education was essential before technical instruction. Educated workmen were at a premium in the industrial areas and earned the best wages. Thus education served not only the industrialists' interests but also helped to raise the standard of living of the working class through higher wage rates.¹⁴

5. Cobden's promotion of the Manchester Athenaeum

Cobden's thinking went deeper than that of most of the reform group described above. He knew that educational efforts would be precarious unless the economy was put on a sound basis which meant, above all, the repeal of the Corn Laws and a reformed foreign policy. He was also convinced that the whole community needed to be permeated by the ideas of the reform group before Manchester could exert an influence on government policy. There were far too many millowners who could not see beyond the walls of their mills. But the fact was that the boom of 1834-36 had led to political apathy, "making Tories of all". It would take a commercial crisis or famine harvest to get

the Corn Laws abolished. In the meantime it seemed that educational projects would be agreeable to the reforming element of the middle class.¹⁵

Cobden's imagination was fired by the idea of something Manchester lacked - a great club which could cater for thousands of members desiring a good library, lecture courses and a gymnasium. He had seen such an institution, the Athenaeum in Boston, Massachusetts, in July 1835. Manchester already had very select libraries and institutions - the Royal Institution, the Literary and Philosophical Society - but what Cobden envisaged was a club which would attract a large proportion of the lower middle class of clerks and warehouse managers as well as millowners and professional men. It would be a non-sectarian meeting ground for the exchange of ideas and for learning. The subscription for such facilities would inevitably cut out the working class but one result which Cobden hoped for was that the Mechanics' Institute would be left freer to the working class for whom it was intended by the transfer of middle class members to the Athenaeum.

Cobden formed a little group of friends of his own age - James Heywood, a lawyer, John Walker, a surgeon, and Edward Worthington and J.A. Jesse, two solicitors in partnership, to plan a fund raising campaign. James Heywood was influential in Unitarian circles. He was the younger brother of Benjamin Heywood the banker, had studied at Cambridge University but could not take his degree owing to the religious test. In 1833 he was admitted barrister at the Inner Temple.

The group was rapidly enlarged and Unitarians such

as W. Langton, John Potter, R.H. Greg and R. Philips Jnr. were on the committee formed on 13 October 1835 to arrange a public meeting. The Athenaeum project was launched on 28 October at a meeting chaired by the Boroughreeve, John McVicar. James Heywood was elected President, and W. Langton, Treasurer. Edward Worthington (Church of England) was made Secretary. W. Neild, the Quaker cotton spinner was one of the auditors.

Cobden, in a very nervous speech, made the salient point that he was to repeat often at major meetings of the Athenaeum: that it was the duty of industry and commerce to foster education and the arts.

"It would be a shame to Manchester, whose population increased at the rate of twelve thousand a year, and where mills were continually rising up for the purposes of manufacture, if they could not get up one mill - one manufactory to work up the staple of the mind, which here was of excellent quality".¹⁶

Cobden had succeeded in engaging the Unitarian-Quaker reform group in an important project and in bringing in men of other denominations who proved during the next years to be staunch supporters of further educational ventures e.g. Absalom Watkin, W.R. Callender, J.S. Grafton - all Congregationalists - and Joseph Adshead, a Baptist. Men of all denominations were placed on the Board of Directors. The Athenaeum opened on 11 January 1836 in temporary accommodation while a fine building designed by Charles Barry was built. But even before it was opened in 1839, Cobden had to fight for his ideal.

Fragility of co-operation between the Unitarians and other denominations - the jealousy of Unitarian predominance - was shown by the row which broke out at the annual general

meeting on 31 January 1838, over the proposal to exclude Unitarians from office. Cobden sharply criticised the religious bigotry and intolerance which would turn the Athenaeum into "a temple of gloomy fanaticism". Cobden, who pointed out that the Unitarians had raised £3,290 out of the £10,000 for the new building, finally won the argument.¹⁷

When the building was opened on 28 October 1839, Cobden made a fine speech emphasising that the most successful commercial cities of ancient Greece and medieval Italy had been associated with high culture and science. "I trust it will be our duty to see that something more will be expected of us from posterity than that we shall be recorded as the mere accumulators of wealth". But the first years of the Athenaeum were very difficult owing to the slump which had already set in by 1839. But by 1843 new life showed, symbolised by the great soirees of 1843-45, to which notably Dickens and Disraeli were invited. Membership was 1,722 by 1844 but it fell far short of the 5,000 or so which Cobden thought was a reasonable target membership.¹⁸

Cobden was also one of a group including James Heywood which, in 1836, discussed a plan for a university in Manchester. He mentioned it in his speech at the Athenaeum in 1839. But the plan lapsed for several years due to lack of money. The need for higher education was partially met from October 1840 by the return of Manchester College from York, where it had been removed in 1803. The scope of the College, primarily one of preparation for the Protestant dissenting ministry (mainly Unitarian) was enlarged to include courses leading to degrees of the University of London. Cobden was among those who subscribed to the fund

for increased resources.

The bequest of John Owens, a wealthy businessman who died in 1846, led to the establishment of Owens College in 1851, free from religious tests. It started in Cobden's old house on Quay Street, later becoming Manchester University.¹⁹

6. The first attempt to form a national education society.

The timing of Cobden's next venture was fortuitous and ultimately derived from the campaign of Thomas Wyse and James Simpson for a national system of education. Wyse was an Irish Catholic but very tolerant in outlook and attracted to phrenology and Combe with whom he corresponded. As MP for Tipperary (1830-32) and Waterford from 1835 he strove to establish a strong board of education on a legislative basis in Ireland, to replace the weak unpaid board appointed by the Lord Lieutenant in 1831. The government successfully opposed Wyse's bills, knowing full well that a precedent was intended for the rest of the United Kingdom.²⁰

In 1835, Wyse, as Chairman of the Select Committee on Foundation Schools and Education in Ireland, called on Simpson to give evidence. Simpson gave a very long and persuasive resumé of his Necessity of Popular Education (1834). He also made the novel proposal that a "Royal Society of Education" be established to signify the importance of education as a new science.²¹

The reluctance of the government to be committed to any legislation about education - it was religious dynamite - was also shown by the Select Committee on Education in England and Wales which reported evidence without recommendations in August 1835. But Wyse and Simpson determined to keep the question before the country.

In April 1836, the Education Committee of the recently elected Liberal Corporation of Liverpool was reviewing the religious instruction given in the two schools it managed in order to open them on equal terms to children of all denominations. Since it was proposed to introduce the Irish National System, which separated general from doctrinal instruction, Simpson, a keen supporter of this, was invited to give a series of lectures on moral and educational philosophy. The chairman of the Education Committee was William Rathbone, a Unitarian, who was married to a sister of the Greg brothers of Manchester.²²

News of the invitation soon travelled to Manchester. Cobden evidently saw the opportunity for Manchester to share Simpson's infectious enthusiasm, using the railway. Cobden gathered a committee from his "circle" to invite Simpson to Manchester. It was composed of Thomas Potter, Peter Ewart, G.W. Wood, W.R. Callender - all closely involved in the Athenaeum project - and John Brooks, a Congregationalist and calico-printer, Charles Cumber, Headmaster of a Quaker school in Mount Street and J.N. Rawson, Secretary of the Phrenological Society. George Wilson was Secretary, and Cobden, the Chairman.²³

Simpson lectured alternately in Liverpool and Manchester. He reported to Combe about his reception in Manchester:

"My committee are their highest men and they have most cordially taken me by the hand. The hall being a large courtroom, the grandees have generously offered me the lecture theatre in the Royal Institution which holds 800 and where the aristocracy are accustomed to go.... The phrenologists have rallied round me to a man;

and some excellent people are among them in both towns....

They call Edinburgh, quand Phrenology, Rome, you Pope,
your brother and me Cardinals and Robert Cox Archbishop!"²⁴

At the end of Simpson's last lecture on 18 May 1836, Cobden proposed a public dinner on 25 May to honour Simpson. Simpson must have kept Wyse informed of the promising developments in Manchester, for Wyse travelled up from London to attend the dinner. Cobden was due to chair the celebration but one of his sisters died the previous day. The main local speakers were Prentice and Absalom Watkin. Wyse, from the chair, gave a fine speech. He argued for the best quality of education for all classes and both sexes, and schools managed by locally elected committees and aided by a National Board of Education. The religious difficulty could be solved in districts where denominations were mixed by the Irish system, to which he referred without name. He made the first public intimation of a plan to establish an educational society in London to act as a clearing house for educational information from all parts of the country and especially from local societies. He urged Manchester to form one.²⁵

The cheering and acclamation which greeted Wyse's long speech was the response of reformers who saw their vision of a new society illuminated by his eloquence. Afterwards, Simpson wrote to Combe that:

"Mr. Wyse says the manifestation at Manchester will do them both [Spring Rice, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lord Lansdowne, President of the Council] good, and nothing but such agitation will. The Manchesterians.... are determined to offer a seat to Mr. Wyse, whom they worship. He however cannot leave Waterford - but will be happy at the compliment as it will give him weight with the government - help the agitation - and do him no harm with his own borough".²⁶

A pamphlet report of the speeches was very quickly published. Cobden, in an unsigned introduction, called for "a combined effort of the public-spirited and philanthropic minds of every shade of religious and political opinion in the cause of an efficient plan of education. And it is confidently hoped that steps will be taken immediately for the formation of a society having such an enlightened object in view". Clearly, he did not see any advantage in forming a society which was mainly composed of the reform group which cheered Wyse. If a national scheme of education was the object, then the co-operation of the Established Church and evangelical dissenters must be obtained. It was presumably the failure to achieve this which chiefly prevented the society being formed. No details have survived - only a passing allusion by Cobden many years later that in 1836 "I remember having in my counting-house in Mosley Street, the minister 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."²⁷

Very probably the meeting took place early in June 1836 after the publication of the pamphlet. Cobden held it in his office because he wished it to be private, so that the participants could speak candidly and without fear of being reported in the newspapers. It was obviously an important meeting which he would not have called unless he had a practical objective in view. It is significant that it was a meeting of clergy for it is the earliest sign of Cobden's attitude to national education which he declared in a speech in 1851:

"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".²⁸

In other words, Cobden did not favour the policy of Wyse and Simpson who hoped for publicly controlled schools quite independent of the churches. In 1836 there was no question of rate aid for the denominational schools to be discussed, as there was in the 1840's and 1850's. Just what proposals Cobden put forward in his office will never be known but it is very likely that they included a plan for a normal college and model school - that is, a special school for children at which teachers were trained. There are two reasons for supposing this. The first is that the lack of trained teachers was a serious problem in Lancashire. There was no training college for teachers between London and Glasgow. The second reason is that the government had offered in December 1835 £10,000 to the National and British Societies for a normal school if one could be established in common. Cobden would hear that no agreement had been reached and that the money was still available. An agreement among the Churches in Manchester would be a strong basis for an application to the government.²⁹

The opposition aroused from nearly all churches by the government's plan in 1839 for a state normal school is enough to appreciate the kinds of disagreement in Cobden's office. The months of June and July 1836 were particularly unfortunate as news was filtering through from Liverpool that an amended version of the Irish system was to be implemented in the Corporation Schools. One hour was allowed for doctrinal religious instruction by various

ministers after the schools had closed in the afternoon. The Anglican clergy were placed on exactly the same footing as Catholic or any other clergy. The result was a massive protest by Protestant clergy in Liverpool on 13 July 1836, fully reported in Manchester newspapers. There was also an element of anti-Catholicism in that the Scripture Extracts adopted by the Irish Board - and therefore assumed to be "Popish" - were read by all children in the main school day.³⁰

Cobden allowed the project for a society to lapse for the time being. He was very busy with other matters between June and October 1836: the publication and distribution of his second pamphlet Russia and with writing his Address to the Independent Electors of the Borough of Stockport, to be ready for a general election should one come soon. This manifesto gave detailed comments on nearly all political issues, as he intended to spend from October to April 1837 in the eastern Mediterranean, at least partly for health reasons. It was published in December 1836. The note about national education was cautiously non-committal, urging "a comprehensive system".³¹

The Wyse celebration had little impact on the wider community of Manchester. The pamphlet report did not sell well and copies were available a year later. This setback prompted Cobden to invite Combe to lecture in Manchester in April 1837 after his return from abroad. Combe's friend Sir George S. Mackenzie, geologist and phrenologist, stayed with Cobden in early August 1836.

He wrote to Combe that Cobden was "just a man to your mind"; the Manchester reformers were very keen for Combe to lecture - "they seemed to regard this as the great force that was to set a great machine agoing".... they wanted him "to act as Grand Master Mason in laying the foundation stone" of a new order in Manchester.

Combe agreed to the lectures and told Cobden:

"Your presence would be to me a very great inducement to go there. I have read your "Russia" with great pleasure, and recognise in it the wisdom and the goodness of fine moral organs, and expect much gratification from personal acquaintanceship with you. It is replete with the same principles which I have endeavoured to expound in the "Constitution of Man".³²

There was one other important matter discussed in August 1836 by the Manchester reformers about which no record has been found. Wyse and his associates founded the Central Society of Education (hinted at in the Manchester speech) sometimes in June or July 1836, probably the latter month as a Prospectus was sent out at the beginning of August. Its object was "to collect, to classify and to diffuse information concerning the education of all classes" without sectarian objectives and publications would be issued containing reasoned papers from all viewpoints. With Wyse (chairman) and B.F. Dupper (Secretary), both known as educational reformers, at the helm, it was not surprising that it was found impossible to get other than reformers - Radicals and Liberals in politics - on the Committee of Management. The ostensible neutrality of the Society was thus compromised from the very start. The obscurity of the place and date of the society's foundation, the total lack of publicity which seemed called for, suggests great uncertainty about its plan of operation.³³

Manchester appears to have adopted a cautious attitude. Of the Manchester reformers, only Benjamin Heywood joined (life member), as if there should be at least a line of communication with the Central Society. There was a complementary or possibly superior strategy - individuals may have differed in how they saw it - that an attempt should be made at the Bristol meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in September 1836 to establish a separate education section because the Statistical Section forbade discussions about reforms. James Heywood and W.R. Greg of Manchester were among those who favoured this. Cobden, who was very busy in Manchester, did not go to Bristol.

The Bristol initiative failed, but a decision was made for interested members of the British Association to meet separately at the Liverpool session in September 1837 to discuss educational reforms.³⁴

Summary

The chapter shows the steps by which Cobden entered political life in Manchester. His view of the national political situation is summed up. Then the condition of Manchester is surveyed as the context for Cobden's educational activities i.e. population, industry and housing; education; local government and political rivalries; religious divisions. The importance of the Unitarian and Quaker group of reformers is emphasised, especially their concern for education. Then Cobden's initiatives of 1835-36 in Manchester are examined:

- (1) the establishment of the Athenaeum, intended to be

a non-sectarian and non-party forum for widening the political and social horizons of the middle class;

(2) the unsuccessful attempt to form an association to promote the education of the working class;

(3) preparations for new initiatives: the invitation to G. Combe to lecture in Manchester and the link with the Central Society of Education.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

The establishment of the Manchester Society for Promoting National Education.

1. Cobden's attitude to a national system of education.

Cobden arrived at Falmouth at the end of his Mediterranean tour on 21 April 1837, having been away six months. He had left Daniel Noble, President of the Manchester Phrenological Society, in charge of the preparations for Combe's course of 14 lectures on phrenology. They began on 10 April and ended on 2 May, attended by about 650 people. Attendance at most lectures had been near that total. Cobden met Combe for the first time on 26 April. He told William Tait, editor of Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, that "never before was any person so attended and complimented! He is engaged for every day for a month for breakfast, dinner and tea. The Constitution of Man is very much read by all classes".¹

The ideal of education loomed large in Cobden's mind. It was reinforced by reading Wyse's long and comprehensive book Education Reform; or, the Necessity of a National System of Education, published towards the end of 1836. Like Combe and Simpson, Wyse conjured up the prospect of a new society based on the harnessing of physical power - being achieved daily - and of mental and moral power, scarcely yet acted on. He outlined education in primary, secondary and superior stages to meet the demands of all classes and of all individuals within those classes. The quality of education must be high throughout the system: primary education should not be regarded as the education of the poor.

"Happy would it be, both for knowledge and freedom, that

we could see seated on the same benches, in pursuit of the same common objects, all the several classes of the community. Why should that be impossible in England which is equally common in Prussia, and in America?".

This time, Cobden had less agreeable comments for Tait: "education, education, education is the motto of every enlightened democrat in America. At a meeting of the refugee Irish held on St. Patrick's Day in New York the accounts of which are in this morning's papers I observe amidst toasts of the most democratic and republican character one of "Thos. Wyse and national education". Yet the labours of that inestimable patriot are scarcely heeded here, and his late volume upon education has fallen from the press unheeded by the radical newspapers and reviews!!!!"²

For Cobden, the implementation of the ideal was the problem. The obstacles were enormous, lying not only in the traditional, stratified nature of British society but in the divergence of opinion among those who sought change. Melbourne's government seemed no more willing than in 1836 to act. Members of the government - Lord John Russell (an Honorary Vice President of the British and Foreign School Society and a Life Member of the Central Society of Education), Lord Lansdowne and Spring Rice were concerned about the issue but could not agree in any plan. Lord Brougham, Lord Chancellor from 1830 to 1834, but now out of favour with the Whig government, introduced a private bill in February 1837 to establish a Board of Education but it had found little support. Brougham, like Russell, was an Honorary Vice-President of the British and Foreign School Society, but he had not joined the Central Society.

Fundamentally, there were two apparently irreconcilable approaches to national education. The leaders of the Central Society - Wyse, B.F. Dupper, W. Hickson - believed that secular knowledge with some moral and religious education was the urgent need of the working class and of the classes above. It was the prime duty of the state to ensure that it was given with the help of locally elected bodies. Articles by Wyse and Dupper in Central Society of Education, First Publication, published about May 1837, gave fairly explicit support to this view, although the society claimed in the introductory article to have only scientific, investigative objects. Strict neutrality as regards religion was also asserted, but it did not help the society to be treated tolerantly. Neutrality was interpreted by many as indifference to religion.³

The other approach was that of the National Society and British and Foreign School Societies who shared the Treasury grants. They believed that religious knowledge with some secular knowledge was the prime need of the working class and that it was possible to supply this with the help of state grants. The British Society had adopted a reforming stance in that it complained that the present system unduly favoured the National Society, backed as it was by the ecclesiastical organisation of the Established Church. They hoped for a measure of state power - a board of education - to make the present system work fairly. By contrast, Wyse wanted a board to be a strong directing power, with responsibility for training teachers.⁴

Cobden never recorded, in public or private, his views on these fundamental matters but it is clear from his

actions during twenty years of involvement that he believed it was possible to avoid an explicit choice of state or denominational schools; that it was possible to bring the latter into a publicly assisted and supervised system if the principle of non-exclusiveness was observed. That is, that denominational schools should be open freely to all children and that special religious formularies or catechisms should not be compulsorily taught to those who objected on grounds of conscience. As late as 1857, Cobden, with Sir John Pakington, promoted a bill embodying this principle. Although unsuccessful, it was remembered by William Forster when he drew up the Education Bill of 1870.

It might appear inconsistent of Cobden not to strongly support a plan of locally rate-supported schools, entirely independent of the churches. Such a system would best promote the educational aims of Combe and Wyse. There are probably two main explanations, one practical and the other religious. The practical was two-fold. First, there was not in the countryside nor in many towns (including Manchester) any elected councils to manage such schools nor the degree of social and religious equality which in the New England states of America supported the elected "school committees". Coupled with this was the fact that the Church of England and dissenters were strongly entrenched in the field of education and would resist attempts to by-pass or oust them from it.

Cobden's attitude to denominational schools was probably influenced by his deep conviction of the importance of religion, revealed as well as natural. He firmly believed that the Bible was an essential part of daily religious

instruction and may also have felt - there is specific evidence about this - that a denominational school was a guarantee of enthusiastic religious instruction. And there is also his belief in "progressive Christianity" which he probably thought would gradually reduce dogmatic differences. His criticism of denominational schools was directed to neglect of broadening the curriculum and to exclusiveness in the case of National Schools. Thus Cobden did not think denominational schools were fundamentally antagonistic to true education, as did Combe and other "secularists".⁵

2. Cobden's activities in the summer and autumn of 1837.

Education was only one matter that pressed on Cobden after his return to Manchester. On 19 May he was introduced as a Reform candidate to the electors of Stockport. William IV was not expected to live long and his death would bring a general election. In early June, barely a fortnight before the king died, Cobden visited several Radical or Reform politicians and newspaper editors in London - and William Allen, the Treasurer of the B. & F.S.S. There is no record of what he discussed with Allen but it surely concerned education. Cobden would have learned that the Society intended to press Lord Brougham to amend and re-introduce his bill, which was aimed to make the existing grants system fairer and to permit rate aid. Allen also probably voiced his concern about the implications of the Central Society's publication. In fact, later in the year, he resigned from membership.⁶

Cobden did not raise the issue of national education during his election campaign at Stockport in July. The main issue he raised was the necessity of repealing the

Corn Laws. The economic situation had recently taken a turn for the worse. The failure of several American banks which owed money to British banks and the collapse of some small banks led to credit crisis and fall in stock prices. Cobden's firm had its profits for 1837 largely wiped out. He believed that the British banking system needed reforming and the Corn Laws abolished, so allowing United States imports to be paid for by corn exports to Britain, instead of paper securities.

The electorate in the two member borough of Stockport was not more than 1,500. The open polling spread over several days at the end of July and beginning of August was very lively. As an advocate of voting by secret ballot, no bribery was applied on Cobden's behalf. H. Marsland (Reformer) and Major Marsland (Tory) were returned, the latter beating Cobden by only fifty votes. Cobden complained that he had been "beaten by the parsons and the beer barrel". His public letter to the Rev. C.K. Prescott deplored the Anglican clergy's intervention in politics and subsequent correspondence are significant in that it made it unlikely that Cobden would secure their co-operation soon afterwards in the matter of national education.⁷

The generally bad result of the elections for the Radicals, which left the Melbourne government with a reduced majority over the Tories, focussed Cobden's attention on education and the ballot. He asked Tait: "Are you convinced by the last returns that we must make education - moral and intellectual education - the basis of our political reforms? The doings at Liverpool, Middlesex,

make one think of the days of Walpole and I ask myself have we not too much liberty already for the intelligence of the people? You will say, try the ballot, and I agree that must be done, and if after that we cannot send good men to represent us, let us pray for a mild Whig aristocracy to rule over us".⁸

Cobden's first action was to help Lieutenant Fabian RN, a retired naval officer who had since 1830 been an agent of the B. & F.S.S., making periodical tours to stimulate the establishment of British schools. Cobden accompanied Fabian to education meetings in Sabden, Clitheroe and Bolton, and spoke in support. On 22 August Fabian lectured on the Society's system at the Manchester Athenaeum. Sometime during the year, Cobden joined the Manchester committee of the Society.⁹

For two or three months, Cobden rode both the education and ballot horses, as if unsure which was the stronger. The two issues were interlinked in his mind - and also the Corn Laws - in that if the ballot was won in the new Parliament, legislation on education and the repeal of the Corn laws would be much easier. The first week of September was a very curious one because Cobden spoke twice on the same platform with Wyse, who spoke on education and Irish problems. The occasions were a dinner at Salford (6 September) to celebrate Brotherton's election as MP and a meeting of the Bolton Reform Association (9 September) to open a reading room. At Bolton Cobden said "he would much rather have the ballot without education than education without the ballot",¹⁰

The session of the British Association due to open

in Liverpool on Monday 11 September and Wyse's general plans for agitating national education must have been discussed by the two men - and also Edmund Ashworth who chaired the Bolton meeting. Papers were to be read on the state of education, including Ashworth on Bolton and W.R. Greg on York. Wyse also planned to hold a meeting at the end of the session, but not officially connected with it, to exert pressure of "scientific" opinion on government for legislation.

Cobden's temporary reluctance about an education agitation in Lancashire is further indicated by the fact that although he attended the British Association and almost certainly Wyse's two "extra mural" conferences, he suggested to Ashworth (whilst at Liverpool) that the Manchester Chamber of Commerce be used for an agitation to repeal the Corn Laws.^{11.}

Events during the British Association week must have reinforced Cobden's doubts about the expediency of an education agitation but they were apparently overcome by Wyse and others. First an acrimonious correspondence began in the Morning Chronicle, a leading Liberal paper in London, between Henry Dunn, the Secretary of the B. & F.S.S. and "a member of the Central Society of Education". It illustrated the gulf of suspicion and hostility which had opened up between those who wanted a national system based on the churches and those who wanted a strict separation of religious and secular education. The second matter was the success of the Rev. H. McNeil, a Protestant minister of extreme views in Liverpool, in forcing Wyse's meeting at the Mechanics' Institute on Monday 18 September to be

billed as for "the friends of the Central Society of Education" instead of (more neutrally) "members of the British Association".¹²

While the latter meeting kept prudently to non-political facts of education, political decisions were made privately. It is probable that pressure was put on Cobden to organise an education demonstration in Manchester. A Salford town meeting was requisitioned on 18 September to be held on 23 September, to which Wyse, Simpson and Cobden were invited. Simpson lectured to working class audiences of 1,500 at Manchester on 20, 21 and 22 September. On 23 September, it was announced that Wyse was to be invited to a public dinner in Manchester.

The meeting at Salford surely sounded the alarm in churches and chapels in Manchester. Several resolutions were passed. The first asserted that "the chief duty of a government is to provide for the mental improvement and moral training of all the population subject to its control. The fourth resolution, seconded by Cobden, deplored the misapplication of lay and ecclesiastical endowments for education and urged national education on "liberal principles" and untinged by sectarian prejudices".¹³

At a private meeting in Manchester on 16 September, chaired by James Heywood, a sub-committee was appointed to arrange the public entertainment for Wyse on 26 October. By 14 October, a committee of 145 men had been formed, with George Wilson as secretary. Sixty-two of them represented the towns of Ashton, Bolton, Bury, Blackburn, Oldham, Preston, Rochdale, Stockport and Burnley. There were nine MPs. A statement was advertised which made it clear that

although the demonstration was in favour of "a comprehensive system of national education", there was no intention "by means of resolutions or a petition to government, to commit the judgements of those who attend upon the details of any particular system of education for the nation at large".

The strategy of the organisers - and much of it determined by Cobden - was not only to get a wide geographical spread of support but the support of as many uncommitted people as possible. To this end, the invitation to Wyse was balanced by invitations to Lord Brougham and the Bishop of Norwich. The Bishop - Edward Stanley - was recently Rector of Alderley, Cheshire and a well known supporter of the Irish National system. Neither of them were able to attend. The guest speakers covered the whole spectrum of education: Wilderspin (infant schools), Wyse (the general situation and secondary schooling), Benjamin Matthias of Philadelphia (the universality of education in the Northern States), Dr. Jerrard of London University (higher education), and James Simpson (the need for working class agitation for education). All denominations were represented on the committee. The two largest groups were 38 Churchmen and 38 Unitarians. Significantly, there was not one clergyman or minister on the committee nor amongst the principal guests at the dinner except the Rev. R.B. Aspland, Unitarian minister at Dukinfield.¹⁴

There is no certain record of just what parties were approached but it appears that dissenting ministers were, and Anglican clergy not, circularised. The organisers probably expected opposition or a boycott from the Anglican clergy and evangelical dissenting ministers. There was the example of Cobden's abortive effort in 1836 to bring

together ministers of all denominations. Also relations between the Unitarians, who were the driving force of the education movement, and most Protestant evangelicals were as bad as ever. Possibly the organisers, looking ahead to a society emerging from the conference, did not wish to risk the entry into the committee of men who might prove disruptive.

If the committee had been able to state in the advertisement of 14 October that the Irish National system - the separation of religious and secular teaching - was rejected and the B. & F.S.S. rule of compulsory Bible reading advocated, as was finally agreed upon in November 1837, it would have hamstrung the opposition. But the disclaiming of any commitment encouraged accusations that the organisers were covert tools of the Central Society and indifferent to Christianity. During the twelve days before the conference, three pamphlets appeared: the first by the Rev. Hugh Stowell of Christ Church, Salford, a prominent Anglican leader and fiercely Protestant; the second, a reply by Cobden; the third, anonymous. The first and third confirmed the fears of the organisers.¹⁵

Stowell's main charges were that the exclusion of the Bible from a national system was intended as a sop to a minority of Roman Catholics, Socinians (i.e. Unitarians) and infidels; that the majority of children were being taught to read and if not further educated it was due to lack of leisure or desire to learn, not lack of facilities. Stowell asserted that educating the whole community was "an Utopian idea" unless compulsion (to be deplored) was adopted. He urged the people of Manchester not to attend, or, if they

did, to demand that "the Bible and the whole Bible" should be the foundation stone and top stone of any national system.

Cobden's reply appeared in the Manchester Guardian and was reprinted as a pamphlet. He re-iterated the impartial sentiments of the advertisement of 14 October and declared rather disingenuously that "not one of the requisitionists has the remotest connexion" with the Central Society. It was true that Benjamin Heywood, a member of the Society, was not on the committee but Cobden could scarcely be described as less than a "friend of the Central Society", since his friendship with Wyse was well known.

In fact, he showed his sympathy with the Central Society by defending its impartiality and scientific aims and also praising by implication the Irish National system. It was possible to have a system in which various ministers of religion read the Bible to groups in school if a specified time was agreed upon. He had witnessed this operating in one of the Liverpool Corporation schools. This may have been the occasion when thirty members of the British Association visited the Corporation's South School on 14 September - another of Wyse's "extra mural" events.

The main thrust of Cobden's letter was an attack on Stowell's complacency. The cause of bad school attendance was the poor quality of education offered. Compulsion was not necessary, only good schools. The education of the whole people was not considered Utopian in the United States.

The religious persuasion of the anonymous author can only be guessed by its being addressed to "professors of

evangelical religion", for there is no internal clue which indicates whether he was an Anglican or a dissenter. This pamphlet dug to the very roots of the issue as to whether the importance of imparting secular knowledge in common schools justified the exclusion or curtailment of doctrinal religious knowledge. The writer argued that only evangelical truth can turn man's heart and mind away from corruption and sin. Education which neglects this only makes "more self-approving, self-seeking, self-worshipping than before". If the state shoulders responsibility for education it must recognise this fact and not pretend to solve it by a plan which "treats all religions alike on the principle that all are equally useless". There was also a special danger in such equality - that of Unitarianism "pervading and corrupting any proposed national system".

This anonymous minister was utterly sincere but very narrow and Puritanical. A derisive comment about 200 children seen dancing at Robert Owen's school at New Lanark makes it easy to understand why there were so few infant schools in Manchester.¹⁶

3. The demonstration at the Theatre Royal, Manchester.

The demonstration at the Theatre Royal on Thursday evening 26 October 1837 was the largest and most impressive education meeting held in Manchester and probably in Britain in the 1830's. A month's careful planning was fully rewarded. The audience numbered 2,200. If it did not include the entire intellect of Manchester and surrounding towns - Stowell and his ilk were absent - it was a solid array of the most liberal thinking and imaginative men and women.

It was not a reaction to political disturbances. The Charter was not proclaimed until May 1838. It is true that the recession of 1837 had put many mills on short-time and that a protest movement in the north of England against the New Poor Law was beginning but there was no threat to the propertied class in Manchester. Rather it was a product of the upsurge of educational ideas, of Combe's philosophy, of a vision of a better society. If "moral policing" - "social control" in modern parlance - had been the objective a demonstration in support of Stowell's Sunday Schools would have been more appropriate. The great slump and misery of 1838-42 did not provoke the Manchester educational movement. On the contrary, it destroyed it.

The interior of the theatre was altered for the occasion. The pit was boarded over to make a banqueting hall with the stage included. The theatre was decorated and brilliantly lighted to make an impressive scene. A large transparent tablet was placed at the back of the stage, inscribed "National Education", and surmounted by the Royal Arms. The table of the Chairman - Mark Philips MP - was on a dais in front of the right stage door and below the balcony. A large star in gaslight shone brilliantly on the wall of the balcony. The dress circle of boxes and upper tier of boxes were filled with ladies and some gentlemen. The spacious gallery was crowded with members of Mechanics' Institutions. Special guests, including Cobden (who did not speak in the proceedings) sat at tables near the Chairman's.

The evening was dominated by the powerful speech of Thomas Wyse, which lasted two hours and during which hardly

a person moved, Cobden noted. Wyse dealt with the different types of opponents of education and, in so doing, gave an account of the nature and purposes of education which can hardly be bettered 150 years later. There were those who knowing that "knowledge is power" tried to monopolise it; those who feared that progress in science and religion led to irreligion; those who had a limited grasp of what constituted a full education and, finally those who were complacent about the present situation and who refused to study the facts or to look abroad. Britain should adopt the core curriculum for 5 to 14 year olds of the Prussian schools - a study of the mother tongue, mathematics, knowledge of the external world, religion, drawing and singing.

The "modernity" of Wyse can be appreciated in his grasp (already shown by Cobden in his pamphlet of 1835) that the industrial society required the best education of shop floor workers and employers for raising productivity, increasing the wealth of the whole community and creating social harmony.

There is one significant point in Wyse's speech which seems to indicate a "softening" of the Central Society's approach to religion in rate-aided schools. He said that the Bible and catechism of choice could be taught freely wherever the majority of the local community wished it.¹⁷

4. The M.S.P.N.E.

The Manchester Society for Promoting National Education was established three weeks after the Theatre Royal meeting. It took time to consider the results of the meeting and to discuss what should be the basic principles of the society. Presumably the 26 men who were elected as officers and committee members at a meeting at the York Hotel, Manchester,

on 16 November were those who had been the organising group since September. They included most of the men whom Cobden had gathered about him in 1836. There were seven Unitarians, four Quakers, three Churchmen, two Baptists and one Methodist. There were also nine Independents whom Lieut. Fabian described privately as being "not very far off" from Unitarians. William Neild (Quaker) was elected President, and T.H. Williams (Methodist) and Edward Worthington (Churchman) the Honorary Secretaries.

Cobden continued to play a key role in policy. It was decided to continue the general strategy of non-committment to any specific plan of national education and to concentrate, apart from petitions, on encouraging local voluntary effort. The chronic dearth of trained teachers was one major problem which the society could help to solve. Considering Cobden's work for the B. & F.S.S. in the summer, it is not surprising that he sought the advice of Henry Dunn, the Secretary. On 7 November 1837, Cobden wrote:

"Our thought was, to start a school in a poor neighbourhood, as soon as possible with a good master, and then to make it serve as a model for others. But we have also talk of establishing a normal school in connexion. Can you say if any such establishment has been formed out of London hitherto? Has the government yet taken any steps for endowing some normal schools?"

Dunn's reply of 10 November in contrast to Cobden's dispassionate letter, has much of the heat of the education controversy and, because of its importance for the basis of the Manchester society, is quoted at greater length.

"I have heard with much interest of the meeting at Manchester but not I confess with unmixed pleasure. The views of Mr. Wyse strike me as so crude and if carried out so likely to lead to a tyranny of the worst kind that I feared your friends might be too hastily committed to an undigested plan.... However, I do unfeignedly rejoice at any manifestation of interest on so important a subject and especially

when it leads (as it seems it is doing in the present instance) to local effort. Nothing can be more plausible and at first sight unobjectionable than Mr. Wyse's and Mr. Simpson's plan for separating Religious and Secular Instruction, but depend upon it, it will not do. In the working of it, it would throw the whole of the agricultural districts into the hands of the clergy, and in the towns it will promote the influence of the Roman Catholics. Now we do not wish to bring about either of these results. I confess I see no way out of this difficulty except by rejecting all catechetical and denominational instruction and appointing a Bible Class in each school in which the Bible should be read without note or comment, Catholics and Jews being exempted.... Your plan seems to me a very good one, viz. to establish in the first instance one good Model School. I think I should get this fairly to work before I commenced the Normal School.... But pray take care of the theorists, and above all, avoid the appearance of indifference to the spread of Scriptural Knowledge. Cousin is quite right when he says "the less we wish our schools to be ecclesiastical, the more must they be Christian".¹⁸

The fierce and continuing opposition by Anglican clergy and others to schooling without "the whole, unmutilated Bible" clinched the argument for adopting Dunn's advice. Stowell published a second letter dated 11 November mocking the "serio-comic scene at the Theatre Royal" and exulting that it had been a failure, since no society had been formed. He again imputed to the promoters a commitment to the Irish National system and mentioned Dunn's attack on the Central Society - a reference to an anonymous pamphlet generally attributed to Dunn.

On 17 November an article from Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, "State Education versus National Education", was reprinted in Manchester with an anonymous preface addressed to Cobden. The article attacked the Central Society and "imbecile and tyrannous projects". Cobden complained to Tait of this reprint "by the Tory parsons".... "I am sorry that "Tait" should be available for obstructing education".

The culmination of Stowell's campaign was a meeting

of the Anglican clergy of Manchester on 30 November 1837 which denounced all schemes of education not thoroughly Christian in content and especially one which by treating all doctrines equally would produce indifference to religion. It was proposed to further education by opening the Sunday Schools for daily instruction.

The Manchester Society's sixth resolution at the foundation meeting of 16 November embodied Dunn's Bible class suggestion, and referred to "the practice" of the B. & F.S.S. Other resolutions committed the Society to petitioning Parliament and aiding local educational efforts but there was no mention of a school. Evidently that was an unresolved matter but on 25 November Lieut. Fabian reported to Dunn that he had supplied B. & F.S.S. rules and papers to the promoters and that a model school would be opened. The Rules of the Manchester Society were agreed on 2 December. The fourth rule read: "To establish, at the earliest possible period, and to maintain, a school or schools for the education of children, and the qualifying of young persons of both sexes to fill the office of teachers".

The second rule was very wide in scope: "To aid, by its advice and by recommending properly qualified instructors, all those who may be disposed to improve the education and training of the industrious classes of Manchester and the neighbourhood." The wording may be taken to cover adult as well as child education. That this was so, seems confirmed by the fact that at about the same time as the Society opened two schools, two Lyceums for adult education and recreation were opened in Manchester, and one in Salford. They were not under the control of the Society but were

assisted by several of its members, including Cobden.

The schools and Lyceums will be described in the next chapter.

In December 1837, a substantial pamphlet was published containing a full report of the Theatre Royal meeting, the foundation meeting of the Society and the petition to both Houses of Parliament. The petition urged government to perform its duty of providing for the instruction of the people. It did not recommend any particular plan except the efficacy of the B & F.S.S. rule about religious instruction. Thus the Society succeeded in taking the wind out of Stowell's sails.¹⁹

5. Cobden's other activities

Launching the Manchester Society was only one of Cobden's developing political activities. He probably left most of the detailed education work to his colleagues. But he found time to respond to John Bright's request on 13 December 1837 that he should speak at a meeting in support of the British school at Rochdale. John Bright was aged 26, seven years younger than Cobden, and son of Jacob Bright, who owned a cotton mill in Rochdale. John Bright's meeting with Cobden at the latter's Mosley Street office on 19 December was their first and the beginning of what eventually became a famous partnership. Cobden got Lieut. Fabian to speak also at the meeting held on 21 December.²⁰

Cobden completed his graduation as an agitator in 1838. On 2 December 1837 his anonymous pamphlet Incorporate Your Borough! started what was to be a nine month struggle to obtain a Royal Charter for Manchester. The Tory opposition,

aided by working class leaders who feared that^aborough council would establish a new repressive police force, was bitter. The work of agitation and petitioning to the Privy Council was enormous.

Cobden continued to advocate the ballot as the best way to get the Corn Laws repealed. He encouraged C.P. Villiers in his motion in Parliament on 15 March 1838 to repeal the Corn Laws. Pursuing his advocacy of non-intervention overseas, Cobden wrote an unsigned article "The Affair of the Vixen" for Tait's Edinburgh Magazine. In July 1838, he suggested to Tait articles on convulsions in trade and banking and on Egypt and his interview with Mehemet Ali.²¹

Cobden saw immense potential in Rowland Hill's plan for a countrywide penny postage. He told Francis Place, the veteran Radical, that Hill's plan "would do more to quicken and enlighten the intelligence of the million than any measure of our time", meaning that literature and newspapers would circulate more cheaply while cheap letters would stimulate literacy, particularly writing. On 7 May 1838, Cobden gave evidence to the Select Committee on Postage, using the isolated village of Sabden as an example. He also pressed Rowland Hill to mount an agitation in order to ensure the acceptance of the plan by Parliament. Hill declined to do this but it proved unnecessary as the government adopted the plan in 1840.²²

Summary

Cobden's failure to get elected to Parliament in July 1837 allowed him to continue to pursue local objects in

Manchester. He considered agitations to repeal the Corn Laws and for the ballot but finally chose to concentrate on national education. Initially, he supported the efforts of the B. & F.S.S. to establish new schools but he was drawn into an agitation for greater state participation in education led by T. Wyse M.P. But after experiencing the fierce opposition of the Church of England in Manchester to "Godless" schools, he saw the wisdom of avoiding discussion of the details of a national system. Instead, the M.S.P.N.E. was established to open two voluntary schools in working class districts in order to demonstrate the nature and benefits of a good basic education.

Cobden's other activities are touched upon - the agitation to incorporate Manchester and his support of Rowland Hill's plan for penny postage.

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CHAPTER NINEEducating the Working Class: Schools and Lyceums 1838-1845.1. The schools of the M.S.P.N.E.

In 1838, the Manchester Society for Promoting National Education opened two schools and many of its members were also involved in the establishment of three Lyceums - a new experiment in adult education. Unfortunately, none of the Society's records survive except for the Second Report, published in November or December 1841. The following account is based on that and on newspaper reports. The first school, for boys and girls, was opened on 1 August 1838 in Gould Street, St. George's Road. It was in a building purposely built as a Sunday School but now rented from the trustees. The boys' department of the school in Wilmot Street, Hulme, was opened on 27 August. The girls' department was opened in a separate building in October. The kind of accommodation is not known. Both schools were deliberately established in poor districts. The first teachers appointed were Alexander Fife (Gould Street - salary of £133 p.a.) from the Glasgow Normal School, William Webster (Wilmot St. Boys - £116 p.a.) from Borough Road School of B. & F.S.S., and Miss Watts (Wilmot St. Girls) also from Borough Road. The nature of the education given will be discussed first and then financial and other problems.¹

Cobden, in his letter to Dunn in November 1837, said it was the intention "to adopt the best parts of all systems". Apparently at that date, neither he nor Dunn

were aware that David Stow and others had opened the Glasgow Normal School earlier in 1837. But news of it soon spread in 1838. J.P. Kay, Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, visited it in 1837 preparatory to the establishment of a Poor Law School at Norwood and praised Stow's teacher training when giving evidence in 1838 to Slaney's Select Committee on the Education of the Poorer Classes.²

Cobden, Alexander Fife and T.H. Williams (Secretary of the Manchester Society) explained the education to be given at Gould Street to a meeting of parents on 31 July 1838. Cobden also referred to the second school at Chorlton-on-Medlock (meaning Wilmot Street) which was to follow an improved version of the B. & F.S.S. system.

"The Society had selected for trial two of the best systems of training masters - the British and Foreign School system, London, and that of the Glasgow training school under Mr. Stow. Of the latter, a necessary part was a playground, about which, in connection with that school, there was some difficulty; but they hoped shortly to have a playground. Here the children would be trained, not only for the business, but for the innocent and rational enjoyment of life. Hitherto, it had been too much the practice to be satisfied with teaching boys Latin, Greek and Geography, but never to teach them how to feel and to act. The other school, in Chorlton-on-Medlock, did not require a playground as an essential part of its system; he must confess he preferred having one; but there was a difficulty about it in large and populous towns."

Cobden told the parents how important education was for the future of their children - "the man who denied education to his children would shut them out from half the occupations of life".³

Stow's system was not a cheap schooling for the children of the poor. It was probably the most progressive teaching system up to the age of fourteen available

in Britain. The infant stage had much in common with Wilderspin's system. The basis of Stow's system was the belief that rote learning or inert knowledge was useless and that understanding and the ability to apply knowledge and also good behaviour were the true school objectives.

Stow thought that this could only be achieved by "simultaneous teaching", that is, the teaching of the whole class at once by the teacher. This contrasted with the monitorial system which was normal in National and British schools. Stow's system obviously needed the school staffing which was not possible until later in the century.

He envisaged the sole teacher (perhaps with an assistant) periodically taking a class in the gallery, the raised tier of seats, while monitors taught under supervision at other times. In the gallery, Stow advocated the use of what he called the "picturing out" method, the explanation of words and phrases by question and answer, using familiar illustrations, so that the child formed a "mental picture" and really understood the meaning.

Moral training (Stow preferred the word training to instruction) was as important as intellectual. Boys and girls were taught together, and played together in the playground (the "uncovered schoolroom") so that good behaviour could be encouraged by the teacher. There were daily Bible lessons.⁴

At the Gould Street school, a gallery was installed and a playground made and walled round. The curriculum included writing (on paper and slates), reading, spelling, arithmetic, Bible lessons, and for the "head class", English grammar, history, geography, mental arithmetic

and bills. Gallery lessons included natural history, elements of science, mineralogy, botany and "responses" (mutual questioning on the lessons of the week).

The Wilmot Street schools were conducted on the British system with some improvements from the Glasgow training system. There was no gallery but oral question and answer methods were employed. Cobden would certainly have called for the best curriculum and methods; he did so at the annual examination of the Royal Lancasterian School in Manchester on 24 May 1838. Each school had a small library and a ladies committee took care of the special interests of the girls.⁵

The children were given public examinations in order to spread knowledge of the methods and curriculum. The theatre of the Manchester Institute was used and then the Athenaeum after the new building was opened. On 20 April 1840, 1,000 children and their teachers were gathered at the Athenaeum for the examination of Gould Street boys.⁶

The schools were very far from being self-supporting from the fees. These were pegged at the lowest point within reach of normal working class incomes: Gould Street, three pence per week and if more than one child from the same family, 2d; the Wilmot Street schools, four and three pence respectively. At the end of the first year, the fees received at Gould Street were £75 and Wilmot Street £145, which could not pay the teachers' salaries, let alone the running costs or costs of initial fitting up. Of course, it was expected that the major support would be the donations and subscriptions of the members of the Society. The response was good in 1838 and 1839

and £451 was raised but even this was insufficient. The Society was £346 in debt in December 1839.

The Society was doomed by the slump which set in from the autumn of 1838. The profits of the millowners and businessmen which financed voluntary education were first severely cut and then disappeared entirely in 1841. The donations and subscriptions dropped to £272 in 1840 and £117 in 1841. The parents of the children found themselves dragged into unemployment and poverty. The attendance of children dropped from an average of 123 per week at Gould Street in 1840 to 100 in 1841. At Wilmot Street, it averaged 180 boys and 78 girls in 1840; then 101 boys and 51 girls in 1841.⁷

As early as December 1839 the situation was grim enough. Cobden said that the schools could not succeed unless they were under the patronage of the religious sects, especially the dissenters. He knew that the whole educational venture was fundamentally unsound in an economy subject to the de-stabilising influence of the Corn Laws. The people needed bread and work before education. From September 1838, his main concern was the repeal of the Corn Laws.⁸

The Manchester Society carried on bravely until about 1844, disappearing with scarcely any trace. The Wilmot Street schools were handed over in 1842 to the Chorlton-on-Medlock Lyceum which made an unsuccessful attempt to keep them going. Finally, they fell into private hands. By November 1844, the Gould Street school had reverted to the trustees, who struggled to keep it going with a master

from Borough Road. Finally, the master was given it rent free to make what he could of it on his own account.⁹

2. The Lyceums

Cobden's circle of educationists saw the need for adult education as much as formal schooling. In 1838, Manchester's large population was served by the Mechanics Institute and the Miles Platting Institute. The subscription for the former could not be afforded by the very poor but the latter, established by Benjamin Heywood on the eastern side of the city in December 1836, presented a real alternative to the public house where newspapers were usually to be found. Institutions run by working class leaders notably Rowland Detrosier (1800-1834), had either collapsed after a few years, like the Mechanics Institute (1829-35), or failed to get established as in the case of the first Owenite Hall of Science project (1822-33). Lack of money was one of the chief problems.¹⁰

The need for a new "popular" form of Mechanic's Institute had been acknowledged for two or three years. In February 1836, Cobden had suggested to the AGM of the Mechanics Institute that district reading rooms should be established but nothing had been done. This is perhaps not surprising since the Mechanics' Institution managers disapproved of keeping a newspaper room and only altered this policy in 1840 after the success of these rooms in the Lyceums. It was the formation of the Manchester Society and an article by Wyse "On the Lyceum system in America" in C.S.E. Second Publication (1838) which influenced the new move.¹¹

What Cobden, Benjamin Heywood and others had in mind

were very innovative institutions along the lines of Miles Platting. As Cobden put it: "The working classes needed attractions powerful enough to induce them, after a hard day's toil, to spend an hour or two in the evening at any place rather than the ale-house or the gin-shop.... The first thing was, to make these institutions attractive and amusing or they never would receive the support of the operatives; for it was amusement and recreation, rather than severe study, that the working man required after his severe toil for 10 or 12 hours a day". He also urged the desirability of bringing women as much as men into such institutions.¹²

In the spirit of Rule 2, mentioned in the last chapter, many leading men of the Manchester Society were involved in setting up three Lyceums, in Ancoats (September 1838), Chorlton-on-Medlock (December 1838) and Salford (1839). T.H. Williams, Secretary of the Manchester Society, was also Chairman of Directors of the Chorlton-on-Medlock Lyceum. The Ancoats Lyceum originated with a Prospectus published in August 1838 and an initial meeting in the Baptist Schoolroom in Oak Street on 13 September 1838. Edward Herford (a solicitor and son of John Herford, a founder member of the Manchester Society) obtained the advice and assistance of Thomas Coates, Secretary of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.¹³

The Lyceums were independent institutions, although they were soon linked, as will be noted later, by a form of association. They were democratically self-governed. There was not the slightest intention that they should be managed by a middle class oligarchy of "employers",

although it was obvious that, initially at least, all the money for establishing them would come from that source. The intention was that the working class should be helped to help themselves, coaxed towards a situation in which working men ran and financed the Lyceums. The Manchester Mechanics Institute had been severely criticised by Detrosier and others for being undemocratically run, bringing about a change in the constitution in 1834, whereby the Directors were elected from the general body of subscribers.

The government of the Lyceums was each vested in a Board of 24 Directors, Deputy Treasurer and Honorary Secretary (Directors ex officio), annually chosen by ballot amongst the members of not less than three quarters of a year's standing. As Cobden took the most interest in the Ancoats Lyceum, it is singled out for discussion. William Fairbairn, already making his name as a distinguished engineer, and who owned engineering works in Manchester and London, was President. Cobden, James Heywood, W. Langton, W. Neild and W. McConnel were among the Vice-Presidents. James Perkins was Secretary and Benjamin Heywood, Treasurer. E. Herford was Corresponding Director. The occupations (and therefore social class) of the Directors, apart from E. Herford and Abel Heywood, a leading bookseller in Manchester, are not known, but presumably they were "working class". Certainly in 1849, only two Directors were middle class.

It was hoped to reinforce popular control and participation by having premises built from shares bought at £1 each by the members, payable in instalments. £2,500 was

required. A couple of hundred were sold and when in 1845 the plan was revived, it was equally unsuccessful. The Ancoats Lyceum had temporary accommodation throughout the 1840's. The essay and discussion groups met in Great Ancoats Street. The lecture room (at first) was under the Wesleyan Association Chapel in Lever Street and then in the former Manor Court House in High Street. It was given up in 1841 or 1842 due to financial difficulties.

The siting of the library and newsroom (opened on 11 October 1838) is not known. The classes (which began on 26 November 1838) were held five nights per week for women at the Gould Street school of the Manchester Society and at Brown Street for men. The customs of that time did not permit mixed classes for adults.

The subscriptions were 2/- per quarter for males and 1/6 for females. But because of the difficulty that some members found in paying 2/- at once, half quarterly tickets for 1/- were issued from 1840. In January 1839 there were 86 annual members - obviously "friends of the Lyceums" and 687 quarterly members. In August and September 1840 there were 84 "half quarterly" members. The vast majority were mechanics, spinsters, weavers, piecers, warehousemen, or handicraftsmen. In January 1839, there were 57 women. Thirty-two members were under 14 years of age, and 214 were aged between 14 and 21. The Lyceum caught precisely the people for whom it was intended.¹⁴

Now to briefly survey the work of the Lyceum - the classes, lectures and discussion topics, the library and social activities. There were classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, geometry, algebra, mechanical drawing, vocal

music, French, phrenology, and sewing. There were small charges per week for classes; 5d. was the maximum. The discussion society in the first months reflected the general aim stated by the Secretary of making working men and women aware of their relations with their fellows in society and with the physical environment. The topics included "the social position of women" and "is the New Poor Law superior to the Old?" The former topic was obviously linked to the lecture by Mrs. Emma Martin, a 28 year old feminist and Owenite lecturer, on "the education and capabilities of women". W. Hawkes Smith, a Birmingham Owenite and phrenologist, lectured on geology and mining. The Rev. W. Gaskell (Unitarian), husband of the novelist, lectured on "poets of humble life", and Dr. W. Epps on physiology.¹⁵

There is every indication that the mental horizons of the members were stretched. Partisan political opinions were not pressed on members. The newsroom had 38 newspapers of every shade of opinion "thereby enabling each person to form his individual opinion not from ex parte statements but from a general examination of facts and arguments". The library contained 1,688 volumes by the end of 1841, representing every department of literature and science and works of imaginative fiction including Scott, Fenimore Cooper, Bulwer, Dickens and many poets. Social activities focussed daily on the coffee room and occasional tea parties and concerts.

The lyceums made a sufficiently good impression as to be favourably noticed in the New Moral World, the journal of the Owenite socialists, despite the fact that

the Owenites had opened a Hall of Science in Manchester in June 1840. But a modern commentator has made the indictment that the Lyceums were well meaning ventures by middle class manufacturers and merchants who were blind to the fact that they were committed to a social structure which made it almost impossible for the working class to obtain leisure and culture. But this is to ignore one of the main aims of the Anti-Corn Law League and also the thinking about economics which was so important in Cobden's social strategy.¹⁶

Shorter hours and higher wages in factories had, in Cobden's view, to await an expanding economy but a small and important beginning in extending leisure was made by Manchester employers who granted, in 1844, a Saturday half-holiday for warehousemen and clerks, soon copied by some shopkeepers and even a few millowners. It was the start of what eventually became a national custom.

Cobden attended nearly all important lyceum functions in spite of heavy League commitments. He suggested a leaflet campaign to raise funds directed at the working class on a house to house basis and also at the wealthy class. One leaflet, at least, was produced, appealing to the wealthy. A bazaar in January 1841 - which Cobden's wife and a sister helped to organise - raised £1,012. Of special importance was the impulse he gave to the formation of the Manchester and District Association of Literary and Scientific Institutions in October 1839, following the tour of Thomas Coates in September. This Association brought the benefits of mutual co-operation to sixteen institutions in Manchester and surrounding towns.¹⁷

Until the end of 1840, the Ancoats Lyceum and the Manchester and District Association flourished surprisingly well considering the general recession in the economy throughout 1839 and 1840. In 1841, industry sank into deep depression and economy cuts were inevitable. Paid lectures, for example, could no longer be afforded. E. Herford, Secretary of the Manchester and District Association, told Wilderspin, who was hoping for a lecturing engagement, that "all the institutions about here are so very low in funds and the working classes generally disheartened with the badness of the times. The people want bread and care little about instruction". In fact, the Association ceased at the end of the year. The Salford Lyceum merged with the Salford Mechanics' Institute in 1842. The Ancoats Lyceum survived by cutting expenditure and with much reduced membership.¹⁸

When the economy recovered in 1844-45, Cobden and J.A. Nicholls the Secretary, tried to revive the Ancoats Lyceum but the enthusiasm of 1838-40 was lacking. The founders had to admit that the Lyceum would never be fully managed and financially supported by the working class in that poor district of Manchester. Nichols complained in 1849 that the "apathy and indifference of the factory population towards education is something painful as well as fearful to contemplate". The Ancoats Lyceum continued to survive only by taking on the responsibility in 1846 of running a school for factory "half timers".¹⁹

J.W. Hudson, a historian of adult education writing in 1850, thought that the Lyceums had failed to attract a growing membership because they had neglected recreation,

one of the original objectives. This is undoubtedly true but it was a fact that funds for such activities were simply not forthcoming. Dr. J. Watts, reviewing the history of the Ancoats Lyceum in 1852, attributed its ill-success to the continual struggle to overcome illiteracy, instead of being able to concentrate on further education.²⁰

3. The M.S.P.N.E. and national politics

The schools of the Manchester Society might have survived the slump if a loose alliance of the Society, the B. & F.S.S. and the moderate wing of the Central Society led by Wyse, had succeeded in 1838-39 in getting at least a substantial change in the rules governing Treasury grants for education. There was a slim chance of this in 1838. Lord Brougham's bill, which permitted rate aid, was shelved after the first reading on 1 December 1837 but a Select Committee under R.A. Slaney, was appointed to investigate the Education of the Poorer Classes in England and Wales. Unfortunately, Slaney's views were idiosyncratic and did not represent any reform group. He believed that the existing system of aid to the two Societies could be expanded with rate aid. There was a rough balance of Tories and Whigs/Liberals on the Committee but only two men, Wyse and G.W. Wood, were advocates of substantial change. Wood, a Unitarian, was MP for Kendal, and a member of the Manchester branch of the B. & F.S.S.²¹

The obvious weakness of the Radicals called for the maximum co-operation between Wyse, Wood, and the major witness from the B. & F.S.S., Henry Dunn. Wyse and Dunn would certainly have known about the Manchester Society's

plans for two schools and the Bible class rule. This could be seen as the basis for a comprehensive national system aided either by rates or Treasury grants. Such a system would include British schools and schools run by other religious or non-religious bodies. The essential ingredient was a conscience clause for religious instruction in all schools. In other words, one important matter of agreement between Wyse, the Manchester Society and the B. & F.S.S. was the aim of forcing the "exclusive" National schools to accept a conscience clause as the condition of receiving Treasury grants in the future.

There is very little evidence from private sources of the collaboration during the period of the Select Committee. But the actions of the three groups point to it. Wyse discussed the matter with the B. & F.S.S. on 27 February 1838, the day after examination of witnesses had begun. Judging by Dunn's evidence on 8 March, there was agreement that Wyse and the B. & F.S.S. would support the principle of a mixed system of schools, denominational and non-denominational, so long as withdrawal from religious instruction on grounds of conscience was provided for. The system would require the supervision of a Board of Education. Whether Wood's support was the result of specific discussion with the Manchester Society is not known, but his actions on the Select Committee were generally in line with the above objectives.²²

During the months the Committee sat, the three allied groups exerted pressure on the government. In April, William Allen, on behalf of the B. & F.S.S., handed a Memorial to Lord ^{John} Russell, the Home Secretary, for the

confidential consideration of the Cabinet before publication. It corroborated the views given by Dunn to the Committee. Then, on 7 May, Edward Maltby, Bishop of Durham, presented the petition drawn up by the Manchester Society in November 1837 and signed by 24,000 people, to the House of Lords. He spoke ably in support of it. Finally, on 11 June, Wyse presented petitions from the North of England with 35,000 signatures and introduced an Address for a Board of Commissioners to supervise a fairer application of the grants and to establish Normal schools. It failed by two votes only in a House of Commons one third full of members.²³

The Report of the Select Committee was also a bitter disappointment. Wyse and Wood tried vainly to get agreement for further investigation of education in the next session of Parliament. The Tory/Established Church group won completely, and the Report in July called simply for the "continuance and extension" of the grants to the National and British societies. By August 1838, there was considerable frustration in the ranks of reformers. Cobden wrote to Tait urging an agitation for national education but he went abroad at the end of August for two months and when he returned his mind was bent on the repeal of the Corn Laws. In October, Dunn privately warned Lord Russell that the B. & F.S.S. would agitate unless the government acted. Private correspondence shows that Russell agreed with the British Society's position, except for a board of education whose composition would present insuperable problems. But Russell failed to persuade his colleagues in the Cabinet.²⁴

When the government finally acted in February 1839, appointing a Committee of Privy Council on Education (a convenient non-legislative substitute for a board) to supervise grants on a more flexible basis but not enforcing a conscience clause in National Schools, and also to administer a State Normal School (a big concession to Wyse and the C.S.E.), the long-feared explosion of opposition erupted, chiefly from the Established and Wesleyan Methodist churches. The total "package" was a genuine effort to conciliate all parties but the plan for religious teaching in the Normal School was a clumsy compromise, drawing on the Irish National system but giving the Established Church more privilege than the dissenters and Roman Catholics.

Cobden's views were luckily recorded in a letter to Wyse written two days before Russell announced on 4 June the abandonment of the Normal School plan:

"I fear the ministry have blundered in their measure, and that we shall be temporarily at least thrown back - The methodist howl, and the high church crusade, will succeed, because the ministers have not secured the dissenters or the liberal party by their plan - First, they have done wrong in making provision for the visits of chaplains and ministers to their schools. The next mistake is in alluding to the Douay bible, which is not necessary in this country, where Protestantism is the rule and Catholicism the exception - Had they adopted the British and Foreign rule, as regards religion, it would have demolished the cry of infidelity on one hand; and rallied around them the dissenters, quakers, and the liberal party - whilst the methodists would have been neutralised - whilst on the other, they would have put the church party in the position of fighting for exclusive control against a system which is not working well throughout the country. Again they have put sad nonsense into their minutes, when they talk of making religion provide the whole course of instruction. How will they teach the rule-of-three or modern geography religiously! In this they have fallen into senseless prejudice.

We think of trying to get up a petition here to break the fall of the ministerial scheme. But the dissenters,

generally, though favourably disposed towards the government, cannot approve altogether of the plan; and therefore we shall be obliged to word the petition very vaguely. In fact it will not support the plan of the Ministry, but pray for a liberal and comprehensive one. We shall endeavour rather to oppose the rabid and factious opponents than to support the present plan. It is difficult under such circumstances to do anything very satisfactorily. I repeat the ministry have blundered!

The more I think of the subject, the more I am convinced, that the British system is the best, for evading the factious opposition, which will take the cloak of religion against any scheme if possible. As regards the districts where Catholics abound, as here & Liverpool, some practical modification might be afterwards introduced. But in thousands of parishes where no Roman Catholics are to be found, the British system might work without difficulty on that score.

Cobden may have given the impression, by his "Bible only" preference of wanting to prevent National Schools from teaching the Catechism, but judging from remarks elsewhere, it is probable that he meant only that a conscience clause should operate in those schools. The petition called for schools supported by public funds to be open to all denominations without infringement of the rights of conscience and for the government to establish Model and Normal Schools on the same principle. It was signed by 20,815 people in six days and was laid on the table of the House of Commons by C.P. Thomson M.P. on 14 June 1839.²⁵

The petition was the last action of the Manchester Society in the cause of national education. It was not effective in bringing further change in the government's plans now finally settled and which included the allocation of £5,000 each to the National and British Societies for their own Normal Schools. But it may have helped to stiffen the government's resolve to hold out against the attempt of the Tories and the Established Church in both Houses of Parliament to end the new Committee of Privy Council - seen as "the thin edge of the wedge" of state

control of popular education. When the Established Church won further concessions in 1840 with regard to the inspection of their schools, it became reconciled to the Committee which continued to award the greater proportion of funds to the National Schools.²⁶

Summary

In 1838, Cobden and his associates began private schemes for educating working class children in two schools run by the M.S.P.N.E. and working class adults in three Lyceums. The schools aimed to teach a curriculum which would be a model for a future national system. The Lyceums, combining education and entertainment, were intended to be managed by their members and be self-supporting. But the schools and the Lyceums collapsed in the prolonged depression of 1840-42. Money to run them was no longer available and the working class was more concerned with getting jobs and bread.

The final section surveys the efforts of the M.S.P.N.E. in alliance with T. Wyse and the B. & F.S.S. to force the government to establish an improved system of national education. The very partial success of this and CObden's views about the government plan of 1839 are described.

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prints Cobden's letter of 2 June 1839 in full. The original in the Wyse Papers NLI is missing at present. Compare Cobden's remarks to J.H. Burton, 23 April 1839. BL. Add. MS.43667.

26. D.G. Paz: The Politics of Working Class Education in Britain 1830-50 (1980), 65-94.

CHAPTER TEN

The Anti-Corn Law League: "The Education of 27 Millions of People".

1. The foundation and aims of the League.

The Anti-Corn Law League was the single most powerful expression of Cobden's philosophy of social change. "Material and industrial prosperity is the indispensable condition preliminary of intellectual and spiritual civilisation", noted The League newspaper in 1844.

Cobden had long dreamt of a campaign to repeal the Corn Laws but the prosperity of 1835-37 - a "factitious" prosperity, he believed, based on paper credit and good harvests - had prevented it from coming about. But the financial crisis of 1837 and especially the poor harvest of 1838 brought on a slump, accompanied by high bread prices.¹

Cobden was in Constance in southern Germany when he read in forwarded newspapers of the mass meeting at Kersal Moor outside Manchester on 24 September 1838.

He wrote in his diary on 5 October:

"I see the accounts of the great Radical meetings in Manchester etc. These "demonstrations" of the working classes are labour lost whilst the middle class are looking coldly on. But they are not without their moral to thinking minds. They bespeak material suffering without which working men cannot be drawn from their workshops at the voice of the agitator. They are evidence too of the mischief of the Corn Laws but have the middle class the wisdom to see so far? I doubt - nay I half despair - England must be another lesson as Greece and Rome were before her of the destructiveness of aristocratic misrule. The world will bear many a bitter fruit of experience ere people will be taught their interests and their duties - which are one and indivisible!"

He wrote to Frederick the same day saying that he

would start an agitation for repeal when he returned home. But he was anticipated in this by his friend Archibald Prentice, editor of the Manchester Times who had, with six other men not all prominent in Manchester life but all members of Lloyd Street Presbyterian Chapel, formed a Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association on 24 September 1838. An advertisement of the Provisional Committee appeared on 13 October and Cobden's name was added to the revised list published on 17 October, after his return to Manchester.²

Cobden gave a big thrust to the organisation and expansion of the infant association. He secured the support of the Manchester Chamber of COMmerce for total and immediate repeal after stormy meetings led to the election of a new President. J.B. Smith was a respected member of the business community and a noted Manchester opponent of the Corn Laws. In January 1839, Smith was also elected President of the Anti-Corn Law Association which grew into the National Anti-Corn Law League after a meeting of delegates of other anti-Corn Law associations in Britain in March 1839. Formal control of the League was vested in a Council composed of large subscribers to the funds. In practice, as the headquarters was in Manchester and the biggest subscribers were mainly local men, the League was a Manchester run organisation.

The men who rallied round Smith and Cobden were precisely the same circle of men who had supported the cause of unsectarian education, lyceums and other "liberal" causes. They included George Wilson (destined

to be the main Chairman of the Council), Thomas Potter, William Rawson, R. Philips Jnr, Absalom Watkin, R.H. Greg, W.R. Callender, J. Brooks, Henry Ashworth, C.J.S. Walker, W. Neild and John Bright. The League was therefore strong in talent and energy but until 1843 it represented no more than one third of the Manchester business and professional community.³

It is significant that the group which formed the inner circle of the League was composed mainly of the Unitarians and Quakers who had taken the lead in reform projects since 1835. The elements of the new economics depended not just on an intimate knowledge of manufacturing but on the belief in a progressive social order characteristic of the group's religious outlook. Cobden had to prevail on this group to redirect their efforts from educational projects to the repeal of the Corn Laws as the key to unlocking the beneficent potential of machine industry. Support for the Manchester Society's two schools and the Lyceums continued but there were no political initiatives for national education.

When Sir James Graham, Home Secretary in Peel's Conservative government, introduced a Factories Education Bill in 1843, sparking off a controversy similar to that of 1839, Cobden regarded it as an unwanted diversion from the urgent questions of bread and unemployment. A leading article in the Anti-Bread Tax Circular entitled "Education versus Food" summed up this view.

"Connected by a mysterious but indissoluble union, mind and matter act and re-act upon each other. The body drags down the mind along with it, and moral purity is inconsistent with physical degradation.... To them [the legislators] as to others we say, you are beginning at the wrong end.... Let us legislate not merely for the minds, but for the bodies of our fellow countrymen."⁴

Cobden's attitude to the Factories Education Bill will be discussed in Chapter Twelve.

The apparent narrowness of aim of the League is deceptive: the Corn Laws were perceived to be the key-stone of the arch of protection and monopoly in industry and agriculture. The abolition of the Corn Laws was the first step in creating a dynamic economy. But equally important in Cobden's mind, were several anticipated "spin offs". The first was that the campaign would turn the industrial middle class into a new political force. The second was, that the middle class would be "radicalised", by which Cobden meant an appreciation of state policy as he conceived it and the destruction of the traditional Whig and Tory pattern of rule. Thirdly, Cobden hoped that a British free trade policy would prove a powerful example for other countries. This British economy would not truly flourish without a world wide spread of free trade.⁵

The obstacles were immense. The entrenched power and prestige of the aristocracy was formidable. The industrial middle class had so far shown no sustained effort to challenge it. The majority of industrialists in Lancashire were absorbed in their private business affairs without thought of making a collective impact on national politics. Agricultural labourers were sunk in poverty, ignorance and apathy. A section of

the industrial working class was stirring in a new political awareness but was confused in ideas and leadership and suspicious of middle class reformers. Some believed the Chartist message that no improvement in their lot was possible without first obtaining universal suffrage.

Another serious problem lay in erroneous ideas of political economy which had little basis in observable fact but were apparently supported by economists of authority such as Ricardo and James Mill. It was held that poverty was caused by "over-population", that is, the pressure of population increase on limited food and employment resources. There was a fatalistic belief that statesmen could do little about these "laws" except to try to modify their effects by the New Poor Law and by limitation of hours of work in factories. Before examining the "educational methods" of the League, it is necessary to understand "the lessons" taught - the new economics.⁶

2. The new economics.

Ricardian economics and, from the late nineteenth century, Marxist ideas in historiography both encouraged the belief that each social class has specific interests which must conflict with other classes. Therefore it has seemed to many writers that an organisation such as the League, representing the interests of the industrial commercial middle class must (whatever its claims about a "harmony of interests" among classes) be working against the true interests of the working class. The League has not appeared a sympathetic

subject for social and economic historians. It stands in need of a detailed and thorough study in all its aspects, which cannot be attempted here.⁷

In June 1844, The League newspaper asserted that its writers had considerably advanced the science of political economy, the truths of which should not be confused with "the mazes of the Ricardo labyrinth". It was a justifiable claim but one which has not been recognised by historians. The truth has been hidden by the fact that Cobden, who certainly determined the thrust of articles in The League and probably wrote many of them, saw no point in indulging in academic controversy when the prime necessity was to teach the public about economics with the clearest and most persuasive arguments.

Nevertheless, The League noticed the occasional new works on political economy which rejected Ricardian principles and had similar ideas to those held by the League, notably by James Wilson, J.A. Lawson (Whately Professor of Political Economy at Dublin), T.C. Banfield and F. Bastiat. The common assumption of these writers was that, as a review in The League put it, "the wealth, that is, the wellbeing, of a nation depends obviously on the proportion between its production and its consumption, and the distribution of that production so as to meet the wants of all classes of consumers". The production of manufacturing industry and agriculture were equally important and likewise the capacity of the urban and rural population to consume.

Cobden and other League thinkers were receptive

to an international exchange of new ideas among economists who rejected the Ricardian model. But it is difficult to pinpoint the origin of new ideas. For example, Cobden met James Wilson (1806-1860), destined to be editor of The Economist and a Treasury official, in Manchester in 1839 when Wilson was writing a pamphlet about the effects of bad harvests and high bread prices on the economy. But J.B. Say had discussed similar ideas in lectures at the Collège de France.

The League adopted and strengthened ideas, especially by a continuous analysis of changes in the British economy. First there was the period of the slump of 1838-42, then the recovery of industry (but depression of agriculture) in 1843-44 and then the industrial down swing of 1845-46. In so doing, theories were informally developed concerning industrial "fluctuations" (the trade cycle), the determination of wages and the relationship of agricultural to manufacturing prosperity.

Before dealing with the slump, it is useful, in exploring Cobden's ideas, to take first his analysis of the "factitious" prosperity of 1835-37 which preceded it. Both the operation of the Corn Laws and the banking system were responsible for the boom was based on exports to the United States which were not "paid for" by imports from the United States such as corn, which was prohibited by the Corn Laws unless prices in Britain rose very high, but by paper credits and bonds issued by American banks which in turn became securities for bank notes issued by numerous small British banks. In

other words, British industry was stimulated by money inflation in the United States. When the "bubble" burst in the United States in 1837, banks went broke in Britain and interest rates rose. Prices of manufactured goods collapsed and Cobden's firm among others lost heavily.

The Manchester Chamber of Commerce, under the leadership of J.B. Smith and Cobden, declared strongly in favour of the proposals of the "Currency School" (Lord Overstone and others) for the regulation of the note issue by the Bank of England. Both gave evidence to the Select Committee on Banks of Issue in April 1840. Cobden urged that the note issue be confined to the Bank of England and be restricted so that one-third of its liabilities were covered by bullion held. He rejected the idea of the Bank having power of discretionary "management" of notes, fearing that it would provide a lever for political manipulation.

The Bank Charter Act of 1844 which embodied the proposals of the "Currency School" and received favourable comment in The League, was a positive effort by government to give stability to the money and the economy as a whole. The Act proved to have weaknesses and had to be temporarily suspended in 1847 and 1857 but it was not amended. But an act of 1954, giving the Treasury power to vary fiduciary issue, has led to the temptation of monetary inflation which Cobden called "the Alcohol of the nations".¹⁰

But the "currency question" which ended the fragile prosperity of 1835-37 was not Cobden's main explanation

for the deep slump into which Britain sank from the autumn of 1838. The Corn Laws caused, in seasons of poor harvest, a substantial drop in the consumer demand for the products of industry. In seasons of good harvests, such as 1834-36, corn prices fell, effectively "suspending" the Corn Laws, as no import of corn was needed. But in poor harvests, as in 1838, prices had to rise to 63 shillings a quarter before any imports were permitted. The artificially high price of the working class family's loaf - an important part of the diet - was indeed a "bread tax" in the interests of maintaining a high level of rents for the landlords. The analysis published in the Anti-Corn Law Circular on 25 June 1839 is very perceptive:

"The people have had to pay £20 millions more for their food this year than they did last year. The great bulk of our manufactures are not consumed by the rich, but by the classes who are dependent upon their weekly or daily wages. Owing to the high prices of provisions, the earnings of these classes have been absorbed in supplying necessary food; they have consequently been unable to purchase either the usual quantity of home manufactures or of foreign products; and hence the falling off in the demand for our manufactures both at home and abroad; hence the accumulation of stocks, the decline in prices, and the necessity of reducing the supply of manufactures, by working short time until the usual demand is restored, by the ability of the people to clothe as well as feed themselves." Modern analysis of the trade cycle in the first half of the

nineteenth century confirms the insight of the League without apparently being aware of it.¹¹

The second theory which emerged from the literature of the League was the determination of general wage levels in manufacturing industry. Prevailing Ricardian doctrine asserted that "the natural price of labour is that price which is necessary to enable the labourers to subsist and to perpetuate their race without either increase or diminution". Coupled with this was another theory which derived from Malthus' law of population pressing on scarce food resources. This theory, known later as the "wages fund", taught that there was no guarantee that all labourers would find employment, if their numbers increased at a faster rate than the accumulation of capital available for their employment. Ricardian doctrine asserted that such a tendency was likely as rents and food prices rose, lowering the rate of manufacturers' profits.

Ricardo reasoned almost entirely from a priori theories and did not examine the course of actual wage rates in either agriculture or industry. With regard to agricultural wages in southern England, Cobden acknowledged the truth of this norm of subsistence wages. But, as was shown in Chapter Eight, the wages in calico printing were much higher, even for unskilled labourers. The situation was similar in the rest of the manufacturing sector of the textile industry but, significantly, not in handloom weaving. The reason for higher paid work in textile factories was the higher productivity and profit brought to the

employer by the use of machines. On several occasions, Cobden pointed out that the wages in manufacturing were on average higher than on the Continent because labour was more productive and not because of linkage to bread prices.

Appreciation of the high productivity and high wage factor was general among enlightened manufacturers. In 1840, Edwin Chadwick, Secretary to the Poor Law Commissioner, gathered and published evidence about education and high wages from five manufacturers including William Fairbairn of Manchester and Thomas Ashton of Hyde, Cheshire. But in publicity and speeches, the League chose to emphasise the strong connection of demand for labour by manufacturers with full employment rather than narrow the ground to discussion of high wages for very skilled work. A large proportion of workers in manufacturing were not in the highest paid jobs and about 45% were women who received a lower wage than the men but still higher than the wages of male agricultural labourers in southern England or handloom weavers. The League summed up the argument in a pithy adage: "When two masters ran after one man, wages rose, but when two men ran after one master, wages fell".¹²

The League's analysis gained in credibility by the actual trend of the economy between 1839 and 1846. When bread prices were very high between 1839 and 1842, wages were not raised to match them. Instead manufacturing output fell as demand fell, mills went on short time or closed, and the wages of those lucky enough to be employed were cut by 10-15%. With two good harvests

in 1842 and 1843, bread prices fell, demand rose, manufacturing output increased and wages were raised on average 10-15% above those of 1841. The recovery was explained in The League:

"During the first six months of this present year (1843), the people have paid £30,000,000 less for food than for the same period for five years past. The enormous sum of £5,000,000 a month has been left in their pockets to spend on other things; and this sufficiently accounts for an increased demand for cotton, linen, and woolen clothing, for stockings and shoes, for hats and bonnets, for mutton, beef and bacon, for sugar, tea and coffee".¹³

The third theory concerned the relationship of agriculture to industry under the Corn Laws and what it could be in a free economy. Cobden and the League defined the true agricultural interest as the tenants and labourers and not the aristocratic landlords who drew much of their income from fixed rents which did not vary with the price of corn. When corn prices went down following a good harvest in 1843, industry revived but farmers found difficulties in paying rents. The League now switched its probing economic analysis to farming, seeing the opportunity of striking at the root of the Landlords' defence of the Corn Laws. Cobden likened the existing relationship of agriculture and industry to two buckets in a draw well - when one prospered, the other was depressed. But he showed that even in so-called prosperity of high corn prices the tenant farmers gained little beyond being able to pay their rents. At

the same time, industry was depressed by the slump in consumer demand in the urban population, which also had less income for meat and dairy produce. The agricultural labourers' low wages never varied except briefly at harvest time. They rarely ate ^{wheaten}_A bread in southern England.

The League believed that agriculture could become a truly flourishing industry if corn was deprived of its "protection", leases to tenants made longer and more secure, so giving more incentives for a variety of produce. When manufacturing industry was prosperous, there would be a strong and steady demand for a wide range of agricultural produce. There would also be more demand for agricultural labour and consequently higher wages. Labourers would not flock into the towns in quite such large numbers as they had done, swelling the market for unskilled labour in the towns and keeping wages down. In sum, land would attract more investment, tenant farmers would make steady profits and pay better wages and landlords find their rents regularly paid.¹⁴

By 1845, the economists of the League were sufficiently confident to publish an explanatory series on the new economics in The League. The series was entitled "Familiar Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy" and was written by A.W. Paulton, editor of The League, in 1845. The nine articles surveyed the place of political economy in social and moral science, the nature of national wealth, the constituents of "value", capital and labour and "cheap production" (meaning efficient and productive industry).¹⁵

Paulton argued that "the object of political economy, or, as we should prefer to call it, social economy, is to effect for communities or societies.... the greatest amount of happiness by the least expenditure of toil". To achieve this it was essential to break away entirely from the concept of value as the quantity of labour expended on a product. Value resulted from labour but it came not from the quantity of labour but from its productivity - its skill and efficiency or "cheapness". The most productive labour commanded the most rewarding return or "exchange" of goods and services. Thus wealth was measured by the extent of goods and services commanded by an individual.

The living standard of an individual or community was not constrained by the "laws" of population or diminishing returns which haunted the Classical economists. There could be an indefinite production and consumption of goods and services if the right conditions were created. The first requirement was that capital and labour combine to produce the maximum goods and services in the most productive way e.g. using machinery. The second was the creation of a high level of effective demand for these goods and services by establishing wide and unrestricted markets and a strong demand for labour.

This exposition of the fundamentals of political economy was very similar to that being worked out by Frédéric Bastiat, the French economist. Indeed, as will be seen in the next chapter, Bastiat and Cobden were drawn together in 1845 by an instant sympathy with each

other's views.

The League's ability to pioneer new paths in political economy is also shown by the remarkable - and unfortunately anonymous - historical analysis entitled "An Inquiry into the Effects of English Legislation upon Agricultural Wages, Profits and Rent". The articles surveyed developments since the fifteenth century drawing on primary sources which were carefully footnoted. The aim was to show that the prosperity of all engaged in agriculture had been harmed not by economic "laws" but by legislation and restrictions. It is probably not accidentally that, fifteen years after publication, J.E. Thorold Rogers, Cobden's kinsman by marriage, began a massive programme of research on the same subject.¹⁶

The originality of the League's theory of under consumption and of economic growth may be better appreciated if it is contrasted with some major features of the Classical School based on Malthus and Ricardo and also with the "over-production" theories of John Fielden and the "Ten Hours" movement. In neither "school" is there any vision of a higher standard of living for the working class. The Ricardians favoured the repeal of the Corn Laws and industrial expansion in so far as it was the only way of keeping at bay the spectres of "over population", diminishing returns from agriculture, rising rents and falling profits in industry. There was nothing for the working class to gain except temporarily as the tendency of wages was to fall to subsistence level. John Stuart Mill, who began writing

Principles of Political Economy (1848) in 1845, designed to recast Ricardo's doctrines in a less rigid form, in fact made little change in them except to suggest that the slowing down of economic growth and population increase - "The stationary state" - was both probable and desirable. Remarkably, there is nothing in the Principles to indicate any knowledge of the League's analysis of the trade cycle. Mill adhered to "Say's law" which taught that the supply of produce creates its own demand i.e. all sellers are buyers. Therefore general over-production of goods was impossible; only occasional speculation would produce a temporary overstock in one particular industry.

The "over-production" school has, like Cobden's school, been neglected by historians but it was one of the main challenges to the League which published a pamphlet to refute it. There were no outstanding British writers but its ideas may be found in the works of John Fielden, the Todmorden cotton spinner. There is much similarity to the ideas of Sismondi, whose major work Nouveaux Principes d'Économie Politique was published in 1819. The belief that the application of machinery to industry, unless restrained or halted, will inevitably lead to "over-production", falling prices, the collapse of weak firms and poverty and unemployment for the workers, was the main argument of the Ten Hours movement which was strong in the 1830's and 1840's until successful in obtaining the Ten Hours Act of 1847.¹⁷

The advocates of reducing the working day from the normal twelve hours to ten hours believed it would check

over-production and maintain prices and wages. Cobden's opposition to the various Ten Hours bills or amendments in the House of Commons in 1844-46 is easily mis-understood unless it is placed in the context of the new political economy of the League. A reduction of the working day would, in the present and near future, mean a lower wage for the worker and hinder the expansion of production and the increase of profits out of which wages were paid. Cobden was convinced that a more advanced, stable and efficient industry would bring shorter hours and higher average wages without legislation. The next fifty years bore out the truth of this in manufacturing industry, despite the economy retaining many features which Cobden would have regarded as brakes on progress.¹⁸

3. The strategy of agitation

The League was obliged to use the word "agitation" for want of a better one to describe what was in fact the education of public opinion. "It is the progress of rational conviction; the intellect being stimulated in its inquiries and expressions by moral feelings and humane consideration for the multitude of sufferers wronged by the unjust laws whose removal is sought. In this case, therefore, there is none of the common and characteristic dependence of what is called agitation upon the continued application of external excitement.... The success of the League is, not to have worked the millions into rage and fury, but to have instructed, enlightened, convinced, and determined them, so that the power which has been created exists independently

of its authors; and enduringly, in virtue of its own nature".

Cobden applied to this gigantic task of "educating 27 millions of people" (as he described it in 1842) George Combe's theory of human nature. Combe taught that the "animal propensities" - pride, fear, combative-ness, acquisitiveness - were powerful driving forces which must be harnessed to proper purposes decided upon by the awakened moral sentiments and informed rational faculties. He thought primarily in terms of the education of individuals in school but Cobden saw that Combe's theory could be applied to social psychology in the matter of educating public opinion and putting pressure on Parliament.¹⁹

Cobden knew that the task was twofold. Public opinion had not only to be instructed in questions of political economy to which it was quite unused but also had to be moved to act in accordance with new ideas. To do this it was necessary to come to grips with the realities of British society, of classes with deeply entrenched traditions and habits of mind. So powerful were these factors that Cobden believed the League would probably not be successful unless it was able to take advantage of "accidental" events such as famine brought about by a poor harvest. The circumstances in which the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 - Sir Robert Peel using the Irish famine and oncoming slump in Britain as a weapon to dragoon the Tories into accepting a policy of which he had been intellectually convinced by the League - were a perfect illustration of what Cobden

half expected, half hoped for, from 1839.²⁰

The League had a dual purpose: an educational or propagandist role and a political role in the more conventional sense of Parliament, hustings and electoral registration. The latter is not the present concern. Throughout the seven years of campaigning there was a consistent argument against the Corn Laws in which were mixed the new economic theories outlined in the last section. The main vehicles were meetings and lectures and regular publications named, in turn, the Anti-Corn Law Circular (1839-41), the Anti-Bread Tax Circular (1841-43) and The League (1843-46). There were also numerous tracts, two million of which were circulated in 16 months in 1843-44. The League averaged 20,000 copies weekly in 1844, 15,000 going to subscribers. An average of 5,000 letters were posted weekly. Of the highest quality were Cobden's speeches in Parliament from 1841, models of closely reasoned, cogent argument.²¹

What varied considerably were the ways in which Cobden, as the grand strategist of the League, appealed to the "moral sentiments" and "propensities" as spurs to action. There were some important differences in strategy before and after a dividing line of roughly the autumn of 1842 and spring of 1843. Generally speaking, the League appeared to be much more of an aggressive middle-class pressure group in the former period than later. Before 1843, the League was a very weak body in terms of support from manufacturers even in Lancashire. This was partly the result of the slump which plunged many into ruin or near ruin. There was little money

to spare for political agitation. Other reasons were lack of confidence in the League's "extreme" principle of total and immediate repeal instead of seeking the compromise of a low fixed duty and also the League's declared independence of Whigs and Tories. Such thinking was sufficiently strong among Liberal magnates to prevent Cobden's nomination as a Liberal candidate for Manchester in the general election of 1841. Instead, Milner Gibson with a Suffolk gentry background, was selected. Cobden believed that the League had to stir the middle class into action by appeals to its instinct for commercial survival, the place it should have as an order of society instead of conceding a practical monopoly of power to the aristocracy. The "combative" role of the middle class was also emphasised by the apparent indifference of the working class, a matter which will be discussed in the next section. Cobden believed that the middle class would, if it obtained repeal, be striking off the heaviest chains of the working class. This thinking may be likened to "a kind of middle class Marxism", in that the middle class had a "liberating role" in society similar to that which Marx invested in the proletariat.²²

Cobden rarely, if ever, shared his deepest thoughts with his colleagues, some of whom may have had difficulty in seeing the League's path in the difficult early years. It may be significant that William Neild, the Quaker cotton spinner, who joined the League at the beginning, confessed in November 1843 that earlier he had thought the League "had too much reference to the

interests of a class or section of society only, and had not sufficient regard to those of the whole community", but had now changed his mind.

With the good harvest of 1842 and greater industrial activity from 1843, the whole economic situation changed. The industrial crisis was over (until the next bad harvest) but agriculture was depressed. Employers now found money for the League, which became stronger and more confident. Cobden toned down the League's anti-aristocratic stance and argued that repeal would improve agriculture and benefit all classes. It was this shift of emphasis to which Cobden was in fact alluding when he said in a speech in October 1843 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". This passage, quoted by Morley, is sometimes taken to be an admission that the League pursued a selfish class interest. This was not Cobden's intention. He politely included himself in the "we", being concerned to warn some supporters that a greater breadth of thought and argument was now required.²³

The appeal to religious and moral arguments - Combe's "moral sentiments" - was a very important aspect of Cobden's "agitation". There was, of course, nothing cynical about it, given the fact that he held the economic order was part of the divine order of nature. He believed that religion "was a great leverage

which has moved mankind to powerful action" and was determined that the League should have the benefit of it as had the movement for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. When he told C.P. Villiers in 1841 that the people's "veneration for God shall be our leverage to upset their reverence for the aristocracy", we see him contemplating ways of directing the moral sentiments to their "proper objects", as Combe would put it.

Cobden sought to mobilise religious opinion in several ways but, as in the case of national education, it proved impossible to get the support of both Churchmen and dissenters. The membership card of the League in 1841-42 depicted a starving family praying "Give us this day our daily bread" and a label for envelopes bore the legend "Free Trade - the international law of the Almighty". Conferences attended by hundreds of dissenting ministers were held in Manchester and Edinburgh. The Corn Laws were denounced as anti-Christian in artificially raising the price of bread, forcing families into poverty and crime. It was inevitable that almost exclusively dissenting clergy attended, for the Church of England was closely associated with the Tory party and both feared the effects of repeal on rents and the dissenters' campaign to disestablish the Church.

Some historians seem uncertain about the motivation of dissenting ministers. No doubt many ministers were glad to attack the Corn Laws as a prop of the Established Church but to suggest that their support had mainly unworthy motives is to miss the current of

idealism which swept through the dissenting churches in the nineteenth century, particularly about abolishing slavery and war. At least four ministers published little works about Christianity and free trade. Cobden believed that ministers' perception of the connection between free trade and peace was the main reason for gaining their support.

The League always tried to ensure that there was a speaker to arouse moral fervour at meetings - to complement the plain reasoning of other speakers. It was not unusual for a dissenting minister to be on the platform. There were several speakers whom Cobden especially relied on for this purpose, whose oratory had great power: John Bright (Quaker) and MP for Durham from 1843; Rev. W.J. Fox, a Unitarian minister; and George Thompson (Congregationalist) who had been prominent in the anti-slavery movement.²⁴

Cobden tried to get the Peace Society and the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (both strongly supported by the dissenters) to promote free trade as the best means of achieving their objects. Cobden helped to establish branches of both societies in Manchester in 1841 in order to exert pressure at national conferences. He spoke at conferences in London of the Peace Society in 1842 and of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1843 but these moves were only partially successful as many of the members (largely the same in both societies) believed in tariff protection of "free grown" sugar in the British West Indies as opposed to "slave grown" sugar in Cuba and Brazil. Cobden's argument was that this not only raised the price

of sugar in Britain but showed lack of confidence in the greater efficiency and cheapness of the products of free labour.

Cobden thought that women constituted a powerful moral force. To associate them with the struggle in the matter of fund raising bazaars would demonstrate that the Corn Laws directly concerned the welfare of the family, the very foundation of society. The biggest venture in which women played an important organising part was the bazaar cum industrial exhibition held in Covent Garden Theatre, London, during seventeen days in May 1845. It was a bazaar in that items were for sale and consequently had to be small but it was also meant to be a great display of manufactured products both useful and ornamental. It was a declaration of the potential of British industry and its importance for future prosperity. It was also a message of free trade and international peace, reinforced by the hundreds of women behind the stalls. "The mission of woman", stated The League, "is the establishment of peace, love, and unselfishness".

The bazaar was very successful, visitors numbering 10,000 on some days. It marked the League's achievement of influence and "respectability" in London. Its aim prefigured the Great Exhibition of 1851.²⁵

4. The League and the working class.

As the League's economic teachings was about the good of the whole community, it is important to assess the extent to which it gained the support of the working class. This class was a difficult problem in two respects.

First, the workers, lacking the vote, could not directly influence the decision of Parliament. Also, they were too poor to be a source of campaign funds. Secondly, most working class leaders supported the Chartist movement and looked upon the League as a dangerous diversion. Their attitude to repeal was ambiguous. There had been expressions of working class hostility to the Corn Laws since 1815 but many Chartists now used arguments which neutralised those of the League. Repeal would cheapen bread but without working class political power it would enable manufacturers to lower wages, expand industry with further use of machinery and put men out of work.

Cobden's main strategy in 1839-42 being to push the middle class into winning repeal by its own efforts, his policy towards working men was to gradually remove their distrust of the League and make them into at least passive supporters who would sign repeal petitions. The publication aimed specifically at the working class was The Struggle, a four page half-penny unstamped paper published by Joseph Livsey at Preston. Although it was started independently of the League in 1842, it advocated its policies and some thousands of copies were distributed by the League.²⁶

Cobden's view of the Charter was that universal suffrage was premature given working class lack of education and in any case less likely of attainment than repeal. He decided that the best tactic was to keep strictly to arguing the case for repeal and to remain silent about the Charter. He felt confident that in time the impracticality of the Charter and the practicality

and benefits of repeal would be demonstrated. He held the League to the same policy even when some supporters decided to adhere to Joseph Sturge's "Complete Suffrage"- household suffrage, stopping short of universal suffrage - movement in 1842. Typically, he confided in friends that this movement would help to frighten the aristocracy into repeal. However Cobden spoke in favour of Sharman Crawford's Complete Suffrage resolution in the House of Commons in 21 April 1842.

While Cobden chose not to oppose the Charter as a political ideal, he was opposed to the attempts of Chartist s in Manchester to break up League meetings. The issue was complicated in Manchester by the presence of a large Irish population one section of which supported Daniel O'Connell and the repeal of the Union (and who also supported the League) and another which supported Feargus O'Connor, a bitter enemy of O'Connell. Correspondence with E.. Watkin, who organised an Operative Anti-Corn Law Association in Manchester, shows that Cobden accepted that ruffian tactics at meetings would have to be firmly dealt with by the League's own "police".²⁷

One consistent League warning was that unless the government repealed the Corn Laws, the misery of the people in the slump would drive them to revolt. From June until August 1842 League deputies lobbied Parliament about the desperate situation in the North and Midlands. On 8 July Cobden went so far as to tell the Commons that a stoppage of supplies was justified if the government would not deal with the crisis. "As legislators you have the charge of giving employment and sustenance to the

people". On 21 July he appealed to the government not to prorogue Parliament but without success. When the Plug Riots broke out in August - a movement of strikers to stop work at all mills - the League was accused of fomenting the disturbances. Some employers like John Bright at Rochdale told workers that if they wanted "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work" they should first demand repeal, but this was no more than common-sense opportunism. The riots were ended by the use of troops.

From 1843, as work and wages picked up in the industrial districts, coupled with lower bread prices, Chartist declined as a political force and a steady shift of support by the workers to the League began. The weaknesses of Chartist economic arguments were sharply exposed by Cobden in a public debate with O'Connor at Northampton in August 1844. There are many indications of substantial working class support for Cobden and the League. In April 1843, 11,000 workmen in Manchester signed a petition of support for Cobden; in December 1843, 4,000 workmen at Leicester did the same; in February 1844 addresses were presented by workers at two firms in Stockport. The subscription columns of The League between September 1843 and July 1846 name over a hundred firms at which workers have subscribed to League funds.²⁸

In response, Cobden in August 1844 encouraged workers to seize the opportunity of the increased demand for labour to press for wage rises, noting that there had already been two successful strikes in Lancashire. On 26 October 1844, The League began listing wage rises and strikes weekly. Cobden has been misjudged by historians

as hostile to trade unions on the basis of isolated quotations from private letters, in which he criticised the "tyranny" of trade union delegates. Cobden's views were in fact finely balanced and strongly in favour of individual liberty. He believed in the right of trade unions as voluntary associations to bargain with employers and to strike but he was strongly opposed to restrictive practices with regard to apprentices, use of machinery and all dictation to employers about the terms of employment. He was also opposed to the intimidation of workers by trade unions.²⁹

The League found it extremely difficult to get support from tenant farmers and labourers except by acclamation at public meetings. The possibility of independent political action in face of the landlords' political and economic power in the countryside was very limited. Surprisingly, there was a stir in favour of repeal among labourers in Wiltshire, especially at Goatacre and Avebury where meetings were held. Cobden's sympathy for the plight of labourers runs like a thread through all his correspondence. "I long to see an agricultural labourer strike", he wrote in 1850, long before Joseph Arch managed to achieve a strike.

Cobden also made efforts, in the autumn of 1844, to breathe new life into the Lyceums and the Manchester School of Design and create new facilities for recreation. He deplored the exclusion of the general public from the Natural History Society's Museum and the Botanical Gardens. A Manchester Public Parks Committee was established which raised large sums of money for three parks from

League supporters and Sir Robert Peel. Working men contributed at a special meeting in the Free Trade Hall.³⁰

5. Repeal.

It was the poor harvest of 1845, the rise in bread prices and threatened slump which gave the League a final burst of financial support from manufacturers and petitions from the workers. In November 1845, the operative cotton spinners of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire demanded the opening of the ports by Order in Council. There were large public meetings of working people in Manchester and Wakefield in December. Scarcely a Chartist voice was heard.³¹

The famine in Ireland was yet another fact which the party leaders could not ignore. Both Sir R. Peel, the Prime Minister, and Lord J. Russell, the Whig leader, announced their conversion to repeal. Peel resigned, but Russell was unable to form a ministry. Peel returned to office and introduced a bill on 27 January 1846 to greatly reduce the sliding scale of duties on imported corn and to abolish them totally after three years. This small compromise on immediate abolition was soon accepted by the League. The bill passed the Commons on 15 May by the votes of 114 Conservatives and 235 Whigs and Radicals. There were 241 Conservative opponents - effectively splitting Peel's party. The large Commons majority left the Lords with little option but to vote in favour on 25 June.

On 23 June, a few days before Peel resigned on the issue of the Irish Coercion Bill, Cobden wrote privately to Peel urging him not to consider resigning but to

dissolve Parliament within two months and fight an election at the head of a new party of Peelite Conservatives and Liberals. "You represent the idea of the age and it has no other representative amongst statesmen." The new party would have the full support of the middle class and could tackle the "Condition of England Question". But Peel resigned on 29 June and did not ask the Queen to dissolve Parliament. Instead, Russell formed a government in which Cobden could have had a Cabinet post had he wished to pursue a conventional political career.³²

Cobden had no such ambition, nor really any love of Parliamentary life for its own sake. The League organisation was rapidly wound up. He wrote revealingly to the third Earl Grey, who as Lord Howick had been the first Whig magnate to support the League:

"The agitation has been to me a seven years sacrifice of all that selfish men hold to be most valuable in life; and without the recompense which I should have derived from it, if nature had given me a taste for the éclat of popular excitement. But the truth is, I have never had the slightest relish for platform popularity. All that I have done in the "demagogue line" has been hard work to me; and were this question once settled, it would be a satisfaction if I knew that I should never be again required to harangue a public assembly."

Paradoxically, Cobden retained vast political ambition. The repeal of the Corn Laws was but the first step in the great world economic and social revolution for which he longed but which he knew he could never see in his lifetime. The leading article of the last

issue of The League entitled "A Glimpse into the New Era" only touched on it in deliberately modest phrases. "The repeal of the Corn Laws opens up a wide future of hopeful and beneficent endeavour to the philanthropist, the educator, the social reformer, and - as inclusive of these, in the new social era on which we are about to enter - to the statesman." His friends and supporters wanted him to remain in Parliament and set about raising a "Cobden Testimonial Fund" - a gift of eventually £76,000, a large fortune - to provide him with a secure income and to free him from the necessity of selling calico.³³

But in August 1846 it seemed that Cobden had forsaken politics. On 5 August he went to France with his wife Kate and two year old daughter Kate for what he officially called a long rest. He did not return home until October 1847. His son Richard, aged five, stayed for most of this period at a school in Southport. Although it was quite true that Cobden had been advised to rest from public duties by his doctor, he nevertheless intended to combine the holiday with what he described as "a private agitating tour through the Continent of Europe". It was essential to explain to as many rulers and statesmen as possible the meaning of Britain's free trade policy. Considerable interest had already been shown in France by a group of French economists headed by Bastiat who had published a book Cobden et la Ligue. Cobden also had reason to believe that visits to Spain, Italy, Austria, Germany and Russia would be welcome.

Summary

The League was the response of Cobden and his associates to the great slump of 1838-42. The repeal of the Corn Laws was a specific target but the real aim was much broader - the creation of a prosperous and expanding economy permitting the revival of educational projects.

The second section discussed the "new economics" of the League which was quite distinct from the Ricardian school. This fact has been obscured by the League's avoidance of academic controversy and desire to inculcate the main principles underlying a sound economy. But some new non-Ricardian books were reviewed and a series of introductory articles on economics published in The League in 1844.

The third section outlines the educational methods of the League based (at least in Cobden's thinking) on George Combe's theory of human nature i.e. the appeal to the higher emotions of religion and benevolence as well as to the intellect. Finally, the gradual process is traced by which working class distrust of the League was changed to a fair degree of support. There is a brief discussion about the circumstances of repeal and Cobden's decision to temporarily leave domestic politics and travel abroad.

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Note M. Blaug: Ricardian Economics (1958) misinterprets Cobden's surely lucid reasoning on two issues. On p.7, he wrote that Cobden believed lower corn prices might mean lower wages, not noticing that Cobden was referring to a "delusion" of politicians in 1814. On p.206, he wrote that there was a contradiction between Cobden's claim that the price of food was never an ingredient in testing the value of labour and his statement that on average 50% of wages were spent on food. But Cobden was citing a report about bread prices in 1841 when prices were high. His former comment was a general observation and the latter was very specific. See Speeches, I, 3-4, 6-7, 16-17. Blaug, on p.208, refers to "the vulgar propaganda of the League."

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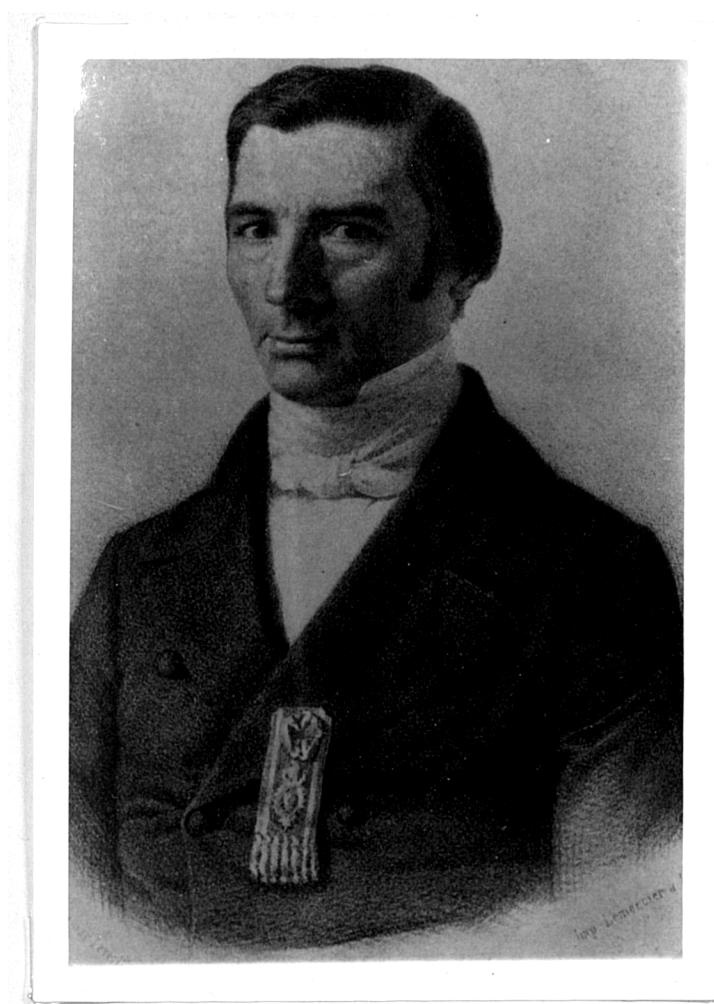
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Motion lost 42 to 145 votes. On the latter occasion,

the second reading of Lord Ashley's bill, Cobden voted that it be read "this day six months". Cobden was abroad when the Ten Hours bill was passed in 1847. See also The League, 6 April 1844, 9 May, 13 June 1846. The League reported the adoption of Saturday half-holidays in certain mills (22 February, 29 March, 21 June, 12 July 1845) and also experiments in an 11 instead of 12 hour day at Preston and Blackburn (16 May 1846).

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3. Bastiat. From an engraving.



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CHAPTER ELEVENCobden and Bastiat: Defining the Economics of a Consumer Society.1. The impact of the Anti-Corn Law League in France.

The League had a considerable impact in France, and through it, Cobden formed an important friendship with Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850), cruelly cut short after five years. Bastiat stands alongside Adam Smith and George Combe as a thinker whose ideas form the basis of Cobden's social philosophy in its maturity. Unfortunately, Bastiat is grossly misunderstood and undervalued by historians of economics in the English speaking world. Before attempting a revaluation of Bastiat, it is necessary to explain the impact of the League in France and describe Cobden and Bastiat's friendship.¹

The League exerted an influence in France because there was a group of economists who shared the main ideas and assumptions of the League's leaders. A Society of Economists had been established in December 1841, whose President was Charles Dunoyer (1786-1862), the author of works extolling the benefits of economic growth and free trade. The Vice-President was Horace Say (1794-1860), son of J.B. Say (1767-1832) who had systematised many of Adam Smith's principles. The successive Professors of Political Economy at the Collège de France, P. Rossi (1787-1848) and Michel Chevalier (1806-1879) were members of the Society. In 1842 the Journal des Économistes was established, a journal of pure economics which Britain did not have for another 30 years.

The French Society of Economists was united in a belief that steady economic growth, the removal of all obstacles to trade and employment, and higher levels of consumption of goods and services were desirable.

Economic growth was the only sound means of dealing with the "social question", with poverty and urban unrest.

The problem of commercial crises was examined in articles in the Journal des Économistes. The chain reaction of harvest failures, increased food prices, lower spending on manufactured goods and slump in manufacturing industry was one theory also argued in The League journal in Britain. The answer to harvest failures was not just free trade in cereals but complete free trade to ensure that imports of cereals could be paid for by exports of other things.²

The French economists, despite their concern for public policy, were not actively involved in politics. It was Bastiat who stirred them into political activity. He was a self-taught economist who had not only absorbed the teachings of the French school and was well informed about British economists but was developing some original ideas. He was born in Bayonne in 1801, the son of a merchant connected with foreign trade. His formal education ended at the age of seventeen at the Collège de Sorrèze. He became a merchant and then, from 1825, a landowner at Mugron. He studied political economy intensively and, as early as 1827-29, formed the idea of writing a popular book about tariffs. But nothing came of it for fifteen years. There was much resemblance to Cobden in the years in London and Manchester before the

pamphlet of 1835. But Bastiat was even longer in finding his moment of destiny.³

Reading about the Anti-Corn Law League changed the quiet, provincial course of his life. There was an association in Britain attempting to popularise free trade. In 1844, he wrote to the Secretary of the League for information and then had an article "L'influence des tarifs Anglais et Francais sur l'avenir des deux peuples" published in Journal des Économistes in October 1844. From then on, a continuous series of articles appeared in that journal composed in the very lucid and often witty style which he believed was essential for the wide dissemination of ideas. Bastiat gained immediate acceptance into the circle of French economists. He corresponded with Cobden regularly from 24 November 1844. In June 1845, he published Cobden et La Ligue, consisting mainly of translated passages from the speeches of the chief League orators - the beginning of his advocacy of a similar association in France. But Bastiat wrote a long and hard hitting introduction in which he attributed the difficulties of British industry and the poverty of the people to the selfish policies of the aristocratic ruling class. It was warmly reviewed in The League. In July 1845, he visited Cobden and other notables of the League. Friendship with Cobden was instant. The two men recognised their identity of philosophy, of political aims and ambitions. Louis Mallet (1823-1890) who knew Cobden well from 1860, judged that "these two men were necessary to each other. Without Cobden, Bastiat would have lost the powerful stimulant of practical example....without Bastiat,

Cobden's policy would not have been elaborated into a system...."

It was probably more than mere coincidence that in August 1845, the month after Bastiat's visit, a series of articles on "Popular Political Economy" by W.A. Paulton began in The League which appear to bring together many of the League's ideas and also ideas of J.B. Say and Bastiat. Anglo-French contacts began to multiply. In October 1845, another enthusiastic Frenchman, Alcide Fonteyraud visited Manchester and described "La Ligue Anglaise" in the journal he edited, Revue Britannique. In February 1846, the Société des Economistes sent a letter, signed by C. Dunoyer, H. Say, and J. Garnier, congratulating the League for its agitation and declaring "its immovable adhesion to the economic doctrines of the League", applied as they were to international peace and the prosperity of all peoples. Two weeks later, Bastiat formed the Association du Libre Échange at Bordeaux which developed into a national association by May 1846.⁴

On 18 August 1846, the Société des Economistes gave a banquet to honour Cobden who was beginning a private tour of the capitals of Europe, following the repeal of the Corn Laws and the winding up of the League. The assembly was composed of nearly all the major French economists, including H. Say, M. Chevalier, J. Garnier, G. de Molinari and, of course, Bastiat. Le Duc d'Harcourt, President of the Association de Libre Échange and a member of the House of Peers, was an important guest. Cobden made one very important point in his speech in French, that his purpose was to explain the commercial revolution

made by Britain and not to interfere in politics abroad. The latter would simply give opponents of free trade the argument that the new policy was in Britain's selfish interest.⁵

2. Cobden and Bastiat 1846-1850.

A fairly good record of Cobden and Bastiat's friendship may be found in Bastiat's letters to Cobden. Unfortunately, Cobden's letters were destroyed after Bastiat's death but Cobden's views can often be inferred from Bastiat's letters. One matter which Bastiat discussed several times was his intentions of writing a book to be called "Harmonies Economiques". The aim was to show the constructive side of the economic principles which so far he had only described in the course of attacking protectionist arguments. He believed that a particularly alarming situation was developing in France because young people were being attracted to the socialist ideas of Fourier, Proudhon and Louis Blanc. He wrote to Cobden in 1847:

"Les socialistes ont une théorie sur la nature oppressive du capital, par laquelle ils expliquent l'inégalité des conditions et toutes les souffrances des classes pauvres."

Bastiat wanted to convince young idealists that a capitalist economy would, if properly developed, bring prosperity and progressive equality for the whole people. But the demands of the free trade campaign distracted him. Instead, he backed up the campaign with a collected edition of the articles in Journal des Economistes under the title Sophismes Economiques (1846) and by editing a weekly newspaper Libre Échange from November 1846. In January

1848, Bastiat published a second series of Sophismes Economiques. These two books in fact anticipate many of the leading ideas of Harmonies Economiques (1850).

The first volume was reviewed in three issues of The League. Bastiat was described as "a philosophical economist of the highest order - a man who unites profound science to active benevolence, a sincere love of truth to a firm resolution to assert its cause". Cobden offered to translate it into English but this was done by G.R. Porter (the statistician) and his daughter. It was published as Popular Fallacies Regarding General Interests (1846).⁶

Cobden advised Bastiat about the free trade campaign, notably that the French agitation could not, because of different political traditions and other hindrances, hope to copy the British model of large public meetings and extensive propaganda. The French association must try to win over French politicians, industrialists and bankers near the centre of power. Whereas in Britain the method had been to work "de bas en haut", in France it must be "de haut en bas". This comment of Cobden's is of special interest, as it was the method followed by Cobden and Chevalier in getting the Commercial Treaty of 1860 through the French Parliament.

Cobden contributed two articles to Journal des Economists in 1848. In the first, he discussed the origins of protectionism and the arguments advanced for it as a national policy; in the second article, the effects of protectionism in the wages and welfare of the working classes. He had found, during his tour of the

Continent, that the arguments used by the protectionists were the same as he had met in Britain and the same counter-arguments were applicable.

One opposition argument which Bastiat had to contend with in France was that Britain had not reformed her foreign policy to show that free trade was not simply a new ledger book of "perfide Albion" but also a policy of peace and reconciliation with old enemies. When Cobden returned to England in October 1847 at the end of his long Continental tour, Bastiat proposed a "Second Campagne de la Ligue" in Libre Échange - the abolition of all colonial tariff preferences, the reduction of the armed forces and the adoption of the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other countries. Cobden did not need convincing of the necessity of this policy but he was chary of proclaiming such sweeping policy at once, preferring to tackle one issue at a time.⁷

When the monarchy of Louis Philippe fell in February 1848 and a Republic government was proclaimed, Bastiat began a Parliamentary career. He became Vice President of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Assembly and was re-elected to this demanding post many times. Louis Napoleon became President of the Republic in December 1848. Hippolyte Passy, a member of the now defunct Free Trade Association, was appointed Finance Minister. Evidently Bastiat thought there was a favourable opportunity for a political initiative. During Cobden's stay in Paris in August 1849 for the Peace Congress, he and Bastiat twice called on Passy with a proposal for a "mutual reduction of the French and British fleets".

There does not appear to be any surviving evidence to explain what Bastiat's and Cobden's plan was. But in October 1849 Bastiat went to England for twelve days and spoke at public peace meetings in London, Birmingham and Manchester. The economists Horace Say and his son Léon and Joseph Garnier (editor of *Journal des Economistes* and Secretary of the Peace Congress in Paris) accompanied Bastiat. The mission did not lead to any Anglo-French negotiations.⁸

Bastiat was now suffering badly from tuberculosis but he did not give up his exacting Parliamentary work nor his efforts to combat socialist proposals. He wrote several pamphlets. Work on *Harmonies Économiques* went forward slowly. Finally, probably realising that his days were numbered, he published it in an incomplete form in the Spring of 1850.

3. *Les Harmonies Économiques: a new paradigm of political economy.*

Les Harmonies Économiques had revolutionary aims for political economy. It is full of challenging ideas for the development of a new paradigm. The following appreciation will discuss, in turn, the form in which Bastiat wrote the book, the place of political economy in social progress, the theory of value, the mass consumption economy, motivating forces of human nature and the rôle of the state.

Bastiat did not write the book as a sternly scientific treatise for other economists, although he hoped that they would take serious note of it. He believed that the political situation in France called for a book which

would swing young people with idealistic views away from a belief that only socialism could create a just and prosperous society. He adopted the lively, argumentative style which had been popular in the Sophismes. As regards content, he also departed from the conventional treatise on economics. He did not write in a neutral or detached manner about capitalism but with a passionate belief that it could, if properly managed, bring a world of plenty for everyone.

He also sought to give capitalism an emotional appeal such as socialism had, by showing that it was not necessarily the glorification of a money-grubbing society. It was about the satisfaction of man's non-material, as well as material needs. Furthermore, the principle that social progress lay in peaceful trade, and not in war and conquest, was in perfect harmony with the teachings of true religion. Thus Bastiat often referred to the "laws of Providence" by which he meant the economic policies and social behaviour which promoted "harmony" in society. Perhaps unwisely, in the light of subsequent misrepresentation, he twice used the term "laissez-faire" with approval, but with the condition that it was interpreted as allowing the "laws" to operate. Unfortunately, these "non scientific" aspects of the book proved unpalatable to most British economists and served only to obscure its brilliant economic insights.

Another weakness lay in the arrangement of chapters. His imaginative and original approach precluded the treatment of political economy in the divisions of production, distribution and exchange which had become usual on both

sides of the Channel. The book surely called for an introductory explanation of how he differed from conventional economists but, instead, he opened with a chapter on "Natural and Artificial Organisation", emphasising his quarrel with socialists. This was a distracting prelude to the very important subsequent chapters on "Wants, Efforts and Satisfactions" and "Wants of Man".⁹

Bastiat believed that political economy was the foundation of social philosophy. The needs of man were infinite and could only be met by the progressive development of society. Human needs were material, cultural, moral and religious. The economic resources of the world were enormous and held sufficient potential for producing food and material products to create and sustain a high standard of living for all the peoples of the world. A civilisation enjoyed by all rested on an economic foundation built up by ordinary people according to the principles of a properly conceived science of political economy. Civilisation required leisure and comfort. Only an international economy geared to labour saving and efficient exchange of goods and services could provide these.

Bastiat did not recognise any "economic laws" which hindered progress, such as many British economists saw - the law of population, the law of diminishing returns, the "iron law of wages". He thought the dominant force in economic life was the striving of individuals to advance their own or family interests. As this human drive was often anti-social, it was the task of political economy to show how it could be made to work for the best

interests of the individual which were inseparable from the true interests of the community.¹⁰

Some writers, who appear to have made little serious study of Bastiat's writings, have classed Bastiat as an "optimist", and a rather foolish one, who believed that the pursuit of selfish interests led to an automatic "harmony of interests". There was nothing automatic about the "economic harmonies" which he thought could be gradually introduced. Such a development could only come about in a state which did not permit class and sectional privileges and in which the citizens fully understood the results of various kinds of economic behaviour. Bastiat's essays in economic fallacies were about the manipulation of economic policies for sectional ends and about the gullibility of ordinary people. Political economy was, at the same time, a study of economic phenomena and a vital instrument of education.

Political economy should also include the study of exploitation (ⁱ~~s~~ ^Apopulation was the French word used). Bastiat left a manuscript chapter on war, but chapters on slavery and monopolies were not written. He did not attempt to describe in detail the facts of existing poverty, misery and commercial crises in Les Harmonies Economiques. He took them for granted, as a jumping off point for his new ideas. The absence of such discussion has probably been another factor in the economists' legend of Bastiat's Panglossian outlook.¹¹

A unique theory of value was the core of Bastiat's book. In the nineteenth century, a theory of value appeared in the works of nearly all economists as a

necessary basis for explaining the general structure of prices. Ricardo stated that value lay in the quantity of labour bestowed on a product. J.S. Mill, in Principles of Political Economy (1849), amended this to the costs of production i.e. the wages of labour and "the profits of the capital", by which he meant the part of the price paid to the supplier of the machinery and raw materials. In France, J.B. Say based value on the utility of goods and services.

These theories had one principle in common: value was an inherent quality of the goods being valued. But a handful of economists, principally P. Rossi (followed by T.C. Banfield in England) had recently taken up the idea that value is essentially subjective, determined by the consumer's preference. Value was simply a relation between goods and the needs of man. Bastiat did not refer to Rossi but he did quote the German economist Heinrich von Storch (1766-1835) as stating a very similar proposition that subjective judgement is important in determining the utility of things. Bastiat considered that this idea of value as something relative was a move in the right direction. It brought consumer wants and preferences into the centre of political economy. But it did not go far enough since it was still about the utility of goods, albeit a relative utility. He wanted a definition by which value was not tied to labour inputs or desirability or price of goods in the market.

Bastiat applied the idea of relativity in a very original way so that a theory of value determined the very nature of production, distribution and exchange.

It was an entirely new mode of thinking about wealth. Wealth was not to be assessed by the quantity of goods and services consumed by individuals but by the degree to which the individual's progressive needs were satisfied by the least labour. Value was the relation between two exchanged services. Service was the term Bastiat used to cover labour and all contributions to production. The object of the economic system should be to steadily reduce the ratio of effort to result in the production and consumption of goods and services. Value measured nothing more than the ratio and value fell as the service necessary to purchase another service required less and less time and effort. Bastiat described economic progress of this kind as "annihilating value".

Bastiat defined the labour or effort expended on producing goods and services as "onerous utility" and "gratuitous utility". Onerous utility is personal effort and gratuitous utility is putting the forces and resources of nature to work in the form of applied science, labour saving machinery, communications and production of goods in places where the conditions promised the most efficient production. In conditions of absolutely free international trade and competition, all consumers will enjoy the fruits of gratuitous utility. Its contribution to the abundance and cheapness of goods and services constituted a form of "community" benefit which Bastiat believed was the answer to socialists who held that only common ownership of property would bring wealth to the masses.

Bastiat believed that rising living standards would lead to more widespread ownership of property of all kinds.

Private property, including land, was justified as a means of rendering services to the owners or others on condition of a return. It was a right only properly applicable in a society of fully free men and where property was not the result of conquest or confiscation and where laws did not prohibit the free sale of land or the division of inherited land. Bastiat's doctrine was an extremely radical one in many countries but few if any critics seem to have recognised the fact.¹²

Bastiat's theory of a mass consumer economy is a consequence of the theory of value and is the essence of the whole book. Chapter Eleven "Producer-Consumer" is the culmination of his argument. He envisaged a national and ultimately world economy determined by the needs of consumers. Mechanised industry, railways and steamships, if accompanied by free trade, and a peaceful international order, was capable of producing goods and services in a quantity large enough to steadily raise the standard of living of the mass of the people. Demand for labour and wage levels would be kept high; the gap between classes in income and standards of living would decrease.

Lower prices due to large and efficient production left the consumer with a greater margin of income to spend on other goods and services. Bastiat did not coin the twentieth century term of the "multiplier", but he would have perfectly understood it, only denying that it was necessary for the government to pump money into the economy to achieve this effect.

An economy expanding on this basis would accumulate capital at a fast rate and, being dynamic, would invest it in new industries and services. The ready availability

of capital would lead to low interest rates. Capitalists would not, in conditions of complete free trade, be able to monopolise advanced manufacturing processes. Prices and profits would reflect only the efficiency of industry and the extent of demand in the free market. Bastiat believed that, given these conditions, wage earners would steadily get a larger proportion of the proceeds of industry. He made a table of four periods of unspecified lengths of time in which he estimated that by the end of the fourth period, the total product of industry having been multiplied four times, the worker's share in wages would have risen from 50% to 70%, while the capitalist's share would have fallen to 30%. Bastiat's analysis was based on the logic of the social and economic principles which he had worked out before he died. Unfortunately he could not produce any factual evidence in 1850 to prove it. The reality of the world about him contrasted very sharply. There was gross poverty in many places and social discontent. Statesmen, capitalists and workers' leaders seemed blind to the true path of progress.¹³

Nevertheless, it proved to be a remarkable prophecy of industrial progress in the United States and Western Europe during the next hundred years. By 1924, labour took 72% of the national income in the United States and 66% in Britain. Putting aside salaried workers, wage earners in Britain took 42% of the national income, and they constituted 11% less of the occupied population than in 1870, when they took 38.6%. This was without all Bastiat's conditions of progress being met, such as uninterrupted peace and unrestricted world free trade.

The major factor, according to the studies of H.P. Brown and S.V. Hopkins, was the steady growth of capital and of the workers' productivity which brought higher real wages. Trade unionism had very little part in it, and this is absolutely the case in the United States where trade unionism was very weak until the Second World War.

It is a strange irony that Marx, who prophesied in Das Kapital (1867) that workers would never gain more than temporary rises in real wages and that capitalism would collapse, is a household name among academics while Bastiat is forgotten.¹⁴

4. Human motivation and the rôle of the state.

One of the difficulties of Bastiat's remedy for social and economic ills was that he saw that the working of certain economic principles, especially competition, was affected by the knowledge and motivation of the majority of people. Hence the need for Harmonies Economiques to be read by the public and not just economists and politicians. Several extra chapters in the second edition, made up from manuscripts left by Bastiat, deal with individual and social motivation - "The Two Aphorisms", "Responsibility", "Solidarity", "Social Motive Force", "Existence of Evil". A chapter in the second series of Sophismes, "Two Systems of Ethics" is also important in understanding Bastiat's thinking.

One of the most damaging ideas which has been pinned on Bastiat ever since the ink was dry on his book, is that he taught that individuals pursuing their own self-interest automatically contribute to the public good, the "harmony

of interests". And yet there are innumerable references in the Sophismes and Harmonies Économiques to the tendency of men to grab privileges, form monopolies of all kinds and to get benefits at the expense of other people, often using legislation to do so.

The root of the problem, as Bastiat saw it, was that people had two kinds of self-interest - their self interest as the producer of goods and services (capitalist, manager, trade union leader, workman) and their self interest as a consumer. The tendency in economic life was for producer interests to predominate, seeking to protect markets, limit competition and raise prices. The only general interest was the consumer interest, provided that this was properly understood. This required the study of a wide range of economic phenomena and of long term effects. All participants in economic life had to be made aware of the detrimental effect to their real long term interests of short-sighted or "selfish" policies.

Bastiat's ethics much resemble George Combe's system. Whether Bastiat was influenced by Combe is not known, as Combe is not mentioned in any of Bastiat's writings or letters. Like Combe, Bastiat held that the innate drive of the individual for self-advancement was neither morally good nor bad per se. It was the objects to which the drive was aimed which determined morality. In "Two Systems of Ethics", Bastiat praised religious ethics as the highest form as it taught that men should put the interests of others before their own. But its practical effect in economic life was minimal and would remain so

until a "defensive form of ethics" had been developed. This was the acquisition by consumers of sufficient knowledge of economics to perceive wherein lay the general interest and to assert this interest in the government of the country. "Society is improved by making the consumer more moral", Bastiat wrote in Harmonies Economiques.

Morality was tested by personal responsibility, by the results of actions coming home to the individual. Much progress lay in stimulating and enlightening the sense of responsibility, so that a collective responsibility gradually emerged - "solidarity", Bastiat called it.

Competition was an important instrument of economic discipline, responsibility and self-knowledge when the market was wide and free of producer restraints. This was far from being the case in Bastiat's day and he strongly rejected the socialist accusation that competition was the major cause of poverty, although it inevitably aggravated it.

Bastiat's "defensive ethics" have a utilitarian character but they are not to be confused with Benthamism, which held that morality was experimental and had no reference to any absolute order of values beyond "the greatest good of the greatest number". Bastiat, like Combe, believed that morality was conformity, by one route or another, to a divine order of nature.¹⁵

Bastiat had a definite view of the rôle of the state in the economy. It was "to establish the dominion of justice". By this, he meant the enforcement of conditions

in which every citizen was free to engage in commerce and industry in fair competition with others. There must be no rigging of the market by any means nor must the state assist sectional interest groups by laws of any kind. The citizen must not be taxed for any purpose but the necessary expenses of government - law and order, certain works and national defence. Taxation for other purposes e.g. state education, state assistance for the unemployed, subsidies to industry, was unjustified on the grounds that it removed from recipients a degree of responsibility for their own welfare and independence.

However this approach to government may be classified, it was certainly not one of "laissez-faire" in the now usual pejorative sense of indifference to the condition of the people. Bastiat wanted government that was proof against the sophistry and manipulation of interest groups and with a good understanding of the principles of economic progress. The remedy for poverty was a dynamic economy. He knew that there was no precedent for such a government. Governments which exploited the people were the norm, and in modern times this was usually done by political manipulation. In Sophismes Economiques, he observed that "when exploitation has become a way of life for a group of men in society, they create in the course of time a legal system that authorises it and a moral code that glorifies it".

But another comment by him in a pamphlet La Loi (1850) seemed to hint that his mind was not yet made up about the limits of state action. "A science of economics must be developed before a science of politics can be logically

formulated. Essentially, economics is the science of determining whether the interests of human beings are harmonious or antagonistic. This must be known before a science of politics can be formulated to determine the proper functions of government."¹⁶

5. Cobden's advocacy of Bastiat's economics and its reception in Britain.

The first edition of Harmonies Economiques was published a few months before Bastiat died in December 1850. Bastiat was very disappointed at the slowness with which it was noticed and, before he died, had only one review which was really appreciative, by Michael Chevalier. Other major reviews were critical, finding much fault with the theory of value. In 1851, Prosper Paillottet and R. de Fontenay, the leading members of the Société des Amis de Bastiat, edited a second edition enlarged by manuscripts left by the author.¹⁷

Cobden strongly recommended the book to his friends, as may be seen from letters to Bright and Archibald Prentice. He differed from Bastiat in the matter of state education but this was a minor detail. He approved all of Bastiat's economic doctrines and especially his manner of presentation. He wrote to Bright:

"Let us convince them [the people] that Bastiat and the economists are the only true philanthropists. We shall not be doing harm by showing that political economy has a heart as well as head. Such men as Chadwick who shake the dry bones of the science like a scarecrow at ignorant people do infinite injury to the benign truths of Adam Smith.... The political economy of France and

Italy is more read than ours because it is not so entirely wanting in the unction of humanity."

Cobden did not seek to have Harmonies Économiques translated into English. The reasons were probably the same as those given to Chevalier in 1863 when he wanted a book translated into English:

"From my experience in other cases I was satisfied that in no case would a translation of a French work on political or social economy have a paying sale in this country. This is proved in the instance of Bastiat's piquant works which were translated, con amore, by Porter's daughter.... the very small circle of intellectual people who buy and read books almost invariably understand your language and prefer to read them in French."

The translations of Bastiat referred to were Popular Fallacies (1846) and probably Essays on Political Economy (1853) - the letter did not give an editor's or translator's name. P.J. Stirling made a translation of a large part, but not the whole, of Harmonies Économiques under the title of Harmonies of Political Economy in 1860. Sales cannot have been good, because Stirling did not produce a second volume until 1870. In the preface to the latter, he quoted a letter received from Cobden in March 1860, just after publication of the first volume: "Bastiat speaks with the greatest force to the highest order of intellects. At the same time, he is almost the only political economist whose style is brilliant and fascinating....No critic who has read Bastiat will dare to apply again to political economy the sarcastic epithet of the "dreary science".

Cobden enthusiastically supported P. Paillottet and R. de Fontenay in their publications of a uniform edition of the entire corpus of Bastiat's published work and a substantial number of his letters. Cobden lent all the letters written by Bastiat to him. Cobden and Paillottet hoped that Chevalier would write a brief biography of Bastiat for Oeuvres Complètes, especially as he had recently compared Harmonies Économiques in importance to Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations. But Chevalier was unable to write it in time and so R. de Fontenay wrote one instead as an introduction to the six volume edition of 1855-56.

Cobden corresponded with Paillottet about this edition and the second of 1862-64. Unfortunately, his letters to Paillottet cannot be traced. Paillottet, in his Preface to the second edition, quoted Cobden as replying to a question about the desirability of making cuts, that "he could not easily bring himself to sacrifice a single line".¹⁸

Harmonies Économiques was ignored by the major quarterly journals in Britain until 1858, when the British Quarterly Review published a surprisingly perceptive and sympathetic review of Oeuvres Complètes. Only two economists, both outside the mainstream, praised Bastiat in published work in the 1850's - G.K. Rickards, Drummond Professor of Political Economy at Oxford University from 1852-57, and W.B. Hodgson, who translated one of Bastiat's essays in 1852. The general trend of academic opinion was probably represented by the dismissive,

almost contemptuous review of Stirling's edition in The Athenaeum in 1860. Bastiat's system, the anonymous reviewer claimed, was a "signal and complete failure"; he had never thoroughly studied the difficult subject of value. The reviewer also made the very insular and arrogant claim that the English school of political economy was the only real one; apart from Say's theory of markets "there is no great truth which the French economists have discovered".

Since T. Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962), there has been much discussion about the difficulties confronting those who wish to make fundamental changes in the outlook and research programme of a scientific discipline. A prevailing paradigm can only be shifted if it is shown to be incapable of dealing with important problems and if an alternative well-articulated paradigm is available and promoted with intellectual vigour. In Britain, the prevailing paradigm was Ricardian and best represented by J.S. Mill's Principles of Political Economy with some of their Application to Social Philosophy. It was published in 1849 and went through several editions, being a standard textbook for forty years. This indicated that its leading ideas were generally agreeable to the interested public. It is probably significant that Mill did not call for a revolution in economic thinking nor any great changes in statecraft. It was suited to the mainly complacent and conservative mood of the governing and intellectual classes, at least until the 1880's.

Mill did not attribute poverty to insufficient economic growth but to working class indulgence in

excessively large families which overstretched the labour market and kept wages down. Without a change of habits by the working class, economic expansion simply exacerbated the problem, encouraging early marriage. Population increase also had other ill effects, pressing on finite food resources, raising rents and reducing manufacturers' profits. Mill did not believe there was any prospect of harmony of class interests unless a "stationary state" - a slowing down of population and economic growth - could be achieved. He expressed a masked distaste for the very idea of competitive capitalism which was characterised by "trampling, crawling, elbowing and treading on each other's heels". Mill thought that the best future for the working class lay in co-operative enterprises.¹⁹

Mill approved of J.E. Cairnes' review in the Fortnightly Review of Stirling's second volume of Bastiat in 1870. Cairnes was another economist in the Ricardian mould. Like Mill, he doubted that the working class could ever flourish under competitive capitalism. He represented the insular superiority of orthodox British economists and also the narrow "value free" boundaries considered proper for the science. His review of Bastiat was important because it was the first hostile criticism of Harmonies Économiques of any length in Britain and set the tone for later writers. Cairnes blasted Bastiat from the basis of his own understanding of economics. He did not attempt to grapple with the issues of economic growth which Bastiat raised. He accused Bastiat of advocating "the most rigid laissez-faire" and the belief that "left to themselves, human interests are harmonious".²⁰

The hostility in Britain to Bastiat's misunderstood ideas was such that it required at least one talented economist to clarify and reinforce them. In the 1860's, there were three young economists who had sufficient sympathy with Bastiat's ideas to have undertaken this task - J.E. Thorold Rogers (1823-1890), W.S. Jevons (1835-1882) and H.D. Macleod (1821-1902). But, as will be seen in later chapters, Rogers and Jevons adopted different approaches to economics. Macleod, a banker, seemed for a while to be on the point of becoming the British Bastiat. Unfortunately, he had published the Elements of Political Economy, with unorthodox opinions, in 1858, before reading Bastiat for the first time in 1859.

Macleod was deeply impressed by Bastiat, each of whose works he summed up very thoroughly in the Dictionary of Political Economy (1863), a new venture in Britain, entirely written by him. Macleod stated that Bastiat had provided the foundation of a new science and he hoped that the Dictionary would bring about an "entente cordiale" with French economists. He met Chevalier in 1862, who warmly encouraged him, but he failed to find any response in Britain for his call for close contacts with France. He also failed to find a university post in Britain and remained isolated in his ideas.²¹

Thus by the time of Cobden's death in 1865 the breadth and full significance of Bastiat's ideas were unknown to the general public. In 1865, Frederick Harrison, the Positivist thinker and trade union sympathiser, wrote an article for the new Fortnightly Review in which he

deplored the narrow limits of political economy and its indifference to human values. What was needed was a social philosophy which encompassed a science of wealth. There is no mention of Bastiat and it is unlikely that Harrison had read Harmonies Economiques. The Intellectual assassination of Bastiat, already well under way, removed a challenging alternative to Ricardian economics.²²

Summary

Bastiat ranks with Combe as one of the great intellectual influences on Cobden. Bastiat systematised many of the ideas about economics current in the Anti-Corn Law League. In his major, but uncompleted, work Harmonies Economiques, he opened up a new paradigm of economic and social philosophy. He showed how modern industry had the potential of developing a mass consumer society if statesmen and the public created the right conditions for it. One extremely important condition, besides free trade and disarmament, was the acceptance of a theory of value contrary to current labour theories of value. Bastiat defined value as a ratio between wants and the ease with which they were satisfied.

This exposition is placed in the context of Cobden and Bastiat's friendship and co-operation in promoting free trade, disarmament and the dissemination of Bastiat's ideas. Finally, the chapter traces Cobden's efforts to introduce Bastiat's ideas in England and the rejection of his paradigm by the majority of economists.

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CHAPTER TWELVEAmid Contending Ideals of National Education 1843-18501. Graham's Bill and the emergence of the voluntary movement.

Immediately the Corn Laws were repealed, George Combe and James Simpson wrote to Cobden urging him to fight for national education. He replied to both that he regarded the question as one of the utmost importance which he would attend to after his return from the Continent. But he then found the situation quite unpropitious for any movement for national education outside the confines of the existing government scheme. In fact, Cobden did not take any initiative until the foundation of the National Public School Association in October 1850.¹

In the late 1830's, Cobden had adopted a very cautious attitude to education reform. Without ever precisely defining the system he sought, he seems to have favoured (at least on grounds of political expediency) a system of mixed denominational and non-denominational schools with the condition that there should be full freedom of conscience. But this practical, tolerant approach became steadily more difficult to maintain with each year from 1843 as two new educational movements developed among liberals and dissenters. The first was the voluntary movement which denied the right of state intervention in education and the second was a new development of the secular movement which believed

it was the state's right and duty to educate the people in secular subjects but not in doctrinal religion. The Lancashire Public School Association, established in 1847, and which Cobden reluctantly joined in 1848, was the outcome of new secularist thinking.

During the League campaign, Cobden kept as strictly as he could to the principle of non-interference in other political issues. In 1842 he declined the invitation of Kay-Shuttleworth, Secretary of the Committee of Privy Council on Education, to advise him on the draft proposals he was making to Peel's Conservative government about an education bill. But the bill eventually introduced by Sir James Graham, the Home Secretary, in 1843, provoked such an outcry that both he and the League were obliged to adopt a public stance.

The participation of dissenters in the League gave them a new sense of political power. They resented the 80% share of the National Society in the Privy Council grants for school building but having once accepted the system it was difficult to oppose it. It was Graham's Factories Education Bill which pushed the dissenters into a phase of militancy and finally a large section into voluntaryism in 1847. Parts of the bill concerned the hours of work of women and children in factories and also the education of pauper children. The part which aroused the anger of dissenters was that which aimed to provide a better system of education for children employed in factories by establishing a new type of school under the supervision of the Privy Council but supported out of the poor rate and managed

by trustees of whom the majority would be Anglicans. The Bishop of the diocese had to approve the competence of the teacher to give instruction in the Authorised Version of the Scriptures. Anglican clergy were allowed into the schools to give doctrinal instruction from which parents of the other denominations could withdraw their children.

The dissenters' opposition was almost total. It placed Cobden, who needed *their support in the League*, in a very awkward position because he felt that that bill had merits and should be improved not rejected. In the debate in the Commons on the second reading on 24 March 1843, he declared he would vote for the bill and seek amendments in Committee. He pointed out that there were two important concessions by the Established Church - the principle of rating and the absence of compulsory instruction in the Church Catechism. It offered the chance of a better education to at least 60,000 factory children.²

In fact, the bill was not voted on. Cobden did not speak again on the bill, either in Parliament or in public. When a dissenting minister said at a meeting in Manchester on 28 March that he regretted Cobden's vote, the Rev. W. McKerrow - an associate of Cobden in the Manchester Society and the Lyceums - read a note of explanation from Cobden. Similarly, neither of the Manchester MPs - M. Phillips, T. Milner Gibson - nor Cobden attended the great opposition rally at the Free Trade Hall on 21 April. Cobden, in a note of apology, assured the meeting of his opposition to the bill if

the government proved unable to make satisfactory concessions. But Sir J. Graham's amendments met with derision from the dissenters and the bill was withdrawn on 15 June 1843.

Cobden made his constructive views known indirectly through the Anti-Bread Tax Circular. Naturally, much was made of the argument that the people must be employed and fed before they were educated. But there was one article, "Strictures on the Government Plan of Education", which, although not written by Cobden, must have had his approval. It proposed a plan for the whole country, not just factory districts. Ratepayers would elect committees to manage schools. As regards religious instruction, the schoolmaster would be restricted to teaching the themes of God's providential government of the world and the accountability and immortality of man. But the clergy of all denominations would have equal access to their respective flocks in the schools. The latter proposal is identical with the Irish National System and the plan followed in the Liverpool Corporation Schools between 1836 and 1842. Cobden had suggested it in his letter to the Rev. H. Stowell in 1837. It seems that Cobden had given up the Manchester Society's rule of permitting Bible reading only on the school premises. This plan had failed to get the support of Anglican and Catholic clergymen concerned about distinctive doctrines.

That this was now Cobden's settled view is confirmed by his remarks to J. Simpson in 1846:

"I agree with you that the religious and secular education must be separated - or rather one must stand up for the distinction of duty between the schoolmaster and the priest. Don't let us quarrel with the parsons,

still less with the religious public, who will be our best friends as they have been in our free trade agitation."³

After Graham's bill, Cobden next confronted Protestant militancy - formalised in the Anti-State Church Association in 1844 - in the Maynooth grant controversy of 1845. The affair illustrated his keen sense of justice, freedom from religious bigotry and moral courage as a politician. In 1845, Peel's government proposed to treble the grant voted annually for Maynooth College, a Roman Catholic seminary in Ireland. It was granted with a storm of disapproval from dissenters who argued that it was a state endowment of religion. In Parliament, Cobden treated the proposal on its merits. It was not introducing a new principle and if the students of the Maynooth College were destined to be the teachers of millions of Irishmen, nothing but good could come from giving them the best possible education. A large grant would permit a more comprehensive education, including practical science. So much did he feel the justice of it, that he organised a petition in Stockport in favour of the increased grant. But petitions everywhere were overwhelmingly from opponents and Cobden was criticised for his stand.⁴

The voluntary movement, stimulated by Cobden's bill and Maynooth, was given an institutional basis by the foundation of the Congregational Board of Education in 1845 committed to established schools independently of the B. & F.S.S., which adhered to the policy of Privy Council grants. In 1846, the movement received a mighty boost of zeal and enthusiasm when Lord Russell's Whig

government proposed, in the form of Minutes of the Committee of Privy Council, an extension of the grant system. The scheme was to train pupil teachers in schools and give some, by competition, scholarships to Training Colleges. It was quite unacceptable to dissenters because public money was now to pay for teaching, including religious teaching, instead of merely buildings and equipment.

Edward Baines junior, a Congregationalist, and editor of the Leeds Mercury, the most influential newspaper in the West Riding of Yorkshire, was prominent in the vociferous campaign to defeat what he described in a pamphlet as "the unjust, unconstitutional and dangerous measure of state education". To arguments for religious freedom, Baines added those of political freedom - that the Minutes were a move towards state control of the minds of individuals. There was considerable opposition in Parliament - John Bright spoke powerfully against - but the government won the division on 22 April by 372 votes to 47.

As a result of Lord J. Russell's victory, the voluntaryists decided to field their own candidates in the general election of July 1847, several in West Riding boroughs. From Venice, Cobden wrote to the town clerk of Stockport, his constituency, stating that he thought it wisest not to raise the contentious education issue:

"I offer no opinion upon the late measure of the government, for I have not had the opportunity of examining them.... For my part, I am convinced that government interference is as necessary for education as its non-interference is essential for trade. Any voluntary system is a chimera. Compare England with

America, Switzerland or Russia for proof."⁵

Cobden had resisted pressure to stand for Manchester giving preference to Bright. But at St. Petersburg he heard that influential Liberals had nominated him in the huge West Riding division, the stronghold of Baines and the voluntary movement. This constituency had 36,000 electors, the largest number in the country. Traditionally it was regarded as a reliable sounding board of public opinion and was an honour to represent. Cobden was elected to both Stockport and the West Riding, and, on his return from Russia, chose to sit for the latter. He had little real choice in the matter, as the gift of £76,000 from his supporters was to enable him to voice, as powerfully as possible, Liberal policies in Parliament.⁶

2. The Massachusetts system and the establishment of the L.P.S.A.

The Minutes of 1846 gave a great impetus not only to voluntaryism but to the secular movement. A definition of secular education was never generally agreed upon by those who supported the concept. What was agreed was that religious differences, institutionalised in denominational schools, should not obstruct the expansion and improvement of education for the mass of the people. Secularists wanted a new and wide curriculum as T. Wyse had shown in his writings. They were not adverse to religious teaching so long as a curriculum common to all could be devised or a system arranged for separate teaching by ministers of religion.

As well as the "religious difficulty", secularists had to meet the charge that giving the government control

over education would be dangerous to political liberty and freedom of thought. Prussia was often cited as a country characterised by state education and despotism. For this reason, some radicals in the 1830's preferred to give the example of the New England states of America where schools were managed by local committees elected by ratepayers with complete autonomy. A system of this kind was proposed by J.H. Roebuck in Parliament in 1833 and by W. Lovett, the Chartist, in a pamphlet in 1837 and a book in 1840.

The Minutes prompted two main secularist approaches to the problem of national education. One was to find ways in which denominational schools might receive Privy Council grants but only for secular instruction and not for religious instruction which could be given by ministers of religion at specific times. The articles of Dr. Robert Vaughan of the Lancashire Independent College in the British Quarterly Review in 1846 and 1847 were good examples of the search for such a compromise; also the pamphlets of two Anglican clergymen, Rev. Dr. W.F. Hook of Leeds and Rev. S.F. Surtees.⁷

The second approach was to abolish Privy Council aid for denominational schools and establish a new system of schools based on local rating and local management as in the United States, and particularly in Massachusetts. Interest focussed on Massachusetts because the common school system was considerably reformed between 1837 and 1846, becoming an example not only of a very unauthoritarian system of publicly provided education but one in which advanced methods of teaching were

being introduced. The chief architect of the reforms was Horace Mann (1796-1859) who in 1837 gave up the prestigious post of President of the State Senate to become Secretary of the new Board of Education. He was a Unitarian who believed strongly not only in natural religion but ^{also} in the value of the Bible in school. In 1837 he began studying G. Combe's works, and after Combe's tour in the United States in 1838-40, became a fervent believer in the application of phrenology and moral philosophy to teaching.

The Massachusetts common school system originated with the laws of Puritan settlers in the seventeenth century which enjoined every settlement to maintain a school. When the United States was established, Massachusetts passed a new law in 1789 refurbishing the old and permitting towns to divide their land into independent school districts, each maintaining one or more schools. In 1837, Massachusetts had a population of about 700,000. The entire area of the state was divided into 300 townships and 2,500 school districts supporting 3,000 schools. There was neither a supervising educational authority nor any system for training teachers. Teaching standards were very low, especially in rural schools.

The Board established in 1837 was composed of ten persons, including the Governor and Vice-Governor ex-officio, and eight nominated persons without salary. The paid Secretary, elected by the Board annually, was really the only executive officer. Mann had no compulsory power over the school committees nor any inspectors to help him. But he used the authority he had, and including the

distribution of the Common School Fund, to raise standards. Helped by a large private donation, he established three Normal Schools in 1839-40. He toured the State continually holding teachers' conventions, published statistical returns and twelve annual reports.

The latter were models of lucidity and enthusiasm about all aspects of education, including curricula, teaching methods, libraries, children's employment, and women teachers. The Fifth Annual Report (1842) has a remarkable argument for the value of education for the material prosperity of individuals and the community. It contained a selection of replies to a questionnaire to employers very similar to E. Chadwick's interviews in 1840. The Seventh Annual Report (1844) summed up Mann's impressions of good and bad teaching in European schools after his tour of 1843.

Mann enforced, by exhortation, the Massachusetts law of 1826 which laid down that "the school committee shall never direct to be purchased or used, in any of the town schools, any school books which are calculated to favor the tenets of any particular sect of Christians". He explained that this did not exclude reading the Bible and in 1848 he stated that all schools had adopted this policy.⁸

Mann met opposition to his reforms at various times but it was overcome. Not surprisingly, some radicals and secularists in Britain were attracted by the Massachusetts system as a model for Britain. What was especially impressive was the evidence that local control could be combined with central supervision and that the

supervision could be exercised in a manner educative of the whole community rather than a bureaucratic procedure. Combe gave full accounts of Mann's reforms in a book about his American tour and in an anonymous article in the Edinburgh Review in 1841, and again in pamphlets in 1845 and 1847. His Scottish friend W.B. Hodgson, Secretary of the Liverpool Mechanics' Institute until 1847, re-published the Seventh Annual Report in Britain in 1845. Mann sent copies of his Reports and other publications not only to Combe and Hodgson but also, among others, to Joseph Hume M.P., E. Chadwick, T. Wyse, and Kay-Shuttleworth. Hume went so far as to introduce a motion, unsuccessfully, in the Commons on 25 July 1843 for leave to bring in a bill for a system of education similar to that of Massachusetts.⁹

The current of interest in Massachusetts is also shown by comments in pamphlets by Rev. S.F. Surtees (Anglican), Rev. R.W. Hamilton (Congregationalist) and Edward Edwards, an assistant librarian at the British Museum. Edwards wrote to Mann in April 1847 that an opinion was gaining ground "that we must aim at a gradual approximation towards your Massachusetts system".

The Lancashire Public School Association, which drew up a plan adapted from the Massachusetts system, was founded by a small group of men in Manchester, most of whom were Scotsmen settled there. The Scotsmen knew each other from attendance at Lloyd Street Presbyterian Chapel where Rev. W. McKerrow was minister. Three of them were involved in the Manchester Examiner, a newspaper which began publication in January 1846 as a

mouthpiece of the League. McKerrow was a proprietor; Alexander Ireland was business manager and T. Ballantyne was a proprietor and editor. W.B. Hodgson was, from 1847, Headmaster of Chorlton High School, Manchester. Both Ireland and Hodgson were friends and correspondents of Combe and shared the same ideals of education. Ireland described McKerrow as "one of the most thoroughly unsectarian clergymen I ever met with, orthodox or heterodox".

The Scotsmen were joined by Samuel Lucas, a Quaker, who was married to one of John Bright's sisters. Lucas had been a coin dealer in London and was now a partner in a cotton mill in Manchester. Lucas appears to have taken the initiative which led to the establishment of the L.P.S.A. In April 1847, he wrote a long letter to the Manchester Examiner stating why he opposed the Privy Council Minutes and outlining a plan for rate aided schools in districts where there were no voluntary schools. He then knew little of the Massachusetts system but very quickly Hodgson put him in contact with Combe. Within five weeks, Lucas and the Scotsmen, with Combe's advice, had hammered out what they believed to be an improved version of the Massachusetts system suitable for adoption by Lancashire with a population of about two million.¹⁰

The plan was a logically organised scheme of education under the control of local government the like of which was not, as it happened, implemented in Britain until after the Act of 1902. It was a system designed to give a good, free education to the whole population. If

it had been established throughout Britain it would surely have wrought a "silent social revolution" before the end of the century.

As in Massachusetts, the foundation was composed of the elected school committees in townships and parishes with over 2,000 inhabitants, responsible for maintaining four types of school; Day Schools for ages five to fifteen, Evening Schools for persons over ten years of age, Infant Schools for children under six, and Industrial Schools for young people without employment. Unlike Massachusetts, there was an intermediate layer of authority between the local committees and the County Board, the Committees of the Hundred. There were six of these ancient county divisions in Lancashire and the school committees in each were to elect the Committee of the Hundred. It had powers to unite parishes with under 2,000 people and enforce rating for schools, and had permissive powers to establish schools for the deaf, dumb and blind. The County Board had more authority than Mann's Board. It had the duties of training teachers in one or more Normal Schools, certifying teachers, approving all books used in schools, inspecting schools, and of collecting and disseminating information about education.

One special responsibility of the Board was the appointment of a commission of nine persons, each belonging to a different religious denomination, to draw up a selection of examples and precepts from the Bible which would satisfy the rule that "Nothing shall be taught in any of the schools which favours the peculiar tenets

of any religious sect". This rule was inspired by the Massachusetts law but was stricter in excluding all possibility of sectarian teaching in that the Massachusetts law referred only to books used in schools. The point was emphasised by the prohibition of all ministers of religion from salaried posts i.e. they could not be schoolmasters.¹¹

Given Cobden's acute sense of how a country's institutions reflect the nature of its society, it is not surprising that he was unenthusiastic about the L.P.S.A. plan. There was also the quarrel of the religious sects which made a radical educational reform movement inopportune for the foreseeable future. There is one significant record of Cobden's private thinking in the diary of Horace Mann who met Cobden, by means of Combe's letter of introduction, in London on 5 June 1843, ten days before Graham withdrew his Factories Education Bill. Commenting on the condition of the English people, Cobden

"seems to despair of any complete remedy. They have not the organisation essential to a National system of education. They have not the general intelligence and capacity of concerted action necessary to form it; and if they had, there is too large a mass of ignorance to be removed within any moderate period, and too many obstacles, living and active, to enable them to succeed."

Much as Cobden admired the society and institutions of the Northern States, he never imagined they could be instantly transplanted into Britain. The cheap American quality newspaper, written in a style appealing to ordinary people, was perhaps the only thing which he did think could be copied without difficulty if the

"taxes on knowledge" were abolished. It may be significant that Cobden did not correspond with Mann. To have done so, would have implied an absolute commitment to the Massachusetts system and the British version advocated by the L.P.S.A.¹²

3. Cobden's political strategy 1847-50.

If Cobden felt any euphoria at the repeal of the Corn Laws, it did not last long. When he returned home after his long Continental tour, he found a political situation which was totally at variance with that which he had hoped would result from the League's campaign. Britain had not been "radicalised". The aristocracy was still entrenched in power. The new middle class Liberal party which Cobden hoped Peel would form had not emerged. The old Whigs were now in power and the Tories were split. The Peelites were simply a minority group in Parliament, as were the radicals. Members of Cobden's way of thinking were few in numbers.

The general election of July 1847 had been, from Cobden's point of view, retrogressive, marked by fighting about religious issues and with little attention to questions of reform in foreign policy, finance and taxation. Even education was not debated as a matter of urgent necessity for civilised living and economic progress but as a branch of theology. With regard to any movement for establishing schools outside the control of the churches, Cobden was placed in an awkward predicament by his acceptance of one of the two West Riding seats. The West Riding was the home base of Edward Baines, the fanatical leader of the voluntaryists.

This was one factor contributing to Cobden's decision not to press the education issue until the voluntaryists' ardour had abated somewhat.¹³

Cobden realised that apart from the fact that he was a national figure and a respected Parliamentarian, he was in essentially the same position as in the late 1830's. He was a reformer with only a handful of reliable supporters trying to implement policies to change Britain and the world. His original plan of converting the country by pamphlets had failed; the League had apparently failed to achieve more than the minimum act of repeal. The remainder of his vast programme would have to be achieved step by step from a weak political base. It would be necessary to win specific reforms by extra-Parliamentary pressure and Parliamentary coalitions or by converting the ruling party.

At the very heart of Cobden's reluctance to agitate for national education was a belief that the economy must be made really sound and prosperous before the working man could understand the importance of education for his children and afford to dispense with their earnings; the ratepayers needed prosperity to ease money from their pockets for education. Also, prosperity was the essential support of that adult education, formal and informal, which was as important as school education.

Every movement or agitation in which Cobden was involved between 1847 and 1850 - financial reform, opposition to intervention in foreign politics, the peace movement, and the freehold land movement - were parts of Cobden's all embracing vision of social progress. In his thinking, they all interlocked but in practical

political work it did not matter that he associated with men whose objectives were more limited. The repeal of the Corn Laws was only the beginning of getting a sound economy. Agriculture needed much improvement and the international economy of free trade had yet to be created. As Cobden had taught in the League years, the manufacturing and agricultural sections were mutually dependent. Agriculture needed investment in new methods and new procedure and more efficient farmers secure in their tenancies or, better still, freeholds. A sounder based agriculture would also help to alleviate urban poverty by checking the flood of poor labourers into the towns.

The international economy Cobden wanted required a revolution in British foreign policy which would encourage foreign countries to adopt free trade - namely the abandonment of interference in the affairs of foreign countries, the end of colonial expansion and a large reduction in Britain's armed forces. There were also other complications. The cancer of Ireland about which Cobden had written in 1835 was as potent as ever. Even the repealed Corn Laws still exerted a baleful influence on the economy, contributing to the slump of 1847-48. The bad harvests of 1846 and 1847 operated as before to raise bread prices and depress consumer demand. It took several years for the international trade in grain to adjust to Britain's abandonment of protection for corn and for British consumers to enjoy the benefits of stable prices.

Cobden was obliged to adopt a piecemeal and

gradualist strategy. First he aimed to permeate public opinion in favour of new policies through speeches and the Manchester Examiner and, as soon as it was possible, through a new London daily newspaper. He also hoped to spread new ideas of political economy by translations of Bastiat's works. Secondly, he intended to support and steer pressure groups and associations which were working towards one or more of his objectives. He knew that it was useless to seek reforms by a frontal attack on the institutions and privileges of the aristocracy or by challenging the snobbish prejudices of the upper middle class which did so much to sustain aristocratic influence. He sought to make progress by quietly undermining his opponents or by winning them over by the "wisdom of the serpent".

He decided to undermine an interventionist foreign policy and high arms expenditure by revealing to the taxpayers just how their money was wastefully spent. Cobden drew on Combe's psychology: John Bull could be made critical of British blundering abroad by "playing off his acquisitiveness against his combativeness". He aimed much further in financial reform. The greater proportion of taxation was indirect and raised on items consumed such as tea and sugar. To reduce taxation would increase consumption of all products and leave greater quantity of capital in the community for productive investment. Necessary taxation should be raised as far as possible by direct means from income and property. To exemplify these ideas, Cobden publicised a "National Budget" in December 1848 with the backing of the Liverpool Financial

Reform Association.

Cobden hoped this association would soon grow into a powerful national organisation but he was disappointed in this. The majority of radicals to whom he looked for support were more attracted by Parliamentary reform. Schemes ranged from a revival of the Charter by F. O'Connor to J. Hume's "little Charter" of household suffrage. Cobden's friends J. Bright, G. Wilson and Sir Joshua Walmsley M.P. for Bolton from 1849 were in favour of Hume's scheme. Cobden's private views were that even a limited extension of the franchise was unobtainable by a reform act; that even if obtained, the new electorate would not necessarily support the reforms Cobden wanted. Cobden was farsighted in this matter: he suspected that if franchise reform became a matter of competition between Whigs and Tories, the Tories would raise the stakes to something near universal suffrage in order to be able to manipulate a large uneducated electorate rather than have difficulty with a smaller electorate more likely to be dominated by the middle class and probably Liberals.

The result of Cobden's need of support for financial reform and the Parliamentary reformers' need of Cobden's support was the establishment of Manchester and London based associations in 1849 which combined financial and Parliamentary reform. The compromises required to keep these associations going proved too delicate to be either satisfactory or long lasting. Cobden did not achieve any reform of taxation or armament.¹⁴

Cobden also tried to influence the international

peace movement to concentrate on practical objectives rather than general denunciations of war, pious pleas for peace and ambitious projects for a permanent Congress of Nations to guarantee peace. There had been strong links between British and American peace advocates for many years. As the Quakers and other dissenters were prominent, propaganda tended to be religious and idealistic. Similar movements sprang up in France, Belgium and Germany.

Cobden, a founder member of the Manchester Peace Society in 1841, had tried to get the International Peace Congress of 1843 to endorse free trade as the best means of promoting peace. He did not attend the Peace Congress held in Brussels in 1848 but sent a letter opposing the proposal for a Congress of Nations on the grounds that it would soon become an intermeddling and quarrelsome body. He encouraged the appointment of a Peace Congress Committee consisting of persons dedicated to disarmament as well as true pacifists or "non-resisters". This Committee organised the Congresses at Paris in 1849 and Frankfurt in 1850 - both attended by Cobden - which passed, besides resolutions in favour of a Congress of Nations and a High Court of Nations, "practical" resolutions for arbitration treaties and against bankers' loans to governments (like those of Russia and Austria) which used them on armies to suppress the liberties of their subjects.

Cobden urged the need for general arbitration treaties in the Commons in June 1849 but was voted down by 176 votes to 79. He spoke at public meetings against

indiscriminate loans and wrote a cogent but anonymous article in the Westminster Review.¹⁵

The remaining movement in which Cobden participated in 1847-50 was the freehold land movement which he thought could produce a steadily increasing number of smallholders in the countryside. He believed it would be beneficial to agriculture and also prove politically influential by promoting a class of "forty shilling" freehold voters who would be independent of aristocratic pressure in elections. The League had organised such a movement for political reasons in 1844-46 and a Manchester Freehold Society started in 1845. In 1848, Cobden was impressed with the growth of the Birmingham Freehold Land Society and in 1849, with Sir J. Alamsley's help, got the Metropolitan and National Freehold Land Society established. A monthly journal, The Freeholder, was published from January 1850, to which Cobden contributed.¹⁶

4. Cobden's membership of the L.P.S.A.

Cobden's lukewarm attitude to the L.P.S.A., both before and after he joined in December 1848, must be seen in the context of his overall political strategy in the years 1847-1850. The matter was a rather uncomfortable one, because Combe, whom he continued to hold in the highest esteem, kept up a steady pressure on him to lead an agitation for national education. Also some of his old friends, like Rev. W. McKerrow and Salis Schwabe, a calico-printer at Middleton, were members.

Cobden realised that eventually he might become involved. In the meantime, he was obliged to show a

polite interest while excusing himself from joining or assisting the association. He wrote to the L.P.S.A. on 19 October 1847 "approving" the plan; the text of the letter is not preserved. His reply to Combe's inquiry as to whether he had examined the plan was notable for the complete absence of specific commitment:

"The quarrels of the sects seem, after all, likely to land us upon a rational system of secular education as the only escape from our difficulties. This view is certainly gaining ground; and the Lancashire plan of which you speak is one of the symptoms."

Whatever features of the plan Cobden disliked, he kept to himself. Judging by the position he took at the founding conference of the National Public School Association in 1850, he certainly objected to the exclusion of the whole Bible implied by the provision for Scripture extracts. Samuel Lucas, who favoured the extracts, was himself obliged to admit to Combe that it was one of the features of the plan which aroused most hostility. Cobden also probably regretted the lack of provision for voluntary schools to receive rate aid.¹⁷

One fact made it easier for Cobden to avoid direct involvement: he was no longer an M.P. for a Lancashire seat, nor was he, from 1848, resident in Manchester. He used part of the National Testimonial to buy the farmhouse and 140 acre estate of Dunford, near Midhurst, Sussex, where he had been born. It was rather delapidated and it took five years to have it enlarged and made the permanent family home. Meanwhile Cobden, his wife, son and three daughters lived in a tall house at 103 Westbourne Terrace, near Paddington station.¹⁸

The L.P.S.A., under the leadership of Samuel Lucas,

worked hard to establish itself in Lancashire. It was bad luck that this coincided with the economic depression which tightened purses as always. Membership remained small and was drawn from that group of Unitarians, Quakers and tolerant dissenters which had hitherto been the core of support for unsectarian education in Manchester. Everything was done to publicise the association by meetings and notices in the press. Eight monthly issues of the Educational Register were published in 1849 and 1850; and in 1850 a book of lectures given by members was published.

Cobden saw no reason by December 1848 to alter his non-committal attitude but he joined the L.P.S.A. probably because he could no longer decently refuse to do so, especially after Joseph Hume, the noted radical M.P. for Montrose in Scotland, became a Vice-President in August 1848. But when he attended the L.P.S.A. meeting in Liverpool on 29 November 1848 - the only one he ever went to - he confined his remarks to the difficulties of the situation caused by the strength of the voluntary movement and told Lucas privately that he was too engaged in other activities to help. He accepted an invitation to become a Vice-President in January 1849.

In December 1849, Cobden sent an apology for non-attendance at the annual conference, adding the carefully chosen words that "a comprehensive plan of education, such as your Society advocates, is necessary to the liberty, the morality and the prosperity of the country". Experienced Liberal politicians at Westminster knew that any bill would have to be a compromise to have even a

small chance of success. W.J. Fox, M.P. for Oldham and a L.P.S.A. Vice President, introduced, independently, a bill for national education in February 1850 which combined the principles of local rating, Privy Council supervision and participation of voluntary schools.

Cobden did not speak in the debates but he sat through them, complaining to a correspondent of "an outpouring of bigotry.... such as would have done credit to Spain in the palmy days of its auto-da-fé!" The bill was defeated by 287 votes to 58 - Cobden in the minority.¹⁹

The fundamental facts of English society and politics were against the L.P.S.A. as they were against the N.P.S.A. which succeeded it. The L.P.S.A. had a vision of a well-educated society, appropriate to the needs of a developing industrial society. But it was the vision of a tiny minority. The middle class of Manchester did not as a general community respond to Cobden's Athenaeum call of 1844 to become the leaders of a new society. He expected little of Manchester after 1846. He told Combe:

"the middle class will not look at the question in a non-sectarian spirit, and the aristocracy, in their hearts, don't want any education at all for the poor".

Cobden hoped that the blindness or inertia of British statesmen and industrialists would at least be shaken by the commercial competition of the United States but this did not occur in his lifetime. It was not until the 1890's that German, not American competition became a matter for serious debate.

Cobden's unsuccessful strategy in finance and foreign policy by 1850 drove him to seek another but slower means of reform - the gradual education of public opinion by

cheap daily newspapers. In the spring of 1850, he began to encourage the revival of an old campaign to abolish the "taxes on knowledge" - the advertisement, paper and stamp duties on newspapers. But by the end of the year he was pitched into the movement he had so carefully kept away from the L.P.S.A. leaders, incurably optimistic, decided in September 1850 to hold a conference to reconstitute the L.P.S.A. as a national association and prepare a bill for Parliament. Cobden could not refuse the invitation. He was committed to the two movements simultaneously for the next six years.²⁰

Summary

Cobden hoped that an education act would be achieved after the repeal of the Corn Laws. But two developments occurred which made it unattainable at least for the foreseeable future. One was the growth of the voluntaryist movement among dissenters who rejected all state aid for education. The other was the example of the Massachusetts common school system which encouraged the most zealous educational reformers in Manchester to establish the Lancashire Public School Association.

Cobden believed that the radical L.P.S.A. system, implicitly aimed at replacing Privy Council grants to church schools, was inapplicable to English social and political conditions. Although he felt obliged to join the L.P.S.A. in 1848, he considered that the education problem would not be solved before a change of policy by the voluntaryists and by the Church of England. In the meantime, he concentrated on other reforms such as financial reform, international arbitration and the free-hold land movement.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Guiding the National Public School Association 1850-1854.

1. The foundation of the N.P.S.A.

The conference to convert the LPSA. into a national association met at the Manchester Mechanics' Institute on 30 October 1850 under the chairmanship of Alexander Henry. About 350 people were present, including W.E. Hickson, editor of the Westminster Review, who recalled the work of the Central Society when chairing the NPSA. meeting the following day. Among others of interest were G.J. Holyoake, editor of The Reasoner and one to become famous in the future - W.E. Forster from the West Riding.

Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, recently retired from the Committee of Privy Council, sent a letter declining the invitation in terms of some significance for the future of the NPSA. He could only support a system under "the superintendence of the great religious bodies of this country". This comment explains the absence of Church of England clergy and of dissenting ministers apart from those who were active in the LPSA., Rev. Dr. J.R. Beard (Unitarian), Rev. E. McKerrow (Presbyterian). There was one Anglican clergyman, Rev. W.F. Walker of Oldham, who had been a member of the Manchester Society in 1837. The support of Unitarians was emphasised once again by donations from A. Henry and Mark Philips.¹

Cobden was not optimistic about the prospects for national education but he came determined to guide the

N.P.S.A. in adopting a constitution and policy which stood at least some chance of success. He knew that many would regard his attendance as the beginning of a vigorous agitation on the lines of the League's early days, forgetting the last phase in which policy had been aimed at converting opponents. In any case, the objectives of repealing an obnoxious law and establishing a comprehensive system of education were totally different. Repeal was a simple negative while education involved the constructive co-operation of persons with not only vested interests and prejudices in favour of a particular system but ^{also} with deeply held beliefs about the place of religion in education. He was also becoming convinced, as he confided to Bright, that "the capitalist class of Lancashire will never take the lead in any reform of either a political or social character which aims at the extension of the rights or the amelioration of the condition of the masses of the people".²

In 1849, Cobden had, after reading the pamphlet What Is Secular Education?, told Combe that "yours is the definition of education" - a statement which was accurate except for Cobden's additional belief in the value of revealed, as well as natural, religion. But he did not believe that Combe's ideal school curriculum would be acceptable to more than a tiny minority of the electorate. To complicate the already difficult task of creating a school system with questions of curriculum would be disastrous. The agenda, as Cobden saw it, was to draw the Church and dissenting schools into a rate-

aided system which would enable those schools to give a better education and also permit the building, in areas of educational deficiency, of schools managed by the ratepayers. Once the system was established, efforts to broaden the curriculum could begin. What was absolutely to be avoided was a policy of hostility to any of the churches or criticism of the education given in their schools. There was also another consideration: many voluntaryists, such as Joseph Sturge and Henry Richard, were allies in the peace movement.³

Cobden wanted the new association to present an attractive front to dissenters by showing that its plan was identical to the system of Massachusetts and other New England states which had been accepted by the Protestant churches there. Cobden probably had a hand in getting the Rev. Dr. Leonard Bacon, a Congregational minister of Newhaven, Connecticut, who was visiting Europe, to speak about the New England common schools at the conferences on 30 and 31 October. It was important to show that these schools did not reflect a community indifferent to religion but one in which all sects were in agreement about unsectarian day schools. Cobden's speeches at the conference clearly blazed the desired path of moderation and tolerance. The most important sentence in his speech on 30 October was that they had "the only platform on which a great union can be formed to advance the education of the people". It was in that spirit of not antagonising the religious public that he got the word "Secular" in the proposed title National Secular School Association altered to

"Public" as it had been in the LPSA. He also tried to have the work "unsectarian" substituted in the body of the same resolution which called for "the establishment by law, in England and Wales, of a general system of secular instruction, to be maintained by local rates and under the management of local authorities, specially elected by the ratepayers". Although forcefully supported by W.E. Forster, Cobden failed to get this change.

At the conference of the NPSA the next day, a resolution moved by the Rev. S. Davidson, stating that rate-supported education should be secular only, was passed. But Davidson commented that he approved of the use of Scripture extracts, which had been part of the LPSA plan. Despite the commitment of members to a "no Bible" or a Scripture extract basis, Cobden made an unequivocal statement in his speech that "he would not be a party to excluding the whole Bible from any school where the local body can unite in introducing it". The speech was mainly a well-argued plea for education, obviously addressed to the country as a whole. It ended eloquently:

"On all these grounds, whether on the fair and ample plea of improving the national tastes and amusements, whether it is to men the power of judging what they will be called to judge, the political destinies of this country, whether it is that they may judge the highest of all questions, that of religious faith, whatever be your motives, give the people instruction, elevate their minds, improve their faculties, stimulate their reason, and in every phase in which you view mankind, they will come out better and purer for the process to which you subject them."⁴

The Rev. Dr. Bacon's speeches emphasised how the common schools in the United States harmonised with a very Christian and churchgoing population. Both Cobden

and the NPSA thought these speeches well calculated to sway the voluntaryists from their erroneous views. Eleven thousand copies were printed as a leaflet. Cobden wrote to J. Sturge, the Quaker philanthropist and voluntaryist, urging him to suggest to Edward Miall, the editor of The Nonconformist that he fairly examine the NPSA proposals and Bacon's views before committing the next issue to complete hostility. The Nonconformist's leading article proved a disappointment. It argued mainly that whatever merits the common schools might have, they were inapplicable to English social conditions. The rating system worked well in New England because citizens enjoyed equal political rights and high wages. How could it work in English towns where so many parents were indifferent to schooling or in rural parishes where the squire and parson would obstruct it?⁵

Combe wrote enthusiastically to Cobden about the conference and the value of his leadership but was quickly disillusioned by Cobden's reply. The split in the Liberal party caused by the voluntaryists was as wide as ever and deprived him of "locus standi" in Parliament. "I repeat that we are in almost hopeless difficulties and you must not attach too much importance to the Manchester meeting". He explained his position about the Bible, pointing out that in more than half the parishes of England, a dissenter or Roman Catholic was scarcely to be found. "I have made up my mind to go for the Massachusetts system as nearly as we can get it".⁶

Cobden was determined that the Bible question should be cleared up. He knew that many members of the Executive

Committee would be very reluctant to concede that the term "secular" might include Bible reading. The most influential members - S. Lucas, Dr. W.B. Hodgson, Rev. W. McKerrow, Rev. Dr. S. Davidson and Rev. Dr. J.R. Beard - were in favour of permitting Scripture extracts without making their use compulsory. Nevertheless, the next weeks showed considerable differences of emphasis among them. Dr. Hodgson, who had opposed Cobden over the deletion of "Secular" in the title and in the body of the resolution, and S. Lucas complained in private letters about Cobden's Bible declaration. Hodgson thought that it would offend the voluntaryists who opposed all rate support of religious instruction. "Now I say that "no Cobden or no principle" was our probable alternative". Lucas thought that it would annoy the dissenters as it would allow the Church, in rural parishes where there were few dissenters, "to have it all its own way". But Lucas was now resident in London and could not wield an influence by being present at meetings.⁷

Cobden was a member of the Executive Committee which met on 21 November 1850 to discuss the draft of the Basis of the NPSA drawn up by the sub-committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Beard. This was similar to the resolution passed at the conference on 30 October but with added reference to "a thorough training in useful knowledge, good principles and virtuous habits". The sub-committee agreed that the Basis "should be regarded as excluding the use of the Bible as a school book". The Executive Committee, with McKerrow in the chair, thrashed out the issue for over three hours according

to Hodgson's detailed account to Combe. "The talk somewhat desultory, but it soon appeared that Mr. Cobden stood absolutely alone with the exception of Mr. Schwabe in objecting to the exclusion of the Bible". Finally, the Rev. J.A. Baynes (Congregationalist) of Nottingham suggested that the schools be closed at certain times for religious instruction to be given elsewhere. "This seemed to catch the true sense of the meeting and Cobden who was thoroughly bothered seemed not indisposed to adopt this as a mode of escape from the awkward position in which he had placed himself". It was agreed that Cobden and some others should attend a meeting of the sub-committee on 22 November to agree on a new draft of the Basis. This was done and Cobden seconded a resolution moved by McKerrow that:

"The National Public School Association is formed to promote the establishment, by law, in England and Wales of a system of free schools; which, supported by local rates, and managed by local committees, specially elected for that purpose by the ratepayers, shall impart secular instruction only; leaving to parents, guardians and religious teachers, the inculcation of doctrinal religion, to afford opportunities for which the schools shall be closed at stated times each week."

But this resolution proved to be contentious when it was reported to the General Committee, chaired by S. Schwabe and attended by Cobden, on 4 December 1850. The first issue was the sub-committee's unauthorised insertion of the phrase "in such parts of England and Wales as may need them" governing the establishment of schools. McKerrow, Cobden and Hodgson protested at the change and it was dropped as no one would move an amendment in favour of it. Hodgson was annoyed at this obvious attempt to limit the universal spread of rate-

supported schools.

The second issue was whether "closing the schools" meant, as McKerrow and Beard claimed, that after normal school business had finished on the days allotted for religious instruction, that instruction could be given on the school premises. McKerrow and Cobden suggested a wording that would make it clear that religious instruction was so permitted but after much discussion, in which Hodgson pointed out the failure of that plan in the Liverpool Corporation Schools to conciliate religious opinion generally, the amendment was dropped. The original resolution was passed with one dissentient, R.G. Yates, of Liverpool. Hodgson, angered at Beard's and McKerrow's "duplicity", abstained.⁸

The detailed plan of the NPSA was not agreed and published until March 1851. For the time being, it would seem that Cobden accepted the exclusion of Bible reading or perhaps quietly argued for its inclusion. It was characteristic of his manner of winning support for the NPSA that he talked to as many Churchmen and dissenters as he could in private when views were likely to be stated less rigidly than in public. But the master of persuasive arguments wasted his breath. He reported his efforts and an encouraging new development to Combe on 8 January 1851:

"During the last month I have been holding large private conferences of the leading men interested in education at Leeds, Birmingham, Huddersfield and other places and have had the opportunity of freely canvassing the opinions of dissenters and Churchmen, from Dr. Hook to Joseph Sturge. I find no difficulty in beating them in argument when they oppose our secular plan, but beating is not converting. Of the two, I must say the Church clergymen are more reasonable than the dissenting

ministers. The latter try to stand out still for the voluntary system against any state provision, whilst the former have thrown over voluntaryism as a failure, and are only bent upon making the most of a government system of some sort. There was a very important meeting of Churchmen and clergymen held yesterday in Manchester when they agreed unanimously (high and low Church uniting) to recommend a plan for levying a rate on Manchester and Salford for the purpose of supplying education gratis to the people of those boroughs. The existing school houses to be used; the Church schools to receive payment for all the children they educate, the dissenters the same; and wherever there are more school houses wanted they shall be built out of the fund so raised by the rate, and in this latter case the Bible only without creed or catechism shall be read, and the affairs of these latter schools to be exclusively in the hands of laymen. This plan is a decided step in liberality on the part of the Church clergy of Manchester and I must say that if the dissenters, under Mr. Baines' guidance, continue to pursue their impracticable course, the public will be bound to look with a favourable eye to any scheme put forth by the Church by which the education of the people will in some degree be promoted."⁹

2. The N.P.S.A and the Manchester and Salford Committee

A new pressure group which Cobden described soon had profound repercussions on the N.P.S.A. It was founded at a meeting in the Town Hall called by private circular on 6 January 1851, and given a formal basis as the Manchester and Salford Committee on Education (M.S.C. henceforth) on 19 February 1851. The most influential leaders were all Churchmen: William Entwistle, a banker, Rev. Charles Richson, Clerk in Orders at the Cathedral, Canon Clifton, Very Rev. G.H. Bowers, Dean of Manchester, and Canon H. Stowell, Sir J.P. Kay-Shuttleworth was a founder member and his adhesion gave much public weight to the MSC.

Three prominent local men who had supported Cobden in the Manchester Society in the late 1830's joined: James Heywood, M.P. for N. Lancashire and W. Neild (both Unitarians) and W.R. Calender (Congregationalist). These and a handful of Congregational, Wesleyan, Methodist

and Roman Catholic clergy - and one Unitarian minister - show that the MSC plan was attractive, at least initially, to men who were opposed or felt uneasy about NPSA's attitude to religious teaching and existing denominational schools.¹⁰

The voluntary party in Manchester did not form a specific association to fight the NPSA and MSC. Their cause was represented nationally by the Congregational Board of Education and the Voluntary School Association. The voluntaryists were strong in Manchester and led by Rev. Dr. R. Halley (Congregationalist) and Joseph Adshead (Baptist). Roughly a third of the Protestant dissenting clergy of Manchester signed a petition, from a voluntaryist position, against the M.S.C. Education Bill in 1852 and probably many more were like-minded.¹¹

The strength of voluntaryism and the consequent weakness of Liberal support for state intervention in education made the Anglican commitment in Manchester loom large in Cobden's thinking. The change from 1837 was startling when the Rev. H. Stowell had claimed that the Church should have a monopoly of working class education. The change began with the foundation of the Manchester Church Education Society in 1844, which assisted in providing, inspecting and if necessary supporting Church schools in the parish. The Privy Council grant system for building depended on substantial local funds being available. The Rev. H. Stowell was a member of the Society but Rev. Charles Richson was the moving spirit and mainly responsible for its transformation into the M.S.C.

Richson was determined that the Church should educate

a larger part of Manchester's growing population. For a year or two, ample funds flowed in then tapered off so that by 1848 Richson had concluded that some system of rate aid was the only answer. The L.P.S.A. was seen as a threat to the Church's position and the Society organised opposition at the public meetings called by the L.P.S.A. in 1849 and 1850. By 1850, the Society was aiding 45 Church schools in Manchester and Salford, of which only 11 counted as National Society Schools and therefore receiving grants from the Privy Council. The Church was teaching about half the number of children in denominational schools but Richson knew from hundreds of house enquiries of the Society that half the children of school age were neither at school nor at work.

In 1850 the Society had no money to aid any of the schools and, in September, Richson drew up "Marginal Notes of a Bill to promote and stimulate the education of the people of England and Wales". Richson was far in advance of the Church's thinking at national level. The National Society opposed, and continued to oppose for another twenty years, the principle of local rating and even a conscience clause in its schools, for which Richson's Society petitioned in vain in 1850.¹²

The financially well backed M.S.C. made some think its plan to get a private bill for the boroughs of Manchester and Salford stood a much better chance of success than the N.P.S.A.'s aim of a national bill. Joseph Brotherton, M.P. for Salford, a Bible Christian, although a member of the N.P.S.A., attended the MSC meetings and eventually agreed to introduce its bill in the Commons in 1852. The Times

praised the MSC and thought that Cobden's Bible declaration ought logically take him into that camp.¹³

But Cobden chose to stay in the NPSA but do everything he could to make its plan of education acceptable to a wider range of opinion than the M.S.C.'s plan. He announced his policy of not opposing the M.S.C. at a N.P.S.A. Conference on 22 January 1851. He dwelt on the weaknesses of the MSC plan which he hoped would be revised. "It is a proposal by which everybody shall be called upon to pay for the religious teaching of everybody else" - a new endowment of religion which was surely unacceptable to all dissenters. He pointed out how the proposal for compulsory reading of the Bible in new schools would, unless the Douay Version was allowed, exclude the children of 80,000 Roman Catholic Irish people in Manchester. The solution was the Massachusetts law which permitted the Bible to be read if school committees agreed on it. Cobden implied that in predominantly Roman Catholic districts either the Bible in any version would be excluded or the Douay Version would be permitted.

The main thrust of Cobden's speech was to edge the NPSA and MSC closer together and so to amend the plans being put forward that not only might an alliance be achieved but the voluntaryists might/seriously consider joining. The "great united party" for education was Cobden's dream and endeavour until 1857. But his long term optimism was always tempered with caution. "The Church scheme", he wrote to Combe, "lately put forward in Manchester will break down and its failure will bring many more into our ranks. Still I don't see my way out

of the old rut...."¹⁴

Cobden's insistence on the Massachusetts rule in the NPSA plan was successful. Lucas' letters to Combe make it clear that it was adopted because it met Cobden's wishes and also because it stopped an argument between the committees in Manchester and London as to whether Scripture extracts should be specifically excluded as the former wanted or included as London (dominated by Lucas) wanted. The phrase in Clause 6 Section 10 of the Plan finally agreed on 17 March 1851 - "Nothing shall be taught in any of the schools which favours the peculiar tenets of any sect of Christians" - permitted the whole Bible or extracts to be read at the discretion of the school committee. This non-committal compromise greatly irritated W.B. Hodgson who had wanted a definite and logical secular plan. He complained to R.W. Smiles, Secretary of the N.P.S.A., that he could not understand what was allowed or forbidden in the way of religious instruction.¹⁵

In February 1851, the M.S.C. decided that only the Authorised Version could be read in new schools established by rate funds. This was a blow to the Roman Catholics who had only nine day schools in Manchester taking just over 2,000 children, a tiny proportion of the number of school age - about 21,000. That these schools could receive rate aid under the M.S.C. scheme could not make up for the fact that the Catholics would be prevented from having new schools in which the Douay Version might be read. The Roman Catholic clergy signed a petition against the MSC proposals on 15 March 1851.

Cobden spoke out on behalf of the Catholics in the

debate in the Commons on W.J. Fox's motion for rate-aided secular schools on 22 May. Curiously, E. Entwistle, Chairman of the MSC, seemed unaware of the extent of Roman Catholic opposition and questioned Cobden's statement in a letter to The Times. Cobden replied by publishing the petition in full. Contacts between the two associations remained tense. A private conference in Manchester on 4 June of representatives of both sides achieved nothing.¹⁶

One major criticism of the N.P.S.A. plan, mentioned by Cobden in his speech of 22 May, was that it would put aside existing schools, overlooking the provision in Clause 6 Section 3 that school committees could purchase lease or rent school rooms without interference of their use by the trustees and managers as Sunday Schools and for doctrinal religious instruction at certain times. There was also criticism from the voluntaryist position that this clause permitted rate support for doctrinal religion as there was nothing to stop the regular teacher from giving religious instruction "after hours".

These problems were removed in August 1851 by amendment of the N.P.S.A. plan. An appendix was added to Clause 6 Section 3 laying down that in existing schools doctrinal religion could not be taught by the teachers paid by the Committee nor could it take place between certain hours in the morning and afternoon, thus making withdrawal on conscientious grounds easier. A second rule underpinned this: no part of the rate aid should be applied to doctrinal religion. This substantial concession, which allowed denominational schools to

receive rate aid with little interference with the normal timetable - except that a special teacher for religion was required - probably resulted mainly from Cobden's pressure in the NPSA. It became central to his tactics with regard to the MSC and voluntaryists during the next four years. In proposing a dual system of secular and denominational schools, it foreshadowed W.E. Forster's great compromise of 1870.

The M.S.C. immediately rejected the concession. Entwistle construed it not as a fair compromise but as practically a capitulation to the MSC position that the system of national education should be made up of denominational schools only. The NSPA rules were unacceptable in that the regular school teacher was not allowed to teach doctrinal religion and so prevented from dealing with questions of faith or morality which might crop up during lessons.¹⁷

The N.P.S.A. and M.S.C. spent the rest of the year from August in striving to win public opinion to their respective causes. Each mounted a big campaign of petitioning. There was divided opinion in the N.P.S.A. as to whether a national or a private local bill should be proposed. Lucas favoured a local bill as the best means of combating the M.S.C. local bill. He wanted the N.P.S.A. to challenge the M.S.C. and the voluntaryists in open debate. Not until the M.S.C. had been given a "sound drubbing" would they prove amenable to compromise. Combe supported Lucas in pressing the N.P.S.A. to take the offensive, as did one of NPSA's financial backers, Edward Lombe, a wealthy Norfolk landowner resident in

Italy, and a bitter enemy of the churches.

Cobden decided to keep strictly out of the local controversy. He told the Manchester committee that he would wait to see which scheme the Manchester public preferred. If it was the MSC plan, he would not oppose it as he considered that with all its imperfections it was better than nothing being done to improve the education of the people. In any case, he believed that unless the N.P.S.A. agitated through local men its case would carry little weight in Parliament. There were plenty of other commitments to keep him very busy: besides being a Commissioner for the Great Exhibition of 1851 he was fully involved in the freehold land, peace, and anti- "taxes on knowledge" movements.

When by mid-November 1851, it appeared that the N.P.S.A's petition had obtained 40,000 signatures, as many as the MSC petition, Cobden could no longer shirk the issue of the N.P.S.A. bill and attendance at a big meeting in Manchester to promote it. But he warned R.W. Smiles that he would only act in a "mediatorial capacity" in Manchester. It is also significant that Smiles reported to Combe that "influential supporters" in Manchester who had raised £1,000 were against "direct and professed hostility to the local scheme." Cobden and the other M.P.s expected to support the N.P.S.A. bill in Parliament - T. Milner Gibson and W.J. Fox - argued successfully for a national bill the permissive provisions of which could be applied to Manchester and Salford. Lucas complained to Combe that the Manchester committee had let themselves be led by Cobden instead

of leading him. Hodgson, the only local member who also might have resisted this, gave up his job at Chorlton High School in October 1851 and went abroad.¹⁸

The N.P.S.A. held a meeting of the National Council and a public meeting in Manchester on 1 December 1851. Combe and James Simpson, who had spoken at several education meetings in Scotland that year, attended.

Cobden spoke at length at both meetings. He reviewed the differences between the N.P.S.A. and M.S.C. plans, making it clear that the balance of fairness, especially for Catholics and Jews, lay with the N.P.S.A. It was for the people of Manchester and Salford to indicate by the petitions which they preferred. He also said - and it could not have pleased Combe - "that 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...."

In the next fortnight, the final draft of the N.P.S.A. bill was completed. It is evident that Cobden's Parliamentary group took it in hand. Lucas wrote of "the emasculated remains of the plan of the N.P.S.A." The plan of March 1851 had been substantially revised. The autonomous County Boards had gone. Instead, a Board of National Education, appointed by the Crown, was to establish School Districts in such boroughs and parishes as were requested by the majority of ratepayers or thought necessary by the Board's inspectors.

Thus the original intention of the N.P.S.A. to divide every county into School Districts was abandoned. The "existing schools" clause was a major concession to the churches. There was also an important change (Clause

16) about the closing of schools for religious instruction. Unlike the wording of the comparable Clause 6 Section 5 in the original plan, the revised clause did not specifically state that the religious instruction would take place elsewhere. Taken together with Clause 12 which permitted schoolrooms to be hired "when not wanted, for the purposes of this act", it implicitly permitted doctrinal religious instruction on the premises. This had been a concession which Cobden failed to get in the discussions of December 1850 and it was probably still a contentious matter.¹⁹

Rivalry between the two associations for public and governmental support continued without abatement until well into February 1852. The M.S.C. sent a deputation to Lord J. Russell on 4 December 1851 and the N.P.S.A. replied with one on 6 January 1852. The N.P.S.A. petition crept ahead of the M.S.C. claiming 60,000 signatures. Rev. C. Richson published a pamphlet reiterating the standard MSC accusation that the N.P.S.A. plan would eventually substitute local authority schools for denominational schools. The voluntaryists joined the fray aiming to stop both parties of "state intervention". They held a conference in Manchester on 2 and 3 February 1852, with J. Sturge and H. Richard attending - two important dissenters whom Cobden had failed to win over.

The question had become so much a local struggle that the N.P.S.A. decided that it would be better for their supporter T. Milner Gibson, M.P. for Manchester, to introduce the N.P.S.A. bill rather than W.J. Fox, M.P. for Oldham, as originally intended. Gibson's first move

was to have the second reading of the MSC bill delayed pending a debate on it by the Manchester Town Council on 18 February. The result of the debate confirmed the deep divisions of opinion, for all three contending education factions were represented on the Council. An amended petition against the bill, cleverly worded by the voluntaryist Alderman Bancroft, was passed by 34 votes to 22. It criticised the M.S.C. bill for usurping functions belonging to the Corporation, for imposing a rate burden unnecessarily and for violating rights of conscience.²⁰

3. The Select Committee on the State of Education in the Boroughs of Manchester and Salford.

The second reading of the M.S.C. bill was delayed still further by the resignation of Lord Russell's government over the Militia bill and the assumption of office by Lord Derby's Conservative government. The N.P.S.A. decided that the best course was to seek a Select Committee on the state of education in Manchester and Salford. Gibson succeeded in obtaining this in the Commons debate on 17 March 1852. The membership of the Committee necessarily included representatives of the three education parties. Gibson (Chairman), Fox and Cobden represented the N.P.S.A; J. Brotherton and W. Monsell, the M.S.C; S.M. Peto, the voluntaryists. John Bright was uncommitted. He had drifted away from the voluntaryists but did not join the N.P.S.A. until 1854.

The Select Committee had separate sessions in 1852 and 1853. The bulk of evidence submitted in 1852 was from the M.S.C. - Richson, Entwistle, Very Rev. J.H.

Bowers (Dean of Manchester) - and the voluntaryists, E. Baines and J. Adshead. The N.P.S.A.'s witness E. Twistleton, former Chief Commissioner of Poor Laws in Ireland, could not attend as he was leaving for the United States, but his evidence about American common schools was appended to the report. The strategy of the N.P.S.A. appears to have been to let the M.S.C. lead the fight against common opponents, the voluntaryists, who argued that there was no deficiency of school accommodation in Manchester and Salford.

Against this case, the M.S.C. had gathered a mass of detailed information which could not be bettered by the N.P.S.A. The MSC's findings about educational destitution were based on visits to 17,426 families in 26 different parts of the two boroughs, roughly one third of the total population. The MSC found that out of 36,527 children between 3 and 14 years of age, 14,197 were at day schools, 5,153 were at work and 17,177 were neither at school nor work. Of the latter, 4,471 were either sick or too young to attend school; 6,268 had never attended a day school and 5,799 had been withdrawn because school pence could not be afforded. Thus approximately 12,000 or one third of the children ought to have been at school. The main reason which the MSC witnesses for non-attendance was the poverty of parents. Hence the need for free education to be provided out of the rates. The MSC put the matter into the perspective that since 1834, the population of Manchester had increased by 52% but attendance at day schools by only 25%.

One fundamental issue was avoided by the committee

and witnesses of all three parties - the quality of education being provided in schools. From the historian's point of view this is regretable because the N.P.S.A. could have shone forth as the advocate of a first class free education for all classes. The M.S.C. was not primarily concerned with improving the curriculum so much as giving the standard National school education to more children. In any case, to suggest that the present curriculum was unsatisfactory was to play straight into the hands of the voluntaryists who asserted that Manchester denominational schools had plenty of spare places.

The N.P.S.A. had its own tactical reasons for not pressing the need for a wider curriculum. Firstly, to do so would imply criticism of denominational schools and would destroy the basis for the co-operation with the M.S.C. to which the N.P.S.A. was now committed. Secondly, it would raise the contentious issue of just how much religious instruction was desirable in day schools. However, this issue was raised in the session of 1853, when the N.P.S.A. witnesses, Rev. W. McKerrow and Dr. J. Watts, were mercilessly grilled about the definition of secular education, "unsectarian" religion and the relationship of deism to Christianity.

The main objective of the N.P.S.A. was to convince the MSC and the government that a rate supported system would never be accepted by the majority of dissenters unless doctrinal religious instruction was kept out of the normal school curriculum. Hence the submission of evidence by persons who had first hand knowledge of American common schools and who would testify to their

success. First there was Twistleton who had personally investigated schools in New England and questioned Rev. Barnas Sears, the Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, in 1851.

Then, in September 1852, Rev. J.P. Thompson of New York, co-editor with Rev. Dr. L. Bacon of The Independent, a Congregational journal, visited Cobden on his way to the conference of the Congregational Union at Bradford. Cobden urged him to tell the voluntaryists that the Congregationalists in the United States fully supported the common school system. Afterwards, Cobden got him to write a long description of the common school system which could be read during the second session of the Select Committee. Cobden, appearing as a witness, read it on 12 April 1853.

The N.P.S.A presented its own statistical evidence in 1853 to back up the findings of the M.S.C. Dr. J. Watts had investigated school attendance in St. Michael's and St. John's Wards, two of the poorest districts in Manchester. He showed that Baines' arguments in the session of 1852, based on statistical averages, gave the false impression that children were generally getting three or four years of schooling. This simply hid the fact that in both wards, a third of the children aged 11-14 had never attended a day school. A small proportion of them had attended Sunday schools proving that even very small fees at day schools deterred attendance. Parental poverty was the main cause of educational neglect.²¹

In June 1853 the Select Committee reported the

evidence of the second session without recommendations. This was inevitable, given the irreconciled parties involved. Lord Aberdeen's government, an uneasy coalition of Peelites and Whigs in office since December 1852, had every reason to do nothing. But it so happened that Lord J. Russell, the only leading Whig or Tory statesman apart from Lord Brougham who cared seriously about national education, was Foreign Secretary and Leader of the Commons. Despite being a rather perfunctory member of the Select Committee, even before the final report was published, he introduced a bill in April 1853 which was of such a stop-gap nature that both the N.P.S.A. and MSC opposed it. It gave Town Councils, if two-thirds of the ratepayers so voted, the power to levy a rate to aid existing schools recognised by the Privy Council, provided a conscience clause operated. There was no provision for new schools managed by Town Councils because Lord Russell was simply avoiding the perplexing issue of religious instruction. Therefore the districts of educational deficiency in urban areas were not provided for. Cobden described the bill privately as "an abortion" and a sad reflection on the education movement. Russell did not attempt a second reading but abandoned the bill.²²

4. Fighting for education versus fighting the French and Russians.

Cobden came to the conclusion by 1853 that a national education act would probably not be obtained until the whole middle class and upper working class had been enfranchised. But he saw no prospect of that happening, a view he held until the 1860's. Nevertheless, he did

not stop working quietly for a unity of educational reformers behind a mutually acceptable bill. But what seemed of the greatest urgency was the education of public opinion. The low priority which governments gave to national education and other domestic issues affecting the condition of the mass of the people was partly the result of the ease with which the public could be excited by foreign affairs, especially the French war scare of 1851-54 and the Crimean War of 1854-56. Cobden attacked government panic mongering and re-armament and pressed ahead with the campaign against the "taxes on knowledge" preventing the establishment of a cheap daily press advocating the true interests of the people.

The scare of a sudden French invasion began with Louis Napoleon's coup d'état of December 1851 and was accelerated by his taking the title of Emperor in December 1852. Anti-French feeling was stirred by memories of the wars with Napoleon I. The new Emperor would surely seek revenge for Waterloo. Cobden believed he would strike at the roots of this hostility by changing the British perception of France. He chose two main ways of doing this in 1793 and 1853 in Three Letters, a pamphlet which, like his earlier ones, was really a short book.

Firstly, Cobden showed by examination of the historical record that Britain was responsible for the war with France in 1793 which led to Napoleon's rise to power. The British government's action was the response of a frightened aristocracy anxious to ward off the infection of democratic ideas from France. Similar motivation, Cobden implied, was still operating in the minds of the

contemporary aristocracy.

Secondly, he showed that France in 1853 had no economic interests which could be a motive for war. Its industrial progress, second only to Britain's, depended on trade with Britain and the social condition of their people was greatly superior to that of the British. France was enjoying the benefits of a social revolution dating from 1789. There were eight million peasant proprietors compared with the poverty-stricken and degraded British peasantry. There was no law of primogeniture as in Britain which protected huge estates. There was no hereditary peerage, no Established Church. There was equal opportunity in the army and in the civil service. There was a fair system of taxation which did not, as in England, exempt real estate from the taxation of inherited property.

Cobden's strategy in the book was drawn, as so often before, from Combe's psychology. In the closing pages, he urged that British energy and combativeness should be directed to the conquest of moral evils at home - ignorance, drunkenness and crime. He cited the example of the brave Quakers who went to Ireland in the great famine of 1846-47.²³

A pamphlet from Cobden - the first since 1836 - was bound to arouse great interest. It went through four editions, including a special cheap one sponsored by the Peace Congress Committee. Nearly every newspaper apart from the Manchester Examiner and Times described Cobden as foolish and unpatriotic. The Times printed 1793 and 1853 in full but questioned the relevance of the situation in 1793 before the rise of Napoleon to that of

1853. It also reacted sharply to Cobden's criticism of primo-geniture, foreshadowing the controversy of 1863. The Times moved steadily against Cobden from now on, declaring in October 1853 that "the peace movement, as it is called, has been from the first the ruin of Mr. Cobden's reputation as a statesman".

This development can be traced in the cartoons and verse of Punch, representative of "middle-brow" opinion. Punch had been on the League's side; it wrote favourably of the Peace Congresses of 1849 and 1850, but in 1852 Cobden was reproved for his opposition to the Militia bill and in 1853 strongly criticised for appeasing the French. When the Crimean War broke out in 1854, Cobden and Bright became figures of ridicule for their alleged pro-Russian stance.

Cobden knew that his peace advocacy would carry a penalty. He confided to George Wilson: "I am quite resolved not to flinch from my peace views however much they may tend to shelve me as a practical politician". But it is very unlikely that Cobden's growing unpopularity with the general public damaged the efforts of the N.P.S.A. since the indifference or half-heartedness of all governments to legislation was already an established fact. The tiny minority of fifty or so M.P.s favourable to an educational bill was powerless. But he continued to promote the cause of education in every possible direction.²⁴

For twenty years Cobden had hoped that American industrial progress and a potential commercial rivalry would prompt British governments to examine all the foundations of industrial power. These were not just free

trade and peace but a well educated people capable of handling and exploiting new technology and able to understand the teachings of political and economic science. In 1854 a useful piece of evidence came into his hand - the official report of Joseph Whitworth on the New York Industrial Exhibition of 1853. Whitworth was the most outstanding engineer and machine maker in Manchester, employing hundreds of men. He gave forceful testimony of the factors behind the remarkable mechanical exhibits at New York. Cobden mentioned Whitworth's report publicly in October 1853 a few months before it was published and no doubt frequently in conversation. Whitworth had told him that "if we do not educate our people, we are beaten". Alas, British exports were expanding without competition from the United States, and the report had no discernable impact on the government's attitude to general education.

Cobden supported the increasing expenditure of the Committee of Privy Council, boosted by the introduction in 1853 of capitation grants for inspected schools in rural areas, extended to those in urban areas in 1856. Between 1853 and 1856 the public expenditure on education increased from £251,000 to £424,000, still a paltry sum compared with poor relief expenditure of £6 million. In 1854 Cobden declared that expenditure on education should be at least £3,500,000; and he was prepared to accept a defence expenditure of £10 million.

At Barnsley Mechanics' Institute in October 1853, Cobden stated that he was no longer particular from whence education came - "give me voluntary education or State

education, but education I want". By the former, he meant the further growth of the Mechanics institutes and study classes which had been notable in the West Riding since 1846. Many of the smaller institutes concentrated on basic education. Cobden urged Barnsley Mechanics Institute to establish a school in connection with it like Huddersfield Mechanics Institute had done. He did not wish to encourage Baines' denominational schools which he described privately to Samuel Smiles as "often mere pretences for education - sometimes, indeed, put up to prevent somebody else from educating the people".²⁵

Cobden's undogmatic and flexible approach can be seen by his part in establishing the Manchester Model Secular School in 1853-54 - described in the next chapter - and his effort to have a Church of England school built in the parish of Heyshott in Sussex where he was renovating his new home, Dunford. A Church school was unavoidable, since there was no dissenting chapel nor indeed any proper school.

Cobden also applied a new strategy in the search for a united party in Manchester. Several facts had become clear during the Select Committee hearings: the Massachusetts plan of Bible reading only was not generally popular among those most concerned about religious instruction. Neither was the NPSA plan of closing the schools at certain times to allow religious instruction elsewhere. The Roman Catholic witness, for example, said that there were too few priests in Manchester to cope with such a system, which was not desirable anyway.

Such opinions pushed Cobden to a new position which he called "separatist", not secularist. It was, in effect, extending the N.P.S.A. "existing schools" clause to all schools whether old or new. He believed it possible to get agreement with both the voluntaryists and the Anglicans by a two-fold plan. First a timetable separation or religious instruction during the normal school day but only the secular instruction to be paid for out of the rates. Second, in the case of schools established out of the rates, the nature of the religious instruction should be by majority choice of the ratepayers and could include the Church catechism. There would be a conscience clause in all schools. Cobden hoped that the strict secularists would be satisfied with there being no compulsory stipulation for religious instruction. In other words, the system could permit fully secular schools.²⁶

In the autumn of 1853, the N.P.S.A. began new publicity. Copies of Thompson's letter submitted to the Select Committee were sent or handed to every member of the Congregational Union conference at Manchester. In London, S. Lucas edited The Advocate of National Instruction.

On 18 January 1854, the N.P.S.A. held a meeting in Manchester for which Cobden secured two speakers whose words would carry weight. One was Bright, who now spoke publicly for the first time in support of the N.P.S.A., and the other was D.C. Gilman, an American diplomat on his way to St. Petersburg. Gilman, like Dr. Bacon in 1850, was asked to describe the New England system.

Cobden, in his speech, urged the advantages of "separation" and proposed co-operation with other parties. He must have been encouraged by the knowledge that Rev. C. Richson had, in November 1853, stated in a lecture that secular schools were entitled to receive rate aid.

Soon after the N.P.S.A. meeting, a group of N.P.S.A. members, including Cobden, had several interviews with the M.S.C., Sir J. Kay-Shuttleworth acting as a mediator. Kay-Shuttleworth declared his support for the N.P.S.A. principle that religion be taught at separate hours. Cobden told Richson that "until he could make the separation of the religious from the secular education, he would never receive one farthing of the public money in Manchester".

But the M.S.C. would not budge, even though Manchester Town Council petitioned unanimously against its bill on 15 February 1854. Cobden and Bright suggested that the N.P.S.A. bill be moved as an amendment to the M.S.C. bill when it was re-introduced in the Commons on 21 February. But instead, Milner Gibson successfully moved an amendment which opposed the introduction of an education bill as a private bill. There was nothing more that the N.P.S.A. could do but hope that the M.S.C. would become more conciliatory after the failure of the bill. Cobden reiterated his views about "separation" in the Commons in May and June 1854 and it seems that more private meetings with the M.S.C. may have taken place about this time.²⁷

In June 1854, the Society of Arts held an Education Exhibition at St. Martin's Hall, Long Acre, London.

Educationists from all parts of Europe and North America attended with exhibitions of their books and equipment. A number of informal lectures were given by educationists and Cobden probably persuaded Henry Barnard, the official representative of the Connecticut Board of Education, to give a lecture.

In the Spring of 1854, a war crisis with Russia arose which not only instantly extinguished the French "menace" but turned France into an ally, confirming Cobden's thesis of the cynical manipulation of public opinion. In September, British and French armies landed in the Crimea. Cobden was obliged to tell R.W. Smiles that it was useless to renew any agitation for education; "War must be I fear accepted as a substitute for every social and political reform".

But an opportunity for private negotiation cropped up. Inexorably, the desperate need of Church schools in Manchester for funds pushed the M.S.C. towards further compromise. In November or December 1854, Cobden breakfasted with Richson and found to his delight that the M.S.C. was now willing to set apart a particular hour in the morning when, if at all, religious instruction would be given and that no payment would be made from the rates for it. The way was now clear for the long sought alliance with the MSC. But a new factor now complicated matters. The M.S.C. thinking in terms of a national permissive bill like the N.P.S.A., decided that Sir John Pakington, the Conservative statesman, be their Parliamentary spokesman. It ultimately led to the promising co-operation of Cobden and Pakington in a bill

in 1856-57 but in the short term it was a setback.

Pakington, although a liberal Churchman, was less advanced in his educational views than Richson, for he would not agree to rate support for secular schools.²⁸

Cobden's guidance of the N.P.S.A. by the end of 1854 had been wise and constructive. He had rescued the N.P.S.A. from the complete impotence of a tiny group advocating a predominantly secular education which could never succeed in obtaining Parliamentary approval for its plan and made it a tolerant and conciliatory body. This was done without ever sacrificing the fundamental principle of the N.P.S.A. that ratepayers had a right, if they so decided, to build and manage schools which gave a secular education only or in which only the secular part was paid for out of the rates.

Summary

When, in 1850, the L.P.S.A. became a new association seeking legislation for England and Wales, not just Lancashire, Cobden was obliged to take a leading part in its affairs, although he did not think that the prospects for legislation were good. Then, faced with a rival group, the Manchester and Salford Committee, which proposed to give rate aid to Anglican and dissenting schools, Cobden worked for changes in the N.P.S.A. plan which might make an amalgamation possible. Unluckily, protracted rivalry continued, also involving the voluntaryist party. Rival bills failed in Parliament. Finally, the Crimean War swept aside most public discussion about education, but contacts were maintained between the N.P.S.A. and the M.S.C. in the hope of future co-operation.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN. REFERENCES

1. MET 2 November 1850. The two meetings were also quite fully reported in The Times, 31 October and 2 November 1850. Kay-Shuttleworth's letter was printed in MG, 6 November 1850. The original, dated 29 October, is in M 136/2/3/2976.
2. BL.Add.MS.43649. C. to Bright, 18 October 1850.
3. BL.Add.MS.43660. C. to Combe, 5 January 1849.
4. Cobden's two speeches are conveniently found in Mrs. S. Schwabe: Reminiscences of R. Cobden (1895), 122-132, 132-149. Bible declaration on page 136.
5. N.P.S.A. Minutes 4, 12 November 1850. A copy of the leaflet is in the N.P.S.A. Scrapbook.
BL.Add.MS.50131. C. to Sturge, 2 November 1850.
Add.MS.43657. C. to H. Richard, 26 January 1851.
The Nonconformist, 6 November 1850.
6. BL.Add.MS.43660: Combe to C., 4,11,14 November 1850;
C. to Combe 9 November 1850.
7. L.P.S.A. Minutes, 15 October 1850.
BL.Add.MS.43660. C. to Combe 18 November 1850.
NLS. MS.7308. Hodgson to Combe 5,7,8,9 November, 15 December 1850 (quotation).
M136/2/3/2134. Lucas to W. McCall, 3 November 1850.
NLS. 7392. Combe to Hodgson 7,9 November 1850.
8. N.P.S.A. Minutes, 18, 21,22,26 November, 4 December 1850.
NLS.MS.7308. Hodgson to Combe, 15 December 1850.
9. BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe 8 January 1851.
Rev. Dr. W.F. Hook, a vicar in Leeds, had very liberal views on the education question.
10. MG 4, 8 January, 22 February 1851.
11. The Times, 19 September 1851; MET 3, 25 February 1852 (speech and letter from Dr. R. Halley).
PP 1852 XI Report of Select Committee on State of Education in Boroughs of Manchester and Salford. Q.2441-6.
Petitions submitted by J. Adshead.
12. C. Richson: Education in Manchester: Considered with Special Reference to the State of Church Day Schools and the Means of Extending Education Generally (1850).
C. Richson: A Sketch of Some of the Causes, Which, in

Manchester Induced the Abandonment of the Voluntary System in Support of Schools and the Introduction of the Manchester and Salford Education Bill(1851).

See also: S.E. Maltby: Manchester and the Movement for National Elementary Education (1918), 71-77, and W.R. Ward: Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (1972).

13. The Times. 25 January, 30 August 1851 (J. Brotherton's speech).
14. Speeches, II, 567-584.
BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe, 4 February, 1851.
15. M136 /2/3/2149. S. Lucas to R.W. Smiles, 16 February 1851.
NLS.MS.7317. S. Lucas to Combe, 13 February, 2 March 1851.
M 136. 2/3/1623. Hodgson to R.W. Smiles, 12 February, 1 April 1851.
UCLA. Collection 1040, Box 1. C. to S. Schwabe, 7 March 1851.
N.P.S.A. Minutes, 18 February, 11,17 March 1851. The NPSA Plan of March 1851 was Printed in Maltby, supra, 141-144.
16. UCLA. Collection 1040, Box 1. C. to S. Schwabe, 14, 24 March 1851.
Parl. Debates, H. of C. 22 May 1851. Motion defeated by 139 to 49 votes.
The Times, 26, 27 May 1851.
N.P.S.A. Minutes, 21 March, 1,8 April, 3, 17 June 1851.
17. Maltby, supra, 145.
N.P.S.A. Minutes, 8, 29 July, 12 August 1851.
NLS. 7321. N.P.S.A. printed circular of 22 August 1851 gave details of the new clause.
MG 30 August 1851 (new N.P.S.A. clause), 6 September 1851 (letter from W. Entwistle), 10 September 1851 (reply from Dr. J. Watts).
18. M136/2/3/2160-2177. S. Lucas to R.W. Smiles, 8 June, 16 September, 25 November, 8 December 1851.
NLS.7317. S. Lucas to Combe, 15, 22 November 1851; E. Lombe to Combe, 15 October 1851.
N.P.S.A. Minutes, 18 November 1851.
NLS.7321. R.W. Smiles to Combe, 30 September, 3 October, 14, 26 November 1851.
M136/2/3/614-620. C. to R.W. Smiles 5, 13 September 1851.
Fitzwilliam Museum MSS.76-91. C. to Samuel Smiles 10 October 1851.

WSRO. CP 30. C. to H. Ashworth, 14 September, 27 November 1851.

W.B. Hodgson gave a lecture in support of strictly secular education in Manchester Town Hall on 13 August 1851. See Aspect of the National Education Question in Manchester. MRL P664/14.

19. Speeches II, 595-607.

NLS.MS.7428. Combe's journal, 1 December 1851. The entry was only one sentence without any comment on the meeting.

NLS.MS.7317. S. Lucas to Combe, 18 December 1851.

20. MET 10, 24 January, 18, 25, 28 February, 3 March 1852.

M136/2/3/620. Cobden to R.W. Smiles 3 January 1852 (apology for not attending NPSA deputation).

M136/3/9/248. NPSA Circular (N.D. but 1852) - details of petition and statistical inquiry.

C. Richson: A Letter to Salis Schwabe Esq., to Show the Points of Agreement and Difference in the Educational Measures Proposed by the NPSA, and the MSC. on Education (dated 2 February 1852).

N.P.S.A. Minutes, 12 August 1851, 7 January 1852 (Letter to W.J. Fox, 23 December 1851), 7 February 1852.

MG 21 February 1852.

21. N.P.S.A. Minutes, 16 March 1852.

Parl. Debates, H. of C., 17 March 1852.

PP 1852 XI. Report of the Select Committee on the State of Education in the Boroughs of Manchester and Salford.

PP 1852-53 XXIV. Second Report.

PP 1852 XI. Appendix 6. Letter from E. Twistleton to T. Milner Gibson. Also, statistical evidence presented by the M.S.C.

PP 1852-53 XXIV. W. McKerrow gave evidence on 15, 18 March 8 April 1853; Dr. J. Watts on 8, 12, 15 April 1853. See Q.527 for Watts' statistical evidence about school attendance. He also submitted three papers about public education in Holland, printed as Appendices 1-3.

J.H. Hinton: The Case of the Manchester Educationists. A Review of the Evidence Taken Before a Committee of the House of Commons in Relation to the State of Education in Manchester and Salford (1852).

J.H. Hinton: The Case of the Manchester Educationists.

- Part II. A Review of the Evidence.....In Relation to a Scheme of Secular Education (1854). Hinton, a Baptist minister and secretary of the Baptist Union, was a fervent voluntaryist. He gave evidence on 29 June 1853.
- WSRO. CP3. J.P. Thompson to C., 8 September 1852.(enclosing Rev. L. Bacon's letter of introduction), 22 November 1852.
- BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe, 5 November 1852.
- N.P.S.A. Letterbook 6, f.153. R.W. Smiles to C. 8 November 1852.
22. PP 1852-53 III. Lord J. Russell's Borough Bill.
Parl. Debates, 4, 7 April, 29 July 1853.
 BL.Add.MS.43668. C. to S. Lucas, 12 April 1853.
 BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe, 15 April 1853.
 MG 8 June 1853. Report of NPSA. deputation to Lord Russell on 3 June 1853. Cobden was present but did not speak.
 Maltby, *supra*, 86, prints MSC. document of 11 May 1853.
23. Some of Cobden's speeches critical of defence policy are conveniently found in *Speeches*, I, 529-576; II, 425-446. Hobson, 95-98. C. to H. Richard, 1, 25 January 1853.
Political Writings, 274-379. For references to social conditions in France, see 289, 332-333, 369, 371.
24. The Times printed 1793 and 1853 in issues of 28,29,31 January 1853; leading articles on 28, 31 January, 2 February, 14 October 1853. The Times of 14 February 1853 printed a long critical extract from the Weekly Dispatch.
Punch, XVI (1849), 143, 257; XVII (1849) 101,126; XVIII (1850), 68,112,116,173,202,220,243,247; 14 February 1852 ("Speak, Mr. Cobden!") 21 February 1852 (Cartoon, "The Rivals"), 19 February 1853 (text and cartoon), 15 April 1854 (text and cartoon "Pet of the Manchester School").
 M20. C. to G. Wilson, 4 December 1852.
25. PP 1854 XXXVI. New York Industrial Exhibition. Special Report of Mr. Joseph Whitworth.
Speeches II, 606,618.
 BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe, 25 April 1853.
 MRL. 923.2.S345. C. to J.B. Smith, 28 October 1853.
 WSRO. CP17, J. Whitworth to C., 31 October 1853.
Parl. Debates, 28 April 1853, 30 June 1854.
 Fitzwilliam Museum. C. to S. Smiles, 17 November, 23 December 1853.

26. BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe, 4 September 1852. In spite of Cobden's efforts, the Heyshott National School was not opened until January 1864. See PRO.ED/7/123. PP 1852-53 XXIV. Q.1191-1196. Evidence of Very Rev. L. Toole (Roman Catholic). See also J.H. Hinton (Baptist), Q.1536-1544.
- BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe, 10 February, 8 May 1854. Combe to C., 21 February, 10 May 1854.
- BL.Add.MS.43665. C. to J. Robertson, 25 March 1854 (uses word "separatist").
- WSRO. CP.473. C. to J.M'Clelland, 8 August 1853 (a printed letter).
27. N.P.S.A. Minutes, 24 October, 7 November 1853.
Advocate of National Instruction. There were 4 issues: August and November 1853, February and May 1854.
 MET 21 January, 1854 (Report of NPSA meeting); Leeds Mercury 21 January 1854 (critical comment from voluntaryist position).
- BL.Add.MS.43650. C. to Bright, 9 January 1854.
- BL.Add.MS.43677. C. to D.C. Gilman, 31 December 1853, 3, 13 January 1854.
 MET 16 November 1853 (Report of C. Richson's lecture).
- BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe, 17 February 1854 (meetings with MSC).
- N.P.S.A. Minutes, 27 February 1854.
Parliamentary Debates, 21 February, 12 May, 30 June 1854.
28. New York University. Henry Barnard MSS. C. to H. Barnard 16 June 1854 and Thursday undated but 29 June 1854. R.W. Smiles to H. Barnard, 23 June 1854.
 M136/2/3/628. C. to R.W. Smiles, 22 June 1854.
 N.P.S.A. Letterbook 6, f.524. R.W. Smiles to C., 23 June 1854 (about despatch of copies of J.P. Thompson's "letter" to Barnard).
 The writer has not been able to find a report of Barnard's lecture. It is noted in Lectures, in connection with the Educational Exhibition of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce delivered at St. Martin's Hall (1855) that many lectures were delivered from scanty notes or none at all and that no record of them was made.

Chambers' Edinburgh Journal, 12 August 1854, has a good description of the exhibition.

M136/2/3/629¹. C. to R.W. Smiles, 23 October 1854.

BL.Add.MS.43661. C. to Combe, 9 December 1854.